

FOCUS

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FOCUS

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Editors:

DANI KERMAIER
YISROEL GORDON

Consulting Editors:

AARON PLATT-ROSS
LAWRENCE GALLANT
SARAH BERGER

Contributing Editor:

MOSHE ADATTO

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Focus is a forum for the rabbis of the Jewish Study Network to present the community with a sample of their teachings in writing. The JSN is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to raising the level of Jewish literacy in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

General inquiries and correspondence are welcome. Send to:
Jewish Study Network 2584 Leghorn St. #A Mountain View, CA 94043
Fax: 650-961-4572 Email: focus@jsn.info.

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Preface

There are good reasons why Passover is the most widely celebrated Jewish holiday. Commemorating the Exodus of the Jewish slaves from Egypt some 3000 years ago, Passover is Judaism's Independence Day. At the Pesach Seder, families and friends gather together to remember the past, appreciate the present, and lay foundations for a better future. But let's not forget – Passover is only the beginning.

The Exodus was just the first stage of a greater plan, a process that culminated fifty days later with the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. This evolutionary period remains fresh in our consciousness with the help of additional observances. First, we count the days of the journey to Sinai, a mitzvah called *Sefirat HaOmer*. And then we celebrate the Sinai experience with the holiday of Shavuot.

Pesach is best viewed not in isolation, but rather as the start of this larger holiday season. We are therefore proud to present in this new issue of Focus a set of articles that span the breadth of these observances. As people prepare to welcome Passover 2005, Focus raises the bar by adding content that spills over beyond Pesach.

As always, each article exemplifies the unique blend of inspirational, creative and abstract thought that is the hallmark of Torah learning. But Focus is not meant to be theoretical. The more we learn, the more we are motivated to apply our learning and celebrate the formative events of our history.

With this in mind, we have included "The Traditional Seder: A Halachic Guide" by the Jewish Study Network's authority on Jewish law and custom, Rabbi Avi Lebowitz. Educated laymen and rabbis alike will appreciate the extensive endnotes, which contain much original material. It is our hope that "The Traditional Seder" and the other articles in this edition of Focus help make this period of time all the more meaningful for you and your family.

Wishing you and yours a happy Pesach-Shavuot Holiday Season!

Rabbi Joey Felsen
Founder
Jewish Study Network

Rabbi Dani Kermaier
Founder
Jewish Study Network

Introduction

The Pesach / *Sefirat HaOmer* / Shavuot holiday season parallels the High Holiday season at the other end of the Jewish calendar, and is no less significant. The High Holidays season presents an opportunity for repentance and the Pesach-Shavuot season presents an opportunity for rebirth. These are the days that mark the creation of the Jewish people and, taken together, they form a powerful system for personal growth. But before we can tap their power, we must first understand how they work.

On the second day of Pesach we begin the countdown to Sinai. The mitzvah of *Sefirat HaOmer* (the counting of the “*Omer*”) instructs us to count the forty-nine days from Pesach to Shavuot. These were the days of our spiritual journey from enslavement in Egypt to the Revelation at Sinai.

Besides the excitement and anticipation that the counting of days both expresses and generates, there is a deeper reality that this counting reflects. By the time of the Exodus, the Jews in Egypt had sadly fallen to a very low spiritual level. Although the Jews did manage to maintain a rudimentary national identity, the corrupting influences of Egyptian culture had taken a heavy toll.

Consciously or not, over the years the Jews slowly assimilated the hedonistic Egyptian culture. In fact, the Midrash tells us that to angelic eyes the Jews were indistinguishable from the Egyptians. When the Red Sea came crashing down, the angels asked G-d, “Both the Jews and the Egyptians are pagans! Why should the Jews be saved and the Egyptians drowned?” Apparently, the worthiness of the Jews was, at that point in time, visible only to G-d Himself.

We are taught that there are fifty levels of spiritual impurity. One who descends into the fiftieth is unredeemable; it is the point of no return. The Jews had reached the forty-ninth and were teetering towards the fiftieth. It was at that very last moment that G-d came to rescue them and take them out of Egypt.

During the forty-nine days from Exodus to Sinai the Jews were cleansed level by level. It was a decontamination period to get the spiritually degrading Egyptian culture out of their system. The period culminated on the fiftieth day, when they reached a state of complete purity and were ready to receive the Torah. It is this day-by-day ascent from the depths of impurity that we are counting with

Sefirat HaOmer. Each day that we count represents another step away from Egyptian paganism and another step closer to the pure state necessary for receiving the Torah on Shavuot.

This is the classic understanding of the evolutionary period of our history; however, one piece of the puzzle doesn't fit. How can we say that the Jews were on such a low level at the time of the Exodus? We know that the Jews grew from their experience as slaves. The years of oppression and suffering ingrained into the Jewish soul an ability to feel other people's pain. Indeed, the Torah tells us that Egypt was the refinery that forged our national character (Deuteronomy 4:20). How are we to reconcile this greatness with the fact that the Jews were pagans when they left Egypt?

To satisfactorily answer this question, a basic distinction needs to be made. It was in Egypt that the Jewish heart was forged and it was there that we became a caring, giving people. This is true. But possessing a good heart is not the same as being spiritually pure. A pagan can also be a nice guy.

A fine character isn't good enough to merit Sinai. It is required, but insufficient. Purity of mind and soul is also necessary, for the Torah is the guidebook for achieving sanctity and sanctity can only thrive in an atmosphere of purity. We needed a forty-nine day spiritual dialysis in the desert to get Egyptian culture out of our system. Only after that maturing process could we stand at Mount Sinai and receive the Torah.

Our slavery in Egypt began a process of national growth that did not end with the Exodus. It continued on until we arrived at Sinai. On a deeper level, Shavuot is really the last day of Pesach. The festival of Pesach is incomplete until the purpose of the Exodus is fulfilled with the realization of our spiritual potential.

The formative events of our history were not frozen in the ancient past. They made indelible imprints into the fabric of Jewish time, and each year as we pass through these days history repeats itself. The process of Pesach / *Sefirat HaOmer* / Shavuot is the process of birth / maturity / consummation. On Pesach we were born as an empathetic people, during *Sefirat HaOmer* our hearts and minds matured, and on Shavuot we entered into a covenant with G-d. These events created a repeating holiday cycle that we relive and reinforce each and every year.

The Haggadah Revisited:

Finding Relevance in an Ancient Text

Rabbi Moshe Adatto

At times, the Pesach Seder has a ritualistic feeling to it. Everyone knows their lines – from the child who asks the Four Questions to the uncle who makes the same joke every year. We bring our props, from the traditional matzah and bitter herbs, to the more modern plague kits. However, the biggest question of the entire Seder is the one we don't ask – Why are we doing this again? Or, to put it in Seder lingo, “Why *isn't* this Seder different than all other Seders?”

Same Old Story?

Like most good questions, this question rests on an assumption so strong that we almost don't recognize it. In this case, the assumption is about the purpose of the Haggadah. After all, doesn't *everybody* know that the purpose of the Haggadah is to retell the story of the Exodus? Indeed, a superficial look at the facts seems to bear this out. Literally, Haggadah means ‘the telling over,’ the largest section of the Haggadah is called *Maggid* (which also means ‘telling over’), and this is the biblical mitzvah associated with our Pesach recitation: “And you shall tell your child on that day, ‘...G-d acted on my behalf when I left Egypt” (Exodus 13:8).¹

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And yet, we are left with a nagging feeling that there must be more to the Haggadah than telling the story. After all, do we really need to retell the story *again*? Surely we haven't forgotten it since last year! Perhaps our assumption needs to be reevaluated.

Haggadah Revisited

When we examine the Haggadah anew, we find certain aspects which don't seem to fit with our preconceptions about the purpose of this recitation. Firstly, why the emphasis on questions and answers? Indeed, the Talmud (*Pesachim* 116a) goes so far as to say that even a person who celebrates the Seder alone should ask himself the Four Questions.² Surely we are not asking ourselves questions in order to get any new information. Yet, if the point is to remind us of what we already know, the questions still seem like an awkward way of reminding ourselves about the Exodus. We could simply retell the story, and get on with dinner.

Furthermore, the Haggadah itself is clearly not satisfied with simply retelling the story:

...If G-d had not taken our fathers out of Egypt, we, our children, and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.

