

גאולה אריכתא

THE LONG REDEMPTION

Pesah 5782
פסח תשפ"ב



גאולה אריכתא THE LONG REDEMPTION

"We mention the Exodus from Egypt at night" (Mishnah Berakhot 1:5). The Haggadah quotes this *mishnah* as an allusion to telling the Exodus story at the Seder. But this *mishnah* is actually referring to a *berakhah* in Ma'ariv about *geulah* (redemption). The Gemara adds that the Amidah, the climax of prayer, must be immediately juxtaposed with this *berakhah*. Nothing—not speech, not Torah learning, not other *berakhot*—may separate between redemption and the Amidah. And yet, there is a *berakhah* (called "Hashkiveinu") that intervenes! How can this be? The Gemara answers: that *berakhah* is considered to be a "*geulah arikhta* - long redemption" (Berakhot 4b)—not an interruption, but something that extends redemption and pulls it forward into our prayers.

Pesah celebrates the Jewish redemption story. And yet, as we peer into the tortuous narrative arc of our people—and, indeed, of the world—we cannot help but notice that redemption is not a static point in history. The Exodus is just one chapter in a long story still unfolding before us. Redemption is not a one-time event, but a process that stretches from the furthest origins behind us to the remotest prospects that lie ahead. Our story can only truly be told as a *geulah arikhta*—a long, extended, enduring redemption.

In this reader, we invite you to reflect with us on our multifaceted redemption story. Join us as we consider our Exodus in terms of its extended duration—from the earliest stirrings of our people's redemption, to its place in our lives today, to the most complete manifestations of redemption that might yet be brought to the world. In so doing, may we all merit to see more clearly the realization of the long redemption.

Wishing you a happy and meaningful Pesah,
The Hadar Team

KOL HAMARBEH LESAPPER

“Growing” the Seder Story Through Noticing & Wondering



וְאִפִּילוּ בָּלֵנוּ חֲכָמִים בָּלֵנוּ נְבוֹנִים בָּלֵנוּ זְמוּנִים בָּלֵנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִצֹּה עֲלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם הֲרִי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח.

And even if we were all sages, all discerning, all elders, all knowledgeable about the Torah, it would be a commandment upon us to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. And anyone who grows (marbeh) the telling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt, behold, they are praiseworthy.

One way we can “grow” our telling of the Exodus story is to pay close attention to a Seder “text”—whether it is actual text from the Haggadah, a family custom, or a symbolic item on the table. In doing so, we notice the text’s details with greater clarity and hear the text’s voice more deeply.

Once we have noticed our text in brand new ways, we can also grow our telling through wondering and raising questions about what we’ve discovered. When we do this with other people at the table and encounter their wonderings, we also experience the value of engaging with another person to open up a text’s possibilities. This whole process helps us develop new appreciation for the Exodus story and for the people with whom we are sharing it.

This is a turn-and-talk guide that can help you and the people at the Seder with you—both adults and children—do exactly this. The leader in this guide might be someone leading the entire Seder, or just leading a particular section. For example, you might use this activity to grow discussions of:

- » Family customs, such as melodies, unique Seder plate customs, or roles for children
- » The three *matzot*
- » The Seder plate or any one of the items on it
- » The teaching of R. Elazar b. Azaryah
- » “In every generation a person is obligated to see themselves as though they themselves went out of Egypt”
- » Psalm 114: “When Israel went out from Egypt...”
- » Elijah’s cup
- » External texts that the leader or guests have brought to the Seder, including essays in this reader

Noticing and Wondering

1. Introduce a text: Before reading a section of the Haggadah text, talking about a Seder item, or enacting a custom, the leader should tell the participants what they are about to do, and invite them to notice any details that stand out to them.

2. Action: Then read the section, present the item, or enact the custom. While this is happening, people may notice particular words in a text, the features of an item on the Seder table, or the choreography of a custom.

3. Turn and Talk: Next, the leader should prompt people to turn to the person next to them and follow these conversation steps. If you like, you can hand out copies of the card at the bottom of this guide, with a shorthand version of the “Noticing and Wondering” steps, to help participants get the most out of their discussions.

- » *I notice...* Choose one detail about this text that really stands out for you, and share it with the person sitting next to you. For example, “I noticed that we break the middle *matzah*, hide a piece of it away, and keep a piece with the other two *matzot*.”
- » *I wonder...* Wonder out loud about any questions it raises for you.
For example, “I wonder why we do that. On Shabbat, we have two *hallot*, so why do we have two and a half *matzot* on Pesah?”
- » *What do you think?* Invite the person next to you to share their thoughts in response to your noticing and wondering.
For example, “Maybe because part of the Pesah story is about us being slaves, so we have a broken piece to remind us...”
- » *I think...* Share some thoughts of your own in response to your own question and what the person next to you shared.
For example, “Yeah, that also makes me think about how we take grape juice from our cups when we recite the plagues. Since there are sad things about this story, they get represented by a piece of broken *matzah*...”
- » *Switch roles (and repeat the first 4 steps)!*
- » *I appreciate...* Once each partner has had a turn to notice, wonder, and respond, share something each of you appreciated about the other during your exchange.

4. Share insights. The leader can then bring everyone back together and offer the opportunity for people to share insights that emerged from their conversations.

You can use these steps to grow conversations at your Seder just once, or repeat them at different points, as often as feels appropriate for your participants.

“GROWING” YOUR SEDER TURN & TALK PROMPTS

- » *I notice...* Share one detail that stands out to you.
- » *I wonder...* Share a question that it raises.
- » *What do you think?...* Ask the person next to you for their thoughts.
- » *I think...* Share your own thoughts.
- » *SWITCH!*
- » *I appreciate...* Share something you appreciated about talking with the person next to you.

SINGING IN THE DARKNESS

The Audacity of Faith

Rabbi Avi Strausberg

The Israelites didn't just sing *after* their salvation at the Sea of Reeds. They actually sang *before* they were saved. With a pursuing army closing in behind them and a wall of water before them, they nonetheless sang.

In the Book of Exodus, after we read about the miraculous parting of the Sea and the Israelites' witnessing of God's awesome power, the Torah tell us:

שמות טו:א

אָז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־
הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאֹמֶר
אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָּאָה סוּס
וְרִכְבּוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם:

Exodus 15:1

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to God. They said: I will sing to God, for God has triumphed gloriously; horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

There are two uses of the future tense that are out of place in this verse. First, the Torah brings together past tense and future tense when referring to Moshe's song, writing "az - then," which would naturally indicate past tense, followed by "yashir - he will sing," in the future. Second, the Israelites declare together in the future tense, "ashirah - I will sing." Generally, we gloss over these unexplained uses of the future tense and assume that, in poetic form, it really means to indicate present tense: in the moment after they crossed the Sea and witnessed God's saving power, the Israelites burst forth into song.

The 18th century commentator Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev offers another explanation. He suggests that, in fact, the Israelites sang "az -

CAN WE REALLY BE EXPECTED TO BE LIKE THE ISRAELITES, SINGING IN DARKNESS, FINDING SONG IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING?

then," that is, at some other time in the past. "Then"—while they were still trapped between a warring army and water, with the Egyptians coming up behind them. "Then"—in the midst of their suffering, they cried out, "ashirah - I will sing." They were so certain of their coming salvation, of their ability to sing God's praises in the future, that they were able to sing "az - then," even in the darkness.¹ Just as Nahshon ben Aminadav boldly jumped into the waters before they split, confident that God would provide a way forward,² so, too, says Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, the Israelites "believed with certainty that the Holy One would perform for them a salvation, and it rose up in their hearts immediately to sing even before the salvation."³

While usually we think of Shirat Ha-Yam (the Song of the Sea) as a song expressing great relief and gratitude after being saved by God, it becomes a testament to the immensity of the Israelites' faith through the lens of the Kedushat Levi. Even before they had been saved, even with certain death behind them and no path before them—still, they sang.

On the one hand, I'm awed by the faith of the Israelites. So audacious were they to burst out in song in a moment of danger and doubt. On the other hand, they set an impossible bar for the rest of us. Can we really be expected to be like the Israelites, singing in darkness, finding song in the midst of suffering?

On this theme, Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Shapira, writing from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942, connects singing to prophecy. He teaches that, in order to sing about a future state of salvation, one must be able to achieve a level of prophecy, an ability to see through the darkness and brokenness, and visualize salvation. Yet we can only prophesy from a place of joy.⁴ When we are deep in sadness, it is impossible to imagine a better future. And therein lies the problem. How can we sing about our future salvation? How can we tap into a state of prophecy when we are in the midst of suffering and brokenness? Rabbi Shapira addresses this question.

אש קודש פרשת בשלח תש"ב

כי לזמר צריכים שמתוך נפשו
ולבו יזמר מעצמו ואפילו הנביא
שאחד מתנאיו הי' שיהי' בשמחה
... בשעת יסורים...

1 Kedushat Levi, Parashat BeShallah.

2 See the story in Talmud Bavli Sotah 37a.

3 Kedushat Levi, Parashat BeShallah.

4 Rabbi Shapira derives this idea from Rabbi Hayyim Vital in Sha'ar Ha-Kedushah.

Eish Kodesh, Parashat Be-Shallah, 1942

In order [for a person] to sing, his⁵ essential self—his soul and his heart—must burst into song. One of the conditions of prophecy was the necessity for the prophet to be in a state of simhah⁶ at all times, even while in a time of suffering...

Rabbi Shapira connects this to the prophet, Elisha, whose ability to prophesy left him when he was angry with the King of Israel.⁷ In order to rouse his spirits and enter a state of joy, he said to those near him, "Bring me a minstrel." Sure enough, after the minstrel played, the "hand of God came upon him" (II Kings 3:16). Rabbi Shapira writes,

לכן צריכים איזה דבר טוב וישועה
לשמח את לבו ואז ע"י שבא
לשמחה מדבר הזה יכול לזמר גם
על היסורים לד'

We see clearly that something good has to occur, there must be salvation, for the heart to rejoice. Then, when a level of simhah has been reached, a person can sing to God about suffering as well.

Elisha needed to be in a state of joy in order to prophesy. But he couldn't get there alone. He needed the help of the minstrel. He had to ask someone else for help. Only then was he able to achieve a bit of the happiness that would allow his soul to sing, not only of future joy, but of his pain as well.

The story of the Israelites' crossing at the Sea asks of us to sing even in suffering. And yet, warns the Eish Kodesh, when we are on our own, this is an impossible ask. We cannot sing in sorrow. We cannot always claim with certain faith that a path to salvation is clear when we can barely get out of bed in the morning. In these moments, if we're to find a little bit of joy in order to enable us to get to that place of song, we're going

to need each other. We can be each other's minstrels.

In his commentary on Parashat Vayikra, Rabbi Shapira brings in a verse from Isaiah (6:3), familiar from the Kedushah, in which "one angel calls another, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy is God.'" He notes that the Targum Yonatan, the Aramaic translation of the Prophets from Eretz Yisrael, translates the word "call" as "receive." With this alternative translation, we see a beautiful blurring of what it means to call to another or to ask for help. Calling and receiving are two actions in one. When we call to one another, we receive something in return, and when we receive something, we call out. Calling and receiving are reciprocal sides of the same coin: two beings reaching out across the divide, offering support and care to one another.

Based on the Zohar, Rabbi Shapira teaches that it's none other than the Jewish people, as they perform acts of kindness for one another, that inspire the angels of Isaiah to call-receive from one another.

אש קודש פרשת ויקרא ת"ש

ולא רק כשנותנין זל"ז צדקה
וגמ"ח מקבלין דין מן דין רק גם
כששומע איש מצרות ישראל
ועושה כל מה שיכול לעשות
לטובתם... והיא מפני שה'וקרא זה
אל זה' שהיא מקבלין דין מן דין
שמקבלין מישראל, גם מתוך צער
ישראל בא שזה תומך לזה, ולבו
של זה נשבר מצרות של זה.

Eish Kodesh, Parashat Vayikra, 1940

Angels receive from one another not only when Jewish people give charity and perform acts of kindness for one another: even when one Jew simply listens to the troubles of his fellow Jews, angels are empowered... The angels' calling to one another, which is empowered by the Jewish people receiving from one another, has in it much of the pain of

the Jewish people. This is the pain of one Jew broken by the woes afflicting his fellow and another buttressing his fellow through his pain.

When we are alone, we cannot pull ourselves out of our own sorrow. We may not be able to find the little bit of joy in our hearts necessary to bring ourselves to a place of song. But there is something we can do: we can call, and we can receive. We can witness each other's suffering and allow our hearts to break open with compassion. We do not learn from the angels what it means to love and support. Rather, the angels learn from human beings how to be with another in sadness.

I do not have the certainty of faith of Nahshon, who jumped into a sea that was closed before him, or the Israelites, who sang in suffering before the moment of their salvation. And I know that, for many of us, when we're in the midst of great pain, it can be impossible to imagine a way forward, and to sing out in future gratitude. And yet, I do believe with certainty in the changing tides of sadness and gladness. Just as sure as I know that joy gives way to grief, I know that sorrow eventually gives way to joy.⁸

In the moments when we feel trapped between water and war, with no path forward and no way back, may we be so lucky to have the clarity of faith of the Israelites' to say, "I will sing now, and I will sing then." I will sing now—in the darkness, in the suffering, with salvation still yet to come—and I will sing then, when there is reason to sing, in the joy, with salvation in my hand. And, when we can't manage that much alone, may we be each other's minstrels. May we make each other smile or laugh, just a little, so we can find the strength to pick up our weary heads and find those first notes of song. ♦

5 Following the gender as used by Rabbi Shapira.

6 In Hassidic thought, this refers to a kind of blissful joy.

7 See Talmud Bavli Shabbat 30b.

8 As it says in Psalm 30:12, quoted in our daily prayers: "You turned my lament into dancing, You undid my sackcloth and girded me with joy."

KAREV YOM

Singing in Redemption, Yearning for Integration

Deborah Sacks Mintz

with a new song from the Rising Song Institute

לילה בחצי הלילה—It happened at mid-night.

This opening line of renowned 6th century poet Yannai's *Pesah piyyut* (poem) invites us into a reflective journey of redemptive moments throughout the Jewish narrative story, connected by the common backdrop of night's deep darkness. This poetic journey throughout Tanakh's accounts of Benei Yisrael's victories culminates in a plea for a redemption that is yet to manifest:

קָרַב יוֹם אֲשֶׁר הוּא לַיּוֹם וְלַיְלָה
 לַיְלָה: תִּאֲוֵר כְּאוֹר יוֹם חֲשֵׁכֶת
 לַיְלָה:

Bring near the day that is neither day nor night. Illuminate like day, the dark of night.

