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In memory of
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Brian and Anneke Zifkin
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מפתחות למגדל

Introduction to the Haggadah

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg ~ Senior Rosh HaYeshiva

The Seder night is often defined by the robust list of commandments and directives, ranging from telling the story of the Exodus to the wide variety of culinary obligations. While most of these are relatively simple to execute (maybe not *maror*), the demand of "*sheilat haben*", the questioning of the child, is certainly one of the more challenging ones. A debate as to the nature of this objective reveals two very different paths of performance.

The Talmud (Pesachim 108b), in discussing aspects of the commandment to drink four cups, relays the following:

> *The Sages taught in a baraita: All are obligated in these four cups, including men, women, and children. Rabbi Yehuda said: What benefit do children receive from wine? Rather, one distributes to them roasted grains and nuts on Passover eve,* ***so that they will not sleep and also so they will ask***.

Putting aside the question of assuming children could somehow be obligated in the four cups, Meiri (and most other Rishonim) focuses on the mechanism of having the children ask. Giving the children these treats

will ensure they do not fall asleep, engaging them in the various activities of the Seder, culminating with the questions of "*Ma Nishtana.*" Similarly, hiding matzah from the children will also act to keep them awake and interested, leading them to asking "*ma nishtana*". The key theme here is ensuring the children do not fall asleep.

Rambam (Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 7:1-3) has a slightly different formulation. He first discusses the overarching commandment of telling the story surrounding the Exodus, along with the format occurring through "informing" one's sons (*vehgadta levincha*). He then writes:

> *He should make changes on this night so that the children will see and will [be motivated to] ask: 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' until he replies to them: 'This and this occurred; this and this took place.' What changes should be made? He should give them roasted seeds and nuts; the table should be taken away before they eat; matzot should be snatched from each other and the like…*

While it may not seem obvious, there is a compelling distinction between Meiri and Rambam's understanding of these snacks. Meiri's formulation is through the giving of the candies, the children will stay awake, and thereby ask the questions laid out in the Haggadah. Rambam, however, has the candies functioning as a method of *shinui*, a change of sorts, which would then elicit the questions.

Understanding the debate leads to two very different ideas in how one would view the idea of *sheilat haben*. Meiri takes a more formal "halachic" approach to the matter. Children need to stay awake, as there is an obligation to inform them of the story of the exodus. Ensuring the participation of one's children brings about the fulfillment of the obligation. Thus, if one's child fell asleep prior to being able to recite "*ma nisthana*", *sheilat haben* would not be fulfilled. This concretizes the questions through the text of the Haggadah.

Rambam, however, sees the essence of *sheilat haben* through lens of *talmud Torah*. One is obligated to recount the story of the Exodus, informing one's children of the miracles and wonders. How best to accomplish this goal? Present something different, a catalyst to have the child ask a question. The opportunity for a dialogue is now extant, and learning about the Exodus, through the context of the Haggadah, can now occur. As the primary obligation is centered on this type of learning, the objective can still be accomplished without a child. Whereas Meiri has the treats serving as a means to ask questions, Rambam sees the treats as the very object of question itself, thereby opening up the door to discussion.

While these are two distinct positions, both agree concerning the importance of drawing children into the Seder experience. Certainly, offering children sugar-filled candy will do wonders to ensure they are wide awake, if not bouncing off the walls. However, things are a bit more challenging when it comes to Rambam's approach. The notion of creating a change is ever more challenging, especially when children are educated to know what to expect at the Seder.

The consumption of *karpas* is an ideal example of this challenge. The Mishneh (Pesachim 114a) states:

> *They brought before him (vegetables). He dips the lettuce before he reaches the course that is secondary to the matzah.*

Later on, the Gemara refers to the unique "double dipping" that takes place during the Seder. Rashbam (and others) understand the vegetables and subsequent dipping (the second being *maror*) to refer to *karpas*. Why do we have this vegetable and dipping? It presents an opportunity for the children to ask questions about the evening, as it is strange to have this take place in a normal meal (later commentaries tie *karpas* to servitude in Egypt. If so, it is strange that there is no *mitzvah* to consume *karpas*, or recite a unique *bracha*).

If the objective of *karpas* is to encourage children to ask questions about the uniqueness of the night, it seems like it would be a one-off experience; after all, year after year there is *karpas*, and most children would know that *karpas* is present in order for them to ask questions. In other words, there would be nothing novel taking place. Of course, it goes without saying that children who come to the Seder armed with materials from school will know exactly what to expect. Even the age old *minhag* of singing the various steps of the Seder reveals any potential future surprises.

Let's set aside whether one could replace *karpas* with some other food item, as the change would most certainly elicit a wonder from children ("I thought *karpas* was a vegetable! What is going on tonight?"). To introduce a sense of spontaneity that encourages

questioning and dialogue can be a challenge. Sages over the years have emphasized the importance of introducing changes that could light the spark of curiosity (as the well-known story of Rav Chaim putting a pot on his head). It would seem ideal for a parent to spend considerable preparation time in trying to create that sense of newness and spontaneity, engaging the curiosity of the child, and immersing in the dialogue of learning.

In the spirit of inquiry, curiosity and dialogue, it is a privilege to present another year of Al HaMashkof. Watching our students work on this noble project is inspiring, and I am always astonished at the quality of Torah ideas that emerges. I hope that these words of Torah help supplement your Seder experience.

Chag Sameach!

Bedikat Chametz

That Darn Weasel: Searching Out the Meaning of Bedikat Chametz

Jake Kaweblum ~ Hollywood, FL

The Rambam describes the act of *bedikat chametz* in the following way (Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 2:3):

> *According to the Sages' decree, [the mitzvah involves] searching for chametz in hidden places and in any holes [within one's house], seeking it and removing it from all of one's domain.*

Seemingly, one's obligation is not fulfilled until all *chametz* is removed from one's house. The purpose of the *bedikah* appears pretty straightforward: search and clear all areas in order to establish one's home as one completely free of *chametz*, the clear end goal. However, the Mishnah in the first Perek of Pesachim seems to contradict this assumption of the obligation.

The Mishnah in the first Perek of Pesachim (9a) states:

> *We are not concerned that maybe a weasel dragged chametz from one room to another room, or from one place to another place, because if so, from one*

> *courtyard to another courtyard and from one town to another town, [we would have to be concerned that it dragged chametz] and there would be no end to such concerns.*

Since practically there would be no end to the *bedikah* in such a situation, we just absolve one from the obligation to continue searching where a weasel may have dragged bread. Why? The goal is to have a house free of *chametz*, regardless of the difficulty; that is the *halacha*! How can a practical concern negate the halachic objective of *bedikah*?

The Rambam lists another case in regards to the *bedikah* in Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 2:7:

> *A person who checked on the night of the fourteenth and placed ten loaves of chametz [on the side] and [later] found [only] nine must suspect [that chametz is present in his home,] and [hence], must search a second time, for definitely it was taken by a weasel or mouse.*

What obligates one to search a second time, as opposed to our Mishnah? In both cases, he has not fulfilled the obligation of creating a *chametz*-free home. Why only then does the disappearance of one loaf call for a second search even though he has also not fulfilled his *halachic* requirement in our Mishnah?

I think that these questions can help us redefine our understanding of the *mitzvah* of *bedikah*. Initially, one might have thought that one's obligation in the search is

to create an objectively *chametz*-free home, where any *chametz* found in one's home prevents one from fulfilling his obligation in *bedikah*. However, seeing as this is essentially impossible in light of the Mishnah's conclusion about there being no practical way to prevent the search from extending to whole cities, I think that the *chachamim* formulated one's obligation in *bedikah* differently than previously thought. It cannot be that we are obligated by the *chachamim* in something which is by definition impossible to fulfill.

One's obligation in the *bedikah* is to **not** to create an objectively *chametz*-free home; rather, it is to establish oneself as a *bodek*, meaning one with the status of "checker." In order to fulfill the *mitzvah*, one needs to meet certain requirements to achieve this status of *bodek*.

With this idea in place, we can view the laws of searching laid out by both the Rambam and the Mishnah not as the *halachic* requirements for one's home, but rather the steps necessary to establish oneself as a *bodek*. Therefore, there is no need for one to continue searching amid the concern of the weasel. The criteria set out by the *chachamim* have already been met, with the individual defined as a *bodek*.

Rashi on our Mishnah supports this idea of *bedikah*:

> *We are not worried that when one checks this corner that during his checking, perhaps a weasel will drag chametz to a place that has already been checked and he would therefore need to go back and check again*.

Obviously, one's obligation is not to establish his house as *chametz*-free. Rather, he has already attained the status of *bodek* and is finished with his *halachic* requirement.

It is now clear why the Rambam states one would need to search a second time when one of the original ten loaves of bread he set out is missing. The concern of there being *chametz* present has not originated from an outside source as seen in our Mishnah with the weasel; the concern has emerged as a result of his own actions. There now exists a clear lack in his status as a *bodek* because the suspicion came from him due to his negligence. He has therefore not established himself as a complete *bodek* because of this personal deficiency.

Many connect the idea of *chametz* to the evil inclination. The gemara itself calls the *yetzer hara* the "yeast in the dough" (Berachot 17a). Just as the obligation of *bedikah* requires us to establish ourselves as "checkers" of getting rid of physical *chametz*, so too in our own lives, the need for introspection as a religious ideal goes beyond just a removal of particular unwanted actions. We need instead to live lives in which we are constantly thinking of ways to improve, to learn more, and to take on the status of being a "*bodek*" at all times - vigilant, aware, and humble, as we move through life.

Biur Chametz

The Nature of Chametz: An Object of Prohibition or a Prohibited Object?

Shmuel Feder ~ Far Rockaway, NY

When the Torah introduces the prohibition of eating *chametz*, it adds a very ambiguous statement: "*tashbisu se'or mibateicham*", "you shall remove leaven from your home" (Shemos 12:15). In the beginning of the second chapter of Maseches Pesachim (21a), there is an argument between Rabbi Yehuda and the Chachamim regarding this obligation. According to Rabbi Yehuda, one must destroy one's *chametz* with burning, to the exclusion of any other way. The Chachamim argue that you can even crumble it and throw it into the wind or the sea. While on the surface it may seem that they simply argue on how to translate the word *tashbisu*, I think there is a deeper understanding of the debate.

Let's examine these two sides, starting with Rabbi Yehuda's position. The Gemara (Pesachim 28a) questions how Rabbi Yehuda knows that the only way to fulfill this obligation is through fire. The Gemara there discusses three proofs to his view, and our focus will be on the last one. According to this third proof, the exclusive method of destruction is derived from the rule that all things

which have a prohibition to be left over - like *korbanos*, which have a prohibition of *nosar* - must be destroyed with fire. Rabbi Yehuda argues that just as *korbanos* in those cases must be destroyed with fire, and **only** fire, so too *chametz*.

However, there seems to be a significant flaw in this argument. It isn't so clear in the first place that there is even a prohibition to leave *chametz* over on Pesach. Therefore, Rashi explains that the prohibition by *chametz* which Rabbi Yehuda speaks of is *bal yira'eh ubal yimatzei*, meaning "you shall not see it nor find it", which prohibits a person from leaving *chametz* over during Pesach.

Although the Chachamim find an exception to this rule which silences Rabbi Yehuda, I still think this attempt reveals an important idea regarding Rabbi Yehuda's view on the nature of *chametz*. If the basis of *biur chametz* by fire, according to Rabbi Yehuda, is due to the prohibition of *bal yera'eh ubal yimatzei*, he is then arguing that the essence of these prohibitions is not limited to the individual forbidding him to own *chametz* over Pesach. Rather, it is like *nosar*, where the prohibition is on the *chametz* itself as an object of prohibition. *Nosar* can be easily seen as an object of prohibition, since there is a prohibition to own it in addition to the prohibition to benefit from it. Thus, Rabbi Yehuda's *chiddush* is that *chametz* is a *cheftzah* of *issur*, and *bal yera'eh ubal yematzei* demands we actively get rid of it.

Why does Rabbi Yehuda demand it be accomplished by fire only? I believe it is because fire is the only way to really destroy an object, rendering it nonexistent. Because the issue here is the *chametz* itself, it's not enough to merely remove it from your ownership.

Instead, you need to remove the object from the world as a whole.

Now that we understand the foundation of Rabbi Yehuda's position, let us explore the opinion of the Chachamim. This can be accomplished through an analysis of the debate between the Ramban and the Baal Hamaor regarding the prohibition to eat *chametz* after midday on Erev Pesach. The Baal Hamaor maintains, "If you eat your *chametz* after the sixth hour you didn't violate anything because there is no greater removal than this." The Ramban responds very harshly, saying that it's impossible for there to be an obligation to destroy your *chametz* without a prohibition from eating it as well.

At first glance, the Baal Hameor seems to be stating a paradox: how can eating something function to distance someone from the chametz? On the contrary, doesn't it only bring you closer to it? On the other hand, according to the Ramban, why does the obligation to destroy *chametz* necessitate a prohibition to eat it?

I think the Ramban and the Baal Hamaor are really arguing on the nature of the obligation to remove your *chametz*. According to the Baal Hamaor, the obligation is simply to achieve a result of removing your *chametz* insofar as it is food; there is nothing wrong with the object itself. Given this formulation, the act of eating something is the ideal way to fulfill this goal. There is no better way to accomplish this other than exhausting its use as food. Once you eat something, its objective as food has been completed, and it is now as far from the category of food as it can ever be.

However, according to the Ramban, the obligation is to perform an action that denounces this object as food. Although eating something does

accomplish the goal of the Baal Hamaor, at the same time you are only furthering your relationship to this object as food. According to the Ramban, eating is actually the worst method of fulfilling this obligation because, in doing so, you are demonstrating the exact opposite of your goal: the only purpose of this object is to be eaten. Due to this formulation, the Ramban's rejection of the Baal Hamaor makes a lot of sense: the obligation to demonstrate the removal of something from the broader category of food cannot coexist with the ability to validate the purpose of the food via eating it.

Circling back to the original question: What are Rabbi Yehuda and the Chachamim essentially arguing about? After delving deeper into either side, it becomes clear that they are really arguing about the nature of the prohibition against owning *chametz*. According to Rabbi Yehuda, since there is actually a problem within the *chametz* itself, you must destroy the entire object, not just to the point of inedibility. However, according to the Chachamim, who maintain that the real issue with *chametz* is only insofar as it is food, argue that you don't need to go so far to remove the object from our world; rather you are merely obligated to remove the *chametz* from the category of food.

This approach helps us understand what we are really doing with *biur chametz*. Whether it be Rabbi Yehuda's approach of complete destruction or the Chachamim's focus on removing its food status, the goal remains the same: to clean ourselves and our homes of the *chametz* of the past, and to prepare for a *chametz*-free future. By understanding the deeper layers of this mitzvah, we can understand Hashem's Torah and what we are supposed to do that much better. May our

fulfillment of this mitzvah bring us to a meaningful and transformative Pesach.

Seder Plate

The Seder Plate: A Teaching Tool, Not a Rule

Avi Barningham ~ West Hempstead, NY

Among the many elements of the Pesach Seder, few are as odd as the Seder plate (*ke'ara*). Meticulously arranged with symbolic foods representing different aspects of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the *ke'ara* has become such a central part of the night's rituals that many assume it holds an intrinsic halachic status. However, a careful analysis of sources reveals that the Seder plate is neither a halachic obligation, nor is it even a necessary feature of the Seder. It seems its development stems from a later effort to structure the Seder experience - not as an independent mitzvah, but as an educational and organizational aid. The true halachic obligations of the night are the mitzvot of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*, *Achilat Matzah u'Maror*, and the requirement to bring the *Korban Pesach*. The *ke'ara*, while effective in helping to facilitate these mitzvot, is ultimately a *minhag* without Talmudic precedent.

You would think that if it were a requirement to have at the Seder, it would be mentioned in the Talmud or at least early halachic sources. However, it turns out that the *ke'ara* is absent from these sources. The Mishnah (Pesachim 114a) says, "They bring before him *matzah, maror, charoset*, and two cooked dishes." This ensures that

the necessary foods are present at the Seder. But notice that the mishna does not mention a requirement to arrange them in a particular way or on a single plate. The Talmud (Pesachim 114b) discusses the meaning of each food item but offers no prescription for their display.

The absence of a Seder plate as a formal requirement is even more apparent in the Geonic period, during which the structured Seder as we know it today was still taking shape. The Siddur Rav Amram Gaon and the Ba'al Halachot Gedolot (BaHaG) outline the order of the Seder but make no reference to the *ke'ara* as such. The Geonim were evidently more concerned with ensuring that the mitzvot were fulfilled properly—*matzah, maror,* and *Sippur Yetziyat Mitzrayim*—than with the arrangement of the foods. The Rambam continues this tradition in Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 8:1, where he lists the required foods but does not codify any requirement for their structured display.

We find the practice mentioned first among Ashkenazi *rishonim*. For example, Machzor Vitry (Laws of Pesach 69) in the 11th century describes it as a plate with all the food items of the Seder brought to the table after *Kadesh*. Later, the Tur (O.C. 473) mentions this practice of placing these foods on a *ke'ara*, and the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 473:4) explicitly states that one should bring a plate (*ke'ara*) with these foods on it. However, these sources do not establish the *ke'ara* as an independent halachic obligation, but rather as a practical means of ensuring that the required foods are present and readily available. The primary focus remains on the consumption of these foods at the appropriate points in the Seder, not on their specific arrangement. Thus, while later sources assume the presence of a *ke'ara*, it functions

as an organizational and symbolic tool rather than a Halachic necessity.

This perspective is further emphasized by the Rama (O.C. 473:4), who explains that the *ke'ara* serves a functional role in the Seder rather than a symbolic one. The Rama quotes the Maharil that the arrangement should ensure their pragmatic use throughout the Seder:

> *And he should arrange the Seder plate before him in a way that he will not need to pass over the mitzvot, meaning the karpas should be on top of everything, and the vinegar closer to him than the matzah, and the matzot closer than the maror and charoset, and these should be closer to him than the shank bone and the egg.*

According to the Rama, then, the reason the foods are placed on a plate is to facilitate their use throughout the Seder—so they remain accessible for all the different steps of the Seder. In other words, the *ke'ara* is not an essential ritual object, but simply an organizational tool to streamline the Seder. From a strict halachic perspective, one must have matzah, maror, charoset, and two cooked dishes at the Seder, but there is no requirement for a *ke'ara* or specific arrangement.

If the *ke'ara* is not halachically mandated, why does it seem so central to the Seder? The Rambam (Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 7:3) says, "One must make changes on this night so that the children will see and ask." The Seder is deliberately designed to stimulate curiosity and elicit questions, and the *ke'ara* is an effective

educational tool. While not required, its structured presentation of symbolic foods creates an unusual visual display that prompts inquiry—aligning with the Rambam's emphasis on engaging children through experiential learning.

How does the *ke'ara* lead us to ask questions? One method is through the use of unconventional food presentation; the food is displayed but not immediately eaten, disrupting normal dining conventions. Another method is through the use of contradictory symbols; the *ke'ara* juxtaposes bitterness (*maror*) with sweetness (*charoset*), mourning (*beitzah*) with redemption (*zeroa*). Also employed is the structured yet strange layout; different traditions arrange the foods in specific formats, sparking curiosity about their meaning.

Rav Soloveitchik explains (in *The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening*) that the Seder is not merely a text-based retelling of *Yetziyat Mitzrayim*, but a dramatic reenactment designed to immerse participants in the experience. He identifies a dual structure to the night: a) *Sippur Yetziyat Mitzrayim* – engaging in storytelling and dialogue, and b) *Achilat Matzah u'Maror* – participating in physical actions that reinforce the narrative.

This aligns with the Ramban's commentary on Shemot 13:8, where he explains that the Torah gave us physical mitzvot as a means of reinforcing faith:

> *Since open miracles do not occur in every generation before the eyes of every skeptic and denier, Hashem commanded many mitzvot as a remembrance of Yetziyat Mitzrayim, so that testimony of the redemption remains alive forever.*

The Torah mandates mitzvot like *matzah*, *maror*, and the *korban Pesach* to provide a tangible connection to redemption. However, the *ke'ara* is not among these mitzvot. It is a visual aid, not a commanded practice, reinforcing ideas rather than fulfilling a direct mitzvah. Thus, the *ke'ara* is used as a tool to fulfil the core mitzvah of *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The presence of the *ke'ara* enhances the experience of the Seder but does not define it. The true mitzvot of the night remain the consumption of the required foods and the retelling of *Yetziyat Mitzrayim*. By recognizing the *ke'ara* as a minhag rather than a purely halachic construct, we can use it to help us ensure that we fulfill the mitzvot that are the essence of the Seder—the dialogue, and the experience of redemption.

Structure of the Seder

A Cognitive and Sensory Psychological Model of the Haggadah

Shmuel Brackman ~ New Haven, CT

What does cognitive psychology and sensation have to do with the Haggadah? The Pesach Seder is not simply a retelling of history; rather, it is a full-body experience that triggers recall to memory and memory formation. I will attempt to demonstrate that the Seder follows a cognitive sensory model, structured to embed the story of ancient Jewish servitude and redemption from Egypt in our memory and embody it today using the senses of **audition**, **sensation**, and **vision (hearing, touch,** and **sight)**. Each sense has a direct relation to the story itself: a **visual** sense has a direct connection to a tangible item in the story, an **auditory** sense prompts us to remember a non-tangible part of the story (more of a narrative recall), and a **sensation** would connect to a feeling the ancient Jews had throughout the story.

The Seder is rooted in the function of collective memory. What is collective memory? Collective memory is the memory of individuals as part of a larger group. That is not to say that we recall our own personal subjective past, but rather our collective social past—the

story of the ancient Jewish servitude and redemption from Egypt. Experts in the field of cognitive psychology have found that:

> *Collective memory is a specific operation of individual consciousness when it participates in or connects to the communication that constitute society, either as member of social group (shared memory), or as participant in social interaction (collaborative memory).*[1]

Through the Pesach Seder and the Haggadah, a constructed social framework, we participate in the recollection of our collective memory of the redemption from servitude in Egypt as a society. Whether we celebrate together or alone, the recollection is still a part of the social framework of the religion in the sense that we all perform the Seder. The Haggadah itself would agree with this notion, stating:

> *We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD our G-d brought <u>us</u> out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm*[2]*... Generation by generation, each person must see*

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[1] Jean-François Orianne and Francis Eustache, "Collective Memory: Between Individual Systems of Consciousness and Social Systems," *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2023 Oct 12;14:1238272. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1238272. PMID: 37901083; PMCID: PMC10603192.

[2] Maggid, We Were Slaves to Pharaoh In Egypt

> *himself as if he himself had come out of Egypt, as it is said: 'And you shall tell your child on that day, 'Because of this the LORD acted for me when I came out of Egypt[3].'*[4]

The Haggadah presents the need to recall our memories from this societal event and pass them over to our children so they may have the memory as our ancestors did before us. The purpose of this recollection is to identify our relationship with G-d and His role in bringing us to a redeemed state. From generation to generation, we spend one night a year holding on to this memory as though ours. Memory is a substantial part of the Seder, structured in two parts: the storytelling from servitude to redemption, and the experience of freedom/self-determination.

Two Parts: Servitude to Redemption and Freedom/Sovereignty

Part 1: Servitude to Redemption

The first part of the perceptual aspect of the Haggadah begins with *Urchatz* and *Karpas*, where we wash our hands and then eat vegetables dipped in salt water, a **sensational** recall cue to the tears of the ancient

[3] Exodus 13:8

[4] Maggid, Rabban Gamliel's Three Things

Jews in servitude[5]. *Yachatz* is next, where we break the *matzah*, put half of it back, and put the other half away for the *afikoman*. The *afikoman* is the "dessert" eaten at the end of *Shulchan Orech*, a custom that dates back to Talmudic times. The *afikoman* is a **sensational** recall cue since it is a substitute for the *Korban Pesach*, which was eaten at the end of the meal when one is meant to be satisfied[6].

After *Yachatz* is *Maggid,* which is the retelling of the redemption from Egypt, where we educate the children and rehash the story for ourselves. *Maggid* primarily uses **auditory** recall cues as we tell stories of the redemption from Egypt. At the end of *Maggid,* the first half of *Hallel* (prayer of praise) is another **auditory** recall cue, symbolizing the feeling of freedom and joy from being redeemed by the strong hand of G-d. *Motzi Matzah* comes next, which is both a **visual** and **sensational** recall cue to the redemption. *Matzah* is unleavened bread, a testament to the haste of leaving Egypt felt both by the sight and how it feels in our mouths. *Maror,* the last section in part one, is the complete antithesis to *matzah*, representing servitude through taste, a **sensational** recall cue.

Part 2: Freedom/Self-Determination

The second part of the Haggadah begins with *Korech*, as it is the first section that is not directly correlated to any part of the narrative. *Korech*, the Hillel sandwich, symbolizes self-determination by combining

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[5] Nosson and Yitzchok Zev Scherman, Artscroll Youth Haggadah (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1995), p. 14.
[6] https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/04-16-34/

matzah, which represents our freedom, and maror, which represents our pain, blending freedom and servitude. It allows us to control our own destiny, whether to experience freedom or servitude within our lives, utilizing our ability to make our own decisions. This combination serves as a powerful **sensational** recall cue to the duality of the holiday and our experience of it today. *Shulchan Orech*, the part of the *Seder* where we eat, also takes on a **sensational** recall cue, symbolizing relaxation and laid-backness. Furthermore, in many households, the tradition is to eat an egg dipped in salt water to start the meal. The egg is a **sensational** recall cue of the festival sacrifice (*Chagigah*) given together with the paschal lamb.[7]

Shulchan Orech allows us to reflect and commemorate the Temple services and temple times through the egg and the meal. The meal and the egg are recall cues to remind us of our self-determination and freedom to express ourselves in our homeland during Temple times. This idea takes on all three sensations, embedding in our memory the glory of our ancestor's ability to live their lives freely after many years of servitude.