*...A person is obligated to view himself as if **he** left Egypt.*

With comments such as these, the Haggadah is asserting its personal relevance, refusing to be viewed as mere history.

Perhaps the most obvious proof that the Haggadah is about more than just the retelling of the story is seen in the flow of the Haggadah. Although the longest section of the Haggadah, *Maggid*, is named for the telling of the story, *Maggid* does not conclude with the end of the story; it continues with the beginning of Hallel, chapters from Psalms which proclaim G-d's praise. Not only does the Haggadah continue after the end of the Pesach story, but the story itself cannot even stand alone!

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At this point, it would not be rash to conclude that the retelling of the story, while clearly an integral part of the Seder recitation, is not the ultimate goal of the Haggadah, but only a major step in a greater process. As we follow the Haggadah on its journey beyond the story, we can rise above our preconceptions. This process will drastically improve our understanding of the Haggadah and Pesach as a whole.

Personal Praise

So, where does the story go? Let us listen, as the text speaks for itself. After finishing the story of the Exodus, the Haggadah segues into its claim of personal significance, that “A person is obligated to view himself as if *he* left Egypt.” The Haggadah then continues: “Therefore we are obligated to give thanks, praise, [and] laud... the One who has performed all of these miracles for our fathers and for us.” The goal is to praise G-d. However, the Haggadah is emphasizing that it is not enough to praise G-d from the intellectual awareness of the kindnesses that He performed for our forefathers; the praise must be personal praise of G-d for what He did for *us*! Hence, the Haggadah connects the personalization of the Exodus experience (“A person must view himself as if *he* left Egypt”) with the need to praise G-d (“*Therefore*, we must give thanks, praise, laud...”), because it is only through the personalization of the Exodus experience that we can achieve the personal praise which is the agenda of the evening.

We have now gained a new perspective on the retelling of the Exodus story. The obligation is to retell the story in a way that leads to a personal *hallel* (praise). However, this does not mean that the only goal is *hallel*. If that were true, the Torah commandment would have been to recite the Hallel, rather than to retell the story. Rather, the goal remains to retell the story, but to retell it in such a way as to relive the experience. By connecting the retelling of the story to *hallel*, the Haggadah ensures that we do not mistakenly assume that we fulfill our obligation with a dry, intellectual retelling of the story; it teaches us to relive the story! If we tell the story without feeling “obligated to give thanks, praise,

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[and] laud... the One who has performed all of these miracles for our fathers and for us," then we have missed the point.

Thanksgiving

With this in mind, we are now prepared to understand one very puzzling aspect the Haggadah text. The actual retelling of the Exodus story in the Haggadah is structured around expounding upon four verses in Deuteronomy which relate the story of the Exodus. At this point, the question is glaring: wouldn't it have been more appropriate to use verses from the Book of Exodus? In light of what we have learned the answer is clear. The verses the Haggadah takes from the Book of Deuteronomy were taken from the recitation of one who brings his first fruits to the Temple as an offering to G-d. The offering of the first fruits is an act of gratitude, and the accompanying declaration, which mentions the Exodus, is a statement of gratitude.³ It is specifically for this reason that these verses were chosen to be the foundation of our Pesach recitation. These verses function as an expression of gratitude, and therefore they are the most effective means of evoking feelings of personal gratitude at the Seder.⁴

Going Back in Time

Our new understanding of the mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus presents us with a problem: how does a person relive an experience that happened to his forefathers many centuries earlier? After all, *we* were not slaves in Egypt, and G-d did not free *us* from slavery. If we are to integrate the Haggadah's relevance and meaning into our lives, we must overcome this challenge.

Here we hit the crux of the matter. While it's true that as individuals you and I were never freed from Egypt, as a nation we were. It was the *nation* of Israel that was enslaved in Egypt, and it was the *nation* of Israel that G-d took out from Egypt.⁵ On the night of the Seder, the only way the events will be personally meaningful is if a person sees himself as a member of the eternal Jewish nation. Then he can view himself as if he was actually

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taken out of Egypt. His national identity was born in Egypt, and in that sense he was personally taken out of Egypt.

Our challenge as we prepare for the Seder experience has now shifted. No longer must we struggle to envision ourselves as slaves lifting heavy bricks in Egypt. Instead, we have to confront the reality of our Jewish identity. What does it mean to be part of the Jewish people? How important is it for me to identify as such? If I don't naturally feel it, how can I cultivate it? To answer these questions we need a sharp definition of the Jewish nation.

One Nation under G-d

The Jewish nation has its roots in the Exodus. Often we take the Exodus out of context and view it as one of G-d's social action projects – the Jews were enslaved in Egypt by the wicked Pharaoh and G-d took upon Himself the cause of the enslaved Jews and freed them. However, this perspective is flawed. Over 200 years before the slavery in Egypt began, G-d told Avraham that the Jews would be enslaved by a foreign power and that G-d would later redeem them.⁶ Clearly, G-d's interest in the Jews began before the enslavement.

In fact, G-d's interest in the Jews dates back to His relationship with the forefathers. In a world dominated by idolatry, devoid of worship of the One G-d, Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob stood up as individuals and dedicated themselves to G-d and His mission. In them, G-d found a family which had the potential to be the foundation of a nation imbued with commitment to this mission. The crucible of Egypt served as the test to determine whether this seed would sprout into a flower as a nation fully founded on and committed to this ideal. Thus, the Exodus was not so much about the Jews' freedom from slavery, as much as an opportunity for them to choose G-d as their master.⁷ Even when G-d initially sent Moshe to command Pharaoh to free the Jews, it was with the words, "Send out My nation, so that they will serve Me" (Exodus 7:16). This is the point of it all, the culmination of the whole enslavement. The unique definition of this new nation is present from its inception – a nation committed to serving G-d in this world.

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Ultimately, the Jews faced a serious choice when deciding whether or not to leave Egypt. They were not being offered the freedom to do whatever they wanted; they were offered the option of entering into the service of G-d. Although the meaning and beauty that this opportunity would add to their lives was immeasurable, it was still a daunting task and a difficult decision. In fact, the Midrash teaches that there were a large number of Jews who chose not to leave, and died during the plague of darkness.⁸ Those Jews who decided to leave dedicated their individual and communal existence to serving G-d and building a relationship with Him.⁹ This is the majesty of the Exodus – A people was formed whose essence was to connect with G-d!

Each year during our Seder, we struggle with the same core issue that faced our ancestors: do we prefer to “remain in Egypt,” continuing to live our lives as they are, or are we willing to dedicate ourselves to this lofty mission? When we decide to live beyond ourselves as individuals and take on this mission, we connect with the experience of leaving Egypt. We associate with the nation which underwent the experience, and personally undergo the same process. We *can* view ourselves as if *we* went out of Egypt!

Self-Made Millionaire

The importance of going through this process ourselves can be understood with a simple analogy. There are two ways to become a millionaire – a person can either earn a lot of money, or he can inherit his wealth. While both people have equal ability to spend their million dollars, we treat them differently. We usually accord the self-made millionaire much more respect than the inheritor because he did something active to acquire his wealth – he worked for it. In other words, we view the self-made millionaire as intrinsically a millionaire, because his wealth is due to his own actions. On the other hand, we view the inheritor as someone who happens to be a millionaire, not through any action of his own. The same is true with being Jewish. Everyone born a Jew is Jewish; we inherit that wealth from our parents. Without any action of our own, we are naturally part of the nation with the lofty mission of

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servant of G-d. However, like the millionaire by inheritance, that trait is not considered an intrinsic attribute because it did not come to us through any action of our own. However, we are presented with an opportunity every year on the Seder night – a chance to reenact the Exodus experience. We are faced with the same question which faced the Jews as they decided whether or not to leave Egypt: are we willing to dedicate our lives to G-d, to take on G-d's mission in this world, or not? If we emulate the Jews of the Exodus and choose to become servants of G-d, then, in addition to being Jews by birth, we are also Jews by choice – self-made millionaires!¹⁰

National Mission, Personal Praise

Now all the pieces fit together. Retelling the story does not teach us anything new; rather, it enables us to personally experience the Exodus. We reenact the Exodus, not by making a pilgrimage to Egypt, but by picturing ourselves as part of the Jewish people who were simultaneously freed and created when G-d took them out of Egypt. By viewing myself as a member of that nation, I recognize that G-d took *me* out of Egypt, and gave *me* the opportunity to build a relationship with Him. I can now honestly offer heartfelt, personal praise.