We know well the yearning for illumination in moments of consuming darkness—and yet, the poet does not conclude with a plea for darkness to dissolve and make way for *only* light. Harkening back to Zekhariah's vision for *olam ha-ba* (the world to come),¹ this *piyyut* calls for an integration of night and day itself, an integrated wholeness that may emerge once we bring together both the dark and the light of the human experience.

I offer here a new melody for these lines of yearning, to be sung at Sedarim, synagogues, or wherever you may find yourself singing your hope for redemption this Pesah. As the melody builds from the lowest rungs on the ladder of song, making way for a chorus that climbs up to the highest heights, we embody that which was taught by R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira of Piazetsne, "A person must build ladders to climb to the heavens, [and] a *niggun* is one of these ladders."² This Pesah, may we sing our yearning for wholeness, integrating light and dark, day and night, to draw the Divine all the more near and bring that much closer the world we seek to inhabit. ♦



SCAN TO LISTEN

1 Zekhariah 14:6-7.

2 Born 1889, Poland, Tzav Ve-Zeiruz §36.

"GOD (RE)CALCULATES THE END"

Will Redemption Ever Come?

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer

Sometimes, it feels like redemption will never come. We have waited so long already. But what is the realistic expectation here? If God is waiting for us to suddenly fix all the ills of society or ourselves, if God is waiting for us to suddenly be worthy, when is that ever going to happen? It sometimes feels like we are going to have to keep on waiting... forever.

And yet, we can be surprised. Redemption can come early. The Haggadah reminds us that when we talk about ultimate hope, the forces propelling us toward redemption are already in motion, and are often moving faster than we would ever have thought possible.

The redemption from Egypt took place exactly like this. Its duration and end were already promised by God to Abraham, that his descendants would be slaves for 400 years (Genesis 15:13). The Haggadah refers to this with its description of God as one who "חשב את הקץ - calculated the end":¹

שהקדוש ברוך הוא חשב את הקץ
לעשות כמה שאמר לאברהם
...אבינו בבטח בין הבתרים...

The Holy Blessed One calculated the end, to act in accordance with what God had said to Abraham our father in the covenant between the pieces...

And yet, when we actually do the calculations (based on the ages of our ancestors and their time in Egypt from the Torah), we do not end up with 400 years in slavery, but rather 210! There are many ways to begin to

reconcile this issue.² But a *midrash* suggests that, in fact, redemption came early—and not because the Israelites suddenly became worthy or acted any differently. Redemption came early because of factors totally beyond their control.

**פסיקתא דרב כהנא (מנדלבוים)
פיסקא ה - החדש הזה עמוד 88**
"קול דודי הנה זה בא מדלג על
ההרים מקפץ על הגבעות" (שיר
השירים ב:ח)...

ר' יהודה א' "קול דודי הנה זה
בא", זה משה. בשעה שבה משה
וא' לישראל' בחדש הזה אתם נגאלין
אמר לו, רבינו משה, היאך אנו
נגאלין, לא כך אמ' הקדוש ברוך
הוא לאבינו אברהם "ועבדום
וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה"
(בראשית טו:יג), והלא אין בידיו
אלא מאתיים ועשר.

א' להם, הואיל והוא חפץ
בגאולתכם אינו מביט
בחשבונותיכם, אלא "מדלג על
ההרים מקפץ על הגבעות"

**Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 5
(Mandelbaum, p. 88)**
"Hark! My beloved! There he comes, skipping over mountains, leaping over hills" (Song of Songs 2:8)...

R. Yehudah says: This refers to Moses. In the moment that Moses said to Israel, "In this month, you will be redeemed," they said to him: "Our teacher Moses! How are we going to

be redeemed? Didn't the Holy Blessed One say to Abraham our father, 'They will enslave them and make them suffer for 400 years' (Genesis 15:13)? But it has only been 210 years!"

[Moses] said to them: "Since God desires your redemption, God is not looking at your calculations, but rather 'leaps over the mountains, and skips over the hills.'"

Playing off the imagery of God (represented as the lover in Song of Songs) "skipping" and "leaping," this *midrash* suggests that, even though the Israelites didn't deserve early release, the Israelites benefitted from God's desire to free them.

One medieval commentator applies this *midrash* to our Haggadah phrase:

שיבולי הלקט
והיה מחשב על הקץ לדלגו
ולקפצו

Shibbolei Ha-Leket, ed. Buber, p. 95b
God (re)calculates the end [of slavery], skipping and leaping over it.

Rather than a static "God calculated (חשב) how long slavery was going to be," the author of the *Shibbolei Ha-Leket* suggests that this phrase is actually a constant activity: "God is always מחשב - calculating and recalculating - the end." In this way, it

1 Some texts of the Haggadah have מחשב instead of חשב. See the version quoted by *Shibbolei Ha-Leket* below. This will be critical for understanding the force of the Haggadah's sentence.

2 Most commentators start counting the 400 years from the birth of Isaac. When Isaac was sixty, he gave birth to Jacob (Genesis 25:26), and when Jacob was 130 he went down to settle in Egypt (47:9). This leaves 210 years of actual slavery. Exodus 12:40 says that Israel lived in Egypt 430 years before leaving. Most commentators start that timing from the promise made to Avraham at the covenant of the pieces, supposedly thirty years before Isaac's birth.

could turn out that God “skips and leaps over” the original term of slavery.³

Of course, if God is willing to recalculate the period of slavery in Egypt, might not God recalculate the end of our current suffering, and

SOMETIMES THE TIME FOR REDEMPTION HAS SIMPLY COME, AND IT COMES EARLIER THAN EXPECTED

speed the final messianic redemption of the whole world? Just as in Abraham’s case, the Talmud records a tradition where our end of days is fixed and known ahead of time.

תלמוד בבלי מגילה יז:
אמר רבא: מתוך שעתידין ליגאל
...בשביעית...

Talmud Bavli Megillah 17b
Rava (some texts: R. Hiyya bar Abba) said: In the future, redemption will come in the seventh (cycle)...

Rava (or R. Hiyya bar Abba) could be referring to the seventh annual cycle, the Shemittah year, or to the seventh millennium. Either way, redemption comes at a pre-appointed time.

So, is there any hope for us? Is it possible that God will “skip and leap” to save us, to shave off a few hundred years, so we can finally be redeemed?

The context of Rava’s statement suggests: yes! This section of the

Talmud justifies the order of the different *berakhot* in the daily Amidah, generally based on verses from Tanakh or on logic. The *sugya* notes that, while the *berakhah* of redemption (Geulah) is the seventh blessing of the 18,⁴ it really should have been the eighth, because it would have made more sense *after* the *berakhah* for healing (Refuah), which is number eight in our Siddur.⁵ In other words, this blessing of redemption should have come later in the Amidah, but it shows up a whole *berakhah* early. Surprise is the intended effect here: redemption comes earlier than expected—perhaps even when we least expect it.

Just as for our ancestors in Egypt, then, even though there is a fixed amount of time before our own redemption will come, there is always hope that the full sentence will be commuted. Even if we don’t manage to change ourselves and our world such that we deserve redemption, it is possible that God will nevertheless decide to redeem us.

Indeed, if redemption were entirely dependent on human behavior changing, which we often think of as the only way to redemption, we might lose hope of ever being redeemed. But perhaps that is not the only path. Sometimes the length of suffering is shortened, through no actions of our own.⁶ Sometimes, the time for redemption simply comes earlier than expected. And this should always give us hope. ♦

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- 3 The commentary then goes on to explain that the numerical value of the word *אין* (end), 190, is exactly what God took off the 400 years to arrive at the actual number, 210.
 - 4 Originally, there were 18 blessings in the Amidah. A 19th was added during the talmudic period in Bavel, which we say to this day.
 - 5 The proposed order is based on Psalms 103:3-4, which mentions “healing” before “redemption”: “...the One Who *heals* all your diseases; the One Who *redeems* your life from the Pit...”
 - 6 Classical sources also play with this idea. See Midrash Tanhuma Shemot 20 (parallel in Shemot Rabbah 3:2), that concludes, “whether [Israel] does Your will, or whether they do not do Your will, You will redeem them.” See also R. Meir’s position in Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 97a, that Israel will be redeemed even without doing *teshuvah*.



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Persuading the Powerful

An Excerpt of a Project Zug Course from Rabbi Avi Killip

There are many ways to approach changing a system you see as wrong. The Exodus itself saw the utter shattering of the slave masters of Egypt. But it's often neither possible nor advisable to reduce a system to ruins. Often, you have to work within the system, make the slight changes around the edges, or persuade people on their own terms instead of yours.

According to the following *midrashim* in Shemot Rabbah, this was Moses' experience living in the time of slavery in Egypt. Each *midrash* depicts Moses as a person with some privilege and power (an Egyptian prince) in a system that oppresses the weak (in this case, the Israelite slaves). The texts describe two different approaches to making change. As you read, ideally with a *havruta* (study partner), ask: which approach do you think is most productive? What approach might you take in a similar situation?

SOURCE #1

שמות רבה א:כז

וירא בסבלותם, מהו וירא? שהיה רואה בסבלותם ובוכה ואומר חבל לי עליכם מי יתן מותי עליכם, שאין לך מלאכה קשה ממלאכת הטיט, והיה נותן כתיפיו ומסייע לכל אחד ואחד מהן, ר' אלעזר בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר ראה משוי גדול על קטן ומשוי קטן על גדול, ומשוי איש על אשה ומשוי אשה על איש, ומשוי זקן על בחור, ומשוי בחור על זקן, והיה מניח דרגון שלו והולך ומיישב להם סבלותיהם ועושה כאלו מסייע לפרעה.

Shemot Rabbah 1:27

“And he looked upon their burdens.” What is, “And he looked?” For he would look upon their burdens, and cry, and say, “Woe is me unto you. Who will provide my death instead of yours? For there is not more difficult labor than the labor of the mortar.” And he would use his shoulders to assist each one of them. Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yose the Galilean said: When he saw a large burden on a small person and a small burden on a large person, or a man's burden on a woman and a woman's burden on a man, or an elderly man's burden on a young man and a young man's burden on an elderly man, he would leave aside his rank and go and right their burdens, and act as though he were assisting Pharaoh.

1. When Moses sees injustice, he doesn't argue or protest or complain, he just makes the changes he thinks need to be made. *In which situations is this kind of immediate action possible? What power dynamics are at play here?*
2. This direct action brings immediate relief. *Do you think it contributes to systemic change?*
3. Moses seems to be overstepping his scope of authority and pretending to be a messenger of Pharaoh. *Share a story about a time when you made a direct change, rather than waiting or asking permission.*

Now we will look at the next *midrash* in the same series. In this text, Moses takes a very different, systemic approach to improving the lives of the Israelites.

SOURCE #2

שמות רבה א:כח

דבר אחר: וירא בסבלותם ראה שאין להם מנוחה. הלך ואמר לפרעה: מי שיש לו עבד, אם אינו נח יום אחד בשבוע, הוא מת! ואלו עבדיך, אם אין אתה מניח להם יום אחד בשבוע, הם מתים! אמר לו: לך ועשה להן כמו שתאמר. הלך משה ותקן להם את יום השבת לנוח.

Shemot Rabbah 1:28

Another interpretation: “And he saw their suffering”—that they did not have rest. He went and said to Pharaoh, “One who has a slave, if [that slave] does not rest one day a week, he will die! [So too] your slaves, if you don’t allow them rest one day a week, they will die!” [Pharaoh] said to him: “Go and do for them as you are saying.” Moses went and established the Sabbath day for them to rest.

1. Moses seems to be an ancient lobbyist. He goes directly to the source of power and makes a case for why giving the people a day off is actually in Pharaoh's own interest. *Why do you think this method of changemaking is effective? What allowed Pharaoh to listen?*
2. *Does this method of dealing with authority feel more or less productive than the direct method in the first midrash? Which is more authentic? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each approach?*
3. *Imagine this midrash as a workplace scenario: what is the role of management in navigating between the boss and the workers?*
4. *What risks do you think Moses was taking in either version of this story?*

A TALE OF TWO FREEDOMS

A Storytelling Challenge



While the Haggadah tells us to “grow” the Exodus story (see the framing on pp. 1-2), it leaves the details of how to do this up to the imagination. This activity invites Seder participants to craft their own versions of the Exodus story in small groups. Through playful storytelling, they will connect with the text of the Haggadah and with each other. This activity is designed to be used with older elementary school kids and above. Try this activity after the Four Questions as an introduction to Maggid, or as a preparatory pre-Seder activity earlier in the evening.

INTRODUCTION

Mishnah Pesahim says that, when we tell the story of the Exodus on Seder night, we should “מתחיל בגנות ומסיום בחן” - start with something negative or shameful, and end with something positive or praiseworthy.” But this instruction is vague, even cryptic. What is the negative moment we should start with? What kind of success do we celebrate? How do we tell that story?

Two rabbis in the Talmud, Rav and Shmuel,¹ had very different answers to this question. Shmuel’s answer is the one we might expect. He says to start with our history as slaves and progress toward our freedom. Rav, on the other hand, tells us to start with the idea that our ancestors were idolaters, who only over time came to serve God.

These answers present two different ways of telling the story of the Exodus. Shmuel focuses on overcoming physical slavery, while Rav highlights overcoming spiritual slavery. The Haggadah likes both answers and incorporates both of them into our Seder. Tonight, we will bring these interpretations to life, using them to tell our own versions of the Exodus story. What we create together could not exist with a different group of people or at a different Seder!

MATERIALS

- » Copies of the prep sheet (opposite) for all participants
- » Somewhere for each group to gather

FLOW

- » Read the introduction and goal aloud
- » Divide the Seder participants into Rav and Shmuel teams of 2-4 people. Give each person the instruction sheet and send them to their location. (You may have more than one Rav team and more than one Shmuel team)
- » Groups spend 10-15 minutes preparing their stories
- » Groups present their stories. After each presentation, encourage participants to appreciate something they noticed about how the group told their story

GOAL

Using your instruction sheet as a guide, create a 2-4 minute retelling of your team’s Exodus story.

Your retelling should...

- » start with the words corresponding to your team
- » end with something positive (either the Haggadah’s words or your own)
- » Optional: include one object from the Seder table as a prop
- » include a role for each person on your team

¹ In our printed editions of the Talmud, this opinion is attributed to Shmuel, who was Rav’s contemporary (mid-3rd century CE). But in fact, earlier texts of the Talmud in medieval manuscripts show that the proper attribution should be Rava (a mid-4th century CE Sage). Still, the opinion is referred to as Shmuel’s throughout for the sake of simplicity.