How do we form and recall memories?

In simple terms, memories form when neural pathways strengthen through repeated activity. This

[7] Mishna Brurah 476:11 quotes the Gra (Maaseh Rav 187) that the egg isn't associated with mourning but rather remembering the Chagigah sacrifice which was brought together with the paschal lamb.

process, known as synaptic plasticity, involves ongoing reinforcement that reshapes connections in the brain[8]. For example, any **perceptual** recall cues (**auditory**, **visual,** and **sensational**), which are vast and repetitive, are associated with certain aspects of the Passover narrative. These cues create a neural pathway associating the cue with the Exodus experience.

Recalling memories is as simple as doing the same activity as was done when forming the memories. By using recall cues, we can remember events and information related to the specific cue.

> *"Retrieval cues are aspects of an individual's physical and cognitive environment which aid the recall process; incidentally they can be explicitly provided at recall, self-generated, or encountered more through the retrieval context."*[9]

The environment organized on Passover is designed for the recall cues to strengthen our experience and connection to our past. For this reason, it is crucial that the cues throughout the *Seder* be vast and have specific associations. Otherwise, we would lose an integral part of the Passover narrative, which is the experience of our ancestors.

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[8] Hopkinsmedicine.org, Inside the Science of Memory

[9] Wheeler RL, Gabbert F. Using Self-Generated Cues to Facilitate Recall: A Narrative Review. Front Psychol. 2017 Oct 27;8:1830. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01830. PMID: 29163254; PMCID: PMC5664228.

B'chol Dor V'dor

The model of the Haggadah that I offer allows us to travel back in time and experience the struggles of our ancestors. Our senses help us experience the world through hearing sounds, seeing sights, and tasting foods. We engage these senses to recognize that our ancestors' struggles are not merely relics of the past but continue to resonate in the present. Each year, we experience it anew.

> *"Generation by generation, each person must see himself as if he himself had come out of Egypt…"*

This pivotal moment of our narrative as Jews is carried on with us generation by generation. Losing sight of the connection between our struggles today and the struggles of our ancestors would be tragic. This model ensures that we stay true to our history as the *Seder* takes us through an experiential journey of our past, present, and future, ensuring we never forget our roots. This ancient story is not just an idea from the distant past, but rather an extension of our own collective memories.

The Ritva (in his commentary to the Haggadah) echoes the idea that collective memory is the memories of an individual as part of a collective in his commentary on the verse "Generation by generation…":

> ***In every generation, a person is responsible, etc****. That is, each and every individual must see himself as if he were a slave in Egypt and came out*

> *to be free, as it is said, "For this the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt, as it states above '(He did this miracle) for me and not for him.'"*

For the memory to truly be yours, you must internalize how personal this story is (the Miracle was for **me**), embody it, and then live it through the *Seder*. We must own our past, and recognize its influence on our lives as individuals and collective Jews. This is my story, this is your story, this is our story. The narrative is a part of our lives, and in addition to recognizing its collective influence, we must also understand its intimate connection to us as individuals.

Kadesh

Sanctifying Time: The Beginning of Jewish Time

Rabbi Dr. Jacob B. Aaronson ~ Night Seder Coordinator; Ra"M

If you were to ask someone to tell you the first month of the Jewish calendar, they would likely reply *Tishrei*, when we celebrate *Rosh HaShanah*, literally translated as the beginning of the year. But if you look in the Torah, you will see that *Rosh HaShanah* is described as falling in the seventh month. When the Jews are about to leave Egypt, they are given their first mitzvah as a people. It is the mitzvah of *Kiddush HaChodesh*, sanctifying the months, beginning with the month of Nisan. "The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: This month shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year" (Shemot 12:1-2).

The Ramban helps us to understand this leading mitzvah and the multiple ways in which we refer to the months of the year. In commemoration of the miracle of the exodus and the formation of our people, we reference the months of the year from the exodus. The Torah describes annual events in reference to this singular event. This is similar to how we reference the days of the week in terms of Shabbat. *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and *Sukkot* are described by the Torah as falling in the

seventh month. When it comes to calculating complete years, we count from Tishrei.

Our system of tracking time reflects and continually references the foundational events of the exodus from Egypt. The Ramban also notes that sanctifying the months "is the first commandment which the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Israel through Moses" (ibid). The Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, explains some of the philosophy of the this mitzvah and why it is so central to our transition from slavery to freedom:

> *Time is of critical importance—not years or months, but seconds and split seconds. This time-awareness and appreciation is the singular gift granted to free man, because time belongs to him: it is his time, and he can utilize it to the utmost or waste it. A free man does not want time to pass; he wants time to slow down, because to him time is a treasure. To the slave, however, time is a curse; he waits for the day to pass. The slave's time is the property of his master. No matter how hard he may try to be productive in time, he will not reap the harvest of his work; therefore, he is insensitive to time. His sense of the movement of time, the passing of hours, days, weeks, is very dull. Life, to the slave personality, is motionless.*

> *The Judaic philosophy of time comes to expression in the text of Kiddush. In physics, time is quantified, measured by the clock. But pure time, real time, cannot be quantified; it is pure quality. With Kiddush, we sanctify time and endow it with creativity and meaning. It is the first thing we do as free people at the Seder. The first commandment they were given in Egypt, marking the commencement of their liberation, was to mark time: "This month shall be to you the beginning of months" (Ex. 12:2). We have gained the consciousness of time, and therefore we are free. (Soloveitchik, p.41-42)*

The Rav explains that the experience of time is drastically different for the slave and the free man. The slave cannot control, direct, or fully experience time. He passively waits for it to pass. But time is of the highest value to the free man. He can invest his time and reap the benefits. Given the freedom granted to us by God, we can engage in the act of reciting *Kiddush*, sanctifying and elevating our time. We sanctify every month, every Shabbat, every holiday. And this is the way we begin the Seder.

As we stood upon the precipice of freedom, we were poised to leave slavery behind us. Having been subservient to Pharaoh, we would soon be able to design our own lives and direct our own time. Prior to this transition, we were given the mitzvah of *Kiddush HaChodesh*, sanctifying our time. Freedom is a means to

living lives of purpose and ultimate value. We count, calculate, and appreciate our time in reference to this Divine gift.

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Kadesh

A New Meaning of *Cheyrus*

Moe Wiedermann ~ Dallas, Texas

The word *Kadesh* has the same meaning as *Kiddush,* meaning to sanctify or separate. *Kiddush* for all of the festivals has the exact same wording with only the phase swapped out between them. For *Pesach*, the phrase is *Chag Hamatzos hazeh, zman Chayrusaynu*, meaning "the festival of matzos, the time of our freedom. This phrase is also found in *Ya'aleh Veyovo, an inclusion* in both the *Amidoh* and *Birkas Hamazon* of festivals.

The Hebrew language has two words that mean freedom: *Chofesh*, which is the common word used today in modern Hebrew, and *Chayrus*, the word used here in the *hagadah*. My question is, what is the difference between *Chofesh* and *Chayrus* and why was *Chayrus* chosen to be a part of the liturgy? Rabbi Sacks answers this question by translating the word *Chayrus* not as "freedom" but as "engraving." The word *Chayrus* is even used when describing how the ten commandments were inscribed on the tablets (see Exodus 32:16). Our freedom became something set in stone and for all time. This double meaning was first written about by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Layvi who said that no man can be free unless he occupies himself by studying Torah (see Ethic of Our Fathers 6:2).

I would like to propose a different etymological comparison. I suggest that there could be a comparison

between *Chayrus* and *Chor*, meaning a noble (see I Kings 21:8 and 11). As such, we would translate the phrase in *Kadesh* as "the festival of matzos, the time of our nobility." Not only have we become freemen, we have become noblemen. In an instant we have switched from the lowest of society to the highest! It is for this very reason that we are supposed to eat as royalty does throughout the *seder*. Maimonides elucidates that we are obligated to recline while we eat as does royalty, because we are free (see Maimonides on Mishnah tractate Pesachim 10:1).

What we are doing in *Kadesh* is exactly this. Noble people drink wine. They raise their glass to each other and celebrate the time they are living in. The meaning of the word *Chayrusaynu* is not just to mean that we were made free, but that we were elevated from slavery, the lowest dregs of society, to a sanctified nation of noblemen. *Kadesh* sanctifies the day, but in it, we are sanctifying ourselves. We state through *Kadesh* that God was "*romemanu mikol lashon, vekidishanu bemitzvosav.*" *Kadesh* tells us that we are separated and set aside to serve Hashem in ways that other nations can't.

So let us continue in the path of our forefathers and sanctify this night as one not only of freedom, but of sanctity as well; not only of nobility, but separateness for a greater mission.

Heseba

Leaning and Learning

Rabbi Aryeh Sklar ~ Ra"M

Leaning at the Seder, called Heseba, is an interesting example of a historical artifact at the Seder. Everyone knows the experience at their Seder of awkwardly leaning to the left while drinking their wine and trying not to get it on their shirt or their Haggadah. I don't think anyone has felt very free while doing so. We know that the source for leaning is the fact that people used to eat on couches, and leaning while eating and drinking meant one was of the upper class. Nevertheless, leaning today remains very important. According to most *poskim*, one who doesn't lean at the Seder does not fulfill his obligation and might have to do the various actions that require leaning with them (such as the Four Cups, *matzah*, and so on) again. The Abudraham, in his section of the Haggadah, provides both opinions:

> *Anyone who is required to lean and eats and drinks without leaning, he does not fulfill his obligation. And we say in Exodus Rabbah: (Exodus 13:18) "God tilted the path..." From here our rabbis said, "Even the poor Jewish man cannot eat until he leans, for this is what God did for them, as it says, 'And God tilted the path.' And the Avi HaEzri writes*

that today, since we don't normally lean in our lands, a person should sit as he normally does and does not need to lean.

Here, the Abudraham quotes the Avi HaEzri (also known as the Raavyah), that since we do not lean today in regular life, we should not continue to lean at the Seder. This position, by the way, is later quoted by the Tur (OC 472) and Rama (OC 472:7). And it seems quite logical. So how do we explain the alternative, which is what we generally do? Why do we continue to lean when it seems counter to promoting the feeling of freedom it is meant to represent?

Additionally, the Abudraham's proof from the midrash (Exodus Rabbah 20:18) is very strange. It does not seem to prove that one does not fulfill his obligation if he doesn't lean. Instead, all it says the poor man cannot eat until he leans. This might only be relevant for a time when people would lean, but not that one actually has to lean. Additionally, what does this have to do with God "tilting" the path of the Jewish people when they left Egypt? What does God's circuitous route have to do with leaning at the Seder? I'd like to provide three answers, each with their own valuable lesson for our Pesach Seder this year.

1. Rav Menachem Mendel Kasher, in Torah Shelema on this verse, quotes the Ktav Sofer that it means the following: The emphasis is the "poor Jewish man." How can the poor man, the most destitute person, lean at the seder, when there are so many reasons to not feel free? How can the rabbis insist he do something he does not feel? The answer is that the poor man might think he's in a hopeless situation, with no way out. That's how

the Jewish people felt in the desert - that they were trapped, with no way out. God took them out from a situation that felt hopeless, by leaning them. If God could do it then, He could help the poor man now. That is why even the poor person should lean. According to this, we lean as well because it is a symbol of God's leaning of us in the desert and our hopefulness for a brighter future, even though we rarely feel free through the act of leaning.

2. The Maharal (Gevurot Hashem 61) says that freedom is an ontological truth of the Jewish condition. No matter what external circumstances make us feel enslaved, the redemption of the Jewish people in Egypt is so essential to the nature of the Jewish people that even the most downtrodden person is truly a king. He states:

> *When the Israelites left Egypt, they attained an inherent goodness to the extent that they became worthy in their own right of being free people. This status is intrinsic to Israel – that they are inherently deserving of freedom due to their essential greatness. An incidental occurrence cannot nullify an intrinsic reality. Thus, Israel still retains this status – that they are inherently free – even while experiencing subjugation, which is merely incidental. For after the Holy One, Blessed be He, took Israel out of Egypt, He granted them freedom; and not only that, but He made them kings, as it is stated (Exodus 19), "And you*

shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Therefore, we might say, when God took the Jewish people on a circuitous route, it symbolized the external, non-intrinsic nature of the exile before they return to Israel. Even the poor person has to lean, because even if he feels downtrodden, he has to bring out the feelings of freedom in himself that are latent inside. So too, we lean because we show that we are intrinsically free, just as God showed us in the past.

3. Rabbi Avraham Taub, in his *Divrei Tovah* on Beshalach, has a creative "pilpul"-style answer. He writes that had God taken us the short way, we would have arrived in the land of Israel in one day. Remember, they are traveling on Chag Hamatzot, having eaten the Pesach the night before. If they would have arrived in Israel that day, they would have kept only one day of *chag*. But since God had them go the long way, they were in *Chutz Laaretz*, and therefore He was literally "*yasev*" them - He made them have to lean again and have the Seder for another night, for *Yom Tov Sheni shel Galuyot*! Therefore, says Rabbi Taub creatively, the derivation makes sense - God made them lean for another night, and if we know they leaned the second night, they obviously leaned the first night. Thus, we lean because God "leaned" us an extra time, even when we ordinarily would not have had to.

These three answers provide three practical lessons as we begin in earnest our Seder experience. Number one is that the Seder is an opportunity for us to remember what real freedom is - hope. God gave us hope in the desert, in His protection of us. We lean as He

leaned us. No matter how poor our personal circumstances are, we can recall and maintain that hope through symbolically leaning, just as God did to us back then. Just as the poor person must lean at the Seder for that hope of their circumstances changing ever better, so too us at the Seder.

Number two is that the Seder is a time to remind ourselves that even in times of crisis, upheaval, and uncertainty, our freedom is intrinsic to who we are. Nothing can take that away from us, because it is our very identity, as the Maharal writes. We should lean with the understanding that freedom is in our essence, whether we eat on couches or on floors or at tables. At all times and in all places, we lean, because we are forever free.

And number three, let's be creative. Let's find the reasons for the Seder, even when it feels extra and unnecessary, because it is part of our tradition and history. Rabbi Taub was really creative, as if the Jewish people would have been keeping two days of Yom Tov in the desert the same year of their departure from Egypt, as if there was any *safek* at all. He knows, as we all do, that this is a creative *drash*. Well, he is teaching us that we lean for the extra *drash*, for the piece of Torah (and matzah) that keeps us going and makes the Seder informative and memorable.

Yes, many parts of the Seder are for the children to ask (the Aruch HaShulchan OC 472:6 says this is the reason we lean today as well). But providing them with answers that broaden and sharpen their minds and help them think differently than they normally would is very important as well. So lean, because by leaning, you're learning!

Urchatz

Curb Your Impurity: Urḥats and the Great Hand-Washing Debate

Israel Isaac Skuratovsky ~ Boca Raton, FL

Tannaitic literature lacks mention of any hand washing during the Passover meal beyond what precedes the unleavened bread. However, the *Tosephta*, *Berakhoth* 4:8 (Neusner) prescribes hand washing before regular meals' hors d'oeuvres:

A. What is the order of the meal [at a communal meal]?
B. As the guests enter, they are seated on benches or chairs while all [the guests] assemble [and are seated together].
C. [E lacks: Once all have assembled and] they [the attendants] have given them [water] for their hands,
A. each [guest] washes one hand.
B. [When] they [the attendants] have mixed for them the cup [of wine], each one recites the benediction [over wine] for himself.
C. [When] they have brought before them appetizers, each one recites the benediction [over appetizers] for himself.
D. [When] they have arisen [from the benches or seats] and reclined [to the second stage of the

meal], and they [the attendants] have [again] given them [water] for their hands,

E. even though each has already washed one hand, he now must wash both hands.

F. When they [the attendants] have [again] mixed for them the cup, even though each has recited a benediction over the first [cup], he recites a benediction over the second [also].

G. When they [the attendants] have brought before them appetizers, even though each has recited a benediction over the first [appetizers], he recites a benediction over the second,

H. and one person recites the benediction for all of them [at this stage of the meal].

I. One who arrives after three [courses of] appetizers [have been served] is not allowed to enter [to join the meal].

According to the *Tosephta*, people would wash one hand, likely for cleanliness and etiquette, since they ate hors d'oeuvres by hand while holding a wine cup with the other (see *Derekh ʾErets Rabba* 7). Later, the Babylonian Talmud, *Pesaḥim* 10:3, II.4 (115a–b) (Neusner) assumes one must ritually wash their hands before the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres *(qarpas)*:[10]

[10] The passage assumes the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres *(qarpas)* include lettuce, despite the conclusion of the previous passage, II.2 (114b–115a). See Skuratovsky, *Herb Your Enthusiasm* (Haggadah Supplement 5784).

A. Said R. Eleazar said R. [Hoshaiah II], "Whatever is dipped in a liquid [vegetables dipped into a dip of vinegar] requires the washing of hands."
B. *Said R. Pappa, "That yields the inference that lettuce requires plunging into the mixture of apples, nuts, and wine resembling mortar on account of the poisonous substance in lettuce. For if you should imagine that it doesn't have to be plunged into it, why should it be required to wash the hands? Lo, he doesn't touch the mixture with his hand [if the lettuce is dipped in gently]!"*
C. *But perhaps I may say to you, in point of fact it doesn't have to be plunged into the mixture, since the poison perishes from its odor, but why is it necessary to wash hands? In case he plunges it into it.*

The passage's logic follows: Rav Hoshaiah II says Jewish law requires ritual hand washing before eating food dipped in liquid. I will defer this requirement's explanation, but it suffices now to note its concern with hands contaminating liquids. Rav Pappa assumes this law manifests before a Passover meal custom of dipping lettuce into *ḥaroseth*. This dipping was a custom of the *ʾAmoraʾim* that they believed neutralized a poison in lettuce. Rav Pappa infers that one must touch the *ḥaroseth*, as hand washing becomes necessary only from hand-liquid contact. An anonymous redactor challenges that dipping the lettuce into *ḥaroseth* is principally unnecessary, as its odor neutralizes the lettuce's poison. However, the editor concludes that Jewish law still requires hand washing in case someone plunges their hand into *ḥaroseth*.

Following the Babylonian Talmud assuming an obligatory ritual hand washing preceding the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres *(qarpas)*, all the *Geʾonim* and early *Rishonim*, including Solomon, son of Isaac *(RaSHiY)*, and Maimonides, codify the corresponding prescribed blessing. For example, the *Mishne Tora*, *Ḥamets Umatsa* 8:2 (Touger):

> **Afterwards, one recites the blessing, ["on hand washing"], and washes one's hands.** A set table is brought, on which are [bitter herbs], another vegetable, [unleavened bread], *[ḥaroseth]*, the body of the Paschal lamb, and the meat of the festive offering of the fourteenth of [Passover].…

Maimonides codifies this Passover meal custom following his general mandates of ritual hand washing and blessing before eating food dipped in liquid (*Mishne Tora, Berakhoth* 6:1, 11:15). Additionally, medieval Palestinian and Babylonian rite *Haggadoth* feature instructions or texts for the hand washing blessing preceding the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres.

However, in the 12th century, some Ashkenazi *Rishonim* began questioning the practice of blessing the ritual hand washing preceding the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres. To explain their objection, I must digress to hand washing before eating food dipped in liquid. First, however, I must explain hand washing's foundation in ritual purity. Jewish law legislates a four-tiered impurity system whereby an item's impurity level contaminates

another item at the descending level. Items of primary impurity transmit secondary impurity to items that transmit tertiary impurity to items. However, tertiarily impure items do not contaminate further (except for Temple sacrifices). Accordingly, they do not *impurify* priestly dues but *invalidate* them, meaning priests may not eat them, yet they do not transmit further impurity. See the *Mishna*, *Zavim* 5:12, for a list of tertiarily impure items that invalidate priestly dues.

Focusing on the requirement's liquid element, the *Mishna*, *Para* 8:7 (Cohen, Goldenberg, Lapin) explains its impure status:

> Anything that invalidates *terumah*
> communicates impurity to liquids,
> so that they become first-degree impurities
> that communicate impurity to one [degree of contact]
> and invalidate one [more],
> except for the *tevul yom*.
> Now, it could say:
> "What communicates impurity to you doesn't make me impure.
> But you have made me impure!"

Tertiary-level impure items cause liquids to become primarily impure. The *Mishna* ends with a dialogue symbolizing that tertiary-level impure items that invalidate priestly dues do not affect profane items. However, as the *Mishna* teaches, if those tertiary-level impure items contaminate liquid to become primarily impure, those liquids can contaminate profane items. See

the Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 1:4, II.11–12 (14b) for this classification's motivation.

Finally, returning to the specific stipulation, two premises ground the requirement of ritual hand washing before eating foods dipped in liquid: first, hands that one has neglected to maintain pure since their previous washing are secondarily impure. Second, as the *Mishna* above details, an impurified liquid automatically has a primary impurity. Thus, neglected hands render liquid primarily impure, which transmits secondary impurity to the food. However, some Ashkenazi *Rishonim* (*Tosaphoth* on Babylonian Talmud, *Pesaḥim* 10:3, II.4 (115a), s.v. "*Kol sheṭṭibbelo bemashqe*"; Meir of Rothenburg ob der Tauber apud Jacob, son of Asher, *ʾArbaʿa Ṭurim* 473) argue that all the above regulations are irrelevant because nobody endeavors to eat pure food. Thus, they conclude that the hand washing preceding the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres is not essentially obligatory, and the blessing there would be in vain. This ruling gradually spread to all Ashkenazi Jewry, even penetrating Sephardic Jewry, like with Joseph Karo's *Shulḥan ʿArukh*, *ʾOraḥ Ḥayyim* 473:6 (Sefaria):

> One washes his hands for the sake of the first dipping [of food], but he does not recite a blessing on the washing.

Regarding the remainder of the year, Karo similarly rules in *ʾOraḥ Ḥayyim* 158:4 for ritual hand washing without a blessing. While almost all Jews follow Karo's ruling during the Passover meal, few even wash their hands before eating food dipped in liquid

throughout the year. Furthermore, most contemporary legal scholars rule for universal hand washing.

While the argument of the Ashkenazi *Rishonim* against ritual hand washing's essentialness preceding the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres is defensible, its logical conclusion is not to wash one's hands at all. The Ashkenazi *Rishonim* contend that hand washing for dipped food becomes unnecessary after ritual purity's obsolescence. However, this status quo middle-ground position is difficult. Applying the law of excluded middle, Jewish law either requires hand washing for dipped food, necessitating a blessing or does not mandate it entirely. As the seminal legal codifier, Karo may rebut that one should not bless if the generating obligation is doubtful. However, this reasoning and its resulting custom is, in my opinion, problematic.

I personally see the neglect of hand washing before eating dipped foods throughout the year, while exceptionally hand washing during the Passover meal, as quite problematic. Children learn that the Passover meal prescribes two hand washings, one with and one without a blessing, and they only hear the rationalization in seminary, if at all. By then, common practice during Passover and throughout the year has already instilled the pernicious conviction that Jewish law prescribes arbitrary rituals. Therefore, consistency and understanding of every custom are imperative to dignifying and relishing Jewish law. As such, I feel that one should hand wash, with a blessing, before all dipped foods, including before the Passover meal's hors d'oeuvres, following the Babylonian Talmud's requirement, the paradigmatic Rabbinic Passover meal, and Maimonides' codification.

Karpas

Karpas Creativity

Asher Pinto ~ Woodmere, NY

What comes to mind when you think of *karpas*? Celery and saltwater? Potatoes? But what if someone said fries and ketchup? You might think they're joking. Surely, you can't use fries and ketchup for *karpas*! But is that really the case?

The earliest mention of *karpas* in the Seder is found in the Mishnah (Pesachim 114a):

> *They bring [food] before him, and he dips the lettuce [or another vegetable] before reaching the meal.*

The Gemara (Pesachim 114b) explains that this dipping is done "so that the children will see and ask." The main goal of *karpas*, then, is to create curiosity and engagement at the Seder.

But what exactly is *karpas*? The term itself does not appear in the Mishnah or Gemara regarding the Seder. Rashi (Pesachim 114a) writes that *karpas* is a vegetable, and Tosafot (Pesachim 114a) notes that it is dipped in vinegar or another liquid.

Regarding the choice of vegetable, the Rishonim provide different perspectives. The Rambam (Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 8:2) states:

> *One takes a vegetable, dips it in vinegar or salt water, recites 'borei pri ha'adama,' and eats a kezayit.*

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 473:6) follows this ruling but does not specify a particular vegetable. The general custom is to use parsley, celery, or even potatoes. The key requirement is that it must be a vegetable with the blessing of *borei pri ha'adama* and that it not be maror.

Since the purpose of *karpas* is to spark curiosity and questions, it is worth considering how creativity in this part of the Seder can enhance its effectiveness. The goal is not just to follow tradition but to make the experience engaging and thought-provoking, ensuring that participants—especially children—actively ask about what is happening at the table. Finding ways to make the *karpas* moment stand out, such as using french fries and ketchup, can help achieve this goal, making the Seder a more interactive and meaningful experience for all.