This cannot be a once-in-a-lifetime event. Maintaining this level of Jewish identity and relationship with G-d requires a yearly rededication. This is what makes every Seder unique. Although this year's Seder may look like last year's, that's only on the surface. Internally, a transformation is taking place – we are reconnecting to the national mission. This is the essence of the Seder experience. By making a new and deeper commitment to G-d and the Jewish people, this year's Seder truly can be different than all other Seders.

¹ See Maimonides, Book of Mitzvot, Positive Mitzvah 157.

² Although the verse seems to only obligate parents to retell the story to their children, the Midrash deduces from the text of the Torah that the obligation exists independent of the presence of children. See Maimonides, Book of Mitzvot, Positive Mitzvah 157.

³ See Rashi on Deuteronomy 26:3.

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⁴ See *Da'at Chochmah U'Mussar*, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1875-1936), pg. 125.

⁵ See Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Loewe, 1526-1609) in *Gevurot Hashem*, Chapter 3 that G-d only freed “the nation.” That is why there is so much emphasis on the number 600,000 (this is the number of Jewish males between the ages of 20-60, every time they were counted in the desert). This number is significant in Jewish thought as the number that defines the Jewish nation, and therefore the Jews could only be freed when they reached that magic number (see Maharal for the mystical significance of 600,000). See also *Biurei Haggadah*, Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, pg. 1.

⁶ See Genesis 15:13

⁷ See *Yalkut Shimoni, Parshat Bo* 208 that before the Jews left Egypt, Pharaoh said to Moshe, “Behold you are under your own power; you are in G-d’s domain.” At the very moment of their freedom they were placed in G-d’s service. Thus, on some level, the Jews were not freed, so much as traded. However, the analogy is not perfect; the Jews made the choice to be G-d’s servants, and weren’t traded to G-d against their will.

⁸ *Shemot Rabbah* 14:3

⁹ See *Gevurot Hashem*, Chapter 35; *Pachad Yitzchak* (Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, 1906-1980), Pesach 42 that the Pascal Lamb that the Jews brought as an offering before in Egypt functioned as the mechanism whereby the Jews became servants of G-d. This event more than any other precipitated the Exodus, because the goal of the redemption was in order for the Jews to become a nation focused on serving G-d.

¹⁰ See *Pachad Yitzchak*, Pesach 3:2

Four Patterns of Four

Rabbi Dani Kermaier

Patterns of four keep reappearing throughout the Seder: the four cups of wine, the Four Questions and the Four Sons. These three sets of four help establish the central themes of the Seder night. And they find their source in a biblical fourth set of four:

Therefore say to the Children of Israel [in My name], ‘I am G-d.

I will bring you out (והוצאתי) from under the burdens of Egypt and

I will deliver you (והצלתי) from their slavery.

I will liberate you (וגאלתי) with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

I will take you to myself (ולקחתי) as a nation and be your G-d. You will then know that I am Hashem your G-d who brings you out from under the burdens of Egypt.

Exodus 6:6-7

These four expressions of redemption declare that the Jewish people will undergo a four-phased process toward freedom. G-d introduces this process with a powerful statement:

G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, ‘I am *Hashem*’ (the Tetragrammaton). Even when I appeared to Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob it was as the Almighty G-d, and the name *Hashem* I did not

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make known to them. I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan... I have also heard the cries of anguish from the Children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep enslaved, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the Children of Israel, 'I am Hashem and

I will bring you out...

I will deliver you...

I will liberate you...

I will take you to myself as a nation...

Exodus 6:2-7

G-d is declaring that a new chapter in the world is about to unfold: "I am *Hashem*." G-d's reintroduction to the Jewish people will not be with a veiled presence as He related to Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through the four-step redemption process, G-d appears like we've never seen Him before, revealed and awesome.¹

According to the Midrash, the four cups of wine at the Seder correspond to these phases (*Breishit Rabbah* 88). A closer analysis will show how each of the four cups expresses the corresponding stage of redemption.

The first expression is והוצאתי, "I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt." This is the initial step towards freedom. G-d started off the redemption process by forcing the Egyptians to ease the cruelty that made the Jews' slavery unbearable. Although the Jewish people were still slaves, this first improvement in their quality of life was transformative. It was like going from night to day. The first of the four cups of wine represents this transformation.

The first cup of wine is the *Kiddush*, the function of which is to declare a sanctification of time. Time is a precious commodity and it is the defining aspect of freedom. A slave's time is not his own. Furthermore, the flow of time is meaningless for a slave who has no hope for freedom. Each monotonous day melds into the next, without distinction. We raise our first cup of wine

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and declare the holiness of time. We thus break the first barrier barring the path to liberty.

The second expression of redemption is והצלתִי, “I will deliver you from their slavery.” In this stage, the Jews were freed from slavery; freedom was no longer a wish or hope, it had become a reality. Although the unrelenting workload ceased, Pharaoh still controlled the Jewish people.

The second cup of wine is raised as we tell the story of the Exodus and recite Hallel, when we praise G-d for all that he has done for us. We hold our second cup of wine, joyously recall the story of the exodus and ring out the words of praise and thanks in Hallel. It is only after we gain our freedom that we can tell the story and praise G-d.

The third expression of redemption is וגאלתי, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.” Here, G-d finally took the Jews out of Egypt. Just as in English, the Hebrew "גאל", redeem, has two meanings. It can either mean to rescue from captivity or to recover ownership of a lost item. This second usage appears elsewhere in the Torah. We are told that the relative of a person forced to sell his family estate as a result of poverty has the right to buy it back from the buyer even if he's not interested in selling. When the relative exercises this right, he is described as a "גואל", a redeemer. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh explains that when G-d took us out of Egypt He was also acting as a relative who “redeems.” Just as the family member stands up for the rights of his relative, so too G-d stood up for our rights. In this way G-d established a familial relationship with the Jewish nation. “So said G-d, ‘My firstborn son is Israel!’” (Exodus 4:22).

We drink the third cup of wine after completing the *Birchat HaMazon*, the grace after the meal. The blessing after meals is recited over this cup of wine and it expresses our appreciation to G-d for the food that He provides. Only after we are sated by a meal can we fully recognize what G-d has done for us. Just as a caring “relative,” G-d steps in to provide support when we are in need; and we are always in need! G-d did not only redeem us at the Exodus. G-d is our constant redeemer since without His daily sustenance we could not exist.

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The fourth expression of redemption is וּלְקַחְתִּי, “I will take you to me for a nation and be your G-d. You will then know that I am Hashem your G-d who brings you out from under the burdens of Egypt.” Even after leaving Egypt and becoming our “relative,” the redemption is still not over. In the final stage, G-d took the relationship to a whole new level. By taking us as a nation, G-d “married” the Jews, forging a covenantal relationship that places responsibilities on both partners.

As long as we lack a Temple in Jerusalem as a home for the Divine Presence on Earth, G-d is somewhat distant and hidden and our relationship is limited. Our relationship will only reach its climax when our current exile ends with the ultimate redemption. This idea is indicated by our verse: “I will take you to me for a nation and be your G-d. *You will then know* that I am Hashem your G-d who brings you out from under the burdens of Egypt.” It is only with the consummation of this stage of redemption in the utopian future that we will fully appreciate the G-d who took us out of Egypt.

The fourth cup is taken for the completion of the Hallel in which we focus on the future redemption that we long for. We recognize that as much as we feel close to G-d; only upon experiencing the final redemption and the accompanying revelation, will we consummate our relationship. It is only then that we will be able to properly sing His praises.

II

There is a biblical mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus at the Seder. Curiously, the Torah repeats this mitzvah four times. And each time the Torah introduces the mitzvah with a unique theoretical parent-child dialogue.

In the future your child may ask you, “What are the rituals, rules and laws that Hashem our G-d has commanded you? ...” (Deuteronomy 6:20).

When your children ask you, “What is this work to you? ...” (Exodus 12:26).

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In the future, when your son will ask you, “What is this? ...” (Exodus 13:14).

On that day, you must tell your child, “It is because of this that G-d acted for me when I left Egypt” (Exodus 13:8).

The author of the Haggadah explains that each of these verses deals with a different type of child. Using broad strokes, we can categorize people into four basic groups: The wise, the evil, the immature and the indifferent. Each of these children expresses his feelings differently and, if we listen closely, we can hear their disparate voices in the Four Questions.