1 GREET

Greet your teammates.

2 READ AND DISCUSS

Read your story out loud. Take turns noticing words or details that jump out at you and sharing any insights you have.

TEAM RAV

“Our Ancestors Were Idol Worshipers”

מִתְחִלָּה עֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וְעַכְשֵׁיו קִרְבָנוּ
הַמָּקוֹם לְעִבְדוֹתוֹ.

At first, our ancestors were idol worshipers (literally: worshipers of strange/foreign worship), and now Ha-Makom (a name for God, literally: The Place) has drawn us close to God's worship.²

TEAM SHMUEL

“We Were Slaves”

עֲבָדִים הָיינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם, וַיּוֹצֵיאֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם
בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְרֹזַע נְטוּיָהּ.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord our God took us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.³

3 RETELL

This story is very short! It's time to embellish it, adding details and drama.

- » **At first, our ancestors were idol worshippers...** What is foreign worship or idolatry? What did our ancestor Israelites do as idolaters? Why might Rav think that idol worship was negative (lit. shameful)?
- » **Then...** Fill in the missing **middle**: How did Avraham come to believe in God? Why did God decide to take Avraham out of the house of idol worship where he grew up?
- » **And now Ha-Makom has drawn us close to God's worship...** What details can you add to the idea that “Ha-Makom has drawn us close to God's worship?” How does it feel or look to be close to God? Why is this a positive or praiseworthy end to the story? (Feel free to speak about this symbolically—what does spiritual slavery or freedom look like?)

- » **We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt...** What did it feel like to be a slave? What did the Israelites do as slaves? What was so negative about being a slave?
- » **God took us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm...** How did the Israelites go from being slaves to being freed? How did one thing lead to the other? What happened?
- » **Then...** Fill in the missing **now**. What was the result of God's outstretched arm? What might it have felt like to be freed from physical slavery?

4 CHECK-IN

Invite anyone who hasn't spoken much to add their thoughts. Is anything from the text missing from your telling?

5 PRESENT

Plan your presentation. Don't forget to give each team member a role and to include your object if you like!

2 This is the Haggadah's embellishment of Rav's story. Originally, Rav probably intended to refer to the telling of the story in the last chapter of the Book of Joshua (24:2), his speech beginning, “Across the river...” For this, and also the attribution of Rava vs. Shmuel, see the discussion in Josh Kulp, *The Schechter Haggadah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2009), pp. 201-203.

3 This is the Haggadah's embellishment of Shmuel's story, based on Deuteronomy 6:21.

OPEN HOUSE OR MEMBERS' NIGHT?

Two Models of the Seder

Rabbi Ethan Tucker

Years ago, my family was privileged to host the Vice President and Second Lady of the United States, Al and Tipper Gore, in my parents' home for the Seder. There were so many memorable moments—including their insistence that they stay until the very end!—but the overwhelming feeling was one of sharing something deeply important about our lives, narrative, and convictions with supportive and curious colleagues. There was a palpable sense that the light of our Judaism was shining brightly for others to see and understand. As we tell our

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story each year at this focal event, it can be a powerful moment to share with others who we are, where we came from, and what we stand for. The Seder is, in this way, perhaps the ultimate Jewish “open house.”

But, from the other side, I heard the echo of my grandmother's insistence that one does not invite a non-Jew to a Seder (she happened not to be there with the Gores). This common approach is often assumed to be some sort of self-protective isolationism at best, and xenopho-

bia at worst—the Jewish people at its most insular. In fact, it casts the Seder as the “members' night” par excellence. This is the moment when we tell *our* story, when we re-up our annual membership dues in the Jewish people and its story—and perhaps it is precisely the moment when we *should not* invite others in, so as not to turn our central mission into show-and-tell.

Indeed, both of these approaches have textual and historical roots.

1. THE PESAH OFFERING: A MODEL FOR THE SEDER?

The Seder's archetypal ancestor is the *pesah* offering (קרבן פסח). About this, the Torah is explicit that outsiders may not participate in its consumption:

שמות פרק יב: מג-מח
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן זֹאת חֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח כֹּל-בְּנֵי-נֹכַח לֹא-יֵאכְל בּוֹ: ... תּוֹשֵׁב וְשֹׁכֵר לֹא-יֵאכְל-בּוֹ: ... וְכָל-עֶבֶד לֹא-יֵאכְל בּוֹ:

Shemot 12:43-48
God said to Moshe and Aharon: "This is the law of the pesah offering. No foreigner may eat of it... A resident and hired worker may not eat of it... No uncircumcised man may eat of it."

One cannot practice “religious tourism” to experience the *pesah* offering. Even someone who is a resident worker but not joined to the larger nation is ineligible. The medieval work *Sefer Ha-Hinukh*¹ explains this exclusion as follows:

ספר החינוך מצוה יד
מִשְׂרָשֵׁי מִצְוַה זוּ... בַּעֲבוּר שְׂקָרָבָן זֶה לְזַכֵּר חִירוּתָנוּ וּבּוֹאֲנוּ בְּבְרִית

נֶאֱמָנָה עִם הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, רֵאוּי שְׁלֵא יִהְיֶה בּוֹ רֵק אֹתָם שֶׁהִשְׁלִימוּ בְּאִמּוּנָה, וְהֵם יִשְׂרָאֵלִים גְּמוּרִים, וְלֹא אֱלוֹ שְׁעֵדִיין לֹא בָאוּ בְּבְרִית שְׁלֵם עִמָּנוּ.

Sefer Ha-Hinukh Mitzvah #14

The basis for this mitzvah is... because this sacrifice is a memorial of our freedom and our entrance into a faithful covenant with God, and therefore it is appropriate that only those complete in that faith, so that they are entirely Jews, should take part in it, as opposed to those who have not yet entered into a complete covenant with us.

The *pesah* offering, then, is meant to be a strictly Jewish affair, the ultimate “members' night.” But does this extend to the *matzah* and *maror* that are meant to be eaten with it? What if a non-Jew wanted to be present for the consumption of the *pesah* offering ritual, but not eat it himself? If a non-Jew agreed to refrain from eating the sacrificial meat, might she be allowed to partake of the *matzah* and *maror*? Interestingly, an early *midrash* takes up just this point in the ideological context of the Jewish apostate (the born Jew who has abandoned faith and practice):

מכילתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי פרק יב
לֹא יֵאכְל בּוֹ בּוֹ אִינוּ אוֹכְל אֶבֶל אוֹכְל הוּא בְּמִצְוָה וּבְמִדְוָה.

Mekhilta de-R. Shimon b. Yohai 12:43
"He does not eat of it"—of it [the Jewish apostate] does not

1 A popular and anonymous work from 13th century Spain that goes through the reasons of the *mitzvot*.

eat, but he eats of matzah and maror.

This *midrash* makes a close reading of the word בו (it) in our verse. The person excluded may not eat of it. Why this added word, “it”? Why not just say, “לא יאכל” - he shouldn’t eat?”² It must be that the exclusion is targeted to the meat of the *pesah* offering, but the more peripheral parts of the ritual can be more widely shared. And even though the *midrash* deals here specifically with the Jewish apostate, the exegetical analysis ought to apply to all instances of the word בו (it) in our passage, which would mean that non-Jews would also be permitted to eat the *matzah* and *maror* that were served with the *pesah* offering. And so rules the Rambam (Korban Pesah 9:8).³ If the *matzah* and *maror* were fit for non-Jewish consumption when there was an actual sacrifice offered, then it would seem a sound logical step to remove any barriers to non-Jewish participation in a Seder, a ritual space completely devoid of any sacrificial content. Perhaps, therefore, the Seder as we know it is a possible—maybe even welcome—opportunity for an open house?

There is nonetheless an interesting record of Jews avoiding sharing *matzah* from the Seder with their non-Jewish neighbors, even as there is also ample evidence from centuries later than the Mekhilta of non-Jewish neighbors being interested precisely in partaking of this special seasonal food. R. Menahem Ha-Bavli reports:⁴ “In my youth, I saw pious people who were very careful not to give *matzah* to Muslims on Pesah, and they would appease them by giving them money.” R. David Ha-Levi⁵ reports a similar dynamic in his Christian context (Taz Oraḥ Hayyim 167).⁶ Despite the Mekhilta’s openness to non-Jews’ participation in this ritual, these traditions are undoubtedly channeling the instinct that per-

haps the “members’ night” aspect of the *pesah* offering now resides in the *matzah* at our Seders. Indeed, perhaps the very absence of a sacrifice means the Seder must be imbued with even more of an internal focus, since that internal focus would otherwise be lost entirely!

2. YOM TOV AS INTERNAL STORYTELLING?

Still, there is no real textual basis for excluding non-Jews from a Seder based on anything we have seen so far. Perhaps the ritual *matzah* eaten at the center of the meal might still be reserved for Jews, but beyond that, it seems whatever sort of precedent the *pesah* offering is, it is not sufficient to ban sharing this special evening more broadly with non-Jews.

However, there is another angle that is not Seder-specific that may intrude here. It is raised in the following statement in the Talmud:

תלמוד בבלי ביצה נא:

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: מזמנין את הנכרי בשבת, ואין מזמנין את הנכרי ביום טוב, גזרה שמא ירבה בשבילו.

Talmud Bavli Beitzah 21b
Said R. Yehoshua b. Levi: One may invite a non-Jew over for Shabbat, but one may not invite a non-Jew over for Yom Tov, lest one increase the amount of food one is cooking on their account.

R. Yehoshua b. Levi’s statement is officially grounded in a technical concern. The Torah permits Jews to perform otherwise forbidden *melakhah* (productive work) on Yom Tov in order to prepare food for the day (Shemot 12:16).⁷ But this license is granted only for those who are part of the observance of the day. In the language

of the early *midrashim*, this permission is granted for food prepared “לנך ולא לאחרים” - for you, and not for others.” And if cooking for non-Jews is forbidden on Yom Tov, then it might be problematic to *invite* a non-Jew, because it will be hard not to make extra food on their account, and this would be an unacceptable trespass of the sanctity of the day.

In practice, this statement has died the death of a thousand qualifications with those seeking to have non-Jewish guests over on Yom Tov. Just a few lines later in the Talmud, we find other Sages permitted non-Jewish guests as long as they were not actively invited in advance. Medieval authorities justify serving non-Jews on Yom Tov when it is clear that the relationship is such that no added food will be prepared on their account, or when the non-Jew was sent as an emissary and it is necessary to receive them (Rosh Mo’ed Katan 2). R. Menahem Ha-Meiri on our passage in Beitzah goes the furthest, suggesting that these restrictions only apply to idolaters devoid of any shared religious and ethical civilization with Jews. But for upright, devout, and moral non-Jews, it is permitted even to cook for them outright on Yom Tov!

Nonetheless, I can’t help but wonder if R. Yehoshua b. Levi’s formal language at the end of the statement masks the core of what was animating him here. The basic statement is straightforward: Shabbat is a perfectly good time to invite non-Jews, whereas Yom Tov is not. Why? Perhaps because Shabbat is about the creation of the world, and the basic human need for rest one out of every seven days. For all that Shabbat is a special Jewish institution, its message is universal. The Yamim Tovim, in contrast, are all about the particular narrative lines of the Jewish people throughout history: the Exodus (Pesah), receiving the Torah at Sinai

2 See, for example, the formulation in Shemot 29:33-34.

3 See also Tosafot Pesahim 28b, s.v. *kol arel*, who find it totally obvious that *matzah* and *maror* have no sanctity and thus should not really be regulated in any way like the *pesah* offering.

4 16th century, Eretz Yisrael.

5 17th century, Poland.

6 See Kaf Ha-Hayyim Oraḥ Hayyim 166:140 for a particularly outlandish tale surrounding the question of non-Jews’ consumption of *matzah* on Pesah.

7 Indeed, while this limitation of *אכל נפש* (preparing only what you need for the day of Yom Tov) is understood to refer to *all* Yamim Tovim, it shows up in the Torah *specifically* in the context of Pesah.

(Shavuot), and the journey through the wilderness (Sukkot). Might not R. Yehoshua b. Levi be saying that these are “members’ nights,” times when we need to be able to focus inward and retell our story to one another—and not to others? Again, there is no question that any normative thrust in that direction was ultimately parried by subsequent analyses and rulings. But this may be another anchor point for the instinct that the Seder might be a time for internal focus and storytelling.

3. TELLING THE STORY IN FIRST PERSON

To my mind, however, the most significant aspect of the Seder that bears on our question is the way we tell the story. The Mishnah (Pesahim 10:4) famously requires that we center the passage from Devarim 26 (called “Arami Oved Avi”) in our telling the story at the Seder, a brief synopsis of Israelite history offered by the farmer bringing the first fruits to the Temple. Why this passage? Why not simply relate the story of the Exodus as told in the Book of Exodus, or one of any other summaries and presentations of the Exodus story in the Tanakh?⁸ For centuries, we have pondered why the Mishnah settled on this specific passage as the core version—over all the others—a practice that remains in force until today.

It seems to me that a close reading of the way this passage renders the narrative is of critical importance:

דברים כו:ה-ט
 וְעֵינַי וְאִמְרַת לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
 אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי וַיִּרְדֵּם מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְרֵם
 שָׁם בְּמִנְתֵי מֶעַט וַיְהִי־שָׁם לִגְדוֹל
 עָצוֹם וְרָב: וַיִּרְעוּ אֲתוֹנוֹ הַמִּצְרִיִּים
 וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה:
 וַנִּצְעַק אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע
 ה' אֶת־קוֹלֵנוּ וַיִּרְא אֶת־עֵינֵינוּ וְאֶת־
 עַמְלָנוּ וְאֶת־לֶחֶצְנוּ: וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה'
 מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה
 וּבַמָּרָא גָדֹל וּבְאֵתוֹת וּבְמִפְתֵּיִם:
 וַיִּבְרָאֵנוּ אֱלֹהֵי הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן לָנוּ
 אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲרָץ זָבֵת חֶלֶב
 וְדָבָשׁ:

Devarim 26:5-9

You shall then recite as follows before the LORD your God: "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to

MIGHT NOT R. YEHOSHUA B. LEVI BE SAYING THAT THESE ARE "MEMBERS' NIGHTS," TIMES WHEN WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO FOCUS INWARD AND RETELL OUR STORY TO ONE ANOTHER— AND NOT TO OTHERS?

Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

Listen to the first person plural. The Israelite farmer, displaced from the chronology of the Exodus by a mil-

lennium or more, speaks about it as a first-hand experience. These are our ancestors, our pain, our promise, our redemption.⁹

This narrative and liturgical frame leaves an indelible mark on the Seder as a time when everyone around the table is meant to tell this story in the first person. Yes, our Seders can be moments when we radiate out to others what we are proudest of and what we stand for. But there is something irreproducible about being at a Seder full of people who fully identify with the experience, who don't tell the Exodus story merely as something that they think about often or that provides lessons for today, but as something that really happened to them and their ancestors. Even if our Seder is not for members only, it isn't meant to have the ethos of an "open house" in the sense of testing the waters to see how deep you want to go in. At the Seder, we are meant to be fully immersed in the story, so immersed that we lose our place in space and time.

I remember that year with the Gores feeling that tension in the air—the sense that we were part of an important moment in history where we could share so proudly and freely, but also the ways in which that sharing can, if not properly balanced, create an anthropological remove from what is meant to be our story. Whoever is at your Seder this year, and however wide you have opened the doors of your home, I hope you can powerfully feel yourself renewing your membership in our story, a story that is meant to enable us to renew our commitment to our particular Jewish mission. ♦

8 For example, the closing chapter of Sefer Yehoshua, which also gets highlighted in Maggid and seemed to serve in the talmudic period as a possible alternative to “Arami Oved Avi.”

9 Indeed, the other great framing mechanism of the Seder, beginning with “עבדים היינו - we were slaves” and ending with “אבותינו הוציאנו ממצרים - God took us out from there,” are the words placed into the mouth of a Jew, who, centuries later, speaks about everything that happened as if it were a first-hand memory. See Devarim 6:20-25.

TELLING GOD'S STORY

Rabbi Tali Adler

Whose story do we tell on Seder night?

The answer, at first, seems obvious: the story we tell is our own, the story of our deliverance from idolatry to monotheism, from slavery to freedom. It is the core story of our people. It is the grand drama of Jewish history in which we are still enmeshed today.

Perhaps, however, it is not only our story we tell on Seder night. Perhaps on the night of the year most

GOD BECOMES A SURROGATE MOTHER TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S ABANDONED BABIES

devoted to storytelling, we tell our children God's story as well.

A *midrash* in Devarim Rabbah tells a story of what happened to the Jewish baby boys born in Egypt and sentenced to death in the Nile. In response to Pharaoh's decree, Jewish women, unwilling to condemn their sons to death, ventured into the wilderness to give birth to their babies, away from Egyptian eyes. When the babies were born, their mothers, understanding that to bring their babies back with them meant certain death, turned to God. "I have done my part," they said, "and now, it is time for You to do Yours."

And, according to this *midrash*, God did.

דברים רבה (ליברמן) א:טו
א"ר חייא הגדול: ... ישתבח שמו של הב"ה, הוא בכבודו היה עושה להם כך. והיו התינוקות גדלים בשדה כצמחים הללו, והיו מתגדלין ונכנסין בעדרים לבתיהם, הוא שיחזקאל אומ' "רבבה כצמח השדה נתתיך" (יחזקאל טז:ז).

Devarim Rabbah

(Lieberman) 1:15

Rabbi Hiyya the Great said:...

May the Name of the Holy Blessed One be praised, since He Himself cared for them.

The children grew in the field like grass, and after they grew, they returned to their homes in flocks. This is what *Yehezkel* said, "You grew like the grass of the field" (*Yehezkel* 16:7).¹

God becomes a surrogate mother to the Jewish people's abandoned babies. The image of God the *midrash* offers is markedly different from the one usually conjured by *Shemot*. Whereas in *Shemot* God is often understood as a warrior fighting to free the Jewish people from Egypt, the God of this *midrash* is a mother, caring for Her infant. Whereas in *Shemot* God cares for His children by bringing punishment and death to others, the God of this *midrash* cares for Her children the way we do: by nursing them, washing them, and cherishing them.

Eventually, when the danger has passed and it is time for the children to be returned to their parents, God brings the children home:

והיאך היו מכירין לילך אצל
אבותיהם?

אלא מקב"ה היה נכנס עמהם והיה מראה לכל א' וא' בית אביו, ואומ' לו: קרא לאביר פלוני ולאמך פלונית,

ואומ' לה: אין אתה זכורה כשילדת אותי בשדה פלוני, ביום (פלוני), מקודם חמשה חדשים.

How did they know which parents to go back to?

The Holy Blessed One accompanied them, pointed each and every one to his parents' home, and said, "Call your father this and your mother that."

The children would say to their mothers, "Don't you remember when you gave birth to me, on this day in that field, five months ago?"

God's kindness to the lost children of Egypt is not limited to the care God gives them while their parents cannot care for them. God's kindness extends to making sure that the children know who they are, telling them their parents names, the circumstances of their births, and where they came from. In a world in which the Egyptians intended to extinguish Jewish families, God rebuilds those families by making sure that Jewish children know who they are. In this *midrash*, God saves the Jewish people by making sure that our children know their parents and their parents' stories.

The *midrash* concludes with another reunion. This time, it's between God and the children:

כשבאו לים וראו אותו היו מראים לאמותם באצבע, ואומרי' להן "זה א-לי ואנוהו" (שמות טו:ב), זהו שגדלני, זה א-לי ואנוהו.

¹ This *pasuk* is quoted in the Maggid section of the Haggadah.

When they came to the Sea and saw Him, they pointed Him out to their mothers with their fingers and said to them, "This is my God, and I will honor Him" (Shemot 15:2)—this is the One Who raised me, "this is my God, and I will honor Him."

It is the children God cared for who first recognize Him as the greatest miracle the Jewish people have ever experienced: not as the great warrior Who has saved them from the pursuing Egyptians, but as the One Who raised them and returned them to their homes.

In this ending, the *midrash* offers us a glimpse of what Seder night might be: a chance to return God's favor to us, the parents who passed through Egypt.

Every family that gets to care for their own children, to feed and raise them themselves, is tasting one of the immeasurable gifts of freedom. When we raise our children ourselves, we have the merit to do for them what God did for the children of Egypt: dressing them, holding them close, and loving them. Care is the gift of freedom. It is a gift not all of our ancestors had, and a gift still denied to many.

And yet, the side effect of the harrowing upbringing of those slave children was growing up with God. When they grew up, they recognized God immediately; it came as naturally to them as recognizing our own parents comes to us. Our children, cherished by human hands, do not grow up recognizing God the way they recognize their own parents. In a world where God sometimes feels impossibly far away, this gift of raising our own children, one of the most precious human beings can hope for, also means we have a responsibility. Just as God told our children our stories when we were absent, we must tell our children God's story as well.

On Seder night, we step into God's role: whereas God in Egypt told those children their parents' stories, making sure they would understand how to be part of their families when they were reunited, on Seder night, we tell our children stories of God,

making sure that when they encounter God in the world, they will recognize Him. Just as God taught our children our names and stories when we were unable to, on Seder night, in a world where it sometimes feels like God is our absent parent, we tell our children about God.² In telling our children the story of the Exodus, we are telling them Who God is.

This is God's Name, we say. And this is His story. God gave birth to us long ago in a land called Egypt. This is

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how you will recognize God when you meet Him: He is the One Who frees slaves and loves the broken-hearted. He is the One Who cares for those no one else can care for.

He is the One Who brings lost children home. ♦

2 For more on the image of God as absent, see Hadar Advanced Kollel member Akiva Mattenson's prize winning essay, "Out Beyond the Sea," available [here](#).

WINE, WOES, AND WRITING OUR STORY OF REDEMPTION

Rabbi Aviva Richman

At the Seder, we vacillate between two positions, slavery and freedom, reliving experiences of suffering and salvation. On this pendulum, the role of the four cups of wine would seemingly be to swing us strongly to the side of freedom and celebration. As the Talmud says about the importance of wine on holidays, “There is no joy other than wine” (Talmud Bavli Pesahim 109a).¹ Historically, the Greco-Roman practice in the Sages’ surrounding culture also featured wine to increase the joy of the meal at important banquets. But when we look more deeply into religious associations with wine, it takes on a more complex role at the Seder and might actually intersect with the experience of suffering, not just the experience of joy.

The Talmud discusses the religious valences of wine in multiple places. In addition to the discussion in Massekhet Pesahim about drinking wine at the Seder, there are extended interpretations of the meanings of wine in Sanhedrin, regarding the rebellious son (בן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵד),² and in Yoma, regarding the prohibition of drinking on Yom Kippur. All of these passages draw heavily on characterizations of wine in Proverbs, particularly chapter 23. When we read these parts of the Talmud as intertexts, we see that wine at the Seder plays an important, delicate, and even dangerous role, as we tell our annual story of “degradation to praise” (גנות לשבח), relating how we move from a sense of our degrada-

tion to a sense of our worth and value.

When Massekhet Pesahim gives guidelines on the nature of wine used at the Seder, one sage asserts that, even if it is diluted, the wine must have both the taste and the appearance of wine.³ A verse from Proverbs that alludes to the color of wine comes to support this halakhic requirement: “Do not ogle that red wine, as it lends its color to the cup, as it flows on smoothly” (Proverbs 23:31). But when we look at the broader context of this chapter of Proverbs, and the way this chapter is invoked in other parts of the Talmud, this brief prooftext is rather ironic. Brought in connection to the night when we indulge in four cups of wine, this passage of Proverbs actually speaks of the dangers of drinking:

משלי כג:כ-כא, כט-לג

אֲלֹהֵי בְּטָאֵי יַיִן
בְּזֹלְלֵי גֶשֶׁר לָמוֹ:
כִּי סִבָּא זֹזְלֵל יִנְרֵשׁ
וְזָרְעִים תִּלְבִּישׁ נֹמֵה:
לְמִי אוֹי לְמִי אֲבוֹי
לְמִי (מְדַבְּרִים) לְמִי שִׂיחַ
לְמִי פִּצְעִים חֲנָם
לְמִי חֲכָלְלוֹת עֵינָיִם:
לְמִי לְמִי אֲחָרִים עַל־הַיַּיִן
לְבָאִים לְחִמּוֹר מִמֶּטֶף:
אֲלֹהֵי תִּבְרָא יַיִן כִּי יִתְאַדָּם
כִּי־יִתֵּן (בְּבוֹס) עֵינָו
יִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּמִשְׁרָיִם:
אֲחָרֵיתוֹ כְּנֹחֵשׁ יִשָּׁר
וּכְצִפְעָנִי יִפְרֵשׁ:
עֵינָיו יִרְאוּ זָרוֹת
וְלִבָּהּ יִדְבֵּר תְּהַפְּכוֹת:

Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-33

²⁰Do not be of those who
guzzle wine,
Or glut themselves on meat;
²¹For guzzlers and gluttons will
be impoverished,
And drowsing will clothe you in
tatters...
²⁹Who cries, “Woe!” who, “Alas!”;
Who has quarrels, who
complaints;
Who has wounds without
cause;
Who has bleary eyes?
³⁰Those whom wine keeps till
the small hours,
Those who gather to drain the
cups.
³¹Do not ogle that red wine
As it lends its color to the cup,
As it flows on smoothly;
³²In the end, it bites like a
snake;
It spits like a basilisk.
³³Your eyes will see strange
sights;
Your heart will speak distorted
things.

Wine can be disastrous. Abusing alcohol can lead to a cycle of desperation and harm. This is most evocatively demonstrated by another interpretation of “Do not ogle that red wine”—the very same verse Rava uses to prove the Seder needs red wine. This verse is also invoked to remark that one must not even look at wine “because it could end in blood” (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 70a).

On Seder night—especially in the times of eating the *pesah* sacrifice—

- 1 Wine and alcohol in general is obviously a complex topic which can't be addressed satisfactorily in this medium. Struggling with addiction is real, and we are lucky to live in a time where there are many resources to help. This literary reading is in no way meant to compete with sound medical and psychological expertise. I do hope it offers an understanding of what wine is meant to do at the Seder so that the practice can be appreciated and be made more accessible, even to those for whom it would be dangerous to actually drink wine.
- 2 See Deuteronomy 21:18ff.
- 3 See Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim 472:11 on the preference for red wine at the Seder. While this is preferred by some, red wine is not required by all halakhic authorities. Even the preference for red falls away if white wine is deemed “better” for any reason.

we seem to do exactly what Proverbs chides us not to do: we guzzle wine and glut ourselves on meat!⁴ What purpose do the four cups of wine serve, if they can be so dangerous?

The Talmud expounds on this same passage in Proverbs at length in its discussion of the wayward and rebellious son (בן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵד), whose crime, according to the Talmud, is an overindulgence in wine and meat (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 70a-b). This hyperlink to the rebellious son offers an eerily resonant mirror image for the Seder, especially as some traditions assert that the rebellious son must have indulged in meat and wine while in a group (*haburah*), just as, on Pesah, the *korban pesah* is meant to be shared together in a *haburah*.⁵ Furthermore, at the Seder, we meet a version of the rebellious son: the wicked son of the four sons fame. Seeing our own indulgence in wine through the lens of the rebellious son as an intertext to Seder night, we might have to allow ourselves to *identify with* the rebellious and wicked sons in these two passages, rather than “othering” these two characters as very different from ourselves. Indeed, the Talmud interprets three of our biblical ancestors as versions of “rebellious sons” in their own right because of their abuse of wine (Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 70a). The first was Adam, presuming that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was a grapevine, and the actual enticement to partake was that of drinking wine. The second was Noah, who sinned with wine upon coming out of the ark and “should have learned from his ancestor Adam.” The third is Shlomo, who is rebuked by his mother, Batsheva, for his indulgence in wine. Rather than rebellious or wicked sons who stand on the margins of our story, these central “rebellious sons” are characters with whom the tradition invites us to identify, woven into the fabric of our religious inheritance.⁶

The story of Shlomo’s indulgence in wine is particularly resonant for

our experience of the Seder, because it involved being seduced by Pharaoh’s daughter. Shlomo drinks too much wine on the same night as dedicating the new Temple he built, and he is seduced by his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, so that he oversleeps, and the people are waiting for him at the Temple. At this moment, on the very day of its dedication, God decrees that the Temple will in the future be destroyed. On the day the Temple was built, its unmaking was already set into motion. Building the Temple is the last stage in the story of the Exodus, and we see in this *midrash* that the day marking our ultimate arc into freedom also saw us already taking a step back in the direction of unwinding the Exodus, back towards the lowliness of Egypt. And how did that occur? Through wine.