Yachatz

Yachatz: One Man's Slavery is Another Man's Freedom?

Noach Popack ~ Woodmere, NY

During Yachatz, we break apart the middle matzah, hide the larger half for the end of the meal as the afikomen, and put the smaller half between the two matzahs.

What is the purpose of these actions? To understand this, we must first examine the essence of matzah.

Matzah is a perplexing subject in Judaism. It is called the "bread of affliction", as it says in Devarim 16:3, "...for seven days you shall eat with it matzoth, the bread of affliction…" But it also symbolizes freedom, as it states in Shemot 12:39, "They baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as unleavened cakes, for it had not leavened…"

How is it possible for two concepts that could not be more different to both be represented by matzah?

To explore this duality, we must turn to the context of Yachatz. We just finished Karpas. Many have the custom of dipping the vegetables in salt water, leading to an association with the salty tears of our forefathers during the years of harsh slavery.

During Yachatz, we continue this theme of pain and affliction, and I believe the breaking of the middle

matzah symbolizes this. Specifically, we place the smaller half between the two whole matzot, which replace the two loaves of challah typically used on Shabbat. These loaves represent the double portion of manna provided to us in the wilderness, as explained in Shabbat 117b: "Rav Ashi said: I saw that Rav Kahana took two loaves in his hand… He said in explanation that it is written: 'They collected double the bread' [in reference to the manna of the wilderness]." Just as God supported us in the wilderness with the manna, so too He comforted us in the time of slavery. Thus, we take the smaller broken matzah and place it between these matzahs representing slavery and God's comfort during this time.

Let's now look at the afikoman. The afikoman is (so to speak) "broken apart" from our affliction. It's the larger half of the middle matzah that we wrap and hide away for the end of the Seder. The afikomen is eaten as dessert. Afterward, in Barech, we thank God for our meal. We then open the door for Elijah the Prophet, the harbinger of the Messiah. We conclude with songs of praise to God in Hallel and sing L'Shana HaBa'ah B'Y'rushalayim [Next Year in Jerusalem] during Nirtza. In doing so, we express our hope that the Messiah will arrive in the coming year, so we can all be in Jerusalem. The afikomen is representative of gratitude, joy, and connection with God.

To resolve this contradiction we have to assume that there is something more fundamental that unites the different descriptions of matzah. I believe that the deeper meaning lies in matzah being the "working man's bread". In the Abarbanel's commentary to the Haggadah (on Ha Lachma Anya), he quotes Isaac the Israelite saying, "A piece of matzah is hard for the stomach to digest, and it

takes a long time to go through the digestive system…. the Egyptians served it to Israel so that a small amount of bread would sustain them for a long time when they were working for the king and making bricks." In our haste to leave Egypt, we were too busy to let the bread rise. In both contexts, the matzah is used in the context of work, with the Egyptians, our hard labor, and in our exit, our efforts to leave.

It seems that with our slavery in Egypt our "working man's bread" is transformed into the "bread of affliction" since our work for Pharaoh was permeated with abuse and cruelty. Whereas with God, our "working man's bread" is the "bread of freedom" because it is our national destiny, in some sense, to be God's "slaves", as it says in Shemot 10:3, "Send free my people so that they may serve me!" God "freed" us and made us his nation, thus our "working man's bread" now represents our work in the service of God. It seems that our true "freedom" is to be in the service of God, where our national potential can be most manifest.

What does this have to do with Yachatz? The rituals of Yachatz seem to represent our long, hard, painful exile, but also a message about our future hope. First, it represents the exile. Not only is it preceded by *karpas*, which is dipped in the saltwater representing our tears, but in Yachatz itself, we split the matzah which symbolizes our pain and suffering. However, at the same time, we hide away the afikomen, symbolizing our hope for the future. This hope looks forward to a time when the splitting will no longer be an act of affliction, but rather one of God's love and protection, as it was during the Splitting of the Sea. By splitting the matzah now, we are saying that we are dedicating our efforts with our

"working man's bread" to God instead of to Egypt. We look forward to the time when our throats will not be full of whimpering and our tears will not be of sorrow, rather our throats will be full of praise and our tears of joy. We will no longer open the door for the Egyptians or any of our enemies who seek to slay our children, but rather we will open our door for the harbinger of our final redemption.

Yachatz represents our hope for the future in our time of affliction, and our search for God in this time of spiritual darkness.

Maggid

Questions on the Answer

Rabbi Walter Orenstein, zt"l

Rabbi Walter Orenstein taught at YU and Stern College for Women. Several months after his passing in March 2023, his family reached out to Migdal to ask if we were interested in his copious notes and teaching material related to matters of faith and philosophy. Full length dissertations on Olam Haba, Resurrection of the Dead, and other such topics were brought to Yeshiva and made available for our students' perusal. One short piece on the Haggadah was found, and we are including it here for your edification. May his memory be a blessing.

There are two *mitzvot d'oraita* fulfilled at the Seder. One is matzah, derived from the verse:

"In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty first day of the month at evening." (Shemot 12:18)

The second is to tell the story of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt at the Seder. This mitzvah is spelled out in Shemot 13:6,8 as follows:

"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of the Lord... And you shall explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did to me when I went free from Egypt'."

As such, we tell and retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt year after year in fulfillment of the mitzvah.

The story is told in a question and answer format. Four questions are asked, after which we recite the answer. It is our custom that the youngest child asks the questions, but in actuality if only a husband and wife are making the Seder, the wife asks her husband, and if one person is making the Seder, he asks the questions and answers them. All this is to maintain the question and answer format.

Now the truth of the matter is that the answers that we give to the Four Questions pose some questions themselves. This is what we will devote ourselves to this afternoon, namely, *the questions on the answer.*

Just before the Four Questions are asked, we invite all who are hungry to come and join us. It begins as follows:

"This is the bread of affliction (poor man's bread) that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt."

Is this correct? But we read in Shemot 12:34:

"So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders… and they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves."

Doesn't the matzah we eat commemorate the matzah the Israelites baked as they left Egypt?

The answer is that there are two kinds of matzah that we commemorate at the Seder. One is the matzah that the Israelite slaves ate in Egypt because their taskmasters didn't allow them to bake regular bread.

Why? One reason is because it would have taken too long; it would take too much time away from work. Another is because matzah is difficult to digest; it keeps you feeling full for a long time. As such, the slaves wouldn't have to eat so many times a day. This matzah is called "*lechem oni*" or "*lechem avdut*."

Then there is the matzah the Israelites baked upon leaving Egypt. That matzah is called "*lechem shel geulah*."

So matzah is symbolic of two ideas: *galut* and *geulah*.

But why mention *galut* at all? The answer is because it is a prerequisite to *geulah*. *Geulah* emerges from *galut*. If there were no *galut* there would be no need for *geulah*.

The Talmud (Pesachim 116a) teaches that we must begin the story of the redemption at the Seder with the shame of the Jewish people and end the story with their praise. In a sense, the *galut* of the Jewish people is their shame, for were it not for their sins they would not have been exiled. They would not have been in *galut* in the first place. The *geulah* is their praise because were it not for their merit they would not have been redeemed.

Lechem oni, the bread they ate in Egypt, represents *galut*. Perhaps that is why we mention it at the beginning of the Seder.

Now, why do we recite this paragraph in Aramaic, rather than in Hebrew like the rest of the Haggadah? There are two answers.

The simple answer is that this is an invitation for the poor to join us in our celebration. The Jews were in Babylonia and Aramaic was the language all the Jews spoke and understood at the time.

A more sophisticated answer is the following. While ordinarily when we petition God for our needs, the Talmud warns us not to petition in Aramaic for the angels whose duty it is to bring our prayers and petitions before God, because they do not recognize this language. Whereas, at the Seder when we recite praises to God, we don't need the help of the angels. Why is that? The Zohar teaches that God Himself is present at the Seder. So beginning the Seder in Aramaic symbolizes that truth.

After the four questions are asked, we immediately begin the "answer," in fulfillment of the mitzvah to tell of the story of the redemption. The opening paragraph already presents a problem. We read:

"And even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all of us elders, all of us well-versed in the Torah - we are still commanded to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. The more one tells about the departure from Egypt, the more one is to be praised."

Why? If we are wise, people of understanding, elders who have experienced so much of life, if we are already well-versed in the Torah, why do we have to keep on telling the story? And why is it that the more one tells of the story, the more he is to be praised?

The answer is that the telling of the story of the redemption from Egypt isn't merely relating the history that took place at the time. For if it were, there would be no purpose in the wise and the well-versed in torah telling and retelling the story. They certainly know all the details. Instead, the telling of the story is a fulfillment of Hallel, praise to God for that great event in history, the miraculous redemption that took place and the wondrous miracles he performed for our ancestors at the

time. Can there be a limit to our praise of god? The more we praise him the better.

But wait a minute. The Talmud (Berachot 33b) relates the following:

"A certain [reader] went down in the presence of Rabbi Haninah and said: O God, the great, mighty, terrible, majestic, powerful, awful, strong, fearless, sure and honoured. He waited till he had finished, and when he had finished he said to him, Have you concluded all the praise of your Master? Why do we want all this? Even with these three that we do say, had not Moses our Master mentioned them in the Law and had not the Men of the Great Synagogue come and inserted them in the Tefillah, we should not have been able to mention them, and you say all these and still go on! It is as if an earthly king had a million denarii of gold, and someone praised him as possessing silver ones. Would it not be an insult to him?"

It would seem from here that one simply has no right to praise God in his own words. So considering that the telling of the story of the redemption from Egypt is praise, by what right are we told that the more one tells of the story, the better?

The answer is that our sages rule (Rashbam and Rosh on this Gemara and the Tur: Orach Chaim 113) that the limitation of our praise to God applies only to the amidah. At any other time, we may praise as much as we are moved to do. Therefore, "The more one tells about the redemption from Egypt [which is a form of praise to God], the more one is to be praised."

The next paragraph of the Haggadah gives us an example of five *talmidei chachamim* who fulfilled the mitzvah of telling the story of the redemption all night.

They were certainly to be praised. But what is difficult to understand is the significance of the statement of their students when they said: "Our dear rabbis, the time has come to recite the morning *Shema*."

Now it is important to note that the author of the Haggadah tells us that the rabbis spoke of the redemption from Egypt all night, until the morning. We know that the mitzvah of telling the story of the redemption is fulfilled only at night, not during the day. Yet, when morning came, they were still speaking. What mitzvah were they fulfilling?

By this time, they would have finished the story of the redemption and would have been studying the laws of Pesach. While these are indeed part of the mitzvah of telling the story of the redemption, doing so also fulfills the general mitzvah of studying Torah.

Now, Jewish law tells us that if a person is involved in a mitzvah and another mitzvah comes his way, he may continue with the mitzvah in which he is involved and disregard the new one. But when does this apply? Only when the second mitzvah can be fulfilled at a later time. But if it is a time-oriented mitzvah, one must interrupt the first mitzvah and go to the second.

Now the study of Torah is not a time-oriented mitzvah; it applies all day and all night. The mitzvah of *keriat shema*, however, is a time oriented mitzvah. The halacha therefore tells us that we must interrupt the study of Torah in order to recite the *Shema*. This is what the students came and told their teachers.

Now you may ask: Didn't the teachers know the halacha? Of course they did. It was not the halacha of which they were ignorant, it was that they were so engrossed in their studies that they didn't realize that

daylight had already come and with it the time to recite the *Shema*.

The next paragraph of the Haggadah reads as follows: "R. Elazar ben Azariah said: Although I was like a seventy year old, I was never privileged to find valid biblical support for reciting the story of the departure from Egypt at night until I heard Ben Zoma expound on this very theme…"

Let me first clarify that Rabbi Elazar was eighteen at the time. Nowhere near seventy. He was a *talmid chacham* of the highest order. He studied Torah day and night, and perhaps that was what made him look old. The Talmud tells us that God blessed him with grey hair so that he would look older and his colleagues would respect him as an elder.

Now Rabbi Elazar was not speaking about the Seder night. Everyone agrees that the mitzvah of telling the story of the departure from Egypt at the Seder, which takes place at night, is a biblical commandment. What Rabbi Elazar was referring to is the mention of the Exodus in the daily and holiday Maariv service. Let us ask the question: Why was Rabbi Elazar so concerned with mentioning the Exodus at night?

To answer this question, we must understand the symbolism of day and night in Jewish literature. Day is marked by light and light symbolizes Torah. Day symbolizes joy and happiness; it symbolizes the multiplicity of blessings that God grants mankind. Day symbolizes *geulah*, redemption, personal redemption that each and every one of us attain in life and redemption of the nation of Israel. Night, on the other hand, symbolizes *galut*, the exile. It symbolizes darkness, the inability to see things clearly. Fear of the unknown and terror when

contemplating the known. It symbolizes pain and tragedy, suffering and death.

The Psalmist writes (Psalms 92:2-3): "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to proclaim Your goodness in the morning, and Your faithfulness at night."

"Night" is symbolic of the night of *galut* in which we, as a nation, find ourselves. In this *galut*, where we are oppressed by the nations of the world and depressed over our situation, our Sages tell us that it is important to mention God's faithfulness, that He will fulfill his promises to redeem us from *galut* and bring on the *geulah shelema*.

Every night, as we experience the literal night, we also experience the symbolic night. Whether it is the *galut* experience of anti-semitism, or the barbarism of the Arabs in and around Israel who commit terror, we need that encouragement, that shot in the arm of hope to keep us going. We mention the departure from Egypt because it is proof positive that God cares, that He is concerned with his people, that He has not left them to power politics, that He keeps his promises, that He does redeem.

That is why Rabbi Elazar was so anxious to establish that the story of the Exodus should be recited at night. It is proof-positive of God's faithfulness.

As we celebrate the Seder this year, we need that encouragement as well. This year, perhaps more than any other year, we must tell ourselves that God is faithful, that He will fulfill His promise to redeem the people of Israel, that He will bring peace and security to the nation of Israel and to the world at large as well. May Hashem's will be fulfilled speedily in our time. *Amen v'amen.*

Ha Lachma Anya

The Bread of Freedom

Jeremy Levin ~ Richmond, VA

Maggid begins with a short piece written in the Geonic period. This paragraph, written in Aramaic, begins with holding up the matza, showing it to those at the table, and reciting:

> *This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come in and eat; let all who are in need come and join us for the Pesach. Now we are here; next year in the land of Israel. Now – slaves; next year we shall be free.*

We are immediately struck by a question. What is a paragraph written in Aramaic doing in a book full of *lashon hakodesh* (i.e., Hebrew)? The answer given in the Mesivta Haggadah, citing the *rishonim*, is that since this was written in the Geonic era, a time when many spoke Aramaic, the decision was made to write it in a way that women and children could understand it. The problem then becomes that if so, why is the last little bit, "Next year we will be free," still written in Hebrew? The Mesivta Haggadah answers this as well, stating that even though the authors wanted this paragraph to be easily accessible by all people, they also worried the last bit

would be too easily misunderstood by the gentiles. Thus, they decided to write in *lashon hakodesh*, so as to limit its meaning to a very specific audience.

This need for Ha Lachma Anya to both speak to the Jewish people, and exclude gentiles who might misunderstand or cause problems, ties into an oddity in the text of Ha Lachma Anya itself. One of the first questions that arises is the final line: "Now we are slaves; next year we will be free." This assertion is perplexing in the modern era, where the Jewish people, particularly in the land of Israel but basically everywhere, are more free than ever in history. Why do we continue to maintain that we are still in a state of slavery?

One possible interpretation is that the slavery mentioned here is not really a reference to our slavery in Egypt. Perhaps we are talking about our slavery in a more spiritual sense. The Jewish people, despite our rights and liberties the world over, are often bound by other forces, whether it be internal struggles of Jews against Jews, societal pressures and assimilation, and personal failures to live up to our true selves.

Rav Kook relates to this kind of slavery in *Maamarei HaRayah* (p. 157):

> *The difference between the slave and the free man is not merely one of social position. We can find an enlightened slave whose spirit is free, and, on the other hand, a free man with the mentality of a slave. Intrinsic freedom is that exalted spirit by which man – as well as the nation as a whole – is inspired to remain faithful to his inner*

> *essence, to the spiritual attribute of the Divine Image within him; it is that attribute which enables him to feel that his life has purpose and value. But a person with a slave mentality lives life and harbors emotions rooted not in his essential spiritual nature, but in that which is attractive and good in the eyes of another, who thus rules over him, whether physically or by moral persuasion.*

The concept that we could be physically free, but have a slave mentality, is so significant today. How many of us are addicted to the various ills of modern life? Our phones on 24/7, our businesses making demands of us that impact our physical and mental health, our society that demands submission even if we disagree with its values. Rav Kook is saying that freedom is really an internal state of being. To be proud Jews, to know and love each other, and know there is a better tomorrow around the corner.

This is the message of Ha Lachma Anya, and why it switches between Aramaic and Hebrew. The idea is that if we are proud, talk to each other, and do not fall prey to the enticing assimilation of the gentile world, we will emerge free. Not just physically free, but mentally, spiritually, and internally.

Mah Nishtanah

Questioning the Questions: Why Ma Nishtana…

Dani Roth ~ Woodmere, NY

At the start at Maggid, right after filling the second cup of wine, we recite Mah Nishtana. Mah Nishtana has no mention of the events of Yetzias Mitzrayim, so why should it be included in Maggid? How does this fit in with the mitzvah of "*Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim*"? Is it different from the mitzvah of "*Vihiggadita Levincha*"?

Gemara Pesachim 116a discusses the recital of Mah Nishtana. The Mishna says:

> *The attendants poured the second cup for the leader of the Seder, and here the son asks his father the questions about the differences between Passover night and a regular night. And if the son does not have the intelligence to ask questions on his own, his father teaches him the questions.*

The Gemara then comments on this:

> *The Sages taught: If his son is wise and knows how to inquire, his son asks him.*

> *And if he is not wise, his wife asks him. And if even his wife is not capable of asking or if he has no wife, he asks himself. And even if two Torah scholars who know the halakhot of Passover are sitting together and there is no one else present to pose the questions, they ask each other.*

The Mishna says that if the son can't ask the Mah Nishtana, then it is the father's job to teach him the questions one should ask. It seems from here that the father would fulfill the *chiyuv* to recite the Mah Nishtana. But the Gemara states if the son is not intelligent enough to ask, the wife asks instead. This seems contradictory: Why would the father's recital of the Mah Nishtana in the capacity of teaching fail to fulfill the *chiyuv*?

It seems that the answer is that the Mishna and the Gemara are talking about two different "*kiyumim*" of the obligation for *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim*. One way to fulfill this obligation is through *Vihiggadita Levincha,* teaching your sons so that the story will be passed down to the next generation, which the Mishna addresses. The father has the responsibility to make the son recognize the distinctions of the night, even if the son doesn't ask. The Gemara, however, is dealing with the obligation of the "format" of Sipur, a different *kiyum*. The best way to fulfill *sippur* is through a question-answer format in a dialogue. This is why the Gemara states that the wife must ask if the son cannot partake in a question-answer format. The father teaching the son, without the son initiating the question, is lacking dialogue. This is why both the Mishna and Gemara are needed.

According to Rabbi Yisroel Chait, the best format is teaching a son, where there is a dialogue format and transference of knowledge, fulfilling "*Vihiggadita Levincha*". The next best format is teaching your wife, where there's no "*Vihiggadita Levincha*", but there's transference of knowledge and dialogue. The third level is between two Chachamim, where there's no transference of knowledge, but you have dialogue. And the lowest level is where there is no real dialogue, but you have a dialogue format when one is alone and asks himself.

On further explaining the role of Mah Nishtana, the Gemara later mentions Rav Nachman:

> *Rav Naḥman said to his servant, Daru: "With regard to a slave who is freed by his master, who gives him gold and silver, what should the slave say to him?" Daru said to him: "He must thank and praise his master." He said to him: "You have exempted us from reciting the questions of: Why is this night different". Rav Naḥman immediately began to recite: '"We were slaves."*

This further proves that the function of Mah Nishtana is to render *sippur* ("Avadim Hayinu") in the framework of dialogue, and that *sippur* is a "response". After Daru's answer that a slave should thank his master, Rav Nachman goes straight to Avadim Hayinu, making it not just a monologue, but a part of a dialogue. But without Daru saying anything, Rav Nachman

commencing with Avadim Hayinu would not be a "response."

The dialogue format is ideal as knowledge is better received when it is a response; a response satisfies curious minds already engaged in the discussion. Telling a friend a new idea wont impact him as much as if that idea was part of a discussion. This is critical, as this mitzvah is all about transmitting knowledge.

This is the reason Ma Nishtana comes at the start of Maggid. It starts the conversation which Avadim Hayinnu responds to, creating a dialogue format that best engages the son and best fulfills the mitzvah of *sippur*.

Avadim Hayinu

The Underlying Theme of Avadim Hayinu

Raphael Drang ~ Miami Beach, FL

Avadim Hayinu is regarded by many as one of the most important sections in the Haggadah, as it creates and establishes the central theme that persists throughout all of Maggid. The problem is that upon closer examination, it would appear that there are many different ideas presented within Avadim Hayinu that question whether or not there actually is any internal consistency. Is it just a collection of different ideas arbitrarily thrown together because they seemingly revolve around a similar topic, or is there a deeper, underlying theme that is present within each sentence?

Avadim Hayinu opens up with this statement: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and Hashem our God brought us out of there with a strong arm and an outstretched hand." The statement paraphrases - but doesn't quote - the *pasuk* in Deuteronomy, 6:21, "and you shall say to your children, "We were slaves to pharaoh in Egypt and hashem our god brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand." Normally, the style of the Haggadah is to have a rabbinic statement followed by "*sh'ne'emar*" and then a proof from the *pasuk*. In this case, however, it just states the *pasuk*, but doesn't really reference it at all. And why start with "we"? The context in the above verse is

Moshe addressing the people who were actually slaves themselves. Therefore, if we aren't quoting the *pasuk* verbatim, it doesn't seem sensible to mention "we".

Once the choice to say "we" is made, the next statement in Avadim Hayinu becomes all the more confusing. After saying, "we were slaves…" we read how, "and if the holy one, blessed be he, not taken our fathers out of Egypt - then we, our children and our children's children would still be enslaved to pharaoh in Egypt." Avadim Hayinu seems to begin by talking about us being slaves, then indicating all of our generations would remain as slaves. Why make this point?

The third statement raises similar questions. It states: "And even were we all wise, all intelligent, all aged, and all knowledgeable in Torah, still the commandment would be upon us to tell the coming out of Egypt." If the commandment is just to tell the story of *yitzias mitzraim*, then one would assume the goal is to be informative. In removing that notion entirely, one must wonder what is the goal. Furthermore, this doesn't really have anything to do with slavery. Why add it? How is this consistent?

The fourth and final statement of Avadim Hayinu says as follows: "And the one who does more in the telling of the coming out of Egypt, this is admirable." Again we find ourselves wondering how this flows from the previous statements. Why exactly does it have to say it's admirable to tell the story over more. It would seem a more thorough and detailed account of the story would be ideal. What point is being highlighted?

Let's establish a general framework to help answer the above questions. Turning to the verse in Deuteronomy, it is true that the people Moshe is

addressing really were at one time slaves themselves; however, the nature of the command is more than the discussion of how they were once slaves. Moshe commands them to tell their children, "we were slaves". These children were never slaves; after all, they are the new generation of non-slaves, and yet they are included as being slaves in the statement "Avadim Hayinu". If so, this would mean that the nature of this command isn't just simply to tell your children that you yourself were once a slave, but rather that *we* were once slaves, directly incorporating them into the nation's historical identity. Moshe is telling Benai Yisroel the mechanism of how to establish the *mesorah* within your children, which is by saying "we were slaves in Egypt and Hashem freed us with a strong hand".

Now we can begin to understand how Avadim Hayinu is structured the way it is. The reason why the Haggadah doesn't quote this statement with a "*sh'ne'emar*" becomes clear: it's functioning as a mechanism to establish the *mesorah*.

The second statement follows by elaborating on what it means to be connected through generations. "Had Hashem not freed our fathers - then we, our children, and our children's children would still be slaves." "Our fathers" refers to the beginning of the *mesorah*, "us" referring to those within it, and "our children" meaning the responsibility we have to pass it on. Finally, the idea of "our children's children" highlights that this *mesorah* is continuous, where those who have it passed to them will pass it on to the next generation.

Along the theme of establishing and passing along the *mesorah*, we have a framework for the third

section of Avadim Hayinu. The fact that no matter how smart, wise, old, or knowledgeable in Torah anyone may be, they still are commanded to tell over the story of *yitzias mitzraim* emphasizes that the commandment is for a purpose well beyond an academic understanding. The obligation to establish and pass on the *mesorah* applies to everyone equally, and all the attributes mentioned in the statement (being wise, old, smart, knowledgeable in Torah) wouldn't be exemptions, but rather greater motivation for the mitzvah as they are the ones who can mostly accurately recognize the importance of it..

Finally, the last statement in Avadim Hayinu, explains what a person's relationship with the *mesorah* should be. "The one who expounds upon the story more, it is praise worthy." Putting this into the context of establishing the *mesorah*, there are two types of people that understand this. Those who don't do more, as in those who do the minimum necessary to establish a functioning *mesorah*. Then there are people who understand the true importance and value of the *mesorah*, who will go beyond just what is required. These people truly understand why we need *sipur yitzias mitzraim* and therefore they will want to tell more. The attitude towards the *mesorah* is what is most deserving of praise.