Before we tell the Exodus story at the Seder, the youngest child stands up and asks the Four Questions:

Why is it that on all other nights we eat either bread or matzah, but on this night we eat only matzah?

Why is it that on all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but on this night we eat only bitter herbs?

Why is it that on all other nights we do not dip our herbs even once, but on this night we dip them twice?

Why is it that on all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night we eat in a reclining position?

We would suggest that each of these four questions corresponds to a different one of the Four Sons described earlier. And each of these sets can be further linked to a corresponding stage of redemption, albeit in reverse order.

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The Wise Son, the First Question and the Fourth Cup

In the future, your child may ask you, “What are the rituals, rules and laws that Hashem our G-d has commanded you? ...” (Deuteronomy 6:20).

Why is it that on all other nights we eat either bread or matzah, but on this night we eat only matzah?

As we see from the above verse, the wise son asks about the mitzvot which G-d has commanded us. His interest in the intricacies of law and observance expresses a deep commitment to Judaism. This is the theme spelled out by the fourth cup of wine and the fourth expression of redemption, וְלִקְחֶתִּי, “I will take you to me for a nation and be your G-d.” Relationships are based on commitments and the wise son wants to know precisely what they are. He therefore asks about the mitzvah of matzah, a mitzvah which requires a scrupulous attention to detail. Great care is necessary to create a matzah which is kosher for Pesach. Baking matzah is representative of the diligence necessary for all mitzvot,² and this is what interests the wise son.

The Wicked Son, the Second Question and the Third Cup

When your children ask you, “What is this work to you? ...” (Exodus 12:26).

Why is it that on all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs, but on this night we eat only bitter herbs?

With his putdown, “What is this work to you?” the wicked son questions the value of these commitments to G-d. He does not appreciate our relationship with G-d and he views the Torah commandments as “work.” The second of the Four Questions, “Why on this night we eat only bitter herbs,” is an expression of the wicked son’s negative attitude to the Torah. He sees only bitterness and hardship. We rebuke the wicked son with the biting response, “If you would have been there, G-d wouldn’t have

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redeemed you!” The message of the third cup is the third expression of redemption, וּגְאַלְתִּי, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.” G-d demonstrated his relationship with us by acting as our redeemer. It is this relationship with G-d that the wicked son neither merits nor wishes to pursue.

The Simple Son, the Third Question and the Second Cup

In the future, when your son will ask you, “What is this? ...” (Exodus 13:14).

Why is it that on all other nights we do not dip our herbs even once, but on this night we dip them twice?

The simple son asks, “What is this?” This is the question of a confused soul. This son lacks direction and is wandering in his exploration of Judaism without a clear path. This connects with the third of the Four Questions, “Why on this night do we dip vegetables twice when normally we don’t dip at all?” The vegetables have no obvious connection to Pesach, we eat them all year long. The point of dipping the vegetable is not easily understood.³ This corresponds to the second cup and the second stage of the four-part redemption process, וְהִצַּלְתִּי, “I will deliver you from their slavery.” This was a confusing time for the Jewish people. Slavery had come to an end; however, we weren’t liberated yet; we were still under Pharaoh’s rule. Our future was uncertain. The Torah instructs us to answer the simple son, “With a mighty hand G-d took you out of Egypt from the house of slavery.” We tell him that even at this stage, when the future was so unclear, we still have faith that G-d would not forsake us.

The Son Who Doesn’t Know How To Ask, the Fourth Question and the First Cup

On that day, you must tell your child, “It is because of this that G-d acted for me when I left Egypt” (Exodus 13:8).

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Why is it that on all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night we only eat in a reclining position?

In this fourth parent-child dialogue, the dialogue is missing. All we see is the response to the child. This indicates that the fourth son doesn't even know where to start. He does not understand why G-d took us out of Egypt at all and he is silent. We respond by pointing to the *marror*, a symbol of servitude, and to the matzah, a symbol of freedom, and we tell him, "It is because of *this* that G-d acted for me when I left Egypt." It was for both servitude and freedom that G-d took us out of Egypt.

The final of the four questions focuses on this duality of slavery and freedom. Why must we lean—in the manner of free individuals—while eating and drinking on this night? We are commanded to recline? The fulfillment of a command is an expression of subservience while reclining is an expression of freedom. In fact, it is precisely this duality of the service of G-d that we wish to express.

This contrast is seen in the first cup of wine and the expression והוצאתי, "I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt." This stage of redemption underscored the stark difference between oppressive slavery and living as a slave under a caring master. In a similar way, we can fully enjoy the pleasures of freedom while being under the subservience of G-d. When we show the child both the matzah and the *marror*, he learns to appreciate what G-d did for us by taking us under His Wing.

The four sets of four come together to set the tone of the Seder. The Four Questions of the Four Sons rededicate our commitment to depth and meaning in Judaism. And the four-fold redemption process expressed by the four cups of wine inspires a yearning for the future redemption and the Third Temple.

Next year in Jerusalem!

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¹ It is interesting to note that the Tetragrammaton, the four letter name of G-d, is another instance of the number four. Its mystical implications are beyond the scope of this article.

² In fact, the Hebrew spelling of the words “matzah” and “mitzvah” are identical (מצות) even though their vowelization (*nikud*) is different.

³ The symbolic act of the dipping into salt water reminds us of the tears we cried as slaves in Egypt, but the vegetable itself has no apparent meaning.

Hallel:

To Praise or Not to Praise?

Rabbi Yaacov Benzaquen

Pesach is a holiday in which we celebrate the Exodus and praise G-d for the miracles He performed for us. While we think of 'praise' in very simple terms, there are many subtleties to the concept of praise in Judaism. Not all praise is created equal.

One would imagine that the more we praise the Almighty the better. However, in Judaism things are never simple. A Talmudic teaching challenges our naïve assumption. The Talmud states, "One who recites Hallel (a collection of chapters from the Psalms) every day is a reviler and a blasphemer!" (*Shabbat* 118b). Putting aside, for the moment, the difficulties of dealing with such a radical teaching, on its most basic level this statement seems to discourage praising G-d daily. This is, of course, an impossibility. The entire book of Psalms sings G-d's praises, and many of its chapters are an integral part of the daily prayers. What does the Talmud mean?

Rabbi Avrohom Grodzinsky, in his *mussar* work *Toras Avrohom*, identifies four different types of praise. The basic level of praise is that of the *pesukei dezimrah* verses, recited as part of the regular Morning Prayer service. This comprises a selection of Psalms where King David extols G-d for the miracles of everyday life and the natural world. Rabbi Grodzinsky points out that with minimal preparation we can reach the level necessary for this type

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of praise. Our sages instituted a blessing to be recited before these Psalms as a preamble to *pesukei dezimrah*. One blessing is sufficient to put us in the right spiritual orientation for *pesukei dezimrah*.

On Shabbat and the holidays the *pesukei dezimrah* is more extensive. The additional Psalms recited on these days praise G-d not only for natural miracles, but also for some supernatural ones. One Psalm in particular in this section stands out. It is described as *Hallel HaGadol*, the Great Praise. It recounts both “natural” events and supernatural miracles. The creation of the heavens, the splitting of the sea, the punishment of the Egyptians by the slaying of their firstborn are a few of the miracles mentioned in this Psalm. G-d opens our spiritual eyes on Shabbat and the holidays, allowing us to perceive His involvement in the world more clearly. This higher level of perception engenders an ability to offer a higher level of praise than during the rest of the week, which translates into our recitation of these additional Psalms on Shabbat and holidays.

On certain holidays we recite *Hallel HaShalem*, the Complete Hallel. This Hallel praises G-d for miracles and redemptions from across the breadth of history and also redemptions that will happen in the future. It mentions the Exodus from Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, the giving of the Torah, the future resurrection of the dead, and the Messianic Era. This type of Hallel is reserved either for holidays called *moadim* (lit. appointed days) or for days when we commemorate great miracles. It is the unique holiness of these days that enables and empowers us to offer the *Hallel HaShalem*, the Complete Hallel.¹

The fourth and highest form of praise is *shirah*, pure song. The level of *shirah* is not attainable by all people. Only by experiencing great miracles and salvation firsthand can one break out into such a song of praise. These songs are the deepest expressions of feelings of awe and appreciation to the Almighty. Moshe, Miriam and the Jewish people sang such songs at the Red Sea, Devorah and Barak sang such songs after the defeat of Sissrah and his army,² and the barren Chana sang such a song upon the birth of her son Shmuel.³

The basic principle is that it is the situation that determines the type of praise that is appropriate. We are not always ready to

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sing *Hallel HaShalem*, or even *Hallel HaGadol*. If a person recites *Hallel HaShalem* every day he is praising G-d without being cognizant of the revelation of G-d as described in the Hallel he is saying. This turns the *Hallel HaShalem* into mere lip service. This is why the Talmud states that reciting Hallel daily is comparable to blasphemy, for to speak of G-d's wonders in a nonchalant, unappreciative way is sacrilegious.