Applying these teachings to our four cups of wine at the Seder, we see that our celebration of freedom on Pesah is complicated. Seder-gone-wrong could plunge us back into the depths of Egypt, like Shlomo seduced by Pharaoh’s daughter. The four cups of wine are no longer merely a symbol of abounding joy and freedom. Wine at the Seder might also hit us in the lowest points of our story, in our degradation, where we are told we *must* begin the Seder—as the Mishnah instructs, “מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח” (We begin with degradation and emerge into praise).⁷ Wine not only expresses the climax of the story where we emerge triumphantly as free people; it also meets us in our disappointments and dead ends, as “slaves.”

What is this wine meant to do if it intersects with this side of our story? Our Seder wine is not meant to be the wine of wallowing or drowning in sorrow. It is meant to serve an important purpose as we tell our story. The Gemara observes that “wine enters, and secrets come out” (Talmud Bavli Eruvin 65a).⁸ Drinking our four cups of wine at the Seder might actually be intended to do just that: to

draw out our secrets, to reveal our innermost questions and hidden intuitions, as we do the neverending work of narrating our identity from a “lowly” place of degradation. In this way, the four cups of wine are truly integral to the act of Maggid and *sipur yetziat mitzrayim* (telling the story of the Exodus). They are the very conduit that allows for unveiling our narrative.

We see this allusion to wine and narrative in another one of the Talmud’s extended exegeses of wine and Proverbs 23, in Yoma, where there appears, seemingly out of nowhere, a verse from Proverbs 12:

תלמוד בבלי יומא עה.
“דאגה בלב איש ישחנה” (משלי
יב:כה)... ישיחנה לאחרים.

Talmud Bavli Yoma 75a

“If there is worry in a man’s heart, let him quash it (yashenah)” (Proverbs 12:25)... He should tell it (yeshihenah) to others.

The only good that could come from drinking wine, instead of repressing our worries, is that the wine draws the heavy thoughts out of us, so we might discuss them with others, who help us work through them. This may be much less dramatic a narrative arc “From degradation to praise” than the miracles of the redemption through the plagues and God’s outstretched arm. But in the face of things holding us back from redemption in our own lives—personally and communally—it is a significant step to draw our sorrows out from the depths of our hearts and into the realm of articulation, listening, and company.

In this framework, where wine at the Seder may link to our woes rather than to celebrating the joys of freedom, there are boundaries on our wine consumption, perhaps as a reminder not to fall into the dangers of “those whom wine keeps till

4 Note that this ancient source predates our medical knowledge of the nature of addiction.

5 See the extended discussions of this in Mishnah Pesahim, roughly chapters 7-9.

6 For more detailed discussion of the בן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵד, see R. Avital Campbell Hochstein’s recent PhD dissertation, “Formations of Youth and Adolescence in Talmudic Discourse: A Study of Sugiot on the ‘Wild and Unruly Child’” (Bar Ilan, January 2020).

7 Mishnah Pesahim 10:4 forms the core arc of all versions of the narrative we tell at Seder night.

8 Playing on the fact that “יין - wine” (10 + 10 + 50 = 70) has the same *gematria*, numerical value, as “סוד - secret” (60 + 6 + 4 = 70).

the small hours, those who gather to drain the cups” in the verses from Proverbs. We don’t drink any more wine after the *afikoman*, which must be eaten by midnight, even though, as we know from the story of the Sages that opens Maggid, we can keep talking of redemption until dawn. The four cups of wine become a targeted intervention to reach us in the state where we feel stuck, and, through speech and connection, transform our worries into what will nourish our joy. This transformative speech, *sippur yetziat mitzrayyim*, spills over into a life of its own, no longer dependent on wine, and brings us closer to the dawn of redemption.

For a variety of reasons, people may or may not actually drink wine at the Seder. For medical reasons, or due to the dangers of addiction, it may be problematic and prohibited for some of us to drink wine. Hopefully, this excursion into the meanings and purpose of wine can help us realize that, whatever we drink at the Seder, the desire is to create a context that allows us to “reveal our secrets.” Seder is meant to go deep, to allow us to notice and articulate the ways we feel stuck, to draw out our worries and speak of possible pathways towards improvement, and experience *sippur yetziat mitzrayyim*, speech that does the work of redemption. ♦

WHAT THE SEDER TEACHES US ABOUT FOOD WASTE

Yitzhak Bronstein

You might not think of the Seder, a meal of excess and luxury, as encoding deep values about food waste. Indeed, this is a message of the Seder that is often left unobserved.

One core element of the Seder in Temple times was the biblical prohibition on wasting any part of the special sacrifice, the *korban pesah*. The Torah states that no piece of the sacrifice may be left over until the morning after it is meant to be eaten, and whatever is uneaten at that time must be burned (Shemot 12:10). While the Torah gives no explanation for this prohibition,¹ the medieval commentator, Bekhor Shor, believes that the commandment to burn the remains provides some indication as to why it was prohibited to leave remains in the first place. He explains that all of this—not leaving any remains, and then, if one did, being commanded to burn them—was to prevent the leftovers from being thrown out in a disrespectful manner.²

Hazal, though, seem to see the prohibition here as concerned with wasting the *korban* food, as such, whether or not it is treated in a derogatory manner. This is indicated in a number of Rabbinic prohibitions applied to the *korban pesah* specifically (and not to other sacrifices, which also have biblical time limits). For example, they forbid its sacrifice in circumstances where it would be

prone to be left uneaten. At least one Tanna forbids the slaughter of a *pesah* for an individual person, perhaps

OUR COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF ENSLAVEMENT SHOULD CALL US TO DO FAR MORE TO ALLEVIATE THE SUFFERING OF THOSE STRUGGLING TO SUBSIST

because it could lead to tremendous waste.³ More to the point, Hazal prohibit slaughtering a *pesah* sacrifice for a group whose ability to partake is doubtful, such as prisoners whom the authorities have promised to release but who are still incarcerated.⁴ Other offerings must also be eaten within a defined timeframe, but the *pesah* is the only sacrifice where Hazal delineate these stringencies to ensure the timeframe is upheld. Far

from simply relying on burning the leftovers as a solution to the problem of degradation, Hazal seem to be particularly concerned to avoid a *korban pesah* being wasted at all.

This aspect of food waste has naturally been lost to our Seder observance, since we no longer bring the *pesah* sacrifice to the Temple. And yet, another aspect of our Sedarim highlights this same core message: the *afikoman*. Although we colloquially refer to the final *matzah* eaten at the Seder as the “*afikoman*,” the consensus among scholars is that, in the Mishnah, the term actually refers to a Greco-Roman custom. At the peak of a banquet, revelers “would burst into others’ homes to force them to join in the continuing party, and they called this *epikomazein*.”⁵ This explains the otherwise cryptic line in the Mishnah: “They do not conclude the *pesah* with *afikoman*,” despite the fact that we actively end our Seder with the *afikoman matzah*! The intent was actually to prohibit us from taking part in this Greco-Roman excess, the *epikomazein*.

Our Rabbis instituted stark contrasts between the *epikomazein* and the *pesah*. Whereas the *epikomazein* involved a rambunctious party going from home to home, the *pesah* was eaten in a single location with a predetermined *haburah* (group of people).⁶ The *epikomazein* was epitomized by gorging; the *pesah* could

1 Notably, this is the first time in the Torah that a command is given about the timeframe in which a food must be consumed.

2 Bekhor Shor on Shemot 12:10.

3 Mishnah Pesahim 8:7. R. Yehudah states that it is forbidden. There is a *mahloket* how to understand the dissenting opinion of R. Yose, who states that a *pesah* sacrifice can be slaughtered for an individual. According to one reading of R. Yose, this is only true if the individual has the capacity to eat the entire animal. See Talmud Bavli Pesahim 91a.

4 Mishnah Pesahim 8:6.

5 Saul Lieberman, *Ha-Yerushalmi Kifshuto*, p. 521. See the detailed analysis in Joshua Kulp, *The Schechter Haggadah* (2009), pp. 261-266.

6 Shemot 12:46. Hazal take this further by forbidding the transfer of *pesah* sacrifice meat between two groups even within a single home (Talmud Bavli Pesahim 85b).

not be eaten in that manner.⁷ In this reading, the prohibition on partaking in *epikomazein* is consistent with a sensitivity toward not wasting any part of a *pesah* sacrifice. The message is: we can celebrate our freedom without succumbing to overindulgence or waste.

Consider the flow of our modern Seder. We begin the Seder in *Yahatz* by breaking *matzah* and putting away some pieces for later, recalling the food insecurity of a slave whose next meal is not guaranteed. By the end of the Seder, we have experienced a miraculous liberation—yet instead of celebrating with boundless abundance, we are called to abstain from indulging in the wasteful revelry of *epikomazein*. Even as we celebrate our freedom and partake in what for us represents the *pesah* sacrifice, *Hazal* were adamant that we remain appreciative of the preciousness of food.

This sensitivity to preventing waste relates to the core values of *Pesah* writ large. On *Pesah* night, the Haggadah calls us to see ourselves as if we have personally been liberated from Egypt. But we must not overlook the significance of the parallel responsibility: “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt.”⁸ Distancing from the *epikomazein* allows us to remain sensitive to the conditions of vulnerable people living without basic food security, and to remain appreciative of the value of food long after our liberation. It is this crucial message that the Seder is designed to encode.

This ethos of *Pesah* should not be limited to Seder night. Remembering that we are liberated slaves should call us to bring this abhorrence of overindulgence and waste into our everyday experiences. While we are living at a time when enough food is produced to feed all of humanity, food insecurity is shockingly common. Two billion people worldwide lack regular access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food.⁹ Even in

a wealthy country such as the United States, 5.1 million households experienced very low food security in 2020.¹⁰ Avoiding a hedonistic celebration of *Pesah* is a start, but our collective memory of enslavement should call us to do far more to alleviate the suffering of those struggling to subsist. ♦

7 Talmud Bavli *Pesahim* 107b. See Rashbam s.v. *אִם דִּילְמָא* who writes that even though the *pesah* sacrifice must not be eaten in a state of hunger, it also should not be eaten in a state of engorgement and gross overeating.

8 Deuteronomy 5:15, 15:15, 16:12, 24:18.

9 *United Nations*, “Food,” available online [here](#).

10 These households reported multiple indications of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns, such as skipping meals. Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh, “Household Food Security in the United States in 2020,” *Economic Research Service: US Department of Agriculture*, September 2021, available online [here](#).

”וכפרתם את הבית” חג של נקייון וקדושה ביתית

הרב נדב ברגר

בצורה מדויקת את היחס המקראי לדם הקרבנות: *The hattat blood is the ritual detergent*.³ בתפיסה המקראית דם החטאת משמש כמעין ”סבון” ריטואלי שמנקה טומאות מן המקדש – ”כִּי נִפֶּשׁ הַבֶּצֵר בְּדָם הוּא וְאֲנִי נִתְתִּי לְכֶם עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֵׁיכֶם כִּי הַדָּם הוּא בְּנֶפֶשׁ יִכְפֹּר” (ויקרא יז, יא).

אם כן, לדעת ר' יוסי פר החטאת אשר מקריבים לפי יחזקאל ביום הראשון של ניסן היה בעצם פר מילואים של יום אחד. בכל שנה, בראשון לניסן, מתקיים מעין מילואים, בועיר אנפין – טיהור של המקדש בראש חודש ניסן כהנה לפסח. אכן, על אף שהתורה אינה מציינת מתי חלו שבעת ימי המילואים, מסורות פרשניות עתיקות סוברות שהמילואים החלו או הסתיימו באחד בניסן.⁴

נמצא לפי ספר יחזקאל שראש חודש ניסן הוא מועד טיהור המקדש השנתי. ומסתבר שהטרה הזו הייתה חיונית לקיום הפסח בי”ד בניסן, שהרי פסח הוא במידה רבה חג של טהרה. לפי ספר במדבר (ט, ט-יד), בעמאים לנפש אדם בי”ד בניסן אינם יכולים לחגוג את הפסח, והם מקבלים הזדמנות שניה חודש לאחר מכן – פסח שני. וכך אירע לכל עדת ישראל בימי המלך חזקיהו: בספר דברי הימים ב' (פרקים כט-ל) מסופר שנאלצו לדחות את פסח לחודש אייר, מכיוון שלא הספיקו להיטהר בזמן כדי לקיים את הפסח. משתמע מכל זה שהקיום הפסח מותנה בטהרה גמורה.⁵

עיון נוסף בפר החטאת של ספר יחזקאל מגלה אנומליה נוספת. לאותו פר חטאת מאפיין ייחודי מאוד, אשר כמעט ואין לו אח ורע במקרא כולו: ”וְלִקַּח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הַחֲטָאת וְנָתַן אֶל-מִזְבַּח הַבַּיִת וְאֶל-אֲרֻבַּע פְּנוֹת הָעֶזְרָה לְמִזְבֵּחַ וְעַל-מִזְבַּח הַבַּיִת וְעַל-שְׁעַר הַחֲצַר הַפְּנִימִית: וְכֹן תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּשִׁבְעָה בְּחֻדְשׁ מֵאִישׁ שִׁגְהָ וּמִפְתֵּי וְכִפְרֹתָם אֶת-הַבַּיִת:

לפי נבואת יחזקאל, בראשון ובשביעי לחודש ניסן, על הכהנים להקריב פר חטאת כדי ”לחטא” – כלומר לטהר – את המקדש. אלא שזה מעלה קושי גדול: התורה לא הזכירה בשום מקום הבאת קרבן חטאת בראשון ובשביעי בניסן! מה

הפרויקט לטהר את הבית מכל זכר של רב ולכלוך הוא תופעה... נטועה בתפיסה עתיקה וייחודית של חג הפסח והתקופה המכינה אליו

פשר הקרבנות הללו שמחדש יחזקאל? לפי ר' יוסי בסוגיתנו, יש תשובה: ”מלואים הקריבו בימי עזרא כדרך שהקריבו בימי משה”.

שבוע הימים שבו קידשו את הכהנים ואת המזבח לקראת תחילת עבודת המשכן מכונה ”מילואים”, ובכל אחד משבעת ימי המילואים הוקרב פר: ”וְזֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם לְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתָם לְכַהֵן לִי לִקַּח פֶּר אֶחָד גֹּן בָּקָר וְאֵילִם שְׁנַיִם תְּמִימִם” (שמות כט, א). קרבנות אלה שמשו לטהר את המזבח כהנה לעבודת המשכן. שחקן המפתח בפרוצדורת הטהרה הזו הוא הדם. פרופ' יעקב מילגרם ז”ל תיאר

חודש האביב, מועד צאתנו מארץ מצרים, הוא גם מועד נקייון הבית – ובלע”ז: *spring cleaning*. אכן, בשביל רבים מאיתנו, ביעור חמץ הוא עניין שולי מאוד בתוך תכנית נקייון מסיבית החולשת על השבועות לקראת פסח. טאטוא ושייפה, קרצוף ומירוק – כל אלה פעולות שבשגרה בתקופה זו. אמנם לפי השולחן-ערוך הדרישה ההלכתית היא רק לבדוק בעין אם יש חמץ בבית ולטאטא לפני הבדיקה, כדי שיהיה אפשר למצוא את החמץ ביעילות. נראה, אם כן, שהפרויקט לטהר את הבית מכל זכר של רבב ולכלוך הוא תופעה שאינה תלויה בחובת בדיקת חמץ כלל. ומסתבר שתופעה זו נטועה בתפיסה עתיקה וייחודית של חג הפסח והתקופה המכינה אליו.