The *mesorah* as the focal point that defines the entire night of Pesach is set up with Avadim Hayinu. Understanding what we mean when reciting Avadim Hayinu is one of the most important things anyone can do during Seder night. Pesach is the night where we give over this *mesorah* and it begins with Avadim Hayinu, laying the foundation for the theme on which the entire Seder rests upon.

Bnei Berak

Why Stay Up?

Shlomo Prather ~ Mill Valley, CA

After being told that even great sages have to engage in the mitzvah of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*, we are then told of great rabbis who all collected together and not only spoke of the story at night, but even went into the morning. So engaged were they in their discussion that their students had to tell them that an important mitzvah was coming up - the Shema. This story has several elements that beg for explanation, but one particular aspect I wish to examine is the concept of staying up all night, which these rabbis evidently did.

I can't help but notice that there are three Jewish holidays in which staying up all night is considered a praiseworthy act. There is Pesach night, of course. The other that obviously comes to mind is the custom to stay up all night of Shavuot. There is also a third time in the Jewish calendar that some stay up, which is Yom Kippur night (and its parallel, Hoshanah Rabbah). What can these three time periods teach us? Is there any connecting thread by which we can pull and derive a lesson for this Festival of Unleavened Bread?

Let's take each in turn, one by one. Why did these great rabbis stay up all night? The Abarbanel, in his commentary to the Haggadah Zevach Pesach, offers a fascinating answer. It isn't just because there is a lot of information to go through, but also because it represents

what the Jewish people themselves were doing at the time of the Exodus. He writes:

> *Passover night is described as "A vigil night to the Lord (leil shemurim)," (Exodus 12:42) and the people of Israel did not rest at all the night that they left Egypt. During the first part of the night they busied themselves preparing and eating the Passover offering with matzah and bitter herbs as they were commanded by God. And during the latter part of the night they prepared for the Exodus. Similarly there was no time to snooze (at the sages' Passover) since they saw themselves as if they personally went forth from Egypt. These holy men performed their acts immediately at the beginning of the night with matzah and bitter herbs, and recalling the Passover offering just as our ancestors did in Egypt. The rest of the night they spoke of the Exodus, and in this way they saw themselves as if they themselves went out of Egypt.*

Thus, according to the Abarbanel, the rabbis were recreating this past event by staying up all night, just as the Jewish people leaving Egypt would have stayed up all night.

The custom to stay up all night of Shavuot is based on the exact opposite premise. Instead of trying to recreate the night of Matan Torah, staying up all night is

to *make up* for the fact that the Jewish people *overslept* the night of the giving of the Torah. The Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:12) refers to Moshe needing to come and wake up the people who overslept before Matan Torah, which we rectify by staying awake all night. So this is really an opposite side of the Pesach coin.

And then there is the third time, Yom Kippur (and the parallel Hoshanah Rabbah). The Tur (OC 619) states that some have the custom to stay up all night Yom Kippur night in the Beit Knesset and recite words of praise to God. The Tur suggests that this custom is based on a statement in the Talmud (Yoma 19b):

> *The prominent men of Jerusalem would not sleep the entire night [but instead engaged in Torah study], so that the High Priest would hear the sound of voices and sleep would not overcome him.*

The reason the High Priest could not sleep is the worry that he would have dreams that would create a physical response, rendering him impure and unable to perform the Yom Kippur service. In order to help, the people of Jerusalem would loudly learn Torah, keeping him awake in the small city we know as the Old City of Jerusalem today. These men stayed up all night because they knew that the prospect of a positive year ahead lay in the hands of the High Priests success in attaining atonement for the people. Similarly, on Hoshanah Rabbah, there is a sense of the "sealing" of the books of life and death, with the fate of the year hanging in the balance.

How do these threads connect? What do they have in common? For Pesach, staying up all night represents the past, and trying to relive it as if we were there. For Shavuot, staying up all night represents a break from the past, and showing God and ourselves how much we have improved in the present. Lastly, for Yom Kippur and Hoshanah Rabbah, we are thinking of the future - will we have a good year? Can we squeeze some more good deeds in before our fate is sealed for the year?

Together, these three nights form a cycle: we remember where we came from (Pesach), show how we've grown (Shavuot), and take responsibility for what comes next (Yom Kippur and Hoshana Rabbah). This is the journey of the year that Judaism demands of us - to constantly connect the past, present, and future in our relationship with Hashem.

Tonight, we are tasked to do what the rabbis of Bnei Brak did - recreate the past and immerse ourselves in that experience. Most of us won't be able to stay up all night doing it, but we should try to take a little bit of their story as a model. Then, we can start the cycle and move from past, present, to the future redemption *bimheira beyameinu*.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya

"All the Days of Your Life": Fighting the World's Greatest Lie, Every Single Day and For All of Time

Dovid Aranowitz ~ Richmond, VA

The obligation to remember the Exodus - specifically, through the third paragraph of Shema - is a fundamental aspect of Jewish life, but its exact scope has been debated by the Sages. At the heart of the discussion is the interpretation of the phrase **"all the days of your life"** in Deuteronomy 16:3, with Ben Zoma arguing for a daily and nightly obligation, while the Sages see it as extending into the Messianic era.

Rabbi Eleazar Ben Azaryah's statement, "I am like a man seventy years old," introduces a halachic discussion about the obligation to remember the Exodus. This debate is rooted in the interpretation of the verse, "That you may remember the day you went out of Egypt all the days of your life" (Deuteronomy 16:3). Ben Zoma argues that the word "all" expands the obligation beyond the daytime and requires that the Exodus be mentioned at night as well. In contrast, the Sages interpret the word "all" as referring to the Messianic era, arguing that the obligation to recall the Exodus extends into the future, even when greater miracles occur.

Ben Zoma's view highlights the personal, immediate nature of remembering the Exodus, making it a daily reality that transcends time and circumstances. By requiring remembrance both by day and by night, he suggests that divine redemption is not just an event of the past but a continuous presence in one's life. The distractions of the day can obscure this awareness, making it easy to fall into a mindset of self-sufficiency and forgetting the source of freedom. Night, however, offers a stillness that allows for deeper reflection, reinforcing the idea that liberation is a divine gift rather than a product of human effort.

Although the Sages wouldn't necessarily disagree with Ben Zoma's principle to reflect on these ideas both day and night, they emphasize the national dimension implied by the statement "all the days," ensuring that even when future national redemptions surpass the Exodus in wonder, the Exodus remains the foundation of Jewish consciousness. Their view asserts that the Exodus is not just about personal reflection, but a collective memory that must endure as the defining proof of divine intervention in history. Yet the Sages insist that no redemption, no matter how wondrous, can erase the memory, because it is the very foundation of Jewish identity and the proof of divine reality. Without this memory, the nation risks losing its grasp on the source of its freedom, reducing even miraculous salvation to a fleeting, circumstantial event rather than a revelation of truth. The Exodus is not just a past event; it is the defining paradigm of Jewish existence. To remember it is to live in continuous recognition of God's rule over reality, ensuring that no future redemption is mistaken as mere historical fortune. It demands a life free from illusions, a

constant confrontation with truth, and an unshakable foundation that remains firm even when the world changes.

Furthermore, Ben Zoma holds that every day a person must be a truth seeker, whereas the Sages talk about a time where the nation and the world will naturally seek truth. The foundation of both of their arguments stands as the ultimate proof that reality is not governed by the arbitrary forces of pagan gods but by a single, absolute God who defines existence itself. In Egypt, nature and fate were thought to be controlled by competing deities, each with its domain, yet the plagues shattered this illusion. The Nile, the sky, the animals, and even life and death itself were bent to one will, proving that reality is not fragmented or chaotic but unified under one truth. The pagan worldview, which assigns power to idols, astrology, and man-made constructs, was exposed as a deception. The Exodus demonstrated that reality is not a game of chance manipulated by unseen forces but follows a singular, absolute structure governed by the Creator. This knowledge forces a shift in how one perceives the world—not as a place of illusions and subjective interpretations but as something governed by objective truth, where falsehoods have no power.

The ideas of the Sages are still relevant and instilled in our understanding of the text, despite the fact that we do not *pasken* like them. Since halacha follows Ben Zoma's view, this means that the obligation to recall the Exodus is indeed a constant, daily reality—both by day and by night. This practical ruling highlights that remembering the Exodus is not just historical or about a future national redemption (as the Sages argue), but an ongoing, personal obligation that must shape one's

consciousness at all times. However, this does not necessarily negate the Sages' argument about the Messianic era; rather, it suggests that their interpretation is not in conflict with Ben Zoma's but operates on a different level. The practical halacha prioritizes the individual's responsibility to remember the Exodus in daily life, while the Sages' perspective remains a broader theological principle—asserting that even in the future, the Exodus must not be forgotten. In other words, halacha affirms that remembering the Exodus at night is essential, aligning with Ben Zoma, but this does not completely dismiss the idea that the Exodus remains the foundation of Jewish history, even when greater redemptions occur.

Living with this understanding means confronting reality as it is, without distraction or evasion. If God alone rules the world, then there is no room for superstition, no reliance on luck, and no submission to false ideologies that claim control over life. The temptation to hide behind comforting illusions—whether in the form of materialism, social trends, or ideological fanaticism—falls away, leaving only the obligation to engage with the world honestly. Every moment becomes an opportunity to seek truth rather than escape into comforting fictions. Hardship is not avoided through wishful thinking but faced with clarity, and success is not attributed to fate but to one's actions in alignment with reality. This mentality fosters an appreciation for the truth, making life one of discipline, awareness, and purpose, where nothing is wasted on deception and everything is directed toward what is real.

Baruch HaMakom

Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu

Rabbi Avi Herzog ~ Ra"M

After discussing the importance and significance of the mitzvah of *sippur Yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, and immediately preceding the passage regarding the *arba'ah banim*, we are presented with a peculiar statement:

> "*Baruch HaMakom, baruch Hu; Baruch shenatan Torah le'amo Yisrael, baruch Hu.*"
> "Blessed is the Omnipresent, He is blessed; blessed is the One who gave the Torah to His people Yisrael, He is blessed."

The name used here for God, HaMakom, is extremely rare. In fact, we only find it in three places in our liturgy: in the Haggadah (in the above passage and in two others); in *nichum aveilim*, recited upon taking leave of one sitting *shivah*; and in *Acheinu Kol Beit Yisrael*, recited in our tefillah on Mondays/Thursdays and commonly upon the conclusion of the recitation of Tehillim.

I would like to share with you a beautiful, moving message of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik regarding this peculiar name HaMakom. (I first heard this thought from Rabbi Yosef Adler, the former *rosh hayeshiva* of TABC and rabbi emeritus of Rinat Yisrael in Teaneck.)

The Rav points us to a seeming discrepancy in *Kedushah*: On one hand, we recite:

> "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh Hashem tzeva'ot, melo khol ha'aretz kevodo*."
> "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the world is filled with His glory."

On the the other hand, we also recite:

> "*Baruch kevod Hashem mimekomo.*"
> "Blessed is the glory of Hashem from His place."

The Rav explains that the first statement, declaring that God's glory fills the entire world, was proclaimed by Yeshayahu. He had seen the majesty of the Beit HaMikdash. At such a time, Hashem's presence was palpable. There was something different in the air. It truly seemed as if His Shechinah was indeed everywhere. Yeshayahu could therefore proclaim, "*melo khol ha'aretz kevodo.*"

The second statement, however, was proclaimed by Yechezkeil. He witnessed our exile to Bavel. He, and the Jews of his time, grappled with the notion that, on the one hand, we believe that God is indeed with us, yet on the other hand, it seems as if God is leaving us, that He is no longer in our midst. At such a time, in the absence of the aura of Hashem's presence surrounding us, the best Yechezkeil could do, the most he could muster, was: "*Baruch kevod Hashem mimekomo.*"

It's as if Yechezkeil was stating, "It may not seem as if God is here. It may seem as if He is no longer with us. But He is indeed blessed from His place, that is to say, I recognize that He is indeed out there some place."

When we take leave of an *aveil*, we refer to God as HaMakom and convey to the *aveil* this very same message. "Right now, when you are grieving, it may seem as if God is nowhere to be found. 'How could God do this to me?' And it's a valid question. But perhaps it may help you to realize, and perhaps it will bring you just a bit of comfort, to know that God is in fact out there someplace. You may not necessarily recognize it at this moment, but God is indeed *mimekomo*."

It is this same idea that we are expressing in *Acheinu*. When we find ourselves in a time of *tzarah* and *shivyah*, distress and captivity, we appeal to Hashem *mimekomo*, from wherever He may be.

And this explains our referring to God in the Haggadah as HaMakom. (It is instructive to keep in mind that this part of the Haggadah was written for the Jew in *galut*.) We may be celebrating our exodus from, and our release from enslavement in, Mitzrayim. But we are still in *galut*. And at times it may feel like God is not with us. So we remind ourselves: God is indeed out there someplace.

History, for better or for worse, repeats itself. In the aftermath of October 7th and all that has followed, it is only natural to wonder how God can allow this to happen. And we are doing ourselves a service if we recognize that we do not have the answers. We simply do not know. But it may bring us some comfort, some semblance of solace, to know, and to even boldly proclaim, that Hashem is indeed out there—that just as

He redeemed us from Mitzrayim, just as He enabled us, through the efforts and sacrifice of our *chayalim* and so many others, to create our magnificent Medinat Yisrael, so too, even if we don't recognize and feel it right now, He is out there for us.

May we be privileged to be able to proudly proclaim, and truly feel, that not only "*Baruch kevod Hashem mimekomo*," but "*melo khol ha'aretz kevodo*" as well!

Arba Banim

Blunting His Teeth or Sharpening His Mind?

Eli Kestenbaum ~ New Rochelle, NY

The Torah presents three verses in which a child asks a question about the story of the Exodus and receives a response, along with a fourth verse that simply instructs us to recount the story of the Exodus to our children.

1. "When your child asks you in time to come, saying, 'What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?' You shall say to your child, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.'" (Deuteronomy 6:20)

2. "And when your child asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' You shall say to him, 'With a mighty hand, the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage.'" (Exodus 13:14)

3. "And it shall come to pass, when your children say to you, 'What is this service to you?' You shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for He

passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt.'" (Exodus 12:26-27)

4. "And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" (Exodus 13:8)

Many have noticed that the answers given in the Haggadah differ from those in the Torah. In this essay, we will focus specifically on the issues surrounding the wicked child. In the Haggadah, the response to the wicked child is the verse that we would normally associate with the child who does not know how to ask (number 4 in our list, which does not describe a question). The Torah's response to the child who asks the Wicked Son's question, "What is this service to you?," is that you should say, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt…" (Exodus 12:26) - number 3 in our list. In contrast, the Haggadah answers with, "Because of what God did for me when I went out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8). Why does the Haggadah provide a different answer to the wicked child than the Torah does?

Rabbi Tevele Bondi (living in 19th-century Germany) writes about this in his commentary to the Haggadah, *Maarechet Heidenheim*. He asks several more questions in order to examine the Torah's response to the wicked child.

For one, what is going on with the part of the response the Haggadah gives to the wicked son that we are to "blunt his teeth"? This is not in the Torah! So where does the Haggadah get it from?

Additionally, the Torah answers the other three children directly, but it gives an indirect response to the answer we give the Wicked Child. In response to the question "What is this service to you?", the Torah simply says, "You shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt…'"—without explicitly addressing the child. In other words, every other verse says something to the effect that "You shall say to your child saying…" If the reason was to avoid calling the wicked child a "child," this is puzzling because the beginning of the verse refers to him as such: "When your children say to you…." Why does the Torah shift its language in this way?

Rabbi Bondi answers this final question by quoting a statement from the Talmud (Sanhedrin 38b), which comments on Mishna Avot 2:14: "'Know what to respond to the heretic.' Rabbi Yochanan says: 'This was taught only with regard to a gentile heretic, but not with regard to a Jewish heretic, as one should not respond to him. All the more so, if one does respond he will become more heretical.'"

This shows that it is forbidden to engage in debate with a Jewish heretic. If so, this principle helps explain why the Torah does not engage with the wicked son directly, as it would be inappropriate to engage with a Jewish heretic; instead, it simply states, "You shall say…," meaning one should say it to oneself rather than addressing the wicked child directly. When the verse begins with "When your children…", this is to clarify that we are talking about a Jewish heretic, not a gentile one.

Out of the concern present in the Talmud that engaging with a Jewish heretic could lead one astray, the

appropriate response is to provide a brief and firm answer rather than engaging in discussion. By doing so, Rabbi Bondi suggests, the wicked child is left feeling dismissed and humiliated, discouraging further attempts to challenge the tradition. This is why the Torah suggests responding with a simple explanation of the commandment rather than a direct conversation.

However, continues Rabbi Bondi, ignoring one's own child is difficult for a parent. A father naturally wants to fulfill the mitzvah of teaching Torah, even to a wicked child. Yet, he is in a quandary, as the Sages advise against engaging with a Jewish heretic. To resolve this dilemma, the Haggadah substitutes the response given to the child who does not know how to ask. By doing so, the father reproaches the wicked child, telling him that had he been in Egypt, he would not have been redeemed. Thus, the phrase "blunt his teeth" is fitting. It means giving a sharp response that frustrates the wicked child, preventing him from further spreading his ideas. By humiliating him, he is discouraged from continuing his challenge, ensuring that he cannot sway others toward heresy.

When I read this piece in Rabbi Bondi's commentary, I struggled to accept it. Is it really true that the best way to deal with heresy is humiliation? I know from my own life that this is not the best avenue to talk to others who struggle with their faith. For example, during my years at Migdal, I've had trouble davening because I keep wondering: Is G-d really listening to me? I've often felt like I've been led astray a tiny bit by going to public school, and lacking a regular Jewish education. True, I learned with a rabbi privately, but that just wasn't the same as going to yeshiva. However, thanks to the

deep conversations and encouragement I've had with my rabbis at Migdal, I know that I'm improving in my Jewish faith. If I had been humiliated and mocked when I would ask questions, I know that I would not have improved, but even would have become more estranged from Judaism. If so, is there a different way to understand the Talmud and the Haggadah's "blunt his teeth" strategy?

I believe yes. When we blunt the wicked child's teeth, it's not about blunting his teeth to humiliate him, but rather, I think it's to show his ways are wrong and help him before he becomes a heretic in the first place. The Wicked Son is doing something important. He's asking questions. We all wonder, think, and consider the biggest questions out there, and when we meet people who can understand these issues better, it's always good to ask those questions without fear of humiliation. Therefore, the point of the sharp response is for him to see immediately that his approach to these issues need to be reexamined, and encourage him to seek out answers.

If so, we have to answer Rabbi Bondi's other questions. According to this new approach, why does the Talmud state that we should not engage with the heretic? And why does the Torah not respond to the Wicked Son's question directly? I believe the answer is that there are many points on the spectrum of heresy. The Talmud, the Torah, and the Haggadah, are talking about three different types of "wickedness." One is where he is just starting his questioning of his Judaism. That is the Haggadah's wicked child - we talk to him and answer him in a way that stops the heresy before it continues with some sharp words. Another point on the spectrum is the Torah's son. That's at the point of the son's heresy where he is really on the borderline. He could go one way

or another. There is a need to respond to him, but not as directly as we would otherwise, to try to prevent being led astray ourselves. Then, there is the out-and-out heretic. That's the Talmud's heretic - someone who has completely strayed, and there is no hope, no questions, no answers, and therefore, no possibility of improvement. To him, we should not engage.

The fact that the Wicked Son is there and asking questions at the Seder table means he wants to improve. Let's keep this in mind whenever we encounter people asking questions, and try to engage with them in a productive and meaningful way.

Yakhol MeRosh Chodesh

The Geonim and the Right Way to Do Maggid

Jeremy Propp ~ New York, NY

If you're like me, you're asking yourself when you get up to the portion of *Yachol me'Rosh Chodesh* in the Haggadah: what is it doing here? It seems like an unnecessary midrash about the verse, perhaps something to be told to the child who does not know how to ask, thereby allowing a basic understanding of the obligation of the night. However, I think that it might just be the most important midrash in Maggid.

From where does *Yachol me'Rosh Hodesh* originate? The source of the midrash is the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, one of the two Tannaitic Midreshei Halacha - books of halachic expositions written by the sages of the Mishna - on the book of Exodus. The verse that it is commenting on is Exodus 13:8: "And you will tell to your son on that day, saying, 'For the sake of what the Lord did for me in my going out from Egypt'" (Anchor Yale Bible, Ex. 13:8). From this verse, the Mekhilta determines through assumptions and resolutions that there is a specific mitzvah to talk about the Exodus at the Seder.

Before returning to the origins, I would like to take a look at the development of the Haggadah to help shed light on this question.

The earliest source for having a Maggid section in the Seder is the Mishna in Pesachim (10:4). After discussing the four questions, the Mishnah states:

> *And according to the intellect of the son, the father instructs him. He begins with shame and concludes with praise; and expounds from "A wandering Aramean was my father" (Deuteronomy 6:20-25) until he completes the whole section.*

The only text mentioned here is "A wandering Aramean was my father," a short description of the story of the Exodus. This text functions as the basis of a father's teaching, setting up clear topics that a father should address at the Seder. Within this framework, a father should teach according to his son's "intellect," adapting his teaching in order to best convey the information to his son.

If, based on this Mishna, the teaching of the Exodus must necessarily be fluid, depending on the intellectual capacities of his children, how then did the Maggid we have today develop as a set text? In point of fact, early Babylonian and Palestinian texts of the Haggadah seem to have a much shorter text, containing little more than the minimum requirements given in the Mishna. The brevity of these texts indicates that the text was supposed to be a guide for the storytelling rather than the storytelling itself.

It seems that as time passed, the Haggadah evolved, with more verses and midrashim being added to it. That said, well into the Geonic Period (the 7th

through 11th centuries), the text had yet to be standardized. That is, until the time of Rav Amram Gaon.

In his most famous work, the Seder of Rav Amram Gaon - the oldest surviving Siddur - the text of the Haggadah looks much more similar to the text we have today. His introduction to the Maggid section explains why we view his text as so fixed. He quotes from the responsa of his direct predecessor, Rav Natronai Gaon, saying, among other things, that anyone who uses a Haggadah that does not contain midrashim is "a heretic with a split heart." He explicitly states that such a person must be a follower of Anan ben David, an early Karaite leader.

Rav Natronai Gaon was reacting to a Haggadah which looked much like the Haggadot that I mentioned earlier. The text was similarly brief and only contained the content explicitly mentioned in the Mishna. He assumed that this text must have been of Karaite origin, but comparisons to Cairo Geniza texts seem to indicate that this was similar to Palestinian Haggadot (Marina Rustow, "Karaites Real and Imagined: Three Cases of Jewish Heresy," *Past & Present*, No. 197 (Nov., 2007), pp. 35-74). Apparently, their Haggadaot did not evolve in the same way the Babylonian ones did. In any case, this Haggadah was what caused Rav Natronai Gaon to write so sharply.

This responsum of Rav Natronai Gaon clearly had a massive effect. Its placement right before the most important section of the most important early Haggadah essentially locked the text in place. How could one change the text? If they did, they would be branded a heretic. That in turn sealed the ending of the following of

the Mishnaic practice. No longer could people adapt the text based on their kids.

This isn't necessarily a problem. First, Karaism was a real challenge in Rav Natronai Gaon's time. He had every reason to assume that the Haggadah that he saw was Karaite in origin. Karaisim was spreading rapidly across Babylonia and Rav Natronai Gaon had to take drastic actions to curtail its growth. Second, if we can't rely on people to tell the story beyond the set text, it is better to have a thorough set text than a short flexible text. Third, and most importantly, the text of the Haggadah being fixed does not affect our ability to interpret the text as much as we want. The very existence of this Haggadah supplement shows that the spirit of the Mishna lives on.

Returning to our initial question, why was *Yachol me'Rosh Chodesh* chosen to be part of the designated text? A brief look into the history of the interpretation of Exodus 13:8 immediately gives an answer - *Yachol me'Rosh Chodesh* is the first text to even imply that there is a mitzvah to tell the story of the Exodus on the first night of Pesach. In essence, it is the source for having a Seder.

From our biased viewpoint, this seems obvious. How could anyone think otherwise? Exodus 13:8 clearly teaches that one must tell the story of the Exodus to one's sons on the first night of Passover. However, just a few short verses later, in Exodus 13:14, we learn that the intention of the donkey redemption ritual is so that one will tell his son about this Exodus. Is this its own mitzvah? Clearly not, as it is not included in any Rabbinic lists of mitzvot. It is simply the goal of the ritual; its peculiarity should cause a child to question its purpose, and in that scenario, one should relate the story of the

Exodus. In that vein, Exodus 13:8 could be referring to the end goal of the Passover observances and not a distinct mitzvah. As a result of this, the midrash of *Yachol me'Rosh Chodesh* teaches that it is.

When Rav Amram Gaon established the text of the Haggadah, his goal was not to end interpretation. It was the exact opposite: to make interpretation more accessible to the common person. After more than a thousand years, this Haggadah text can feel as new as it was when it was first established. All you have to do is remember that the requirement is not just to read the text, but to "tell to your son on that day" (Ex. 13:8) "according to his intellect" (cf. Mishna Pesachim 10:4).