II

On Pesach we commemorate our freedom from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The Talmud says that the Jewish People can fully serve G-d only when they are autonomous (*Megillah* 14a). Only after liberation from the servitude of Pharaoh could the Jews become the servants of G-d. As a result, we serve G-d with the praise of the *Hallel HaShalem* on Pesach every year.

Being that the Jewish people left Egypt on the first day of Pesach and crossed the Red Sea seven days later, we would have expected to recite the Complete Hallel on each of the seven⁴ days of Pesach, or at the very least the first and seventh days. However, we find that Hallel is recited only on the first day⁵ of Pesach. Why is this?

Furthermore, on Sukkot, *Hallel HaShalem* is recited daily throughout the entire holiday. The status of both Pesach and Sukkot is identical: the Torah calls both a *moed*, and work is equally forbidden on Sukkot and Pesach. Why do we recite *Hallel HaShalem* on each of the eight days of Sukkot but only on the first day of Pesach?

The Talmud states that, in Israel, the *Hallel HaShalem* is only required on eighteen days of the year (*Arachin* 10a).⁶ They are the eight days of Sukkot (including Shemini Atzeret), the eight days of Chanukah, one day of Shavuot and the first day of Pesach.⁷ The Talmud explains that Hallel is only recited on days that fit two criteria. They need to be both a “*moed*” (appointed day) and a day of rest from *melacha* (creative work). Pesach, Sukkot and Shavuot fit both these criteria, whereas *Rosh Chodesh* (the first day of the Hebrew month) and Shabbat are each missing one condition, therefore Hallel is not required on those days.⁸

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Based on this, the Talmud (*Arachin* 10b) provides a technical answer to our question. On each day of Sukkot a different set of sacrifices was offered in the Temple, whereas on Pesach identical sacrifices were offered each day of the holiday. Each day's Temple service expresses the nature of that day's sanctity. If two days share the same set of sacrifices it means that they present the same sanctity and the same type of opportunity to serve the Almighty. If these days are consecutive, they are considered a single unit and not independent occasions. A new *Hallel HaShalem* is recited only on days that present distinct opportunities and not simply extended ones.

One holiday, however, does not seem to follow the rules. Chanukah is neither a *moed*, nor is work forbidden on it, yet *Hallel HaShalem* is recited on all eight days of Chanukah. The Talmud (*ibid*) explains that the reciting of *Hallel HaShalem* on Chanukah was established because of the miracle that occurred during those days. The celebration of a miracle is reason enough for the recitation of *Hallel HaShalem*. On days when we are commemorating a great miracle of salvation, we recite the *Hallel HaShalem* as an expression of gratitude to G-d for that salvation.

Our old question has returned to life. The last day of Pesach commemorates the great miracle of the splitting of the sea, certainly a greater miracle than that which occurred on Chanukah. So why is there no *Hallel HaShalem* on the last day of Pesach?

The *Shibolei HaLeket*⁹ offers an original explanation for why Hallel is not recited on the seventh day of Pesach. On the seventh day of Pesach the Jewish People crossed the Red Sea. As they reached the other shore, the sea walls collapsed, drowning the Egyptian soldiers, chariots and horses under tons of rushing water. The Jews looked back in relief that they had finally escaped the oppressors who had terrorized and enslaved them for generations. Although we commemorate this miracle as part of the Pesach holiday, we are warned against rejoicing in the death of our enemies. As the Mishnah records: "Shmuel HaKatan taught: In the downfall of your enemy you shall not be happy and in his stumbling you shall not rejoice" (*Avot* 4:24). In line with this, says the *Shibolei HaLeket*, it is inappropriate to sing G-d's praises for the miraculous events that killed Egyptian soldiers. Complete Hallel is therefore not recited on this day.

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Our sages tell us that the angels in G-d's court are constantly singing His praise. This is especially true when great things happen to the Jewish People. On the day that the Jewish people crossed the Red Sea, the angels prepared to sing G-d's praises for this great miracle, but G-d silenced them. The Talmud quotes G-d rebuking the angels, "The works of My hands are drowning in the sea and you want to sing My praises?" (*Megillah* 10b).

How can this be? G-d drowned Egyptians as a punishment for what they had done to the Jews. Their deaths were well deserved and merited a miraculous display of G-d's Justice. The angels can't sing G-d's praises because G-d's handiwork is drowning in the sea?!

Every human being, even one who has participated in crimes that call for his demise, is a work of G-d's hands. He may be guilty of murder or worse, yet it is inappropriate for anyone to praise his Creator for his death, even if it brings about the redemption of those he was oppressing.¹⁰ This is the profound respect Judaism shows for the human being who was created in the image of G-d.

III

There is one last question that we must address. Although the angels were not allowed to sing G-d's praises, and we too do not recite *Hallel HaShalem* as we celebrate this day, the Jewish People themselves did burst into song as they looked back upon the Egyptians drowning in the sea. "Thus Moshe and the sons of Israel sang this *shirah* (song) to G-d..." (Exodus 16).

Why was it that the Jewish people could sing G-d's praises, but the angels could not? Why can't we sing the *Hallel HaShalem* today if the Jewish people could sing the Song at the Sea?

After the Jewish people safely crossed the Red Sea and were forever free from the oppression of Egypt, they expressed their thanksgiving by means of the Song at the Sea. Although, as descendants of those who were delivered from the hands of the Egyptians, we also need to express our thanksgiving to G-d, there is a profound difference between our need to say Hallel and our ancestors' need to sing *shirah* by the shores of Red Sea.

Had our ancestors not said *shirah*, they would have lost the unique opportunity to fully appreciate and internalize the

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supernatural event of the splitting of the sea. It was a one-time event that demonstrated G-d's glory and His personal involvement with His people. It was necessary for those who witnessed it to verbalize this experience and its significance. By putting their feelings into words and song, the Jewish People came to recognize the tremendous love that G-d demonstrated by saving their lives and changing the course of history. As sensitive as we need to be not to praise G-d when His creatures are dying, we could not neglect our responsibility to appreciate His love. The need to assimilate G-d's revelation as one experiences it, supersedes any other consideration.

¹ There are times when a partial Hallel is recited, and parts of Psalms 115 and 116 are omitted. This Hallel is not even a rabbinic obligation, it is only a custom. (Some don't even recite a *brachah* on this Hallel.) A partial Hallel is recited on *Rosh Chodesh* (first of the Hebrew month) and from the second (in Israel) or third (outside Israel) day of Pesach until the end of the holiday.

² Judges Chap. 5

³ Samuel I Chap. 2

⁴ Biblically, Pesach is seven days long, but Jews in the Diaspora celebrate it for eight days.

⁵ The first day in Israel and the first two days in the Diaspora.

⁶ In the Diaspora, *Hallel HaShalem* is recited on 21 days, since Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot have one additional day of Hallel each. This is due to the additional day of celebration for each pilgrimage holiday outside of Israel.

⁷ In Israel and in many communities in the Diaspora, Hallel is recited on the first night of Pesach twice and once the following morning.

⁸ There is a custom, however, to recite Hallel on *Rosh Chodesh*.

⁹ Classic work on Jewish law and custom authored by Zedekiah Ben Avraham the Physician in 13th Century Italy.

¹⁰ The reciting of the partial Hallel on these days (a *minhag*) is not directly associated with the tragedy. See *Torah Temimah* Exodus 14:20, no. 9.

The Tyranny of Numbers and the Omer Count

Rabbi Joey Felsen

A unique mitzvah first appears on the night of the second Seder. On that night, we begin counting “the *Omer*.” We proclaim that day to be “day one of the *Omer*,” initiating a counting of days that continues all the way to the holiday of Shavuot. This mitzvah is about more than just that time of the year; it teaches us something about our lives that affects us all year round.