לאחר קריאת התורה בשבת החודש, השבת שלפני ראש חודש ניסן, מפטירים בחזון הפסח המקדשי שביחזקאל מ”ה. זוהי בחירה טבעית היות ופרשה זו מתארת את ההכנה לפסח בבית המקדש החל מראש חודש ניסן. עם זאת, זוהי גם בחירה נועזת. חז”ל לא ניסו להסתיר כי במקומות רבים ספר יחזקאל סותר פסוקים מפורשים בתורה.⁶ אחת מן הדוגמאות שמונה הגמרא לסתירה בין יחזקאל לתורה היא הפטרת החודש:

יחזקאל מה, יח-כ

כֹּה-אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהִים בְּרֵאשׁוֹן בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ תִּקַּח פֶּר-בָּקָר וְתִמִּים וְחֲסִאת אֶת-הַמִּקְדָּשׁ וְלִקַּח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הַחֲטָאת וְנָתַן אֶל-מִזְבַּח הַבַּיִת וְאֶל-אֲרֻבַּע פְּנוֹת הָעֶזְרָה לְמִזְבֵּחַ וְעַל-מִזְבַּח הַבַּיִת וְעַל-שְׁעַר הַחֲצַר הַפְּנִימִית: וְכֹן תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּשִׁבְעָה בְּחֻדְשׁ מֵאִישׁ שִׁגְהָ וּמִפְתֵּי וְכִפְרֹתָם אֶת-הַבַּיִת:

1 ראה אורח חיים תל”ג.

2 ”זכור אותו האיש לטוב, וחנניה בן חזקיה שמו, שאלמלא הוא נגנו ספר יחזקאל, שהיו דבריו סותרין דברי תורה” (בבלי מנחות מה ע”א). אלמלא הדרשנות של חנניה בן חזקיה, הקאנון המקודש של כתבי הקודש המקראיים לא היה כולל את ספר יחזקאל, היות ודבריו הרידקליים סותרים דברי תורה.

3 Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus Anchor Bible*, p. 256.

4 ספרא מילואים, פרשה א, פרק א (מב ע”ד); וראו תרגום השבעים, עזרא א’ ז, ה. אף לפי מגילת המקדש, המילואים מתחילים בראשון לניסן, ושם נראה שטקס זה נוהג לדורות, ראו 11QTa XV-XVII (א’ קימרון, *מגילות מדבר יהודה החיבורים העבריים*: כרך ראשון, עמ’ 451 - 651).

5 אמנם מסכת פסחים קבעו חז”ל שפסח שני רלוונטי רק לייחידים בודדים כשהם עמאים: ”נטמא הקהל או רובו, או שהיו הכהנים עמאים והקהל שהורים, יעשה בטומאה. נטמא מיעוט הקהל, הטהורין עושין את הראשון, והטמאין עושין את השני” (משנה פסחים ז, ו).

המקדשי היה מדובר בטהרת המרחב של בית המקדש. אבל משמות י"ב עולה תפיסה דומה גם לגבי הבית בו אכלו את הפסח. טיהור הבית מקדש את המרחב הביתי להיות כמרחב המקדש עצמו. בזאת הבית נהיה אף הוא כמעין מקדש-מעט.

טיהור הבית מקדש את המרחב הביתי להיות כמרחב המקדש עצמו

התפשטות הקדושה המרחבית מבית המקדש לבתים השונים בעם ישראל היא תופעה ייחודית המציירת את הפסח כחג הדמוקרטיזציה של הקדושה.

אבל כיום אין לנו לא מקדש ולא מזבח, לא טומאה ולא טהרה. ובכל זאת, אפשר להציע שתופעת ההיטהרות לקראת פסח ממשיכה להתקיים גם בימינו, רק שאת הדם החלפנו בסבון ובאקונומיקה. אנחנו קוראים לזה נקיונות פסח, אבל באמת לנקיונות האלה אין קשר לחמץ. הרי בנקיונות שלנו אנחנו עושים הרבה מעבר למה שההלכה מחייבת. אכן, נראה שמאחורי הנקיונות שלנו עומד הרעיון הקדום שאת הבית שלנו צריך לקדש לקראת פסח בטהרה. תפיסה זו מזמינה אותנו לראות את סעודת הסדר המשפחתית שלנו כקרבן בבית המקדש. לראייה זו השלכה חשובה מאוד להבנת ליל הסדר שלנו: הסדר אינו רק נקודת מפגש של בני אדם שמתגעגעים זה לזה ואוהבים זה את זה; המפגש האנושי של ליל הסדר הוא מפגש קדוש המזמין אליו גם צד שלישי – אלוקים. אנחנו נזכרים בזאת בחשיבות הדתית שיש לאווירת הבית והמשפחה, ומתקרבים בזאת יחד כמשפחה לנוכחות הקדושה של אלוקים. ♦

הַבַּיִת (יחזקאל מה, יט-כ). על ידי נתינת הדם על המזוזה, המבדילה בין החוץ לפנינים, מושגת טהרה לכל הבית כולו – "וְכַפַּרְתֶּם אֶת-הַבַּיִת". נתינת דם על המזבח היא פעולה שגרתית מאוד בעולם המקדש והקרבנות, אבל נתינת דם על המזוזה מצויה אך ורק בעוד מקום אחד במקרא – פסח מצרים: "וְלָקַחוּ מִן-הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ עַל-שַׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וְעַל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בְּהַם" (שמות יב, ז). אמנם בפסח מצרים ניתן לדם הסבר מסוים מאוד: "וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם לְאֹת עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אֲתֶם שֹׁם וְרָאִיתִי אֶת הַדָּם וְכִסַּחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא יְהִי בְכֶם נֶגֶף לְמַשְׁחִית בְּהַכְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם." הדם משמש כאות למשחית לפסוח על הבית ולא להרוג את הבכור שבו. טעם זה מתאים ספציפית למה שחז"ל כינו "פסח מצרים", אותו פסח חד-פעמי שקיימו בני ישראל לפני יציאת מצרים, ואולי בשל כך חז"ל קבעו שנתינת הדם על המזוזה אינה נוהגת לדורות.

חוף זאת, עיון בפרשה מגלה שלפחות ברובד של פשט המקרא נתינת הדם הייתה אמורה לנהוג לדורות. מסקנה זו עולה מתוך דברי משה לעם:

שמות יב, כא-כד

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְכָל-זָקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מִשְׁכוּ וּקְחוּ לָכֶם צֹאן לְמִשְׁפַּחְתֵּיכֶם וְשַׁחֲטוּ הַפֶּסַח: וְלָקַחְתֶּם אֲגָדַת אֲזוּב וְקִבְלֶתֶם בְּדָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּסֹף וְהַגַּעְתֶּם אֶל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף וְאֶל-שַׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת מִן-הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר בְּסֹף וְאֲתֶם לֹא תֵצְאוּ אִישׁ מִפֶּתַח-בֵּיתוֹ עַד-בֹּקֶר: וְעֵבֶר ה' לְנֹגֵף אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְרָאָה אֶת-הַדָּם עַל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף וְעַל שַׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וְכִסַּח ה' עַל-הַפֶּתַח וְלֹא יִתֵּן הַמַּשְׁחִית לְבֹא אֶל-בְּתֵיכֶם לְנֹגֵף: וְשַׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְחֹק-לָךְ וּלְבְנֵיךָ עַד-עוֹלָם:

מסתבר שבפשט הכתובים נתינת הדם היא חלק קבוע מהקרבנות הפסח בכל שנה ושנה, והיא משמשת כזכר חינוכי לפסיחת הקב"ה על הבית.⁶

ועל אף הטעם שניתן, פעמים רבות יש לריטואל אחד יותר מטעם אחד, וכן נראה לומר לגבי נתינת הדם על המזוזה. פרשת הפסח של יחזקאל מלמדת אותנו שלנתינת דם על המזוזה יש משמעות נוספת: "וְכַפַּרְתֶּם אֶת-הַבַּיִת". כבכל הקרבנות, הדם משמש לטהר. הקשר המתבקש בין שתי המקומות היחידים במקרא בהם נותנים דם על מזוזה בית, מוביל אותנו למסקנה ברורה: אף בפסח, נתינת הדם על המזוזה שימשה לטהר את הבית בו אוכלים את הפסח. אם כן, הפטרת החודש חידשה לנו שיש תהליך טהרה שקודם לפסח. בפסח

THE EXODUS

Past, Present, and Future¹

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

The overwhelming majority of earth's human beings have always lived in poverty and under oppression, their lives punctuated by sickness and suffering. Few escape damaging illness; even fewer dodge the ravages of old age, except by untimely death; and no one, to date, has avoided death. Most of the nameless and faceless billions know the world as indifferent or hostile.

Jewish religion affirms otherwise. Judaism insists that history and the social-economic-political reality in which people live will eventually be perfected—that much of what passes for the norm of human existence is really a deviation from the ultimate reality.

How do we know this? From an actual event in history—the Exodus. Mark the paradox: the very idea that much of history—present reality itself—is a deviation from the ideal, and that redemption will overcome this divergence, comes from a historic experience. That experience was the liberation of the Hebrew slaves, the Exodus from Egypt.

On one level, this is a very specific incident in the particular history of a small Middle Eastern tribe. The entire event was so obscure at the time that no independent record of the liberation exists outside of the chronicle of this people. (It so happens that this people, brought into being by this particular event, went on to transform human consciousness. And its chronicle turned out to be the Bible, the single most influential book in human history.)

On another level, however, the entire experience is highly paradigmatic. Oppression and deprivation are not that dissimilar. As with slaves, deprivation becomes moral and psychological reality. It is this reality that was overthrown in the Exodus.

The freeing of the slaves testified that human beings are meant to be free. History will not be finished until all are free. The Exodus shows that God is independent of human control. Freedom is the inexorable outcome, for only God's absolute power can be morally legitimate.

The Exodus further proves that God is concerned. God heard the cries of the Israelites, saw their suffering, and redeemed them. But the God of Israel who acted in the Exodus is the God of the whole world; God's love encompasses all of humankind.

JUDAISM INSISTS THAT HISTORY AND THE SOCIAL- ECONOMIC- POLITICAL REALITY IN WHICH PEOPLE LIVE WILL EVENTUALLY BE PERFECTED

God's involvement with Israel is a concrete expression of God's universal mother love. In Jewish history, Exodus morality, from which Jewish ethics and Jewish rituals are derived, was made universal and applied to ever-widening circles of humankind. So the Messiah and the concept of a messianic realm are really implicit in the Exodus itself. Messianic redemption is the Exodus writ large.

No, the Exodus did not destroy evil in the world. What it did was set

up an alternative conception of life. Were it not for the Exodus, humans would have reconciled themselves to the evils that exist in the world. The Exodus reestablishes the dream of perfection and thereby creates the tension that must exist until reality is redeemed. This orienting event has not yet been converted into a permanent reality, neither for Jews nor for the whole world, but it points the way to the end goal toward which all life and history must go. Thus, history counts, but it is not necessarily normative; it is something to be lived in, yet challenged and overcome.

Where does Israel get the strength—the *hutzpah*—to go on believing in redemption in a world that knows mass hunger? How can Jews testify to hope and human value when they have been continuously persecuted, hated, expelled, destroyed? From the Exodus.

But the more people comprehend the Exodus lessons of human value and love, the greater their pain in experiencing the exploitation routinely encountered in the world. The enormity of human suffering, which continues to exist as if there had been no Exodus, challenges the belief that there ever was an Exodus. The world taunts the believer, suggesting that being bound by the Exodus ties one's hands. In a society that accounts personal power supreme, why limit one's gains for a will-o'-the-wisp dream? So the Exodus faith must be renewed continually if Jews are not to surrender its norms.

How can we create a continuing set of Exodus experiences powerful enough to offset the impact of present evil? The challenge is to make the Exodus experience vivid enough in an ongoing way to counter but not blot out the unredeemed experiences of life. The goal is not to flee from

¹ Adapted from Yitz Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*, pp. 34-39

reality but to perfect it. To cope with contradiction and not to yield easily, the memory must be a “real” experience, something felt in one’s bones, tasted in one’s mouth.

The psychological function of the Seder—and indeed, to a certain extent, all of Jewish religious observance—is to confirm and strengthen the conviction of the Exodus. But one would be guilty of trivializing to see the “reliving” model in purely psychological terms. Underlying Judaism’s ritual system is a metaphysical statement about the nature of reality—specifically, of time. The Exodus teaches us that history is not an eternal recurrence—ever repeating but never progressing—but a time stream with direction. History is not a meaningless cycle but the path along which the Divine-human partnership is operating to perfect the world. Time is linear, not merely circular; all humans are walking toward the end time when the final peace and dignity for humankind will be accomplished.

Throughout the generations, this view of history has been an enormous source of hope, galvanizing people to major efforts to improve their conditions. In modern times, this concept in secularized forms has powered liberalism, with its promise of progress, and revolutionary radicalism, with its expectations of breakthroughs and even of apocalypse. But in modern cultural understanding, time is perceived as only linear; once lived, it is gone. Hence, there is a strong tendency to put aside the past as irrelevant. Indeed, many modern movements dismiss sacred time as pure projection, an opiate of the masses.

Judaism, in contrast, insists that the past is available and still normative. Judaism celebrates memory as a present channel of access to the Eternal and as a source of hope and renewal for the masses. Through the holiday cycle of the year and other rituals, the past can be summoned up to infuse the present with meaning. Pesah, the Exodus, is not some antiquarian past experience: it is present reality. The taste of perfection in a Pesah or a Shabbat creates dissatisfaction; it prevents the Jew from slipping into equilibrium with the current reality.

Thus, in true Jewish dialectical fashion, time is both linear and cy-

clical. The implied claim of Pesah is that, in sacred time and ritual, believers can step outside the stream of secular, normal time and relive the Exodus itself. ♦

SACRED LIES

Rabbi Micha'el Rosenberg

Although we now take it for granted, the Talmud is confused about the obligation to recline at the Seder:

תלמוד בבלי פסחים קח.