Mitechilah Ovdei

Redemption Through Rejection

Avi Mann ~ Netanya, Israel)

The Mishnah in Pesachim (116a) states: "One should begin with disgrace and conclude with glory." The gemara asks: "What is disgrace?" Rav's position is that we should begin by discussing the fact that our early ancestors were idol worshippers. Shmuel says that we should begin by discussing our enslavement in Egypt. On the surface, Shmuel's opinion makes a lot of sense. If the mitzvah is to discuss our exodus from Egypt, naturally we should begin by describing the slavery that our ancestors endured. Our history of idol worship dating all the way back to the pre-Avraham era doesn't seem relevant to the story.

In order to better understand Rav's position, I would like to ask a seemingly unrelated question. Whenever the Jews were spared from the *makkos*, all of the Jews, or at least those residing in Goshen, were spared. Yet with *makkas bechoros*, only those who participated in the *korban pesach* and the smearing of its blood on the doorpost were spared. What is the cause for this discrimination? If the essential function of the exodus was to free the Jews from slavery, why were some Jews left behind? I believe that answering this question will give us a clearer picture of the idea that Rav is trying to convey.

Analyzing the episode which occurred during plague of *arov* can help answer the question. The Torah explains, after the onset of the plague (Shemos 8:21-22):

> *Paroh called Moshe and Aharon, and he said, "Go sacrifice to your god" in the land… Moshe said, "It is not proper to do so, for we shall sacrifice the abomination of Egypt to Hashem, our God. Behold, if we sacrifice the abomination of Egypt before their eyes, will they not stone us?*

Rashi explains that "the abomination of Egypt" refers to the god of the Egyptians. Thus, the deity of the Egyptians was the very same lamb that the Jews would end up slaughtering later on.

It is no coincidence that the Jews were commanded to slaughter the exact same animal which the Egyptians worshipped. Egyptian society was steeped in the false values of *avoda zara,* and the Jews who continued to take part in those values did not merit redemption. Only those that outwardly expressed their complete rejection of the Egyptian deity were fit to leave Egypt and receive the Torah at *Har Sinai*. The slaughtering of the lamb and the placement of its blood on the doorpost served as a sign of complete rejection and denial of the *avoda zara* that was worshipped in Egypt. In order to receive the Torah and serve the only true God, the Jews needed to remove all of their false idolatrous ideas.

We can see that the exodus not only functioned to remove us from our physical enslavement in Egypt; more

importantly, it served as a transition from *avoda zara* to the true service of God. With this idea in mind, it now makes sense to begin our discussion with the recognition that our ancestors originally worshipped idols. This puts the story into the broader context of our early history as idol worshippers. With a full understanding of our past, we can truly appreciate the exodus in all of its glory. Receiving the Torah at *Har Sinai* established us as a nation dedicated exclusively to the service of God. As we all read the passage of "*MiTchila Ovdei Avoda Zara*" at our Seder this year, it is my hope that this idea will help us expand our appreciation of the miraculous redemption that our nation merited.

Vehi Sheamdah

This Has Stood By Us

Eitan Freedman ~ Rochester, NY

In *Vehi She'amda*, unlike other parts of the Seder, the song is recited over wine rather than matzah. Why is this the case? To answer this, let's delve into the meaning of *Vehi She'amda*.

Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, in his commentary on the Haggadah, notes that the final words of the passage—"And the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hands"—parallel a statement in *Ketubot* 3b. The Gemara there teaches that any decree enacted against the Jewish people will ultimately be annulled.

Throughout history, time and again, enemies have risen to destroy us. They appear to succeed, yet ultimately, they fail, and we not only survive but emerge stronger. As former President Joe Biden once put it, we "build back better." This cycle repeats itself: we rise, we face oppression, we survive, and we continue to grow. The story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* (the Exodus from Egypt) follows this pattern—Yosef provided for his family, and they prospered in Egypt, eventually gaining a better status than most Egyptians. This led to resentment, which resulted in oppression. But Hashem saved us, and the cycle continued. *Vehi She'amda* reminds us of this recurring theme.

Remarkably, we always emerge stronger and closer to *geulah* (redemption). One of the most horrific

atrocities in our history, the Holocaust, exemplifies this. For centuries, Jews endured oppression, but as they began gaining higher social standing in German society, resentment built, leading to scapegoating and, ultimately, genocide at the hands of the Nazis. Yet, as always, Hashem saved us. We persevered, fought back, established the State of Israel, and took monumental steps toward ending the *galut* (exile). Though our enemies continue to seek our destruction, they will never succeed.

Now that we understand *Vehi She'amda* as a reflection on this historical pattern, we can seek the constant that ties all these events together. This will help us understand why it is recited over wine.

The *Maharal* in *Gevurot Hashem* (ch. 51) explains that wine is central to the Seder because it represents the distinctiveness of the Jewish people:

> *"Wine is something separate from water and other drinks, and so too, Israel is separated from the nations… therefore, wine was chosen to symbolize redemption."*

Wine throughout the Seder represents what sets the Jewish people apart. It is no coincidence, then, that *Vehi She'amda*, which emphasizes our survival as a distinct nation, is recited specifically over wine.

I would like to suggest that the connection lies in our unique culture and community, centered around the Torah—a divine gift. Our separateness, as signified by wine, is what has preserved us throughout history. This idea is reinforced by *Chazal's* prohibition against

drinking non-Jewish wine. As the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Maachalot Asurot* 11:1-3) explains, this prohibition was instituted to prevent assimilation. By drinking our own Jewish wine while reciting *Vehi She'amda*, we highlight the symbol of our enduring identity—our ability to remain distinct against all odds.

When considering the phrase *Vehi She'amda*—"This is what has stood by us"—one might ask: What exactly is *this* referring to? Many interpretations exist, suggesting that *Vehi* represents our Torah, mitzvot, or even Hashem Himself.

Rabbi Leo Dee quotes Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson as saying:

> *"If scientists were to investigate which factor each surviving generation of Jews over the millennia had in common, they would have to reject wealth, influence, and power, as many generations in different locations had none of these. They would be left with one parameter: the Torah and mitzvot."*

While this is a compelling argument, I believe the reality is more nuanced. Our culture stems from the Torah and mitzvot, which in turn come from Hashem. Together, these elements form the foundation of Jewish survival. *Vehi* encompasses all of this—it is what has stood by us, preserved us through hardships, prevented assimilation, and ensured that we not only survive but thrive.

This is why we recite *Vehi She'amda* over wine. Wine is the ultimate anti-assimilation symbol, reinforcing the very essence of *Vehi*—our distinct Jewish

identity. When we drink wine at this moment in the Seder, we are making a profound declaration:

> *"They tried to destroy us, yet here we are—not only alive, but reclining like royalty, unassimilated, preserving our traditions, marrying within our people, and worshipping Hashem for safeguarding us. And above all, we are drinking our own Jewish wine."*

With each sip, we recognize what has stood by us and what it has protected us from. The wine serves as a testament to our survival, our distinction, and the divine gift that has preserved us throughout history.

Tzei U'limad - "Rav"

The Story That Passes Over

Joey Grunfeld ~ West Hempstead, NY

"Tzei U'L'mad," "Go out and learn." At this point, we begin doing what the Seder is all about, telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

It's a story we all know and love; an action-packed story that Hollywood has made several blockbusters out of; a story so important that we still commemorate it 3,337 years later. A story where an evil king enslaves the Jews, and orders their sons to be thrown into the river. But a savior named Moshe is born, and, directed by G-d, confronts Pharoah, telling him to let the Jews go, showing him signs and warnings. Pharoah is stubborn and refuses to listen, so Hashem sends the 10 plagues, demonstrating his control over nature. Finally, Pharoah bends and the Jews are freed, only for the Egyptian army to chase after them 3 days later. This, of course, sets up the climactic encounter by the Red Sea, where the Jews are saved by Krias Yam Suf.

It's a classic story that takes up the first four *parshiyos* of Sefer Shemos. But that's not the story the Haggadah tells. Instead, it relates the story in a much drier, unexciting way: Ya'akov and his family went down to Egypt. They started out few in number, but grew numerous. The Egyptians oppressed and enslaved us. We cried out to Hashem. He saved us. Oh, and plagues. Seemingly thrown in as an afterthought just to make sure

you're still awake. That's it. Four *pesukim* from Sefer Devarim.

Wait, Devarim? What happened to the flashy, exciting story from Sefer Shemos? Why are we telling over the short version instead of the detailed version? And if the Haggadah says that one who tells over more is praiseworthy, why does it say so little?

There are several answers to these questions.

The first answer begins with a question: Who is portrayed as the liberator in each version? In the story of Sefer Shemos, Hashem tells Moshe what to do, but Moshe is the one doing everything. Moshe goes to Pharoah and speaks with him, Moshe gives the signs and warns of the plagues, and Moshe is the one who leads the Jews out of Egypt and through the Yam Suf. From this account, Moshe is seen as the one who takes the Jews out, while Hashem is just instructing him on how to do it.

But that is not the point of the Seder. The story that the Haggadah wants to tell is the story of Hashem taking the Jews out. If we mentioned Moshe, it would take some of the focus away from Hashem. The *pasuk* we read states, "And Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand, and an outstretched arm, and with great terror, with signs and wonders" (Devarim 26:8). Here, it's quite clear who the liberator is: Hashem. In the recounting of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* from Devarim, Moshe is never once mentioned. (And in fact, this is true for the entire Hagaddah as well; Moshe's name only appears once, where he is referred to as "Hashem's servant".) This is why the Haggadah uses the Devarim version: to tell the story of Hashem, not Moshe, taking the Jews out of Egypt.

Secondly, what was the primary goal of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*? If the point was to make a great story about Hashem destroying Egypt, with staffs turning into snakes, burning bushes, plagues of blood, frogs, and fiery hail, and seas splitting and then crushing the enemies, then we should use the original version from Shemos. But that is not the point of the story. The point is that Hashem himself, not Moshe or anyone else, took us out, and made us His nation. Hashem could have just as easily taken us out without signs, plagues, or open miracles. All of that was just to demonstrate His love for us. And while it is great that Hashem loves us and performs miracles that defy nature for our sake, that is not the main point of the story, and the Haggadah wants us to focus on what is truly important: that Hashem saved us from Egyptian servitude and took us out "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm."

Another answer that has been proposed by the Mishnat Eretz Yisrael is that the section from Devarim is short, but still comprehensive. Additionally, in the times when the Haggadah was assembled, the Jews were largely an agricultural society. Since these verses are also recited when bringing the first fruits to the Beis HaMikdash, a majority of the Jews would have been familiar with them.

Finally, by leaving out most of the details, it will cause the children to ask "What is this? What does this story mean? What exactly happened when we left Egypt?" In response to this question, the father will begin telling more details of the story the way he knows it. The mother will then add another point that was left out. Another sibling will chime in "But in school, I was told this…". Everyone knows different Midrashim and details

about the Pesach story, and most people tell the story differently. The lack of details given by the Haggadah allows for everyone to share what they know, thereby telling the story in a unique way.

Additionally, this gives parents and children an opportunity to learn Torah together. Most of the time, the parents are at work and the children are at school, which leaves very little time for learning together. By providing a vague story, the Haggadah is practically asking us to ask, which will lead to the collective storytelling mentioned above. And through this process, we deepen both our individual knowledge of the story, as well as the bond between parents and children.

Ultimately, there are several reasons why the Haggadah tells the story from Devarim, and not from Shemos. By doing so, it emphasizes that Hashem, not Moshe, took us out of Egypt, and reminds us of what's truly important, and not purely to entertain. And lastly, it causes the children to ask and the family to tell over the story together, which deepens the bond between generations, and our overall knowledge of Torah.

Arami Oved Avi

Not Necessarily

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg ~ Senior Rosh HaYeshiva

The Maggid section of the Haggadah can be viewed in two discrete parts. The first contains what would appear to be random details in Jewish Law concerning this night, praises of God, and other insights into the background of the Exodus. The second half focuses solely on the analysis of a sequence of Biblical verses, which begin with:

> *The Aramean wished to destroy my father (Yaakov); and he went down to Egypt and sojourned (vayagar) there, few in number; and he became there a nation - great and mighty and numerous.*

The verse points out that Yaakov "*went down to Egypt*". The Sages explain that it was "*anus al pi hadibur*", which many translate as "*forced by Divine decree*". This alludes to the series of events prior to Yaakov leaving the Land of Israel for Egypt. After discovering that his son Yosef was alive, and the viceroy of Egypt, Yaakov naturally wants to see him (Bereishit 45:28):

> *And Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."*

Yaakov begins his journey, and upon reaching Beer Sheva, receives a critical prophecy (ibid 46:3-4):

> *And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up, and Joseph will place his hand on your eyes."*

God is clearly comforting Yaakov about his decision to leave to Egypt. There is a further reassurance in the promise to redeem the Jews from Egypt.

Why did Yaakov require such reassurances? Many commentators struggle to understand exactly what was so troubling to Yaakov. Rashi (ibid 46:3) explains that Yaakov's fear was tied to leaving the Land of Israel. Others, such as Ritva, explain that Yaakov was fully aware of the future enslavement of the Jewish people to the Egyptians. Knowing their fate, Yaakov did not want to travel to Egypt and set in motion the Divine plan.

Yaakov seemed resistant to leave for Egypt; he also seemed to never intend to spend a considerable amount of time there. The verse uses the language of "*vayagar*", which the Sages understand to mean a "*sojourn*":

> "*And he sojourned there*" - *this teaches that our father Jacob did not go down to Egypt to settle, but only to live there temporarily. Thus it is said,* "*They said to Pharaoh, We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants*' *flocks because the hunger is severe in the land of Canaan; and now, please, let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen*."

Why is it so important to emphasize that Yaakov's stay was to be temporary? And can we assume this reluctance to stay was related to his concern of travelling with his family to Egypt?

Yaakov's primary mission was to build the Jewish nation. He carried with him the ideological foundations laid forth by his father and grandfather. The transition now had to extend beyond his direct family to a secure nation. The mission was in peril with the "death" of Yosef, but now, with news of his being alive and ensconced in Egypt, Yaakov was now able to refocus his attention on completing his mission. He was also aware of the future enslavement of the very nation he was tasked with building. Naturally, as a father, he wanted to be reunited with his long-lost son. Yaakov, though, had to consider the potential threats as well that awaited him in deciding to leave his current surroundings. The point of contention between Rashi and the other commentators concerns the nature of the danger. According to most commentators, the danger was sourced in the future physical subjugation of the Jewish people to the Egyptians. The strain placed on the people through the years and years of toil could very well destroy the nation.

Rashi, though, sees the threat in more ideological terms. Leaving the Land of Israel meant leaving an island of ideological security, where the basic tenets of Judaism had been built and a small community developed. Moving the family to Egypt, the pinnacle of secular civilization, meant exposing them to a litany of potentially corruptive beliefs and practices. Naturally, Yaakov would be quite concerned about such a result.

God attempts to assuage Yaakov's concerns, reframing the issue in the context of the prophecy. Yes, the destiny of the fledgling Jewish nation was going to be one filled with peril. But, God promised that it would be a mere stage in their development, rather than their demise. The normal assumption, then, would be a certain resignation of fate demonstrated by Yaakov. However, there is an incorrect premise sometimes promulgated with the idea of prophecy. As we know, mankind was gifted with a concept of freewill. He can choose what type of life to live, strengthening his relationship with God or choosing to turn away. Yaakov was promised by God to be the future of the Jewish people; yet, when faced with an impending attack by Esav, he prepared himself for defense of his family. Yaakov surmised it could be possible that due to his actions, the Divine plan had shifted, and the prophecy altered along with it.

The same type of thinking was taking place here. Yaakov understood that there was a Divine plan, but that did not mean he should abandon his responsibility as the ideological father. He never intended for his family to become a permanent fixture in Egypt, hoping that they would be able to insulate themselves from Egyptian influence and return back to the Land of Israel. As is noted above, the family set up camp in Goshen, removed

as much as possible from mainstream Egyptian society. While Yaakov understood the prophecy as setting the stage for a difficult path, he did not abandon his role as the leader of the nation. He forged ahead, trying to build the strongest foundation possible, in the hopes that possibly the path laid out might be altered.

The seeds of the nation were planted by Yaakov, and he dedicated himself in trying to encourage its growth. As well, he sensed the impending danger ahead, and attempted to put into place some type of protective measure as hope of potential change. With the second half of magid beginning, we now turn to the history of the Jewish trials and tribulations in Egypt. Yet, prior to diving in, it would appear critical for us to not view the events through a prism of fatalism. Framing the story in this manner, and keying in on Yaakov's devoted leadership, help us gain a deeper understanding in the development of the Jewish nation.

Veomar Lach Bedamayich Chayiy

The Dual Nature of Brit Milah

Rabbi Aryeh Wasserman ~ Dean of Students

When recounting the redemption from Egypt, we invoke the verse from Yechezkel 16:6: "וָאֹמַר לָךְ בְּדָמַיִךְ חְיִי וָאֹמַר לָךְ בְּדָמַיִךְ חְיִי". Chaza"l interpret this as referring to the blood of *milah* (circumcision) and the blood of *Korban Pesach*, two mitzvot that sealed the covenant between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael at the time of Yetziat Mitzrayim. This verse highlights *milah* as a defining symbol of Jewish identity and divine protection. Just as Korban Pesach was clearly an an expression of the unique relationship that was forged between Hashem and the Jewish people poised to enter the covenant, so too Brit Milah presumably represents the special relationship that Avraham and Hashem thousands of years ago, and continued through to us, his descendants, as it states clearly in *Bereishit* (17:9-13):

> *God further said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised.*

> *You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.*
>
> *And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. As for the homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring, they must be circumcised, homeborn and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact.*

Yet we find the command repeated at the beginning of parshat Tazria within the context of explaining the various stages of purity/impurity of a woman after giving birth (*Vayikra* 12: 2-4):

> *Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be impure seven days; she shall be impure as at the time of her condition of menstrual separation. – **On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised**. – She shall remain in a state of blood purification for thirty-three days: she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until her period of purification is completed."*

The Gemara provides insight into the necessity for this extra verse, by arguing that the extra statement teaches us that the brit Milah is of utmost importance on the eighth day, so much so that one is required to violate Shabbat to perform the Milah (see Sanhedrin 59b). This is extrapolated from the emphasized word "on the day", meaning that day specifically even if it may coincide with Shabbat. Why do we need this verse to teach us this overriding of Shabbat? Why not use the verse in *Bereishit* which also emphasizes the eight day requirement?

The Rambam's presentation of this mitzvah, and the relationship between the above sources is simply perplexing. When he describes the mitzvah in his Sefer Hamitzvot, he states (Mitzvat Aseh 215):

> *That He commanded us to circumcise the son. And this is what He said to Avraham, "**all of your males shall be circumcised for you**" and it writes in the Torah that one who violates this mitzvah receives Karet.*

Notice that in this formulation, the Rambam doesn't even mention the verse in Tazria, only choosing the verse from the Avraham story. Also notice that he has this strange line about receiving Karet if one is not circumcised, yet does not provide the source text. Furthermore the Rambam's presentation seems to be very different than that found in the Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Milah 1:1):

> *Circumcision is a positive mitzvah [whose lack of fulfillment] is punishable*

> *by karet, as [Genesis 17:14] states: "And an uncircumcised male who does not circumcise his foreskin - this soul will be cut off from his people."A father is commanded to circumcise his son, and a master, his slaves. This applies both to those who are born in his home and to those purchased by him. If the father or the master transgressed and did not circumcise them, he negated the fulfillment of a positive commandment. He is not, however, punished by karet, for karet is incurred only by the uncircumcised person himself.*

While the Rambam is consistent in leaving out the verse from Tazria when defining the essence of the Mitzvah, he chooses to introduce Milah with the later verse in *Bereishit* (17:14) which describes the punishment of Karet, for those who are uncircumcised instead of introducing the mitzvah as he does in the Sefer HaMitzvot. He explains that while the father has a Mitzvah to ensure his son is circumcised at the end of the day, Karet is reserved for the uncircumcised.

In Sanhedrin (59b), the Gemara discusses the status of mitzvot that were given to *Bnei Noach* and then repeated at *Har Sinai*. The position of the Chachamim is that those mitzvot were given at *Har Sinai*, yet written by the previous story for us to understand why Hashem commanded us to do so. The gemara there determines that any such mitzvah applies to both *Bnei Noach* and to Bnei Yisrael (example - don't murder). The obvious question, which the Gemara asks, is what about the

Mitzvah of Milah, should it not apply to *Bnei Noach* as well?

One of the answers suggested is that since the mitzvah was given specifically to Avraham and his children it does not apply universally to all *Bnei Noach*. As such the gemara proceeds to explain why both the children of Yishmael and Eisav are rejected. However, the gemara concludes that the six children of Avraham from his wife Keturah, are indeed required to have a Brit Milah. Rashi (*d"h lerabot bnei keturah)* explains the gemara's conclusion to be referring specifically to those six children, and that Avraham had a requirement to circumcise them as his biological children. However, they themselves had no further requirement to pass this obligation down through the generations. The Rambam though, (Hilchot Melachim 10:9) argues that the *Bnei Keturah* are required to be circumcised and implies that not doing so would result in them being liable for the death penalty! (as is the punishment for the *sheva mitzvot bnei noach*). If the Milah is to be a unique expression of the relationship between the chosen line of Avraham versus everyone else, how can we understand this position of the Rambam?

Perhaps one can suggest that the Rambam understands that there are two distinct elements to the mitzvah of Milah. On the one hand, there is the requirement for the father to circumcise his son. This was a command given to Avraham and his children after him, showing the unique **connection between Hashem and Avraham**. While this is a *mitzvat aseh* on the father, it is like any other *mitzvat aseh* and violating it does not invoke Karet. The second element is the fact that each individual Jew must be circumcised to reflect the **Jewish**

people's unique relationship with Hashem, a relationship that is infused with elements of *kedushah* and *taharah*, things absent from the world of the *Ben Noach*. Violation of this expression is so great, that even though it is technically a *mitzvat Aseh*, it is in a category of its own, and the punishment is Karet.

In the Sefer HaMitzvot the Rambam focuses upon the mitzvah of the father which is a regular *mitzvat aseh*. This can also perhaps explain the placement of this mitzvah after the mitzvah of *kiddushin* (213), and the mitzvah for a man to be with his wife, even refraining from going out to war, for the first year of marriage (214). This is the **father's obligation** in the process of perpetuating the next generation. While it is important to know that there is a dual identity embedded in this one Mitzvah (that of the father and that of the son) and that the consequence could be Karet, the Rambam intentionally chooses to leave those details out when he lists this mitzvah in his list of *mitzvot aseh*.

In contrast the Rambam's introduction to the mitzvah of milah in the Mishneh Torah focuses first and foremost on the **individual's requirement** to be circumcised. He chooses the verse which specifically addresses the individual that is not circumcised. Only after does he detail the second element of the mitzvah, that of the father to do so on the eighth day, and in so doing, fulfilling the son's own requirement as well.

This can explain the Rambam's understanding of the *Bnei Keturah* as well. Perhaps he is suggesting that the mitzvah to circumcise one's son also applies to the *Bnei Keturah* for this act represents the unique relationship between Hashem and their ancestor Avraham. Perhaps they are only commanded to circumcise their son

specifically on the eighth day. After that though, perhaps they would be exempt. (Granted this would be a tremendous chiddush in the Rambam). The mitzvah on the individual, the result of which reflects Hashem's unique relationship with the Jewish people, they have no part in.

It is perhaps for this reason as well that the extra verse in Tazria, teaching us that Milah trumps Shabbat, is necessary. It is specifically mentioned within the context in which the woman's status is being discussed, where the fathers presence is very much absent. The element of Milah that can be done on Shabbat, which itself is a "sign" between us and Hashem, is the individual's responsibility to circumcise himself, in so doing, marking himself as a member of the Jewish nation. It is within that context that a woman is impure for seven days, and then only after the eighth day, where her son is circumcised, does she enter the status of *dmei tohara*, in which any blood that leaves her is deemed to be pure blood. While it is the father who is required to ensure this happens (logistically and for his own semi-separate requirement), the father is intentionally not mentioned here in Tazria. The father's requirement of circumcising his son, while important, would not be enough to violate Shabbat for (*ein aseh doche asie v'lo taaseh*). For this reason the extra verse in Tazria was necessary to teach this particular halacha.

This understanding in the Rambam's position perhaps can help us navigate the challenge of balancing the understanding of dam milah as something both beyond the confines of the Jewish people while at the same time marking a unique relationship that triggered our exodus from Egypt. As we study the verses of

Maggid and in so doing reenact the story of our transition from a slave of the nations to a unique people of destiny, let us remember and appreciate the special blood pact we have with Hashem.

"Vayotzianu Hashem Elokeinu"

And Hashem Brought Us Out of Egypt

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Chait ~ Rosh HaYeshiva Emeritus

In the section of the Haggadah that expounds upon the various verses related to the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, we encounter the verse, *"And Hashem brought us out of Egypt"* (Devarim 26:8). The explanation provided in the Haggadah highlights the emphasis on the name *Hashem*, stressing that G-d Himself, and not an angel, archangel, or messenger, took the Jewish people out of Egypt. It was G-d alone, in His glory, and by His own hand.

A common question raised by many commentators concerns the role of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe's role seems to be that of a messenger or intermediary between Hashem and the Jewish people. How does this reconcile with the claim that *Hashem Himself* took us out of Egypt? There are several answers offered to this question, but the explanation I wish to share comes from the Brisker Rav, as found in his sefer on the weekly Torah portion.