We first count the days and then also the weeks that make up this period, which culminates, after seven weeks, with the forty-ninth day. The significance of this time period is twofold. First, it has holiday significance, as it spans the time from the second night of Pesach until Shavuot, the holiday commemorating the revelation on Mount Sinai. Second, it connects two unique grain offerings that the Jews brought in the Holy Temple: the handful of barley brought on the second day of Pesach and the two loaves of bread made from fine wheat flour brought on Shavuot. The barley offering of the second day of Pesach is the “*Omer*” offering, for which the seven-week period is named.

Even a brief sketch of this intriguing mitzvah raises several questions. Why are we counting these days? Why do the offerings of Pesach and Shavuot switch from barley grain to wheat bread? Further, the counting of the *Omer* has two separate themes – the link between Pesach and Shavuot and the connection

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between the two offerings. Is there any connection between these two themes? Apparently, there is more to this mitzvah than meets the eye.

Before we can probe the depths of the *Omer* counting, we must first analyze Judaism's general approach to counting and numbers. As we see in the mitzvah of taking a census, Judaism is not at all fond of counting people:

When you take a census of the Children of Israel to determine their numbers, each one shall be counted by giving G-d an atonement offering for his life. In this manner, they will not be stricken by a plague when they are counted. Everyone who passes through the census shall give a half shekel of the sacred shekel...

Exodus 30:12-13

The Torah is prescribing a specific method for taking a census, and it threatens a plague if the Jews fail to follow the procedure. Based on these verses, the Talmud forbids counting individuals directly (*Yoma* 22b). To this day, religious Jews take this admonition seriously and refrain from using numbers when counting people. Why? What's so bad about counting people?

When a number is ascribed to someone or to something, a limitation is placed on that person or object. A role or status is assigned. It may only be in the abstract, but a label it is and labels are limiting. Can someone who defines themselves as an eight aspire to be a ten? But the potential evil of assigning numbers extends far beyond that. As we know from our history, assigning a number to a person can dehumanize them.

II

In Jewish thought, numbers are no trivial matter. Numbers can help us identify relationships we otherwise would not see. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet corresponds to a specific

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number. As a result, every Hebrew word is also a number: the sum of the number values of its letters. When we discover a numerical equivalence between two words, the correspondence often indicates a connection between the two concepts that the words represent.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*. The word “*maitzar*” means a place of constriction and confinement. Interestingly, the numerical value of the word *Mitzrayim*, 380, is the same as the numerical value of the word *Mispar*, which means “number.” This could be taken to mean that when we celebrate our Exodus from Egypt, we are celebrating our liberation from the confinement of a number.

Egypt was a society that was completely self-contained. The Nile River irrigated the land and the Egyptians did not need to pray for rain. In the ancient world, the need for rain typically forced a relationship with a higher power or powers. Dependence on forces beyond human control forces man to realize his relative place in the universe. Lacking such an impetus, Egyptian society never had to search heavenward to find divine favor that would grant them their sustenance and survival.¹

Egypt’s independence was not limited to its agricultural growth; it was also financially self-sufficient. Many years earlier, Joseph had amassed the entire region’s wealth through his prophetic plan of stockpiling grain to offset the years of famine (Genesis 47:13-26). Presumably, this wealth furthered the Egyptians’ sense of autonomy and lessened their need to rely on G-d.

Furthermore, even nature was not seen as a limiting force. Magic and sorcery were commonplace, further disconnecting Egyptian society from any relationship with a creator deity.² This is the spiritual desert to which G-d exiled the Jews.

The spiritual emptiness of Egypt stifled the Jews’ relationship with their G-d as well. Their potential for religious growth was limited in Egypt. A number can be a metaphor for this type of confinement, and thus gaining freedom from Egypt can be described as freedom from the limitation of a “number.”

III

This appreciation of the relationship between Egypt and the limiting nature of numbers makes the mitzvah of counting the *Omer* all the more perplexing. The last thing we should do is assign numbers to these days and count! What do we gain by counting the forty-nine days from the holiday of Pesach to the holiday of Shavuot?

This is the paradox of counting. We have seen that ascribing a number can impose a limitation. Conversely, ascribing a number can also be very useful. A string of numbers creates an association between disparate parts. By assigning a sequence of numbers, we impose order and allow each part to contribute to a greater whole. Numbers are both limiting and liberating.

At no time did the Jews need the benefit of counting more than between the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah. The trip from Egypt to Sinai was about more than covering the physical distance; it was at that time that the Jews had to ascend from a non-spiritual existence to the apex of our collective spiritual destiny. Part of that process necessitated a new look at how to approach each day of life. As slaves in Egypt, time was cyclical, with no beginning or end. The same timeless routine, day in and day out. By attaching numbers to the days, the Jews acknowledged the order of time, the world and their lives. And with order comes the possibility for progress and growth.

This is also the meaning behind the *Omer* offering itself. An “*Omer*” is a measurement of dry volume that is equal to the average person’s food consumption for one day.³ On its most basic level, by offering the *Omer* on the altar, we thank G-d for providing us with sustenance. But the significance of the *Omer* runs deeper. Because the *Omer* comes from the first of the springtime barley harvest, its offering demonstrates our recognition of order. By marking the stages of the agricultural cycle we connect ourselves to the order that G-d has imposed on our world. The need for this recognition is so essential that we are

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told not to partake of any grain from the new season until the *Omer* offering is brought (Leviticus 23:14).

We can now begin to understand why the offering switches from barley to wheat. The Talmud describes barley, even barley offerings, as animal fodder (*Sotah* 14a). In contrast, products made from wheat flour are considered to be worthy of human consumption. By the time the Jews left Egypt, their humanity had been all but stripped from them. Spiritually speaking, they were comparable to animals, so on Pesach we bring a barley offering that consists of just grain. From that low point, the Jews began the arduous task of elevating themselves back into refined individuals and recreating a relationship with G-d. We finally achieved our national destiny at Sinai and with it we regained our dignity. On Shavuot we were finally worthy of bread made of wheat. This is why we are commanded to bring two whole loaves on Shavuot and not just a handful of grain.

The journey from Egypt to Sinai could not be completed in a day; it required an orderly process of growth. Each day of the journey from barley to wheat, from animal fodder to bread, from Exodus to Revelation, is counted. For with each passing day we rose ever closer to achieving our goal – becoming the holy nation we were destined to be.

IV

As we recount the story of Pesach, we should try to look beyond the physical freedom from Egypt and focus on the process that developed us into a nation under G-d. We left the confinement of Egypt, which limited our ability to connect to anything beyond our perceived reality, and began a journey toward spiritual fulfillment that culminated at Sinai. Counting each day allowed us to ensure a proper pace for our growth.

This was not a one-time historical event. Each year, we enter this period intent on climbing the forty-nine levels of spiritual growth to be worthy of receiving the Torah on Shavuot. Each day must flow from the day before and prepare us for the

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tomorrow that follows. Without assigning numbers, we would live each day independently and we would not reap the benefits of a cumulative sum. It is only by converting the days of the *Omer* into weeks of preparation that we continually merit to receive the Torah again each year.

The *Omer* teaches us that we cannot conquer personal challenges in a single day; it is only through the accumulation of days and weeks of continued effort that we can anticipate any lasting growth. The *Omer* encourages us to free ourselves from “numbers” and depart from self-definitions that impose artificial stereotypes and limitations. Finally, the *Omer* counting carries us from the sub-human existence of Egypt all the way to the exalted heights of Sinai.

¹ See Deuteronomy 11:10-12 where the Torah contrasts Israel with Egypt in regard to its water source. As a result, the Torah states that Israel is a “land that the eyes of G-d are focused on from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.”

² See Exodus 7:8-13; See also *Yalkut Shimoni, Va'eira* 7:181 that when G-d told Aaron to turn his staff into a snake to prove to Pharaoh that G-d had sent Moshe and Aaron to free the Jews, Pharaoh laughed, saying, “All of Egypt is full of magicians! Would you bring straw to a land filled with straw?!”

³ See Leviticus 23:10. See also Exodus 16:16 that the *Omer* was enough food for one person for one day.