יין,

איתמר משמיה דרב נחמן: צריך הסיבה,

ואיתמר משמיה דרב נחמן: אין צריך הסיבה.

Talmud Bavli Pesahim 108a Regarding wine—

It was said in the name of Rav Nahman that one must recline,

And it was said in the name of Rav Nahman that one need not.

The Gemara offers two conflicting traditions, both in the name of Rav Nahman, about whether one is supposed to recline when drinking the four cups of wine at the Seder. The first tradition says that one should recline while drinking, while the latter maintains that one should not.¹

The Gemara therefore does what it always does in such cases: it seeks to resolve the contradiction.

ולא פליגי, הא - בתרתי כסי
קמאי, הא - בתרתי כסי בתראי.

אמר לה להאי גיטא, ואמר
לה להאי גיטא. אמר לה להאי
גיטא תרי כסי קמאי בעו הסיבה

השתא הוא דקא מתחלא לה
חירות תרי כסי בתראי לא בעו
הסיבה מאי דהוה הוה

ואמר לה להאי גיטא אדרבה תרי
כסי בתראי בעו הסיבה ההיא
שעתא דקא הויה חירות תרי
כסי קמאי לא בעו הסיבה דאכתי
עבדים היינו קאמר

השתא דאיתמר הכי ואיתמר הכי
אידי ואידי בעו הסיבה...

And these two rulings are not contradictory—one was said regarding the first two cups, and the other was said regarding the last two cups.

Some understand it one way, and others in the opposite way.

Some understand it one way: the two first cups require reclining, for that is when freedom is beginning. The two latter cups do not require reclining: what was [already] was.

And others in the opposite way: to the contrary, the latter two cups require reclining—that is the time when freedom comes into being! The first two cups do not require reclining, because we are still saying “We were slaves.”

Now that both were suggested, for both sets of wine one must recline....

The Talmud offers two equally defensible—but completely opposite—responses. Perhaps, the first articulation argues, it matters only that one recline at the outset, “for that is when freedom is beginning.” However, once you’ve established the tone of the evening, “what was, already was.”²

The second articulation makes a very different claim: the first two cups take place when we are telling the story of going out of Egypt, when we’re still living through Egyptian oppression. Since at this point in the story, we’re still enslaved, we must not recline. Only after the meal, as we sing Hallel, when we are in our newly emancipated state, may we relax and lounge as free people do.

The difference between the two models of the Seder is stark: in the first version, the Seder is a gala, an anniversary party. What matters, then, is setting an appropriately festive tone. But in the second version, the Seder is not so much a commemoration of our victory over oppressive evil as it is a re-enactment, a play-acting of the Exodus. Even though, in reality, we sit at our Seder tables as free people, we begin the Seder pretending to be something else. We experience a small taste of enslavement as we sit ramrod straight in our seats drinking our wine, focusing on the *genut*, the degradation with which our story opens; we then further re-enact the story as we transition from that *genut* to *shevah*—praise of freedom and release,

1 Or at least, may not; the Hebrew here is ambiguous, and in at least some cases, the more limiting meaning—one may not recline—is clearly implied.

2 Note that this reading seems to imply that the phrase “one need not” (אינו צריך) means what it says literally: you may recline if you’d like, but you are not required to do so.

drinking our wine in a posture of freedom.³

We see this idea elsewhere, and it clearly infuses much contemporary thinking about the Seder. Consider the following divide between two different versions of the Haggadah.⁴ In the version that is more familiar to most North American Jews, we read:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות
את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא
...ממצרים

In every generation, a person is obligated "lir'ot - to see oneself" as if they have personally gone out of Egypt...

However, the Rambam's version of this is slightly different:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם להראות
את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא
...ממצרים

In every generation, a person is obligated "le-har'ot - to present oneself" as if they have personally gone out of Egypt...

In the Hebrew, only a single letter separates the two versions (לראות vs. להראות), but the difference in meaning is enormous. Whereas the first version is an appeal to one's inner thoughts, the Rambam's version asks us to act out the story we're telling.

The Rambam's version seems far more sensible than the more common one. I understand what it means to play-act, to act out a story that happened to others, not because I claim that it is actually happening to me now, in this moment, but simply because we're retelling a

THERE'S SOMETHING IMMENSELY VALUABLE IN THIS NOTION OF SPEAKING AND LIVING MISTRUTHS IN THE INTEREST OF EXPERIENCING THE UNIQUELY ECSTATIC JOY OF PESAH

story—by definition, someone else's story.

The version that requires us to see ourselves as if we have personally gone out of Egypt, however, is asking us to lie. The Shakespeare scholar, Stephen Greenblatt, makes this point in a startlingly honest way: "Even a very small Jewish child knows perfectly well, of course, that his father has been born, say, in Boston and not in Cairo, that his uncle Abraham has played semi-professional baseball in Cheyenne and not slaved for the Pharaohs, and that his uncle Moses, despite his name, has not parted the Red Sea (sic!). The wicked son would seem, from this perspective, the only honest person at the table."⁵

Despite the fact that we sit in the comfort of our homes, the same homes where we enjoyed our freedom last month and where we will

continue to do so next month, we nonetheless make the claim that we ourselves have experienced enslavement, and likewise have experienced the redemption of going from enslavement to liberation.

There's something immensely valuable in this notion of speaking and living mistruths in the interest of experiencing the uniquely ecstatic joy of Pesah. In Greenblatt's words, "to regard yourself *as though* means in part to pretend to be something you are not... but it also means to accept something that you are, something that you may not have understood about yourself and your origin and your destiny."⁶ Sometimes pretending that we, or the world around us, is other than it appears to be reveals deeper truths—or, perhaps, something deeper than truth.

The idea that we can learn about reality from engaging in fantasy makes sense of an important development in the laws of reclining at the Seder. The Gemara on Bavli Pesahim 108a goes on to say that a woman "in the presence of her husband need not recline; but if she is an important woman, she does need to recline." In its context, the claim is relatively clear: reclining is a sign of liberation, and people in the presence of those who hold significant power over them either need not, or perhaps even may not, recline at the Seder—to do so would be a lie, a claim of freedom in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. For this reason, an "important woman"—a phrase the Gemara does not explicate for us—must recline.

The Talmud's description appears beholden to a vision of the Seder as utterly embedded in the realities of social life. If a particular woman is considered significant in her social

3 The tension between these two models of the Seder is not resolved. On the one hand, the Gemara here suggests a compromise; recline for all four cups. But this so-called compromise is not exactly a fair settlement. Yes, I may be reclining for the last two cups of wine, in accordance with the second attempt to resolve Rav Nahman's two statements, but if the reasoning is to recreate the motion from slavery to freedom, then my reclining for the first two cups undoes any sense of that particular play-acting at our Seder.

4 The passage also appears in printed versions of the Mishnah, as well as most—though not all—versions of the Mishnah in manuscripts of the Talmud; as well, at least as far back as the Maggid Mishneh, commentators attribute the passage to the Mishnah. It does not, however, appear in manuscripts of the Mishnah (i.e. of the Mishnah as an independent work, rather than as cited in the Talmud).

5 Stephen Greenblatt, "The Mousetrap," in Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 138.

6 Greenblatt, "The Mousetrap," p. 138.

setting, she reclines at the Seder. Thus reads the initial explanation of this ruling in the commentary of Rabbeinu Manoah:⁷

ואם אשה חשובה היא כלומר
שאינן לה בעל והיא גברת הבית
צריכה הטיבה.

*If she is an important woman,
that is, if she has no husband
and she is the head of her
household, then she must
recline.*

Rabbeinu Manoah, however, then offers a second explanation:

א"נ שהיא חשובה בפני ה' בפרי
ידיה אשה יראת השם בת גדולי
הדור כוללת שבחי אשת חיל...

*Alternatively, it means that she
is important in the eyes of God,
through her works, a woman
who fears God, descended from
great scholars, possessing the
best traits of a worthy woman...*

This alternative explanation is an inversion of the first. In this way of understanding the Gemara's exception for "important women," a woman's social status—whether she is "important" in the ways most visible in society—is irrelevant. Rather, it is her status in the eyes of God, something fundamentally unknowable to society at large, which makes her a fully liberated person, worthy of, and thus obligated in, reclining at the Seder.

In many ways, this second interpretation is deeply troubling. Like the talmudic passage on which it is based, it begins from a place of assuming gender difference; men are assumed to be free, while (some) women might somehow achieve a status of freedom. Rabbeinu Manoah valuably shifts the realm of that achievement from the historical-

ly patriarchal social realm to God's more egalitarian vision of the world, but this does not undo the damage of beginning with the assumption that men are (inherently) freer than those of other genders.

Nonetheless, Rabbeinu Manoah's second explanation belongs to a different vision of the Seder—the Seder not as the celebration of what has occurred and what is, but rather as an embrace of the *ke'ilu*, the "as if" commanded to us by the Haggadah. We are not, in reality, previously enslaved people who have finally tasted liberation; perhaps, we are not even truly free. But, on Seder night, we step into the role to experience the world as if that were true, experiencing firsthand both enslavement and emancipation.

Rabbeinu Manoah did not live in a world in which gender equality was a reality; sadly, neither do we.⁸ But, on Seder night, we attempt to step into that reality in an as-if way, in the hopes that doing so can move us closer to it in actuality.⁹ Perhaps this explains how Rabbi Yosef Karo, in his Beit Yosef, can write the following, despite his living in a thoroughly patriarchal society:¹⁰

ונתב רבינו ירוחם (נ"ה ח"ה
מב ע"ד) בשם התוספות שכל
הנשים שלנו חשובות הן וצריכות
הטיבה...

*Rabbeinu Yeroham wrote in the
name of the Tosafot that all of
our women are important, and
they must recline...*

I am always torn when I read this passage, torn between joy at seeing someone in the 16th century state what I take to be obvious—that a person's worth is independent of their gender—and frustration at the knowledge that, despite the Beit Yosef's claim here to the contrary, he

lived in a social reality in which women were often treated as anything but important.

But this morally perplexing moment in the Beit Yosef makes sense in light of the Haggadah's injunction to us to view ourselves *ke'ilu*—as if something important is true, despite our knowledge that it is, in some "real" sense, false. We may not live in a truly redeemed world, a world in which the liberation and equality modeled by the Exodus from Egypt is fully realized and obviously manifest. As Rachel Sharansky Danziger has written:

"Perhaps when the authors of the Haggadah told us to see ourselves as if we came out of Egypt, they meant something more than envisioning ourselves wearing tunics, marching out of Egypt with matzos in our sacks. Perhaps they meant that we should take this opportunity to experience what it means to become the authors of our own story. By liberating us from the mindset of a passive audience, the Haggadah frees us to taste self-determination, in an echo of the very event which it so circuitously explores."¹¹

Denying reality is a recipe for failing to improve it. But so, too, if we never step into the *ke'ilu* that we want to inhabit, into imaginative moments of dreaming about the not-yet, we will never get from the enslavement of the first two cups to the liberation of the latter pair, the cups of redemption. ♦

7 Rabbeinu Manoah, Laws of Hametz and Matzah 7:8. Rabbeinu Manoah was a 14th century Provençal rabbi best known for his commentary on the Rambam's Mishneh Torah, from which this passage is excerpted.

8 In 2020 in the United States, women earned 84% of what men earned. See Amanda Barroso and Anna Brown, "Gender pay gap in U.S. held steady in 2020," Pew Research Center, May 25, 2021, available online [here](#).

9 We also must not lose sight of the fact that, in reality, Seder night has historically been a night not of aspirational gender equality, but, to the contrary, an intensely gendered night on which women were often busy with the preparation and serving of an extravagant meal, while men and boys sat at the table engaging in the telling of the story. Indeed, Rabbeinu Manoah offers a third explanation of "important woman" as a woman with household attendants, since perhaps "a woman does not normally need to recline because she is distracted with food preparation."

10 Beit Yosef Orah Hayyim 472.

11 Rachel Sharansky Danziger, "My Own Private Haggadah," *Tablet Magazine*, March 27, 2020 available online [here](#).

TURNING MEMORY INTO EMPATHY

The Torah's Ethical Charge

Rabbi Shai Held

One of the Torah's central projects is to turn memory into empathy and moral responsibility. Appealing to our experience of defenselessness in Egypt, the Torah seeks to transform us into people who see those who are vulnerable and exposed, rather than looking past them.

Here is the articulation of this charge in Parashat Mishpatim: "You shall not oppress a stranger (*ger*), for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the Land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9; cf. 22:20). By *ger*, the Torah means one who is an alien in the place where he lives—that is, one who is not a member of the ruling tribe or family, who is not a citizen, and who is therefore vulnerable to social and economic exploitation. The Torah appeals to our memory to intensify our ethical obligations: having tasted the suffering and degradation to which vulnerability can lead, we are bidden not to oppress the stranger. The Torah's call is not based on a rational argument, but on an urgent demand for empathy: since you know *what it feels like* to be a stranger, you must never abuse or mistreat the stranger.

This prohibition is so often cited that it's easy to miss just how radical and non-obvious it is. The Torah could have responded quite differently to the experience of oppression in Egypt. It could have said, "Since you were tyrannized and exploited and no one did anything to help you, you don't owe anything to anyone; how dare anyone ask anything of you?" But it chooses the opposite path: "Since you were exploited and oppressed, you must never be among the exploiters and degraders. You must remember what it feels like to be a stranger. Empathy must animate and intensify your commitment to the dignity and well-being of the weak and vulnerable. And God holds you accountable to this obligation."

On one level, of course, the Torah is appealing to the collective memory of the Jewish people: the formative story around which we orient our collective life is about our harrowing sojourn in Egypt and our eventual miraculous redemption by God. We should not oppress the stranger because we, as a people, remem-

ONE OF THE TORAH'S CENTRAL PROJECTS IS TO TURN MEMORY INTO EMPATHY AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

ber what oppression can mean. But I would argue that we should also individually personalize the Torah's demand that we remember. Each of us is obligated, in the course of our lives, to remember times when we have been exploited or abused by those who had power over us. (Such experiences are blessedly rare for some people. Tragically, they are part of the daily bread of others.) From these experiences, the Torah tells us, we are to learn compassion and kindness.

It may be tempting to imagine a Manichean world in which the "good guys" learn compassion from experiences of vulnerability and suffering, while the "bad guys" learn only hostility and xenophobia. But it is far more honest, I think, to wrestle with the ways that each of us often has both responses at the same time: part of us responds to the experience of suffering by wanting to make sure that no one else has to endure what we did, but another part of us

feels entitled and above reproach. "If you had been through what I've been through," we can hear ourselves saying, "you would understand that I don't owe anybody anything." As contemporary writer Leon Wieseltier once remarked of the Jewish people, "The Holocaust enlarged our Jewish hearts, and it shrunk them." The Torah challenges us to nurture and cultivate the compassionate response, and to make sure that the raging, combative one never becomes an animating principle of our lives.