In Parshat Shemot (3:11-12), Hashem reassures Moshe by saying, *"Because I will be with you,"* at the time

of the exodus. But the question arises: when did we observe G-d's presence during the exodus? The Brisker Rav answers this based on a tradition: when Moshe spoke, it was evident that Hashem was speaking through him. This is evident from Moshe's initial complaint in the Torah, where he says that he is unfit to be the leader of the Jewish people due to his speech impediment, and that people would not comprehend him. Hashem responds, *"I will be with you,"* and additionally sends his brother Aaron to assist Moshe by acting as his spokesman.

This dynamic is seen when Moshe and Aaron appear before Pharaoh at the beginning of their mission, as described in Exodus 5:1: *"And afterwards Moshe and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said…"* Here, Aaron is assisting Moshe in speaking. However, later on, we find Moshe speaking to Pharaoh alone. In Exodus 8:5, it states, *"And Moshe said unto Pharaoh"*—by himself. According to our tradition, this means that it was Hashem's voice coming through Moshe, and the people understood that Moshe's speech, previously impeded, was now clear and audible. It was as though Moshe's speech impediment had been removed, and everyone recognized that it was Hashem's voice speaking through him.

With this understanding, we can better comprehend the intent of the author of the Haggadah when he says that *Hashem Himself* brought us out of Egypt. Although Moshe acted as G-d's messenger, it was evident that Hashem's presence was with him during the exodus. Typically, when G-d sends a messenger or angel, the divine presence is not directly felt. However, during the exodus, the Jewish people clearly understood that Hashem was present and actively involved in their liberation. This was meant to convey to the Jewish people

that the bond between Hashem and the Jewish people is so profound that His presence was felt by all.

When we follow the Torah and observe the Mitzvot, we strengthen our bond with Hashem. May we be *zocheh* (merit) to witness the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash speedily in our days, so that we can once again perform all the Mitzvot required on the Temple Mount.

"U'Bemoreh Gadol"

Divine Revelation and Fear

Yosef Levine ~ Miami, FL

At this point in the Haggadah, we continue to read the explications from Sifrei Devarim on the bringing of the first fruits in Devarim 26:5-8, which recalls *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. The midrash we read interprets the phrase "*u'be'moreh gadol*," "and with great awesomeness" (I have rendered it as "awesomeness", since it signifies great fear/awe-inducing events, but there is no great word for it in English) as referring to the "revelation of the [divine] presence" - the *giluy shechinah*. How does it prove this? With the following verse from Devarim 4:34:

> *Or has any other god tried to come to take for it a nation from the midst of nation, with tests, with signs, and with wonders and with war and with a great hand and with an outstretched arm and* ***with great awesomenesses*** *like all that Hashem your God has done for you in Egypt to your eyes?*

At first glance, this midrashic is very confusing. Firstly, what does *giluy shechinah* mean in the first place? Secondly, what does it have to do with "great awesomeness"? Thirdly, how does the proof-*pasuk* from Devarim 4:34 prove this point? Lastly, this proof-*pasuk*

largely parallels the original *pasuk* that we are commenting on - both mention signs, wonders, strong arm, etc. - so how does the *Ba'al Haggadah* know that "*moreh gadol*" means *giluy shechina* and not any other phrase in the *pasuk*?

"*Giluy Shechinah*" is an interesting phrase. It literally translates to "revelation of presence," but it is used in this context to mean specifically the Divine Presence. Again, we can look to the Rambam to help us understand this. The Rambam notes many times in his writings, and particularly in the Guide of the Perplexed, that Hashem cannot occupy space, since He is non-physical. Therefore, the Rambam writes (Guide 1:25), when the Torah describes His "*shechinah*," or any "dwelling" in reference to God, it must be signifying a constant divine providence over a certain object:

> *In this sense the term is employed in reference to God, that is to say, to denote the continuance of His Divine Presence (Shechinah) or of His Providence in some place where the Divine Presence manifested itself constantly, or in some object which was constantly protected by Providence.*

This neatly explains why the Haggadah believes that the Divine Presence was revealed in Egypt, since we saw God's actions through His providence over Klal Yisroel and His justice over the Egyptians.

With this in mind, we can now examine more closely the two *pesukim* quoted by the Haggadah. Although, as we noted, they do seem quite similar to each

other, there is a major difference. The second verse, from Devarim 4:34, says that God has done all of these great awesomenesses "to your eyes." This is what the Haggadah is picking up on and demonstrating that the Torah is emphasizing that the events in Mitzrayim and all the themes in it were apparent to the people, or that it was revealed.

The events that occurred in Egypt operated according to principles of Hashem's actions, like His justice, His salvation, and His fulfillment of the covenant with our forefathers. If God were to carry out His justice subtly and made these principles hidden but applied to reality, that would be enough for the principles per se. Hashem remains just, a savior, and a fulfiller of covenants without us explicitly knowing. The methods of the Holy One do not need to be revealed to man for them to be correct and upright.

> *For now I could send My hand and I hit you and your nation with plague; and you would be eliminated from the land. (Shemos 9:15)*

Hashem here proposes to perpetrate simple justice upon the Egyptians by completely destroying them. However, by *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, the whole event was not just an execution of these principles, but a revelation to the system of action as a quality in the redemption itself. Hashem states in the verse that follows:

> *But because of this I let you remain standing, because you will display my*

> *strength, and so that my name will be told in all the land. (Shemos 9:16)*

Hashem proposed that He will put aside immediate justice so that He can display his strength and name to the world. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was a lesson to the world of how divine providence works. Hashem emphasizes this point in his communications to Moshe, where He mentions over and over the idea of people knowing:

> *Know that I am Hashem (Shemos 7:17)*
>
> *So that they know that there isn't like Hashem our God (8:6)*
>
> *So that they know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land (8:18)*
>
> *In order that they know that there isn't anything like Me in all the land (9:14)*
>
> *And you should know that I am Hashem. (10:2)*

I would suggest that this concept is referred to as "*moreh*", "awesomeness," because the proper reaction to such a great display is fear. The Rambam outlines the way to fear God as follows (Rambam Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 2:2):

> *And when he thinks about these things (the actions and creations of God)*

> *themselves immediately he recoils backwards and he fears and knows that he is a small, dark, creature with light, small knowledge before the Perfect Intelligence.*

The Rambam here is describing a certain reaction to contemplating the actions of God, which causes a person to fear Him because he knows the utter insignificance of his existence before the Almighty. By a revelation so explicit to mankind like Yetzias Mitzrayim, one must totally recognize the greatness of Hashem and our nothingness before Him.

The experience of the divine that *Am Yisroel* faced by *Yetzias Mitzrayim* gives us insight into how our nation was instantiated. When God was preparing a nation to be totally subjugated to him through the giving of the Torah, he introduced his complete dominance over the world and supreme knowledge first. They had to be in an utter state of awe before the Lord before they could become God's nation. God in the Ten Commandments introduces Himself as "I am Hashem your God who took you from the land of Egypt." The significance of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* is that we were branded by this body of knowledge through the experience of *Yirah*.

Additionally, this shows that *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was a lesson to the world in God's operations, which is an incredible act of *chesed*. One of the primary ways that halacha and Jewish philosophers use to connect with God is by studying and imitating God's ways. The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:54) states that knowledge of God's actions is the highest level knowledge a person can attain, and imitating those actions is one of the greatest things a

person can do. By God acting in a way that is observable and studiable, He is doing an incredible act of kindness to man by opening an avenue towards man's perfection. It was through *Yetzias Mitzrayim* that as a nation we could relate to God in such a way.

Thus, the Seder night gives us a real chance to connect with Hashem through understanding His ways that were revealed to the whole world at *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. By discussing our redemption out of Egypt, "in front of our eyes", we're going well beyond a mere story. We are actually learning about God's actions and how He runs the world. As the Rambam teaches, this knowledge brings us closer to Him. The Seder, with its questions and discussions, helps us deepen our intellectual relationship with Hashem and gain a sense of fear of awesomeness for His total supremacy.

Makkot

The Ten Plagues: A Tale of Two Narratives

Meir Orlansky ~ Silver Spring, MD

These were the ten plagues that the Holy One brought upon Egypt, and these are they: blood, frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, the striking of the firstborns.

It would be difficult to create a more spartan description of the ten plagues than what is written in the Haggadah. We state their existence, list them, and move on, with a short stop to mention a memorable acronym. It is one set of events among many, no more significant than any other event in the story. In Exodus, in contrast, the ten plagues take up a substantial amount of space, are described in detail, and are expounded upon. In Exodus each plague is a notable event, and the ten plagues as a whole is one of the most significant events in the liberation narrative. How can we understand this contrast?

To grasp the difference in the descriptions of the ten plagues, I suggest we take a step back and look at the two stories as complete narratives. Then, we can understand the ten plagues'role in each story.

The story told in the Haggadah is essentially about the salvation and freedom of our ancestors, the

Israelites. The events told in the Haggadah serve to explain what the salvation was and to exalt it. The salvation is valorized by emphasizing the depths of the Israelites' servitude before the salvation and by elevating the heights to which God brought them in the salvation. The recitations of episodes in the Haggadah before the actual exodus describe the horrid state of the nation, its suffering and tribulations. For example, the passage "And the Egyptians dealt cruelly with us…" describes the agonies of the work imposed on us by the Egyptians. The passage "And we cried out to the Lord…" and its derivation outlines torments inflicted on our ancestors, such as the murder of sons and separation of spouses.

The recitations of episodes during the exodus describe the wonders of the process and God's kindness to us. The passage "And the Lord brought us out of Egypt" details God's stupendous methods to liberate the nation.

The Haggadah places as much significance on other events as it does on the ten plagues, including events which are only just mentioned in Exodus. In Dayenu, we thank God for various wonders He performed, and of the ten plagues, only the last, the death of the firstborn, is mentioned in it. The receiving of the manna is also mentioned and is no less elevated in status than the ten plagues; they both fill one line in Dayenu. The same is true for the nation gaining money from the Egyptians. In Exodus, the ten plagues take up many chapters, the manna is spoken of in two chapters, and the Israelites' plundering of Egypt is mentioned in only a few verses. They are placed on par with one another in the Haggadah because they are of similar importance to the salvation. The manna and riches underline how suddenly

and greatly our ancestors were exalted. The latter two episodes are as important to understanding the exodus from Egypt via freedom as the ten plagues.

The ten plagues serve dual purposes in the exodus story: punishment and salvation. The ten plagues both punish the Egyptians for their actions and act as a mechanism to free the Israelites. I would argue that the former is more essential to the plagues than the latter. The plagues were more a mechanism for punishment than they are for freedom. The Haggadah only cares about the ten plagues inasmuch as they led to the freedom of the nation. The purpose of delving into the nature of the plagues is to understand the punishments of the Egyptians, but punishment is not of central importance to us on Passover night; freedom is. Discussions of the lessons of the plagues, of their moral lessons and theological implications, are monumentally valuable, but do not always contribute directly to our story of freedom. Consequently, the Haggadah does not focus on the plagues in an extended manner by, say, detailing the minutiae of each plague. The book of Exodus contains vast reservoirs of lessons from which we can draw, and it appropriately spends a lot of space on descriptions of the ten plagues. The same cannot be said for the Haggadah, which has a more narrow focus.

The upshot of this is not that we shouldn't care about the ten plagues, but that they are not any more central to passover night than many other events of the exodus are. We shouldn't spend an exorbitant amount of time on the plagues if it detracts from the remaining lessons we can learn. Instead, we should learn all that we can from all the events that took place during the salvation process.

On the Seder night, our focus should remain on the overarching theme of freedom. The Haggadah guides us to recognize the full redemption process, from suffering to salvation, and to internalize its lessons. By engaging with the entire exodus story - not just the ten plagues - we can gain a richer and broader understanding of our ancestors' liberation. The more we explore each element of the story, the more we can appreciate the miracles that God performed for us.

Makkot

The Unique Plague of Barad

Nachum Zerykier ~ Cedarhurst, NY

For this essay on the Makkot, I want to talk (perhaps "ramble" is the right word) about the seventh plague - *Barad*. What is *Barad* exactly? There are very few verses in the Torah describing what *Barad* actually looked like and what it did (Exodus 9:23-25), so I'll put them here:

> *(23) And Moses stretched forth his staff toward heaven; and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down unto the earth; and the Lord caused to hail upon the land of Egypt.*
> *(24) So there was hail, and fire flashing up amidst the hail, very grievous, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.*
> *(25) And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and broke every tree of the field.*
> *(26) Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail.*

I find this really interesting. There are a bunch of questions to ask about *Barad*. First, what is the significance of the fact that it is the seventh plague? The

number seven is very important in the Torah, so it would make sense for the seventh plague to be important as well. So what makes *Barad* so special? As for the specifics of this plague, why does the Torah emphasize over and over again that *Barad* happened "in the land of Egypt" specifically? The Torah even goes out of its way to mention that the *Barad* did not affect the land of Goshen. Why is that? Lastly, all the other plagues have some element of the natural world in it. Certainly, they don't contradict nature. The frogs attack the people, the locusts attack the crops, the boils hurt their skin. These are all basically natural plagues, but on a massive scale and one after another. Why is it, I wonder, that *Barad* has two contradictions in it - fire and ice?

In my opinion, *Barad* is set apart from all the other plagues because it is so intrinsically clear to be a miracle. Even the final plague of *makkat bechorot* isn't naturally contradictory, and can pass off as some kind of freak natural occurrence. Technically, the death of people is possible with poison or other natural means. The plague of darkness is also natural - just the blocking of the sun's rays from getting here. And besides, the Egyptians were barely conscious of it occurring, only knowing that they were somehow paralyzed and not even knowing for sure whether others were until after the plague ended. Yet, *Barad* stands out as something way beyond nature - containing both fire and ice in it - and is therefore so obviously miraculous.

One of the things I have been doing at Migdal is working on the writings of Rabbi Walter Orenstein, a rabbi who taught at YU and left behind tons of notes on the classes he gave. One of the essays he wrote is on the nature of miracles. It's a really cool piece, and as I wrote

this *dvar Torah*, I remembered how Rabbi Orenstein talks about Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's Torah commentary to the Book of Exodus (on Exodus 3:20) regarding the idea of miracles. Rabbi Hirsch, writes Rabbi Orenstein, believed that the way miracles work is that God created a natural order that He controls at all times and leaves "running" in its normal function. Sometimes, though, God takes the reins and changes what is possible through miracles.

In my opinion, *Barad* is such a clear example of this. Fire and ice are some of the most well-known opposites in nature that exist, and yet, in this plague, God made them exist in the same space at the same time. These are two things that can't exist within each other, and yet here we see them doing just that. I believe this is why the Torah emphasizes that it specifically targeted Egyptian land only, while Goshen (and everywhere else in the world) was spared. This clearly shows not just a miracle of ascension of nature, but a miracle of the plague itself being targeted with intelligence. Think about it: it's not like someone just summoned magically some flaming hail in one area. No, it specifically targeted Egyptian land to the point where it skips the piece of land that the Jews lived in. This is certainly something to contemplate.

This also helps us understand why it is the seventh plague specifically. As I mentioned, seven is a pretty important number in Judaism. We have seven days of the week, we have seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot, seven days of Sukkot (with Shmini Atzeret as its own holiday), there are seven branches on the Menorah, and so on and so forth. Chanukah, too, has seven days of miracles plus the first day (which in itself was not a miracle, due to the simple fact that the oil

would last the first day, so the first day was natural, while the rest of the days were miracles). If so, and seven is something that highlights a set and is uniquely important, it makes sense that the seventh plague would have something truly unique about it.

All that said, some may still ask why it wasn't the tenth plague? After all, the number ten is also important (ten commandments, ten plagues, ten generations between Adam to Noach and then Noach to Avraham, etc.). So why not save it until then? The answer to that is simply that until the final plague, which directly threatened Pharaoh's life, it's unlikely he would have truly let everyone go due to his desire to have free labor and the hardening of his heart, no matter how miraculous in nature. The main reason he finally gave up was because his life was directly at risk due to the tenth plague's nature of killing all first born of which he was one.

So, I find it very fascinating that the seventh plague is one that can be so clearly and so cut and dry a miracle of sorts. Something so clearly supernatural, so clearly miraculous, and one that was clear to see for all Egyptians. I imagine it would be quite hard to ignore the flaming balls of ice raining down from the sky at you, killing you and destroying your land, and the animals of the people who didn't listen to the Jewish guy to put them away (see Exodus 9:18).

Barad has always been my favorite plague, I'd say. And as I've shown, there is good reason for that. It also shows on some level what ignoring a clear message from God can cause. Anyway, this has been my ramble on *Barad*. Thank you for reading or whatever, I don't know.

Detzach Adash B'achav

Meaningful and Moving Mnemonics

Akiva Krumbein ~ Cherry Hill, NJ

At the Seder, we recite the well-known acronym "Detzach, Adash, B'achav" to enumerate the ten plagues that befell Egypt. At first glance, one might question the necessity of such an acronym. The plagues are not particularly difficult to remember, and their sequence is repeated throughout the Haggadah. So why did Rabbi Yehudah formulate this abbreviation? What purpose does it serve?

Many have pointed to how the acronym divides the ten plagues into three. Perhaps Rabbi Yehudah meant to use the acronym to highlight this three-fold structure of the plagues. What significance does this hold?

One possibility is to highlight the roles of Aharon and Moshe. The first three plagues (blood, frogs, lice) were performed by Aharon with his staff. The next three (wild animals, pestilence, boils) were performed by Moshe, but without his staff. The final three (hail, locusts, darkness) were performed by Moshe with his staff. If so, Rabbi Yehudah wanted to give credit to them and their leadership in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt.

Another possibility is to point at the natural source of the plagues. The first three emerged from below the ground (Nile turning to blood, frogs from the river, lice from the dust). The second three occurred at ground level (wild animals swarming the land, pestilence

striking livestock, boils affecting people and animals). The last three came from the sky (hail, locusts descending, darkness covering the land). This answer highlights the all-encompassing nature of God's plagues in Egypt, affecting the entirety of the natural world.

The Maharal of Prague (Gevurot Hashem 57) also discusses this question, and gives several answers as to why Rabbi Yehudah split the plagues into three categories. I found one of his answers very interesting. He suggests that the first three plagues caused no damage to property, and did not cause any death. The middle three caused damage to property but no death. And the last three caused damage and death. He writes:

> *The plagues began from a more distant place and continually drew closer until they reached the very essence of Egypt. Anything that approaches and reaches something has three boundaries: the first is the beginning, the second is the middle, and the third is the end, flowing into each other but being distinct in itself as well. Therefore, the first three plagues belonged to one category, as they did not instill fear of death or damage of property. The middle ones were distinct in that they caused damage but also introduced fear of death. They were similar to the first three in that they were not considered actual death, yet they also resembled the last three, as they instilled fear of death*

and destruction. The final plagues were considered akin to complete death.

Thus, each group follows a progression in which the affliction begins as external and impersonal but increasingly affects the Egyptians directly. This gradual intensification serves to demonstrate Hashem's control over all aspects of existence, and hits the Egyptian in an intensely personal and direct way.

A key feature of the Seder is engaging children in the story of the Exodus. By presenting the plagues in an unusual format, the acronym prompts curiosity and encourages questions. This aligns with the broader theme of the Seder night: to provoke discussion and deeper understanding. When children ask about the significance of the acronym, it opens the door to exploring the structure and meaning of the plagues themselves. Thus, the acronym was never intended to serve as a simple mnemonic device. Rather, it was a tool to facilitate discussion and analysis of the plagues. By recognizing patterns within them, we gain a deeper appreciation of their significance and their role in demonstrating Hashem's power and justice.

Ultimately, the most compelling reason for the acronym may simply be that it inspires questions and dialogue. This is the essence of the Seder night. We engage with the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* in a way that fosters deeper understanding and appreciation for the miracles Hashem performed for Bnei Yisrael.

R' Yosi, R' Eliezer, R' Akiva

Uncovering The Debate On How Many Plagues G-d Gave Egypt

Ariel Wallen ~ Fair Lawn, NJ

The Rabbis in the Haggadah debate the number of plagues that G-d visited upon the Egyptians. Rabbi Yosi HaGelili starts with 10 in Egypt and 50 at the sea, based on the ratio of "G-d's finger" in Egypt to "God's hand" at the sea. Rabbi Eliezer multiplies each plague by four, interpreting Psalms 78:49 to have four different descriptions of the plagues: "He inflicted His burning anger upon them - wrath, indignation, pain, and a band of deadly messengers." This yields 40 in Egypt and 200 at the sea. Rabbi Akiva further escalates this, seeing the verse as having really five descriptions (including burning anger), leading to 50 plagues in Egypt and 250 at the sea.

In the Gra's commentary on the Haggadah, he explains the debate between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva in a very fascinating way. He says that, in fact, they are having a debate on a different verse (Habakkuk 3:8):

> *Lord, were you displeased with the rivers? Was your burning anger against the rivers, or your wrath against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariots of salvation?*

The Gra explains that Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva differ in understanding whether or not "rivers" and "sea" are the same thing or not. This would in turn determine if "burning anger" and "wrath" are one or separate parts.

I would frame the debate as follows: Rabbi Akiva might say, "Why would rivers and seas ever be considered the same thing? They have different names for a reason!" On the other hand, Rabbi Eliezer might have responded, "Why would they be considered different? Aren't they both masses of water?"

What are they really arguing about, then? They both agree that the verse uses different contexts of water to describe the miracles of G-d. The question is whether or not the different contexts make them categorically separate or not. Rabbi Akiva holds they do create a separation. Rabbi Eliezer agrees that the water has different limitations but at the end of the day they are both masses of water. The question then is: What separates things categorically? Different contexts or different contents?

As I have shown, it turns out that this debate goes much deeper than just how many plagues there were in Egypt and at the Sea. But it still begs the question: Why is there such a complex debate going on at all? What is the underlying reason for it?

To answer this question, the Gra says in his commentary that G-d gave us two promises. The first is in Exodus 15:26:

> *G-d said, if you diligently follow the voice of Hashem your God, doing what*

> *is upright in his eyes and giving ear to his commandments, and guarding his laws - every sickness that I placed in Egypt I will not place on you for I am hashem your healer.*

In Deuteronomy 7:15 we are promised the following:

> *And G-d will remove from you every sickness and every dreadful disease of Egypt that you knew - will not place it on you and give it to all your enemies.*

The Gra explains that with these verses we can better understand these rabbis' efforts to expand the plagues of Egypt. By increasing the plagues as much as possible, they are thus included in the promise of "…every sickness that I placed in Egypt I will not place on you for I am hashem your healer," as well as in the promise of "…every sickness and every dreadful disease of Egypt that you knew will not place it on you and give it to all your enemies." Because for all the many plagues and punishments G-d gave on Egypt, thus we are promised to be saved from them.

Stated clearly, the Gra is saying that the number of plagues was expanded through this debate because G-d promised us that for every plague given to Egypt, we would be saved from that very plague happening to us. In my opinion, the Gra is telling us that the debate is not that G-d punished them for the sake of revenge. But rather, it was to understand our relationship to G-d; that we rely on Him to protect us.

There are two sides to that protection. The more obvious one is that G-d defeats our enemies. The less obvious one that G-d makes sure we don't get negatively affected. It could be hard to understand everything we are protected from without knowing the possible threats. This debate helps us realize everything we are saved from.

This debate greatly helps us fulfill our obligation to tell over the story of the Exodus by making us have a better understanding of the vast protection G-d gave our ancestors and learning from that how much we rely on G-d.

Dayenu

Judaism's Foundations on Pesach

Rabbi Aryeh Sklar ~ Ra"M

What if I told you that the playful, joyous song of Dayenu actually holds foundational religious ideas inherent in Judaism?

Many commentaries have noticed that Dayenu has exactly 15 stanzas. The significance of the number 15 is not lost on these commentators. Not only is the Seder composed of 15 steps, but there are 15 "Songs of Ascent" (that begin with "Shir Ha/La-Maalot) in Psalm 120 to 134, which symbolize the 15 steps leading up to the Beit HaMikdash. That said, Dayenu also seems to easily divide into three main themes. The first five stanzas relate to the history of our enslavement and eventual freedom from Egypt. The second five stanzas relate to our experience of God's miracles and providence. The final five stanzas relate to our connection to God, including Matan Torah, Shabbat, and the Beit HaMikdash.

Thus, we see latent in Dayenu three foundations of Judaism: the historical, the experiential, and the philosophical. They also are represented by our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who each fulfill an aspect of these three themes. By exploring these dimensions of our faith, we will understand the very essence of what makes Jews, well, Jewish, and what should be developed to keep them that way.

1) The Historical Dimension

The Haggadah proclaims, "This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt… This year we are here; next year in the land of Israel. This year we are slaves; next year we will be free people." The focus is the amazing journey we as Jews have had, from a tiny family to a great and powerful one, from enslavement to glorious freedom, and from idolatry to a monotheistic faith - the mother of all major faiths - in the Holy Land. We have had our ups and downs since then, but the story is nonetheless amazing and full of wonderful people. We care not only about where we were in our past, but where we are now and where we will be in the future. This is the Yaakov story, the father of a powerful people who gather to await the message about the days to come. He is the person our nation is named after, Yisrael, and we are his physical and spiritual descendants.

2) The Experiential Dimension

The Mishna in Pesachim (10:5) emphasizes the importance of experiencing Pesach personally: "[The] Passover-offering [is offered] because the Omnipresent One passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. Unleavened bread [is eaten] because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt. [The] bitter herb is [eaten] because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt. In every generation, a person must regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt."