A Torah of Kindness: Shavuot, Ruth and the Conversion Process

Rabbi Menachem Spira

The Torah establishes three annual festivals for the Jewish people. First mentioned is Pesach, a celebration of the time that G-d took the Jewish people out of Egypt. The last festival mentioned is Sukkot, a celebration commemorating our dwelling in *sukkot* (huts) as we traveled through the desert. However, there is a lack of clarity about the second festival, Shavuot.

The Torah tells us that it comes forty-nine days after Pesach, yet there is nothing in the text that explicitly refers to leaving Egypt. And though we recognize Shavuot as the day that G-d gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai, the Torah never explicitly states this fact either. We are left feeling somewhat hollow, as though we are denied a clear understanding of what this festival of Shavuot is meant to celebrate. But we are not without recourse. As always, we can learn the holiday's true meaning by digging deeper. In the case of this festival, we can learn much by understanding the texts we read on Shavuot, the mitzvot mentioned in proximity to Shavuot, and what we read in the Torah verses immediately prior to the Jews accepting the Torah. What we find is revealing. Rather than being simply a commemoration of the singular act of receiving the Torah, Shavuot is about the proper *preparation* for receiving the Torah. And what is this preparation? In a word—kindness. Just as on Pesach we celebrate our freedom,

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and on Sukkot we celebrate our shelter, on Shavuot we celebrate our altruism, the quality that ultimately prepared us to accept the Torah.

The first hint of the true meaning of Shavuot comes from the Megillah of *Ruth*. We look to the readings and customs of the holidays to provide clues about the holiday's deeper message. For holidays which have a Megillah reading, we must look to the theme of its Megillah. For example, the Megillah of *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs) is a metaphorical love story portraying the beginning of the intimate relationship between G-d and the Jewish people. This is why it is read on Pesach which marks the beginning of that relationship. The Megillah of *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes) which derides materialism, is appropriately read on Sukkot, the harvest time, when one must recognize that the purpose of wealth is to be used in the service of G-d. On Shavuot we read the Megillah of *Ruth*, written by the great prophet Shmuel. To gain a deeper appreciation of Shavuot we will analyze this Megillah. Here is a synopsis:

Megillat Ruth tells the story of the family of Elimelech of the tribe of Judah, in the days of the Judges. The successful Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Machlon and Chilion, left Beit Lechem [Bethlehem], where there was a famine, and settled in the fields of Moab. There, the two sons married Moabite women - Orpah and Ruth. Orpah and Ruth were princesses, daughters of Eglon, king of Moab. Elimelech and his two sons lost their wealth and died before their time, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law destitute and alone. Naomi, bereft of both her husband and her two sons, decided to return home to Israel, and asked Ruth and Orpah to return to their parents' home in Moab.

But Ruth refuses to separate from Naomi: "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back from following you. Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people, and your G-d is my G-d. Where you die I will die, and there

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I will be buried. Thus may G-d do to me, and so may He do more, if anything but death separates me from you” (Ruth 1:16-17).

The fact that Ruth refuses to leave Naomi, proclaiming, “Your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d...” identifies Ruth as one of the first converts to Judaism. Despite Naomi's warning that she might never be able to remarry and pursue a "normal" life, Ruth decides to join the Jewish people, leaving her homeland, her culture, her security and her royal status behind. All she could expect in the future was a life of loneliness and poverty. This great act establishes Ruth as the Torah seeker par excellence and she is held up as the shining model of proper Torah acceptance.¹ The story continues:

Naomi had a wealthy relative named Boaz. The Torah obligates the Jewish farmer to allow widows and the impoverished to glean grain from his crop, and Ruth qualified as both. Ruth met Boaz when she was gathering in his field. As Boaz was a relative of Elimelech's family, he wished to continue the line of her late husband, so that Elimelech's family tree would not come to an end.² He marries Ruth, and the child born of this union is Oved, the grandfather of King David.

We can recognize the Megillah of Ruth as an inspirational story of a great woman. But why is it read on Shavuot? According to the Midrash, the lesson of the Book of Ruth is to teach us the great reward for acts of *chesed*, kindness (*Ruth Rabba* 2:14). What was the kindness of Ruth? In the Megillah, Boaz tells Ruth, “Your first act of *chesed* is surpassed by your second act of *chesed*...” (*Ruth* 3:10). The first act of kindness referred to by Boaz is the fact that unlike her sister-in-law Orpah, Ruth abandoned her position in the royal dynasty of Moab to follow and support her mother-in-law Naomi. The second kindness is her willingness to wait to find a relative to perpetuate the family name, rather than looking to marry outside the family, even though she was not bound by Torah law to do so. For her extraordinary kindness to Naomi and to her late

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husband's family, Ruth merits a reward measure for measure. The royal dynasty of King David descends from her.

The Midrash connects Megillat Ruth and the receiving of the Torah with the following parallel. "...Ruth is entirely *chesed*, and the Torah is entirely *chesed*. As the verse states, 'A Torah of *chesed* is on her tongue' (Proverbs 31:26)" (*Midrash Lekach Tov*, end). Equating the Torah with kindness doesn't sound very accurate. The Torah encompasses a lot more than just *chesed*; for example, not all of the mitzvot between man and G-d have to do with kindness. How can the Midrash describe Torah as being only *chesed*?

Another question. The aforementioned verse, "A Torah of *chesed* is on her tongue" (Proverbs 31:26) seems to indicate that there are different types of Torah. The Talmud asks,

Is there a Torah of *chesed*, and a Torah that is not of *chesed*? [Yes.] Torah for its own sake [free of personal motive or agenda] is a Torah of *chesed*, but Torah that is not for its own sake is a Torah that is not of *chesed*.

Sukkah 49b

Torah for its own sake means commitment to Torah study and fulfillment of the mitzvot solely because they are commanded by G-d, and not for any personal reasons. Doing mitzvot for personal reasons; for ego inflation, career advancement, etc. is not wrong but neither is it the fulfillment of the mitzvah in its purest form. Observing Torah for its own sake is aptly described as *chesed* for true kindness flows from selflessness. The term "*chesed*" is not limited to the actual performance of kind acts; it refers also to the quality of selflessness, the source of the ability to perform kind acts. In that sense, every mitzvah fulfilled free of any motivation other than to do the right thing, i.e. G-d's will, is an act of *chesed*.

The Midrash describes Ruth as being "entirely *chesed*," for she displayed this same quality of altruism. And just as her acts of kindness were "entirely *chesed*," so too her name—which represents her essence—implies her ability to see beyond herself. Ruth did not change her name when she converted, as most

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converts do. This is because the name “Ruth” defined her nature. The Zohar³ understands the Hebrew “*Rut*” to be a contraction of the words, “She saw the words of her mother-in-law.” This refers to Ruth’s ability to see into people, read between the lines of their words and respond to their needs.

Acting beyond one’s own personal needs is the ultimate form of kindness, and this epitomized Ruth’s essence. “Torah for its own sake” is this same type of *chesed*. A life of Torah and mitzvot is a life selflessly lived. It is for this reason that Megillat Ruth is read on Shavuot, the day on which we received and accepted G-d’s Torah.

II

In *Parshat Emor*, the Torah lists and explains all of the holidays. At the end of the description of the holiday of Shavuot, the Torah mentions certain agricultural mitzvot, which obligate the farmer to provide food for the poor. These are the mitzvot of *leket* and *pe’ah*, in which farmers leave stalks of grain in the field for the poor to collect. However, it is unclear why these agricultural laws are relevant to the discussion of the holiday of Shavuot. Our first instinct would be to say that it is because of the seasonal connection. The holiday of Shavuot comes at the time of the harvest, the time of year during which these mitzvot are fulfilled. But that is not the only connection.

When someone wants to convert to Judaism, the Jewish Court attempts to impress upon them the correct approach to Torah and mitzvot. The Talmud requires the court to familiarize the convert with the “difficult mitzvot as well as the [seemingly] easy ones, and the crime of transgressing the mitzvot of *leket*, *shikcha*,⁴ *pe’ah*, and *ma’aser ani* (tithes for the poor)” (*Yevamot* 47a). These mitzvot are more than just benevolent acts; they play a critical role in the conversion process. By accepting Judaism, the sincere convert is displaying a high level of selflessness, and to reinforce this approach to Torah, the court teaches the convert about these mitzvot of *chesed*. These mitzvot are performed anonymously and the owner of the field will receive no honor or recognition for leaving the corner of his field or the fallen sheaves for the poor. The poor man simply enters the field of his own accord and takes

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what he needs. The court wants the potential convert to grasp the altruistic nature of these mitzvot, and to understand that they are symbolic of the entire Torah. Every mitzvah, when done for the right reasons, is an act of selfless *chesed*.