Where Exodus commands us not to oppress the stranger and ties that obligation to the ways memory can be harnessed to yield empathy, Leviticus goes further, moving from a negative commandment (*lo ta'aseh*) to a positive one (*aseh*). "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34). With these startling words, we have traveled a long distance; we are mandated to actively love the stranger. A lot can be (and has been) said about what the commandment to love the neighbor does and doesn't mean in Leviticus 19:18. But one thing is clear: the love we owe to our neighbor, we also owe to the stranger who resides among us. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is famously asked about the reach of the obligation to love your neighbor as yourself: "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Leviticus anticipates the question and offers a stunning response: the stranger is your neighbor, and what you owe to your own kin you owe to her as well. The Torah forcefully makes clear that the poor and downtrodden, the vulnerable and oppressed, the exposed and powerless, are all our neighbors. We are called to love even those who are not our kin, even those who do

not share our socio-economic status—because, after all, we remember only too well what vulnerability feels like.

Deuteronomy subtly introduces still another dimension to our obligation to love the stranger. Along the way, it offers a remarkably moving lesson in theology. “For the Lord your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, Who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the orphan and the widow, and loves the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). The text begins by praising God as “great, mighty, and awesome.” Of what does God’s greatness, mightiness, and awesomeness consist? According to these verses, not of God’s having created the world and not of God’s having demonstrated an ability to smite enemies. No, God’s grandeur is rooted in God’s fairness (“Who shows no favor and takes no bribe”) and in God’s championing the oppressed and the downtrodden (“upholds the cause of the orphan and the widow, and loves the stranger”). This is reminiscent of a verse from Psalms that we recite every Shabbat and holiday morning. The verse begins, “All my bones shall say, ‘Lord, who is like You?’” What is the source of God’s incomparable greatness? Again, it is not raw power or might, but rather mercy and care for the vulnerable. “You save the poor from one stronger than he, the poor and needy from his despoiler” (Psalm 35:10). The God Jews worship, in other words, is a God who cares for the distressed and persecuted.

All of this context helps us to understand Deuteronomy’s presentation of our obligation to love the stranger. Here, loving the stranger is a form of “walking in God’s ways,” or what philosophers call *imitatio dei* (the imitation of God). Just as God “loves the stranger” (10:18), so also must we (10:19). The Torah here presents a radical challenge and obligation: if you want to love

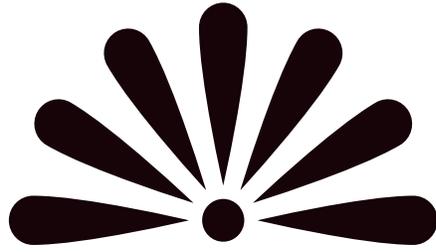
God, love those whom God loves. Love the widow, the orphan, the stranger. In other words, Deuteronomy gives us two distinct but intertwined reasons for what lies at the heart of Jewish ethics: we must love the stranger both because of Who God is, and because of what we ourselves have been through.

Exodus teaches us the baseline requirement: not to oppress the stranger. Leviticus magnifies the demand: not only must we not oppress the stranger, we must actively love her. And Deuteronomy raises the stakes even higher: loving the stranger is a crucial form of “walking in God’s ways.”

Literature scholar Elaine Scarry hauntingly asserts that “the human capacity to injure other people is very great precisely because our capacity to imagine other people is very small.”¹ By reminding us again and again of our vulnerability in Egypt, the Torah works to help us learn to imagine others more, so that we allow ourselves to hurt them less.

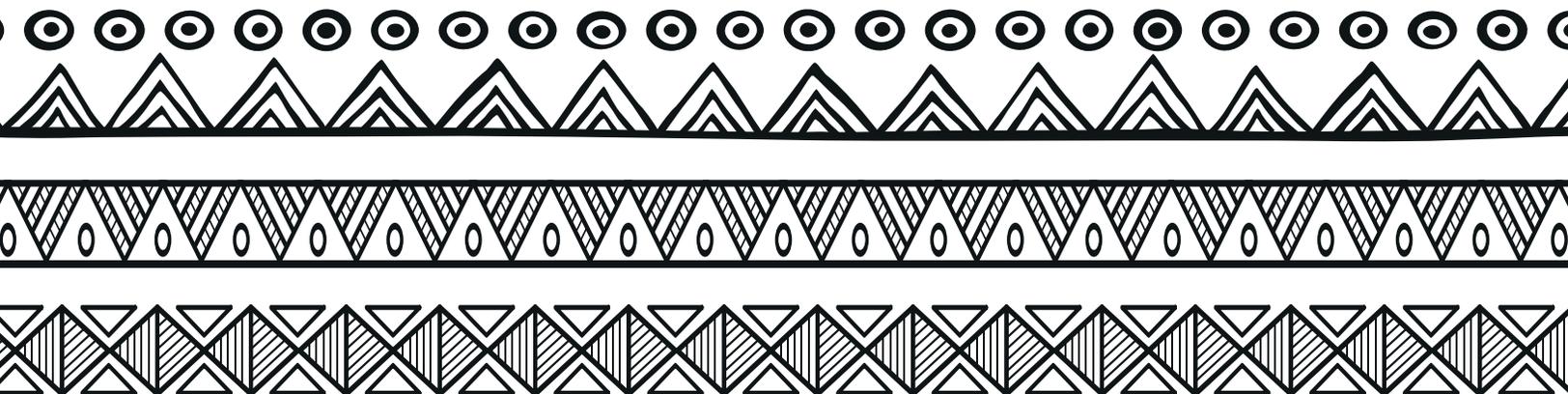
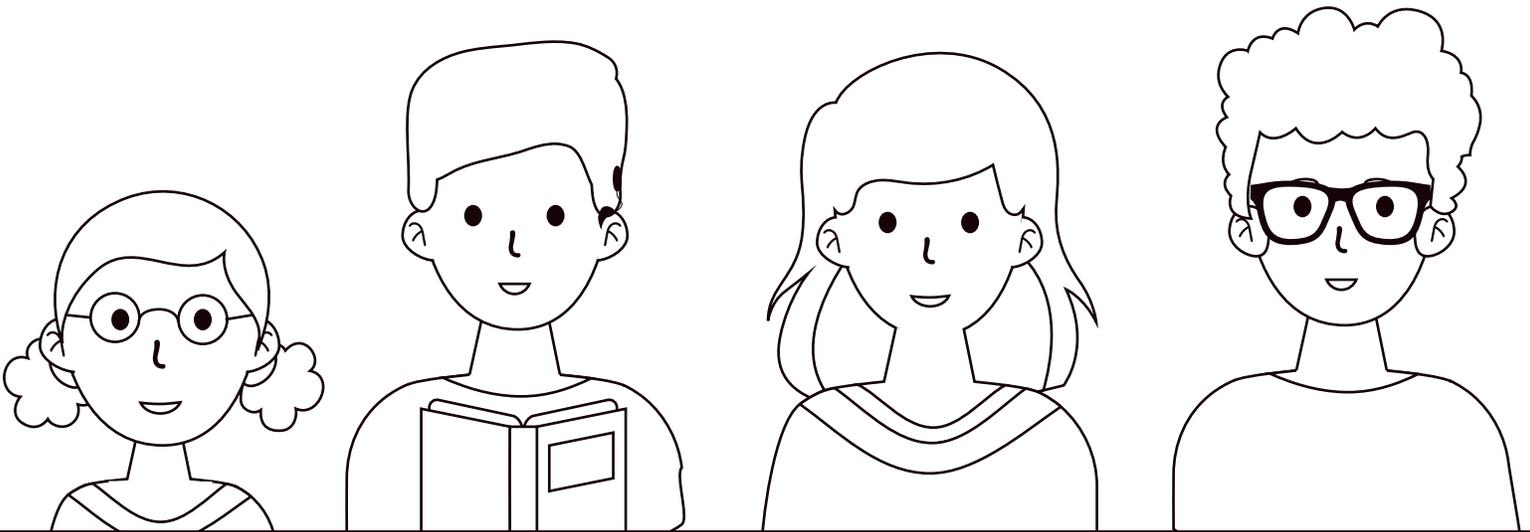
The obligation to love and care for the stranger and the dispossessed is a basic covenantal requirement incumbent upon us as Jews. We surely have moral obligations which are incumbent upon us because of the simple fact that we are human beings. In its recurrent appeals to memory, the Torah seeks to amplify and intensify those obligations, to remind us, even when it is difficult to hear, that the fate of the stranger is our responsibility. This mandate may seem overwhelming at times, and its concrete implications may sometimes be difficult to discern. But loving the stranger is fundamental and lies at the heart of Torah. If we wish to take the obligation to serve God seriously and to be worthy heirs of the Jewish tradition, we have no choice but to wrestle with these words, and to seek to grow in empathy and compassion. ♦

1 Elaine Scarry, “Difficulty of Imagining Other People,” in Martha Nussbaum (ed.), *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), p. 103.



WORD GAMES

for ALL FOUR CHILDREN



בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as if they went free from Egypt.

This is one of the reasons that we are supposed to notice, ask questions, and discuss during the Seder. We not only have to see ourselves in the story, we must experience it as well. And why not have some fun as we do that?

We invite you to use these cards to play with family and friends during the Seder—or any other time during the holiday—as you learn about important ideas, symbols, and people connected to Pesah.

PREPARE IN ADVANCE:

Cut out these cards before Pesah (or just read them from the page). Add your own original ideas on the blank cards provided.

HOW TO PLAY:

The object of the game is to get other players to say the guessing word—but you can't say the forbidden words.

You can play the game in different ways, depending on which of the Four Children you want to be:

Four variations

IF YOU'RE THE WISE ONE

Play by all the rules! Divide into teams and use the cards as a Taboo-style game where each team gets one minute to correctly identify as many words as possible. The first player selects a card and gives their teammates clues without saying any of the forbidden words. The player continues with additional cards until the time is up, and the team counts their points. Then it is the next team's turn. Play as many rounds as you like, or until the cards run out. The team with the most points wins.

IF YOU'RE THE REBELLIOUS ONE

Use the blank cards to create your own guessing words to add to the game, or make up a brand new game with the cards.

IF YOU'RE THE SIMPLE ONE

Play the game according to the wise child rules, but choose only two or three of the words listed to be the forbidden words.

IF YOU'RE THE ONE WHO DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO ASK

Use the cards like a cooperative game of charades. A grownup can whisper the word to a child who will act it out for everyone else to guess, or children can act out words that the grownups must guess. Everyone wins!

חַמֵּץ
HAMETZ

Say goodbye to these foods on Pesah—anything made from wheat, barley, rye, oats, or spelt that has been allowed to rise.



Matzah
Bread
Rise
Leavened
Hallah

שֵׁנִי
SHANKBONE

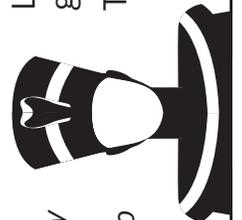
Literally meaning "arm," this symbolic food on the Seder plate reminds us of the pesah sacrifice described in the Torah.



Korban /sacrifice
Roast
Outstretched arm
Seder plate
Temple

פַּרְעֹה
PHARAOH

The King of Egypt who enslaved our ancestors, and changed his mind many times about letting them go free.



King
Mean
Slavery
Let my people go
Ten plagues

מָרֹר MAROR

Woah! Don't take too big a bite of this bitter herb!



Bitter
Herb
Lettuce
Tears
Horseradish
Slavery

צִמּוּת THE OMER

Beginning on the second night of Pesah, we count forty-nine days until Shavuot... who's ready for cheesecake?



Barley
49 days
7 weeks
Count
Shavuot

FOUR CHILDREN

Wicked
Wise
Simple
Ask
Teach



אַפִּיקוֹמָן AFIKOMAN

The larger piece of the broken middle matzah, eaten towards the end of the Seder (sometimes after being hidden and found!).



Hide
Find
Dessert
Broken
Matzah

מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה MAH NISHTANAH

Four questions? One question with four answers? These things make Seder nights different from other nights.



Song
Different
Questions
Ask
Youngest
Night

יְיִנוּ DAYYEINU

Any one thing would have been enough, but we're grateful that God took us from Egypt, split the Sea, gave us manna, Shabbat, Torah, and so much more.



Enough
Miracles
Song
Gratitude
God

כּוֹרֵיךְ KOREIKH

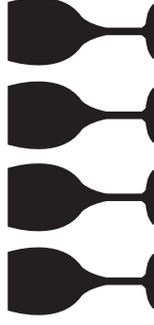
Right before the meal, we do as Hillel did and eat matzah and maror wrapped together.



Sandwich
Hillel
Maror
Haroset
Matzah

FOUR CUPS

To mark the four promises of freedom, we drink four cups of wine or grape juice.



Grape juice/
wine
Pour
Spill
Drink
Redemption

בְּדִיקַת חָמֵץ BEDIKAT HAMETZ

Before Pesah, we go on a final search for hametz, leavened food.



Candle
Search
Crumbs
Feather
Dark



חֲרוֹסֶת HAROSEH

There are so many ways to make this symbolic food that reminds us of the mortar and bricks we used as slaves in Egypt.

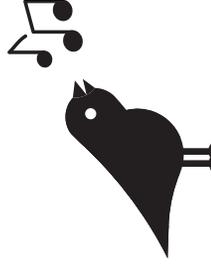


- Sweet
- Mortar
- Apples
- Bricks
- Nuts



הַלֵּל HALLEL

So much fun to sing these songs from Psalms!



- Prayer
- Song
- Praise
- Thanks
- Gratitude



אֵילֵיָהוּ ELIYAHU

We pour a cup just for this prophet, whom we invite to visit every Seder.



- Prophet
- Cup
- Door
- Wine/grape juice
- Drink



בֵּיצָה EGG

This symbolic Seder plate food reminds us of the special holiday sacrifice (hagigah).



- Round
- Meal
- Korban/sacrifice
- Roast
- Seder plate



מֹשֶׁה MOSHE

Although not a central character in the Haggadah, he plays a crucial role in leading our people out of slavery.



- Leader
- Aharon
- Miriam
- Staff
- Pharaoh



מַגִּיד MAGGID

Once upon a time... this is when we tell the whole story of Pesah.



- Story
- Tell
- Egypt
- Slavery
- Freedom