We do funny little things on Pesach to induce a spiritual experience, to make it seem alive and real. Very often, they are not fun, such as eating matza, or maror, but it gives our lives a spiritual flavor which we remember. This lines up with Yitzchak's story - at one

point (almost) sacrificed, the midrash relating that he even saw the angels above, which we equate with the ultimate spiritual experience which we remind ourselves of at Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in preparation for repentance. The story of Yitzchak has another detail that should never be forgotten - he repeatedly redug the wells of his father in spite of harassment - he didn't just have a singular spiritual experience, but he took it with him into real life and reinvigorated tradition with a new well of water.

3) The Philosophical/Theological Dimension

Pesach is a time where our belief in God's existence and providence take front stage. As stated in the Ten Commandments, the very belief in God is predicated on Him taking us out of Egypt, "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt..." (Exodus 20:2). This philosophical approach aligns with the journey of Avraham, who challenged the idolatry of his time through rational arguments (see Rambam's Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:3 for his description of Avraham's philosophical journey to monotheism).

These three perspectives also inform different approaches to Jewish outreach and engagement:

The Philosophical Approach: This method focuses on proving God's existence and the rational basis for Judaism. While effective in certain contexts, its appeal may be waning as people seek more personal and experiential connections to faith.

The Experiential Approach: This method emphasizes emotional and spiritual experiences but can be highly subjective and may not provide a lasting foundation for commitment.

The Historical Approach: This approach has yet to be fully utilized but holds significant potential. By focusing on our shared past, present, and future, it fosters a deep sense of belonging and responsibility. Recognizing ourselves as part of an ongoing, extraordinary narrative can be a powerful motivator for Jewish continuity.

To be successful, we really need all three. And this is what Dayenu represents. With all of the history, experiences, and philosophical study, it might finally be enough for us and we will continue to praise God at the Seder and all year long.

Rabban Gamliel

Rabban Gamliel's Checklist

Matt Lipman ~ Masa Israel Educator

> *Rabban Gamliel would say: Anyone who does not say these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation and these are they: Pesach, Matzah and Maror.*

Rabban Gamliel's instruction in the Mishneh above has provided us with a checklist of items that we must mention at the Seder. It is puzzling that he specifically says "does not say these things" in reference to the obligation. While we cannot currently bring the Pesach offering, we can and do eat matzah and maror. It can be argued that to eat the Pesach offering is aspirational for the future and that the other two items can be eaten in present day so surely it would make more sense to say the person who doesn't eat these items (either now or in the future depending on the item) rather than to say "does not say". What does it mean to "say" them?

Rashbam comments that it is necessary to fully explain these items. It is not a simple case of mentioning them and moving on but rather giving a deep explanation for each of the three items and what they represent. The very nature of the Seder is to arouse curiosity and provide a launch pad for discussion and to

learn more deeply about our story as a people and our practice of mitzvot. By doing this Rashbam says that the obligation will be fulfilled. The Torah Temima adds to this approach by explaining that Rabban Gamliel is singling out these three mitzvot as requiring true kavanah (intention.) Without a full explanation of the three items then having true kavanah is not possible. In order to truly fulfill our obligation at the Seder, we need to truly understand what the items of Pesach, Matzah and Maror represent. There are many explanations of which of these three things represent but for each of the three items here is one explanation. Feel free to add many more at your own Seder and truly fulfill the teaching of Rabban Gamliel!

Pesach: There is a debate about the meaning of the word Pesach. Many of us grew up learning it to mean Passover (hence the English word for the festival) and that it means Hashem passed over the houses of Bnei Yisrael during the final plague. However, Onkelos translates it to mean mercy or compassion and that Hashem showed compassion for his people by saving us from death on that fateful night. The Pesach offering is a reminder for us that Hashem has eternal compassion for us, his people.

Matzah: Matzah represents both affliction and redemption. It is described as the bread of affliction in the Torah and yet is also the food the Bnei Yisrael ate as they fled Egypt-the ultimate escape to freedom. The duality of the symbolism of the Matzah comes to teach us that the experience of the Jewish people has seen many lows but also many highs. Our challenge is to learn from both the highs and the lows of our shared experience.

Maror: We usually hold that the eating of the maror represents the bitter times that Bnei Yisrael experienced in Egypt. However, Rebbe Natan of Breslov explains that the maror is not meant as a reminder of a historical event but a reminder of the difficult times we find ourselves in today. He says that without true redemption, we will always be experiencing a sense of bitterness. The maror is to remind us that we are not yet experiencing the full redemption and only once that happens will we be able to rid ourselves of the bitterness affecting our lives.

Bechol Dor v'Dor

Which *Dor*?

Yeshaya Goldberg ~ Fort Lauderdale, FL

The mishna in the tenth chapter of Pesachim, which goes through the Seder, seems to say two contradictory things. First it says we are supposed to see ourselves as if we left Egypt: "A person must view himself as though he personally left Egypt." However, the next line says, "To thank, praise, glorify, exalt, honor, bless, and revere the One *who performed for our forefathers*." What is the reason for this phrasing of saying we should view it like we personally left, then praise Hashem for what He did for our forefathers ?

I think the answer can be learned from a simple parable of eating a sandwich. There are three steps in eating a sandwich. We first have the desire to eat the sandwich. Then, we say a *bracha* before we eat it. After we have finished, we then say the *bracha achrona*.

The way we relate to the sandwich is on a personal level because that's just the object in front of us that we desire and we aren't thinking about anything else besides our personal needs, we just pick up and eat. This is parallel to us leaving Egypt and picking up and hurrying to get out of there with what we can. We were newly freed slaves and it would have to be hard to finally see freedom and take the chance to run away. This had to be a predicament for a lot of the jews to either leave everything they've ever known, or take a chance with the

rest of the slaves to try out freedom. We should put ourselves in this position to think of leaving Egypt under stress and pressure of the Egyptians coming towards us and fellow Jews assimilating into their culture and think of how great it is that you are here right now not enslaved and able to celebrate Pesach.

Second, we have some recognition of Hashem, but still not complete; we recognize the relationship between us but don't see much of the bigger picture. When we say a *bracha* before we eat we recognize the personal relationship we have with the Creator and give praise for what he provided for us. Similarly when we left Egypt and were on our way we began to get comfortable and build up our faith as it says in Exodus 13:3," You went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for with a mighty hand the Lord took you out"; demonstrates our personal connection as the *pasuk* says "you". Later it talks about becoming unified which connects it to the last point: the Splitting of the Sea.

The last part of the sandwich parable is in the *bracha achrona,* which we say after we are satiated and happy with our meal. This gives us an opportunity while we are full to look at the bigger picture and appreciate all the good that Hashem has blessed us with as it says in *Birkat HaMazon*:

> *You who feeds the whole world with thy goodness, with grace, with loving kindness and tender mercy; thou givest food to all flesh, Through thy great goodness food hath never failed us: since thou nourishes and sustains all beings and doest good unto all, and provides*

food for all thy creatures whom thou hast created. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who gives food unto all….We thank you, Lord our God, because you did give as a heritage unto our fathers a desirable, good and ample land, and because you did bring us forth, Lord our God, from the land of Egypt, and you deliver us from the house of bondage.

Then similarly, when we are leaving Egypt in Exodus 15:1 as the splitting of the sea starts the Jews sing: "Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and they spoke, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for very exalted is He". This was said as the start of a passage of praise that the Jews sang after the miracle of Hashem splitting the sea for them.

The parallel starts with us hurrying and rushing to leave Egypt and having to deal with the dilemma on a personal level of leaving everything we've ever known, seeing our friends assimilate, and the Egyptians chasing us. We put ourselves in this position to think of the difficulties of leaving Egypt under the stress and pressure from the Egyptians and how great it is that you are here right now not enslaved and able to celebrate Pesach. We notice that there was a God who took us out from slavery and we acknowledged we have a relationship with the Creator who saved us. As we are crossing the Red Sea and Hashem splits it for us we rejoice and sing before him as a nation and exalt before Him for saving all of us as a nation and all of our generations to come. We can now look back and say a *bracha achrona*, knowing that we are where we need to be with God's help.

Hallel

Holy Imperfection: Hallel As A Lesson For Our Own Praise

Adam Strub ~ Highland Park, NJ

Completeness and perfection. Many people hold them as a goal, but in our praise of God, they may be the exact opposite. By examining a few of the verses of Psalms that make up Hallel, I intend to show that we need to come to terms with our lack of perfection in our encounter with God, and our praise of God's glory can only be insignificant and incomplete in comparison to it. I think that therefore, our praise is better or more perfect when it is attuned to the moment we are experiencing. This mode of spontaneity is unfortunately somewhat out of line with our current mode of prayer, which has resulted in us accepting as set ritual customs which do not necessarily reflect their ideal or original form.

In Psalms 113, we find the following:

> *High is the Lord above all nations; His glory is above the heavens.*

This is in the first paragraph of Hallel, and it tells us that we have no ability to praise God, who is so far beyond us. Yet, the Psalm continues:

Who is like the Lord our God, who sits enthroned so high, yet turns so low to see the heavens and the earth?

God is so high, yet turns low. His ability to influence our lives, as the Psalmist continues, raising up the needy and making the mother of children happy, is something in need of praise, no matter how much higher he may be than us. Our praise of God Himself will never do, but we still must try, praising both him and what He does for us, even though the statement both commanding praise and of praise that is "Hallelujah!"

This theme explains another verse in Hallel, found in the beginning of Psalm 115:

Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to Your name bring glory for the sake of Your love and Your faithfulness.

God giving His name glory helps us because we are the living manifestation of His name, a testimony of its power, grace, and glory to the world, in that we are looked upon by the nations as the proof of God's existence and strength (see Rashi on this verse, who writes that when the nations look upon the current status of Israel, it might cause them to ask "Where is your God?"), and therefore God choosing to gain in glory naturally comes through us.

This works in reverse as well though, as aside from the uncontrollable, natural gaining in glory that comes through God's name being given glory, it is also our obligation to act in ways conducive towards raising the Glory of God's name in our existence's testimony to

the rest of the world. Beyond the different actions we can take in our own lives to act in a godly manner, it is also our personal responsibility to praise God, in the best way we can manage, even though it can never be complete or sufficient.

Perhaps this is the significance of the fact that we split Hallel in half at the Seder. Many ask why the whole Hallel isn't said at once, and many answers are given. But one might be to give us an inherent connection to the idea that our praise can never be complete, but that even so we must be trying to address the needs and themes of the moment. We can also see this in that the psalms we do say in each half are relevant to the emotion we should be feeling at that moment. At the first set of psalms, we have come to praise right after going through Maggid, and experiencing the glory of the redemption from Egypt. Now, in this second set, we come back to Hallel after welcoming Eliyahu (a sign of our readiness to welcome the Mashiach), and so we read the Psalms relevant to the Messianic age, and those which will, as well, be recited in the Beit HaMikdash.

In conclusion, our aiming for perfection in praise of God misses the mark on its face. As we learn from the Passover Hallel, our praise must exist in response to God's glory, tailored to our human experience. Unfortunately, we tend to pray by rote, our Hallels often being a false song that belies no hope and no praise. We need to take what Hallel tells us, which is to shout out Hallelujah at all the amazing things done for us, even if we can't quite praise God Himself, being so far above us as He is.

Motzi Matzah

One Step, Two Step: Matzah and Maror

Amitai Macklin ~ Teaneck, NJ

The mitzvah of matzah on the night of the Pesach Seder is one of the central obligations of the entire holiday. On the surface, it seems straightforward: one must eat matzah. However, the structure of the Seder is a little strange, and worth looking into. If both of the mitzvot of matzah and maror involve eating a specific food, why are they treated as separate steps in the Seder? Furthermore, if we ultimately eat them together in the form of the *korech* sandwich, why don't we simply combine them from the beginning? It would seem much more efficient, and kill two birds with one stone.

To answer this, we must look deeper into the origins of *korech* and the underlying debate surrounding its practice. The *korech* sandwich is based on the opinion of Hillel. He derived his practice from Numbers 9:11, which states, "They shall eat it (the Pesach) with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." This verse explicitly links matzah and maror with the Pesach, leading Hillel to the conclusion that they must be consumed together in order to properly fulfill the mitzvah (Pesachim 115a). In his view, matzah and maror are not separate elements of the Seder but rather two integral parts of a single commandment.

However, Hillel's interpretation was not universally accepted. Other rabbis in the gemara (Pesachim 115a) argue that one only fully fulfills the mitzvah of matzah if it is eaten on its own. The rationale behind this view is that "*mitzvot* nullify each other." As the Rashbam there explains, part of the mitzvah is the taste. If you don't taste the matzah, you are losing out on an element of the mitzvah. Even more so for the maror, whose bitter taste is essential to it being eaten.

Secondly, maror now has a different status than matzah, ever since the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. The gemara records that, in the absence of the korban Pesach, the korech sandwich no longer fulfills both mitzvot completely. This is because the mitzvah of maror is now only a *d'rabanan*, while matzah remains a *d'oraita*. As a result, eating maror with matzah does not allow one to fully satisfy the Torah commandment of eating matzah, since it would combine two different sources of obligation.

To address this issue, our Seder practice today follows a three-step approach. First, we recite the *brachah* on matzah and eat it separately to fulfill the Torah obligation. Then, we recite the *brachah* on maror and eat it on its own, acknowledging its status as a rabbinic mitzvah. Finally, we eat them together in korech, following Hillel's tradition while also ensuring that we have fulfilled the mitzvot independently. This careful structuring of the Seder preserves both the integrity of each mitzvah and the historical debate surrounding their combination.

The idea that we want to experience each mitzvah separately, while also combining them, is a significant one to me. For one, it's always valuable to "cover our

bases" whenever possible, and fulfill the halacha in the best way we can. But there is something deeper here as well. There are two ways to look at history. Either we can take each time period and every event on its own, and look at its importance on a particular level, or we can do an overall approach, seeing the connections and appreciating everything that has happened in a tapestry of events all at the same time. When we do the first, we see how every step was amazing and miraculous. When we do the second, we realize how every step got us to the final goals, and we can appreciate the moment we are in so much more. At the Seder, we do both. We both do the *mitzvot* separately, and then together, showing that we care of the particulars as well as the big picture.

Besides, watching people take large amounts of dry matzah and struggle to chew is pretty funny (and this is coming from a person with a bottomless pit for a stomach). If we can't appreciate that, then we have bigger problems to deal with.

Maror

To Be Bitter?

Siggy Orenbuch ~ West Hempstead, NY

As we near the parts of our Pesach Seder that everyone looks forward to the most (Korech/Shulchan Aruch), there is one last step in our way, one that is slightly less pleasant than the feast your family has planned (hopefully) right around the corner.

The Torah tells us the commandment(s?) that this whole night is based upon (Shemot 12:8): "They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs." At this point in the Seder, we've passed the Matzah, and without access to the Temple mount, we unfortunately cannot bring a Pesach offering, leaving us with one curious commandment in this sequence before we can indulge in our meal.

Interestingly, according to the Rambam (Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 7:12), Maror is not individually included in the list of Torah commandments, rather it is a facet of the singular Mitzvah of the Pesach offering; eating Pesach, Matzah and Maror together, as stated in the Pasuk that the Pesach is eaten *with* Maror. As the Talmud tells us (Pesachim 120a), *maror* is only required on a d'rabbanan level in cases where the Pesach offering isn't also being consumed.

One practical halacha is brought up in the Mishneh Torah that I found very interesting (Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 8:12):

> *A person who has no other vegetable besides bitter herbs: At the outset, he recites two blessings over the bitter herbs: borey pri ha'adamah and al achilat maror, and partakes of them. When he concludes the Haggadah* [presumably Magid]*, he recites the blessing over the matzah and eats it. Afterwards, he eats from the bitter herbs without reciting a blessing."*

In our modern age of abundance, it's hard to imagine a scenario where one wouldn't have access to a measly Kezayit of potato, celery, parsley or the like. We, very fortunately, don't really understand why this Halacha and others like it were sadly a very necessary question that were asked by many Jews throughout history. While the practical Halacha might not seem so contemporarily applicable, I still find it highly relevant as it helps give a great deal of perspective on Seder night.

The Rambam quotes the Haggadah that our commandment to eat bitter herbs is *"for the sake [to commemorate] that the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt, as it is stated (Exodus 1:14); "And they made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field; in all their service, wherein they made them serve with rigor*". This is the most well known reason for why we eat Maror. The following blessing is sourced by the Rambam from a Mishna

(Pesachim 118a), as one you say before drinking the second cup of wine; "*Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who redeemed us and redeemed our ancestors from Egypt and has enabled us to reach this night so that we may eat matzah and bitter herbs upon it.*" *(Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah 8:5)*

One thing that stuck out to me when I read this particular Bracha was the clear idea of thankfulness, appreciation that no matter where you are, or when, we are instructed in the eating of the *maror* to be grateful that we are *here* and not *there* (enslaved, embittered in Egypt). This is the only Bracha I can think of that instructs us to actively experience something negative to reflect on the salvation from the negative.

I was intrigued by the juxtaposition between the *beracha* and the interesting halacha for those who don't have enough for *karpas* and *maror*. For much of Jewish history, we've been oppressed, put down, and destitute, so much so that laws in our religion must be written down to instruct us how to still observe to the best of our ability in the bad times. Still, we are required, even in times where we don't have the means to have two different kinds of vegetables, to sit down with what we have, and recite the blessing recognizing that G-d saved us from the bitterness of Egypt.

While perhaps the ability to buy vegetables isn't a source of bitterness for the majority of Jews in this day and age, there are other things our nation will feel like it's missing when we sit down for the Seder. Even after everything the Jewish people have gone through in the past year, no matter if you go back two years, five, ten or eighty, year in and year out we still say the blessing on

maror, thanking G-d for our salvation from Egypt, for bringing us *here*, *today*.

Korekh

Korech and Geulah

Shmuel Iserovich ~ Fair Lawn, NJ

Korech is an interesting part of the Seder, because we openly admit before eating it that there is no longer much of a point in having it at the Seder. At the very least, we say that it means something different from what it used to mean. We call it a "*zecher l'mikdash*." This essentially means that it's just there to remind us of what was done in the times of the Beis Hamikdash (according to Hillel, anyways.) The obvious reason that it can no longer be done in the right way is that without the Beis Hamikdash, we can't bring the Korban Pesach, and without the Korban Pesach, we can't complete the korech.

However, there is another component which should no longer be applicable as well: maror, and not just in terms of it being part of the korech. The gemara in Pesachim 120a says that the mitzvah of maror is now completely d'rabanan. The reasoning for this is that in the Torah, when talking about the korban pesach, it says "They shall eat it on matzot and marorim" (Bamidbar 9:11). Although matzot have already been mentioned by the Torah, maror is only mentioned here, thus prompting the gemara to say that it is inherently connected to the mitzvah of the korban pesach, and once the ability to have the korban pesach was taken away, the mitzvah of maror could no longer apply.

This leaves us with two questions: Why does the Torah connect the Korban Pesach with maror, and why did the rabbis decide to ensure that it continued to exist without the korban pesach?

In order to understand the connection between the two mitzvos, we must first understand what they symbolize. Maror, as we're told during the Seder, symbolizes the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. It's meant to make us remember the pain that our ancestors went through. The Korban Pesach was what was brought right before the Jews left, and symbolizes the end of that suffering, the leaving of Egypt, and our allegiance to Hashem. If we are to frame these two within the context of the entire experience of the story of the Jews in Egypt, it makes sense that they have to be linked: The *geulah* can only be truly appreciated if you understand the suffering that happened beforehand.

Furthermore, the Ramban, in his introduction to his commentary on Shemos, says that the *geulah* was not truly completed until the building of the Mishkan. This means that the Mishkan, and its successor, the Beis Hamikdash, were the end goals of the *geulah*, and so it follows that only a Jew who lived while it was still standing could truly appreciate the significance of his ancestors leaving Egypt.

So if the maror and the Korban Pesach were two parts of a whole, why was the mitzvah of maror reinstituted by the rabbis after the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed? To understand why, we must look at the symbolism of the *korech* wrap as a whole. So far, we've looked at the symbolism of the maror and the Korban Pesach, but not the part that wraps the *korech* - the matzah. So if matzah is an essential part of the *korech*,

what does it symbolize, and how does this affect the meaning of the wrap? The interesting thing about matzah is that it has two contradictory connotations: the "poor man's bread" that was eaten during the slavery in Egypt, and the bread that was eaten after the Jews left. It would seem that matzah symbolizes both the suffering in Egypt and the *geulah*, which can be taken to mean that it symbolizes the experience or process of it.

Now that we understand the symbolism of all of the individual pieces, let's put all of them together, and look at them in the way a Jew might look at them in the time of the Beis Hamikdash. The matzah (the experience of the *geulah*) is wrapped around (or encapsulates) the maror (the suffering in Egypt) and the Korban Pesach (the redemption.) In the modern day, then, it's unclear why we should still have the korech. After all, if the symbol of redemption is taken away, the korech just symbolizes that the experience of the *geulah* was just suffering, which doesn't make any sense. That is, if we're talking about the *geulah* from Egypt. But there are other *geulahs*. One in particular hasn't happened yet.

If we take the modern korech to be referring to the future *geulah*, it makes a lot more sense. As of now, the Jewish people have not finished their *geulah* process. Our experience is one of bitterness, and thus our matzah only has maror on it, but we know that this process is incomplete. We know that there is supposed to be a Korban Pesach on it too, we know that the redemption is supposed to come, we know that its end goal is the building of the Beis Hamikdash, and thus we know that it must happen someday. But what do we know this from? We know it from what korech was back in the times of the old Beis Hamikdash. We know that our

experience is meant to encapsulate suffering and redemption. We know that maror without the Korban Pesach is one half of a whole. And this is how our modern, *d'rabanan korech* is a "*zecher l'mikdash*." It helps us look back at the old Beis Hamikdash in order to look forward to the new one.

Tzafun

The "Hidden" Theme of the Seder

Rafael Tzvi Beck ~ Monsey, NY

Tzafun is the part of the night of Pesach that is crucial to the completion of the rituals of the Seder. It is when we eat the *afikomen*, which was hidden earlier in the evening. As my (Yiddish) Haggadah says: " מע נעמט אַרויס די בהאַלטענע אַפיקומן אין מע עסט עס..." meaning "you take out the hidden *Afikoman* and eat it." Immediately, a question arises: Why is the *afikoman* hidden? Additionally, in many families, not only is the *afikoman* hidden, but it is also turned into a game where children try to steal it in exchange for a gift. What's the purpose of this tradition?

The simplest answer for why we hide the *afikoman* lies in the fact that the afikomen is a representation of the Korban Pesach. In Beis HaMikdash times, they would eat the Korban Pesach at the end of the meal, once the participants were already full, and we follow this today with the extra piece of matzah we call the *afikoman*. Therefore, it makes logical sense that we would need to hide the afikomen early on - putting it away and concealing it, far away from anyone who might accidentally use it in their meal or throw it away - in order to ensure that we have it for the end of the Seder. This also explains why the section of the Seder where we eat the *afikoman* is called Tzafun, meaning "hidden," reflecting how the *afikoman* is set aside and hidden in preparation for later on.

As for why the kids are often involved in this game of matzah hide-and-go-seek, the gemara in Pesachim 114b explains that certain actions are done during the Seder to make a visible distinction for the children. For example, the gemara states: "Why do we do two dippings? So that there should be recognition [of mystery] for the children." This is really a practical idea. The gemara says in Pesachim 115b the following about the removal of the Seder plate:

> *Why does one remove the table? The school of Rabbi Yannai say: So that the children will notice and they will ask. Abaye was sitting before Rabba when he was still a child. He saw that they were removing the table from before him, and he said to those removing it: We have not yet eaten, and you are taking the table away from us? Rabba said to him: You have exempted us from reciting the questions of: Why is this night different [ma nishtana]?*

In fact, in many Haggadahs, this concept is introduced even before the Seder begins. When giving instructions for Kadesh, they say how the father, upon returning home from Shul, should quickly make Kiddush so that the children do not fall asleep and will be awake for the Seder.

All of these examples - with the *afikoman* standing out as the most obvious game with children - demonstrates the importance of engaging children in the Seder. But why specifically through mystery that causes

them to ask questions? I believe it's because when something is hidden or a question is posed, it naturally intrigues people and encourages them to seek the answer. By incorporating unexpected traditions like the *afikoman* game and encouraging questions, we ensure that the children remain actively involved and engaged in the Seder. This helps make the Seder not only more meaningful and educational but also more fun and memorable.

In doing so, we can fulfill one of the most crucial aspects of the Seder - teaching children about the story of the redemption from Egypt. This is something that is emphasized over and over in the Haggadah - especially in the section of the Four Sons. It is the mitzvah of "*vehigadeta levincha*" - "And you shall tell your son on that day (of Pesach), saying: It is because of that which God did for me when I came forth out of Egypt" (Shemos 13:8). This is a quintessentially educational mitzvah, and we are tasked to do the most engaging teaching methods to get the kids to understand what our ancestors went through in Egypt. With all of these questions and answers, the dialogue allows the kids - and we are all kids at heart - to really take to heart the full story of our redemption.

Shefoch

Who Are Those "Who Do Not Know You"?

Akiva Oppenheim ~ Woodmere, NY

During the Pesach Seder, right before beginning the section of Hallel, many Haggadot have a short paragraph that reads as the following:

> *"Pour out Your wrath upon the nations that do not know You, and upon the kingdoms that do not call upon Your name. For they have devoured Yaakov and destroyed his home. Pour Your fury upon them and let the fierceness of Your anger overtake them. Pursue them in anger and destroy them from beneath the heavens of Hashem."*

Now, this section immediately causes a bit of discomfort. The phrasing of "the nations that do not know You and upon the kingdoms that do not call upon Your name" is incredibly broad. Isn't that most people? Even if we are to accept that most of the world is religious and believes in some version of God, that isn't exactly "knowing God" and "calling upon His name," when they use other conceptions of God and use other names of God. And is this calling for wrath upon atheists,

agnostics, and many others who are nice people but simply do not call out in the name of the Jewish God?

The history of how Shefoch got into our Haggadot does ease the discomfort a bit. It is thought to have been introduced to the Haggadah during the Crusades, a time when Jews around Europe and all the way to the Land of Israel were being slaughtered, pillaged and raped indiscriminately by proud Christian fanatics. Seen in this light, maybe such a passionate anti-gentile prayer is a bit more understandable. But nevertheless, it does not help us feel better about reciting it today. Nowadays, many of us have coworkers or even friends who aren't Jewish, and we probably don't see them as deserving of divine wrath being poured upon them. So should it continue to be said in the modern era?

There are many avenues of inquiry. Firstly, are we allowed to take out this portion completely? Is it permitted to be altered at least? If we are allowed to, a different question is, should we? Is the historical importance relevant to its continued recital year after year? Lastly, and perhaps most difficult to answer is, what actually is the Jewish perspective on our non-Jewish neighbors? These are important questions, so let's take them one at a time.

Regarding whether we can omit Shefoch, the answer is that on a technical level, undoubtedly yes. We are more than within our rights to omit it entirely. Shefoch has no halachic bearing over the Seder itself, and, as we noted, it was seemingly added in response to the times of great oppression. That said, should we? What value does Shefoch have for the modern Jew?

Some might say that the historical circumstances are important and valuable to keep as a reminder of how

things used to be. More than that, I'm not so sure it is completely out of sync with what's going on in the world today. Frankly, this year in particular has not been an easy one to be Jewish. Antisemitism is on the rise around the globe. Most of the world is suddenly turned against us again, Israel back at war against terrorists who desire the wholesale slaughter of Jews, not to mention the leader of the free world appointing a man who tends to throw Nazi salutes into cheering crowds of thousands of people. It is easy to say that Shefoch can remind us that we haven't moved so far past the Crusades as a human species.

Nevertheless, I think there might be another reason Shefoch should be kept. Perhaps, it is a reminder of two kinds of people there are in the world. To explain this, I want to examine the last question we asked. How does Judaism view those who are not of our faith?

Undoubtedly, this topic is quite broad, and while I don't feel up to the task of giving a comprehensive treatment in these pages, I did find one particular talk on this topic extremely illuminating. It was a lecture given by Professor Shalom Rosenberg, professor of Philosophy and Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University and Herzog College. Prof. Rosenberg discusses many of the sources, ranging from the Talmud to the Kuzari and beyond, to understand that full gamut of views that Jews have had throughout the ages.

What I found interesting is where he discusses the view that while Jews can and even should be wary of non-Jews, that doesn't take away the obligation to behave well towards them. This is because the Jews are meant to serve as a sort of beacon to the rest of the world. He says, "The world learns of God's attributes through observing

the ways of the Jewish people." Because we act as God's ambassadors, it is our responsibility to sanctify His name even in front of the non-Jewish world. In fact, there is even a Tosefta which says, "Whoever steals from a Gentile must return it to the Gentile; **it is worse to steal from a Gentile than from a Jew** because of the desecration of [God's] name."

Prof. Rosenberg goes on to talk about the Meiri's position, which demands that "one distinguish between idol worshippers and 'the nations who are bound by religious behavior and civility.'" The Meiri writes that the Talmudic descriptions of gentiles that are less than flattering refer to people without religion, without ethics; barbarians, basically. He thinks that the Talmud never meant to include regular gentiles, who have civility and are bound by some basic ethics, in its disparaging remarks.

I think both of these approaches are really important to understanding Shefoch. When we talk about God's wrath being poured out on those who do not know Him, that applies to anyone who makes us sad to be part of the same species as them. It is a prayer that this world should be one in which we care about each other, see each other as equals, and extend the same courtesies to others as we would like to have extended toward us. If the Meiri is right (and granted, he is a minority opinion), the Talmud distinguishes between two types of people. One is the wild, barely human being who hates for the sake of hating and just wants to do violence to others. To him, we shouldn't be so nice. But to those who have some kind of values that include a moral sense, whether it be from God or from some internal conscience, that is someone who we should respect.

Let's put a fine point on this. Jews, even supposedly religious ones, can be those who do not know His name too, and are deserving of His wrath in a sense. If a Jew steals from a gentile who is an equal, a person who lives with us and works with us toward a better world, this Jew has desecrated God's name, as the Tosefta noted. Can he be said to call out in that name that he desecrates? I don't think so.

If we recite Shefoch with this in mind, then I think Eliyahu HaNavi's arrival might happen quicker than we think.

Hallel II

Hallel HaGadol: Why Begin the Story at the End?

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring ~ Rosh HaYeshiva

While the educational and narrative components of Seder night are certainly central, praise and thanksgiving are similarly central. In the first unit of Hallel, the emphasis seems experiential. After declaring that each generation must view itself as if it left Egypt, the section that introduces the Hallel begins with the word "therefore". What drives the song is the experience of leaving Egypt – and who would not burst into song while personally leaving Egypt?

The end of the Seder continues with praise. Here, several goals are accomplished. We continue the experience of praising God for the taking us out of Egypt, in some cases the chapters include narrative nuggets that shed light on the Exodus, and we also broaden our perspective, looking to the past and future, framing our the miracles in Egypt as part of God's general providence.

When we reach Hallel HaGadol, Psalm 136, this pattern is clear. It begins with

> "*Praise the LORD; for He is good,*
> *His steadfast love is eternal.*"

The next eight verses praise God for the creation of the world, detailing the earth and the luminaries. The next unit (10-22), as many commentaries (Maharal, Likut M'Ibn Ezra, Likut M'Radak) note, transitions from the universal to the particular, praising God for the miracles during and immediately following the Exodus, culminating the with battles won as the Jews entered the Land of Israel. Radak notes that it is these miracles that show that God is not constrained by nature.

Interestingly, this unit begins at the end of the plagues, beginning the tale at the smiting of the firstborns and then focusing on specific details of the Splitting of the Sea.

"Who struck Egypt through their first-born,
His steadfast love is eternal;
and brought Israel out of their midst,
His steadfast love is eternal;
with a strong hand and outstretched arm,
His steadfast love is eternal;"

Why begin the Exodus story at the end? Some suggest practical reasons – namely that this was the proximate cause for Pharoah letting the Jews leave. (Radak, Maharal, Malbim) Others focus on this being particularly punitive. (Ibn Ezra) Others, however, see this as indicative of broader themes. Sforno, for example, understands that God killed the firstborns as this would convince the Egyptians to let the Jews go. This allowed God to leave the rest of the Egyptians alive. Thus, amazingly, our first mention of the Exodus is thanking God for his mercy on the Egyptians.

"They are the chosen ones among the people, and in this way, he subdued them without a great slaughter among the people, in his mercy for the masses."

Rabbi Cooperman notes how striking this is.

"The kindness toward Israel is already mentioned in the following verse, and therefore, here it refers to the kindness shown to the Egyptians themselves. This is why it does not say 'to Him who struck the firstborn of Egypt,' but rather 'to Him who struck Egypt through their firstborn,' meaning that through their firstborn, He struck them all, thus saving the rest of the people. This is a remarkable novelty – an act of mercy toward the Egyptians. But this is the entire essence of our teacher's interpretation: 'And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.'"

He suggests that the focus is not just that God was kind to the Egyptians, but reminds us that the purpose of the Exodus was not only for the Jews, but also to educate the Egyptians, which required their survival. These dual goals are clear in the Sforno's other presentation.

"To Him who struck Egypt – but not all of them, only striking them through their firstborn so that the others would see and take heed. For the Lord does not desire the death of the wicked, for His kindness endures forever."

The Alshich focuses on the measure for measure aspect. As the Jews are God's firstborn, by killing the firstborn, He was sending a message. This accomplished another goal – educating the world about God.

Thus, the choice to begin the praise of God with the plague of killing the first born provides content for the narrative. For some, we thank God for getting the Jews out of Egypt, thus making only the final plague, which succeeded in this goal, worthy of mention. For others, it expands the purpose of the Exodus, to

educating people about the truth of God, the miracles acting to teach the Jews, Egyptians, and the wider world. Finally, it may also remind us that God's retribution is tempered by mercy, and thus we cannot mention the plagues without balancing our perspective of God. The content of our praises on Seder night (and throughout the year), thus frame how we understand our stories, both personal and national, teaching us what is important, and demanding that our praises be tailored to the narratives of our lives, properly understood.

Chasal Siddur Pesach

Did We Really Do It *Ke-Chukotav*?

Mordechai Gerstley ~ Woodmere, NY

So here we are—another year, another Pesach Seder. This is the conclusion, and we mark it with this short but important prayer.

"Chasal Siddur Pesach": We mark the end of *Leil Seder* with a declaration, one that affirms we have completed the entire Seder with all its rituals and halachot, exactly as it was meant to be performed. This is a bold and brave declaration. But have we? Did we do everything correctly? Did we observe every single halacha? Did we recite everything with intention and focus? Did we pass down the story of exile and redemption to the next generation in a meaningful way? Did we see ourselves as if we had just left Egypt?

This is a great responsibility that we have taken on. But right as we make this declaration, we continue with words of inspiration: "*Zach Shochein Me'eonah*" (Pure One, dwelling in Your Heaven)! Raise up this People, too abundant to count, and soon bring forth the shoots of Israel's stock, redeemed into Zion with great joy!

All around the world—from north to south, east to west, from New York to Jerusalem—holy Jews are teaching their children what it means to be in exile, in hardship, in slavery, and what it means to be redeemed. If anything in this world will bring about the full

redemption, it is carefully adhering to God's law and educating the next generation about what redemption truly means.

If you want to feel as though you, yourself, have left Egypt, then look deeply within. Understand what it means to be a slave in today's world, and cultivate a true yearning for the final redemption, both on a personal and national level. Once we do this, we will have truly completed the Pesach Seder as it was meant to be performed, in accordance with all its rites and rules. Maybe, this is why we conclude the Seder this way.

And surely, this will grant us the merit, drive, and ability to perform it again next year—but in the Third Temple, with the Passover lamb, just as in the days of old.

Adir Hu

Adir Hu - Or Is He?

Adir Friedman ~ Silver Spring, MD

There are many reasons to choose a section to write a *dvar Torah* on. Least of all of them might be that the topic at hand is connected to their name. That being said… let's talk about Adir Hu. This *piyyut* at the end of the Seder raises a fascinating question that I personally think we don't spend enough time on: How does it make sense to praise Hashem directly? Adir Hu is filled with praises about God. Is this heretical?

Let me explain the question. When we praise people for positive traits they have, it's because they have overcome adversity, or because they are great relative to others, whether or not they worked to get to that point. However, God doesn't overcome adversity, so the first case doesn't apply to Him. As for the second case, God has no equal, so any comparative praise is limited, if not nonsensical.

To illustrate this point, let's take Rabbi Ziring. Now, let's imagine that trees praise Rabbi Ziring for being smarter than them (if they somehow could while still having the intelligence of a tree - I know this is getting weird, but bear with me). Obviously, a tree doesn't have the intelligence to understand how smart Rabbi Ziring is. It can't even begin to understand how Rabbi Ziring perceives the world! If a tree were to give praise to Rabbi Ziring, it would be his ability to take in

sustenance other than sunlight and water. It would praise him for having the ability to move. It would praise him for being able to do simple arithmetic. These are so non-praiseworthy for the likes of Rabbi Ziring that it would be insulting. And they don't even comprehend what they're praising!

How much more this is true with us praising God. Of course, we could praise God's creations as a form of gratitude, but that is not what we are doing here in Adir Hu. "*He is* mighty. *He is* chosen."

In Moreh Nevuchim, the Rambam gives an initially very simple answer to this question: We indeed cannot praise Hashem directly. He says that we can't say for sure what God is, only what He isn't. To say that Hashem "is" something borders on heresy. The only reason that we're ever allowed to use such "positive" descriptions of Hashem in Shemoneh Esrei and the like is because a) the phrases appear in the Torah, and, b) these prayers in specific were composed by the Men of the Great Assembly, who were prophets. We should limit positive descriptions of Hashem to these prayers and the Tanach, and whenever we encounter them, we should understand them as either relating to Hashem's actions or actually negating something. This opinion of the Rambam is known as "Negative Theology."

If we accept the Rambam's opinion, we would seemingly be obligated to rip out the page of the Haggadah containing Adir Hu (not on Shabbat or Yom Tov, of course), since it contains many descriptions of God that do not have precedence in the Torah and our prayers made by the Men of the Great Assembly. Additionally, if we went heresy hunting, we'd probably have to destroy a sizable portion of Jewish liturgy as well.

But, surely, this can't be it. Many authorities have disagreed with the Rambam. What do they say?

Let's start with Rav Yosef Albo. In *Sefer HaIkkarim*, he accepts the basic premise of not being able to describe what God is, but not entirely. He says that positive descriptions of Hashem still have value, as God is closer to the human conception of, let's say, wisdom, than he is to the human conception of stupidity. Therefore, we are allowed to in some sense describe Hashem as wise, even though we can't fully comprehend what this actually means. In other words, with the understanding that everything is relative when speaking about God, we can praise him directly.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discusses this issue as well in his work *Halakhic Man*. In this treatise where he attempts to describe the ideal Jew, he says that while the Rambam is correct, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter. Halakha isn't determined by such abstract concepts as Negative Theology, as no one is thinking about this "in moments of divine mercy and grace, in times of spiritual ecstasy and exaltation, when our entire existence thirsts for the living God, [when] we recite many piyyutim and hymns, and we disregard the strictures of the philosophical midrash concerning the problem of negative attributes." Essentially, the Rav is saying, the Rambam is right, but it doesn't matter. *Moreh Nevuchim* is not a book of halacha. It is not necessarily meant to be taken as a be-all end-all regarding how one should practice Judaism. It doesn't relate to the experiential aspect of our religious life.

When I read this, I was not so satisfied. How could we simply throw away the problem that the

Rambam raises, like it doesn't even exist? I think there might be another piece of nuance here.

In *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:32), the Rambam writes that God only made *korbanot* as a temporary provision, so that the Jews at the time of Matan Torah, who are for the first time receiving the staggering revelation of an incorporeal God, wouldn't be too shocked by complete elimination of any familiar act of worship. He says that had *korbanot* not been given, Jewish law would have been too strange and alien for the Jews of the time, and they would not have accepted it. Prayer, he also notes, is a greater form of worship than *korbanot*, though not ideal. In other words, *korbanot* were only given because that was the best way that the Jews at the time of Matan Torah could feel close to Hashem. And nowadays, prayer is the best way that our generation can relate to God. One day, it could be supplanted by a more ideal form of worship, but until then, we can take solace in the fact that it is having the intended effect.

If so, we might say that though the Rambam is correct in the ideal sense, we are still those *korbanot* Jews who need prayer and these descriptions of praise of God to experience our religion with the greatest inspiration and fervor. Perhaps today, Adir Hu is needed. But one day, we won't need these types of praises, and the truth about God will be so obvious to us as beyond our reach that we will indeed rip many pages from our Haggadah and liturgy as being so insignificant in comparison to God's greatness. May we be *zocheh* to serve Hashem in the most ideal way possible.

Echad Mi Yodeah

Echad Mi Yodeah: Why Is It Here?

Doni Weichbrod ~ Baltimore, MD

One of the final songs we sing at the Pesach Seder is Echad Mi Yodeah, a cumulative song that lists numbers from one to thirteen, each paired with a corresponding Jewish concept. The song builds up verse by verse, reinforcing key ideas in Judaism. This song is mysterious in many ways, and I would like to explain some of them.

The earliest recorded version of Echad Mi Yodeah appears in the 16th-century Prague Haggadah, printed in 1526. However, scholars suggest that the song may be much older, possibly stemming from medieval Jewish communities in Europe. It is written in a structure that resembles other folk songs found in various cultures, which use cumulative repetition as a memory aid. It was even said to have been found in the walls of the synagogue of the Rokeach, from the 1400s.

The song has been preserved in various Jewish traditions, with slightly different melodies and even different interpretations of the numbers. Some variations exist among Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions, but the core structure remains the same.

Interestingly, the tune of Echad Mi Yodeah resembles folk songs from Germany and other European countries, leading some to believe that it was influenced by local musical traditions. However, the content is

deeply rooted in Jewish themes, reinforcing fundamental elements of Jewish belief and Torah observance.

Despite its historical background, the inclusion of Echad Mi Yodeah in the Haggadah is not necessarily obvious. Unlike other songs in the Seder, such as Dayenu, which directly relates to the Exodus, Echad Mi Yodeah does not explicitly reference the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. This leads to two important questions:

1. What is its connection to the themes of the night? Is it simply a way to end the Seder on a joyful note, or does it contain a deeper message about our redemption and identity as a nation?

2. Why do we use these examples for each number? The song pairs each number with a Jewish concept: One is Hashem, Two are the Luchot, Three are the Avot, and so on. But why these associations specifically? Could there have been other possible connections? For example, why is thirteen linked to the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy instead of, say, the thirteen methods of expounding the Torah as Rabbi Yishmael teaches? Why does the song focus on certain ideas over others?

Maarechet Heidenheim (Rabbi Tevele Bondi, 19th century)

Rabbi Bondi explains, “Since the angel in charge of the sea accused the Israelites, saying, "What difference is there between these and those?"—as recorded in the

teachings of our Sages—only merit could protect them, nullify the claims of the accusers, and not only save them from punishment but even grant them countless miracles: in Egypt, at the sea, and in the wilderness." Therefore, after finishing the story of the enslavement and subsequent exodus, Rabbi Bondi explains that the song serves as a riddle, listing the merits by which Israel was redeemed. These thirteen merits correspond to the numerical value of "Echad" (One), emphasizing the unity of G-d. Each number aligns with a specific merit, such as Shabbat corresponding to the seventh count. This enumeration highlights the foundation upon which the Jewish nation stands, providing an answer to the question of what protected Israel during the Exodus. Thus, the song is indeed directly related to the themes of the night of the Seder.

Ateret Yeshuah (R. Israel Jonah ha-Levi Landau, Prussia (Poland) 19th century)

The Ateret Yeshua explains, similar to the Maarechet Heidenheim, that Echad Mi Yodeah is a list of merits that caused G-d to take us out of Egypt. He differs slightly in the breakdown of what each verse is specifically referring to. For example he says that ten represents the merit of accepting Ten commandments, whereas Maarechet Heidenheim has a completely different version of the text in which it refers to the ten trials of Avraham, and so he says that it refers to this merit instead. Additionally he explains that eleven represents the merit of keeping their national identity preserved and not changing names to conform with the local naming scheme, which again is different then

Maarechet's understanding that it refers to the merit of the binding of Isaac.

Marbeh Lesaper (Rabbi Yedidiah Tiah Weil, 18th century)

Rabbi Weil emphasizes that the song lists favors that G-d bestowed upon Israel. Beginning with the first stanza, which declares G-d's unity and power over heaven and earth, the song recounts how each of these elements reflects divine kindness. The Exodus itself serves as the foundation for these divine favors, demonstrating G-d's active role in history and His ongoing relationship with His people. For example, nine months of pregnancy symbolizes the manna which fell in the desert, and Rabbi Weil uses the Gemara in Yoma 75a-75b which says that the location of the extra manna would reveal if I child was from a first husband (nine month pregnancy) or second husband (seven month pregnancy), as a proof of the symbolism between nine months of pregnancy and the manna.

Maaseh Nissim (Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum, 18th century)

Rabbi Lorberbaum interprets the song as an enumeration of thirteen blessings that distinguish Israel from all other nations. These blessings, he notes, are the ultimate goal of the Exodus, as they manifest G-d's power and divinity through the Jewish people. Rabbi Lorberbaum writes, "The primary purpose of the descent to Egypt was for the sake of these blessings…." He connects this to the desires of the patriarchs, particularly

Avraham, who longed for G-d's oneness to be revealed through his descendants.

Minchat Ani (Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, 19th century)

Rabbi Ettlinger sees *Echad Mi Yodeah* as a list of divine favors that G-d gave to the Jewish nation, a similar interpretation to the Marbeh Lesaper. These are gifts that G-d granted only to Israel, marking them as unique in the world. For example, the ten commandments, the eleven righteous children of Jacob who bowed before Joseph, and the twelve tribes which comprise the children of Israel. All of these are unique blessings to the jewish nation. Each number represents a different aspect of Jewish spiritual identity, demonstrating how G-d's relationship with Israel is unlike His relationship with any other people.

Beraichos Becheshbon (Rav Pinkus)

Rav Pinkus presents a broader mystical approach, arguing that Echad Mi Yodeah reflects the very essence of creation and the Jewish nation's purpose. The night of Pesach represents the "birth" of Am Yisrael, and just as an entity's full structure is present in its inception, the Seder night encapsulates all of history's spiritual structures. For example, he explains the number nine referring to the fact that in judaic literature, the number eight is lema'alah min ha'tevah, above nature, so therefore nine represents G-d which is past even that. The song, along with other piyyutim like Chad Gadya, traces the full arc of Jewish destiny—from exile to redemption and beyond, hinting at the ultimate future of the world.

Or Yesharim

The Or Yesharim explains that each of the thirteen verses represent the amount of bulls sacrificed to G-d on each different holiday, and that holiday connects to the idea explained in this song. For example he says that "two" refers to the two bulls sacrificed on Yom Kippur, and Yom Kippur was the day that the second pair of luchot were given to the Jewish nation. The reason that he says that only the bulls are being referenced and not the other sacrifices is because the other sacrifices are the same for each holiday. This might explain why for numbers five and six have the sheep counted, are because they are a unique amount and not the usual seven brought on most holidays, or they are in unique ways and not all at once.

My opinion:

Each number corresponds to an essential aspect of the Jewish faith, starting with the most fundamental: the oneness of G-d. By singing this song, we emphasize that the story we just told is not only history but the foundation of our identity and beliefs.

Furthermore, the focus on the words Echad Mi Yodeah, and specifically Yodeah, "knows", seems to put emphasis on our knowledge of G-d and of similar fundamental philosophies. This can be supported by the fact that chazal made the first blessing in the requests section of Shemona Esrei, Atah Chonein, the request for knowledge.

Additionally, this reinforces the idea that Judaism is built on a structured and interconnected framework.

Each number symbolizes an idea that plays a crucial role in our belief system, from the two Tablets of the Law having been communicated to the Jewish people at Sinai, to the three avot whose philosophy we continue and represent to this day. By concluding the Seder in this way, we affirm that our faith is not just about the past but about the principles that continue to define us. It is a reminder that our connection to G-d, Torah, and the Jewish people is not only historical but ongoing and eternal.

Finally, I would posit that the order and the fact that we repeat each verse demonstrates that the order is from most important to least important, the first one, Knowledge of G-d and his oneness, is mentioned in each verse because it is repeated after each one. And so too for each subsequent one.

After all is said and done, the important lesson to take out of this is that, often in Jewish works there may seem to be parts that are not really necessary or don't really mean much, like the fun little number song at the end of the Haggadah, you should think about whether or not there may be a deeper meaning or lesson to learn from it.

Anyone who wants to see a breakdown of the thirteen stanzas according to five of the interpretations found here in a handy chart, follow this link: https://tinyurl.com/EchadChart

Chad Gadya

Breaking the Cycle

Shimon Dahan ~ Brooklyn, NY

Chad Gadya is believed to have been written in the early 16th century, during a time of Jewish displacement and instability (scholars debate its origins). Many Jews, seeking refuge, settled in Prague. After establishing a thriving community, they composed Chad Gadya, which was first published in a Prague Haggadah in 1590. This makes it the most recent addition to the traditional Passover Seder liturgy. Yet, Chad Gadya is more than a historical curiosity; its message aligns deeply with the core themes of the Seder night.

Could Chad Gadya be more than just a playful song at the end of the Seder? Some commentators argue that Chad Gadya was composed to address anxieties arising during the Seder. Rabbi Benjamin David Rabinowitz, in his commentary to the Haggadah called Ephod Bad, suggests that the song was meant to counter the discouragement that could arise from discussing freedom and slavery during the Seder. After all, Chad Gadya seems to exemplify an endless cycle of conflict and struggle for dominance. This cycle, where each character in the story is consumed by the next, is reflective of life for the Jews, where they are constantly subjugated and exiled. The kid is devoured by the cat, the cat falls victim to the dog, and this pattern continues, depicting what seems like an inescapable cycle of oppression.

Nevertheless, the song doesn't end in despair. It presents the concept of divine intervention as a force that will disrupt this vicious cycle. A basic reading of the last stanza signifies a divine resolution. God's destruction of the Angel of Death represents the ultimate redemption—an end to suffering and the full realization of divine justice. This divine intervention breaks the chain of violence, offering a glimmer of hope and redemption. In other words, Chad Gadya reassures us that just as the Exodus marked the end of slavery, divine justice will one day bring a final end to all oppression.

For many Jews today, facing the ongoing struggles of *galus* and the horrors of events like October 7th, it can feel like history is trapped in an endless cycle of violence and uncertainty. Chad Gadya is an important message that comes at the end of the Seder. Even in the darkest times, hope remains. Chad Gadya teaches us that divine justice will ultimately break this cycle, bringing peace, restoration, and an end to suffering.