The proximity of these mitzvot to Shavuot, the key role they play in educating the potential convert, and their place in the story of Ruth, reveals the centrality of *chesed* in the acceptance of Torah. The right way to accept Torah is for no reason other than its own sake.

*Targum Yonatan*⁵ offers a slightly different explanation of what Boaz calls Ruth's first kindness. It refers not to tying her destiny to Naomi's, but rather to her conversion. The kindness involved in following Naomi is clear. Nonetheless, *Targum Yonatan* identifies her first act of kindness to be her conversion, reaffirming the idea that to convert is to see beyond one's immediate self and perform the ultimate *chesed* – commitment to the mitzvot of the Torah.

Now that we understand the unique character trait needed for Torah acceptance and fulfillment, it is easier to understand the reward of kingship that is given to Ruth. She was designated to be the progenitor of kingship, because she displayed the ability to see far beyond herself. She understood the needs of others, the most necessary trait of kingship. Maimonides describes the attribute of the ideal king: "His heart is the heart of the nation" (Laws of Kings 3:6). A king is not a ruler who forces his will on the people. A king exists entirely for the people, to fulfill their needs and to come to their aid. Therefore his heart must encompass the heart and the needs of the people. The king's role is thus the embodiment of *chesed*, absolute selflessness. It is not coincidental that King David's birth and death occur on Shavuot, the day devoted entirely to *chesed*. Nor is it coincidental that King David emanates from Ruth, the model of *chesed*, the progenitor of kingship, and the ultimate selfless convert.

This understanding of selflessness sheds new light on a famous story that has always been an enigma, that of the man who approaches the sage Hillel with the request to be converted "on one foot." Hillel responds, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow... The rest is commentary - now go and learn" (*Shabbat* 31a). The story puzzles us on two levels. First, why does

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Hillel respond to such a ludicrous request, to be taught the Torah “on one foot”? Second, how is Hillel’s answer a synopsis of the Torah? It seems to merely outline the mitzvah to love one’s fellow as himself! The Maharsha,⁶ in his commentary on the Talmud, elucidates the request of the convert. The convert wants to know how to access Judaism. Hillel tells him that the ability to see the needs of others - true altruism - indicates the capacity to accept the Torah. Rabbi Akiva’s famous statement “Love your fellow as yourself...this is a main principle of the Torah” (*Bereishit Rabah* 24:7) is based on the same reasoning. Before the actual observance of the mitzvot, comes the readiness to accept the mitzvot. That readiness is the intuition and understanding of other people’s needs, not just one’s own.

III

Now we understand the need to properly prepare ourselves for accepting Torah. What do we know of the Jews and their preparation? The Torah describes the encampment of the Jews in the desert as they prepared for *Matan Torah*, the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. “Israel camped there” (Exodus 19:2). The Hebrew word for “camped” in this verse is written in the singular form which seems grammatically incorrect. In referring to an entire nation, the plural form of “camped” should have been used. Rashi comments that the singular form is used specifically to signify their unity at that moment, “They were as one man with one heart.” Surely this was the necessary prerequisite for receiving Torah – absolute unity, only achieved when each person is concerned for his fellow.

To reinforce this lesson of Shavuot even further, we observe a period of mourning prior to Shavuot to commemorate a period when such unity did not exist. The students of Rabbi Akiva, who were charged with transmitting the Torah to the next generation, did not behave with proper respect for each other. Consequentially, twenty-four thousand students died in a plague during the period of *Sefirat HaOmer* (the time between Pesach and Shavuot). It is not coincidental that the mourning period for them comes as we prepare for Shavuot. There is recognition that divisive behavior directly contradicts the proper readiness to accept the

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Torah. Accepting the Torah requires altruism, which they lacked, and so they perished.

The Talmud recounts a story concerning the receiving of the Torah. At the time that the Jewish nation accepted the Torah with the famous phrase “*na’aseh v’nishma*,” - we will do and we will listen - a heavenly voice asked: “Who revealed this secret phrase, belonging to the angels?” (*Shabbat* 88a). Considering this story, it is necessary to fully understand the enormity of the phrase “*na’aseh v’nishma*.” It connotes a willingness to accept and do, even before comprehending what the “doing” will entail. This indicates the highest level of reaching beyond oneself. This is a trait belonging to angels, spiritual beings with no personal needs. The greatness of the Jewish nation at that time was that they reached such a lofty level and were able to look and see beyond themselves. This trait enabled them to accept the Torah.

We are often encouraged to think of Shavuot as a celebration of *Matan Torah*, the acceptance of the Torah. By analyzing all these threads connected to Shavuot, our focus shifts from the actual event of *Matan Torah*, to the time just prior—the preparation for accepting the Torah. That is why there is no direct mention in the text of the Torah about the giving of the Torah on Shavuot. The joy of Shavuot is in the celebration that the Jewish people achieved the elevated level that enabled them to accept the Torah.

Although we accepted the Torah on that unforgettable day at Sinai so long ago, a Jew is constantly faced by that same challenge, every year before Shavuot and on every day of his life. Are we ready to accept the Torah? We must go so far beyond ourselves and treat our spouses, children, and neighbors with such a high degree of kindness and consideration that we rise to the level of Ruth, to the level of kings, and ultimately to the level of angels. It is this day-to-day *chesed* that prepares us to perform the highest act of altruism, accepting G-d’s Torah.

¹ The Talmud (*Yevamot* 47b) derives many laws concerning the conversion process from the dialogue between Ruth and Naomi.

² This idea finds expression in the mitzvah of *yibum*, the Levirate marriage (see Deut. 25). Although the mitzvah is limited to the brother of the deceased and

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Boaz was technically exempt from this obligation, he still wished to carry on the family name.

³ Textbook of Jewish mysticism, authored primarily by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, circa 135 CE.

⁴ Two bundles of wheat forgotten on the field during the harvest must be left for the poor.

⁵ An interpretive translation of the Torah written in Aramaic by Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel, circa 10 CE.

⁶ Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Edels, 1551-1631.

Shavuot: The Forgotten Holiday of Awe

Rabbi Yisroel Gordon

It is common knowledge that the Jewish holidays mark the formative events of our history. Yet there is a popular misconception about what exactly those events are. People think Pesach commemorates the Exodus, Shavuot commemorates the receiving of the Torah and Sukkot commemorates our survival in the desert. This is not accurate.

The Jewish people did not receive the Torah on Shavuot. They didn't even receive the Tablets. On Shavuot the Jews experienced the revelation at Sinai and heard the Ten Commandments. The Tablets and the Torah came later.¹

As it is the Sinai experience and not the receiving of the Torah per se that we celebrate on Shavuot, we should take a closer look at this formative event. The Torah describes the frightening scene:

There was thunder and lightning... Mount Sinai was all in smoke because G-d's Presence had come down on it in fire... The entire mountain trembled violently. There was the sound of a ram's horn, increasing in volume to a great degree...

Exodus 19:16, 18

Why the fanfare? This was not the first time G-d had spoken to man. From Adam to Avraham to Moshe, many prophets

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preceded Sinai and G-d managed to communicate with all of them without causing an earthquake. Couldn't G-d deliver the Torah a little more quietly? Why the need for shock and awe?

The answer to this question is provided by the Torah itself:

“Moshe said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. G-d only came to raise you up. *Yirah* of Him will be on your faces and you will not sin” (ibid 20:17).

We do not have to guess at the function of Sinai. It is explicitly stated. Sinai served one purpose and one purpose only: *Yirah*.

The word *yirah* has been left untranslated for it is to be the focus of our study. Often mistranslated simply as “fear,” the true meaning of *yirah* suffers from widespread misconceptions. However, the imperative to define *yirah* cannot be underestimated, as our understanding Sinai depends on it.

The need to understand *yirah* extends beyond the question of Sinai into the practical realm of Jewish law. “You should have *yirah* of Hashem your G-d” (Deuteronomy 6:13). It is a biblical commandment to have “*yirah*” for G-d. As long as we fail to understand *yirah*, we will fail to understand the appropriate way to relate to G-d.

It was for *yirah* that G-d revealed Himself at Sinai and it is through *yirah* that we connect to G-d. Ultimately, it is *yirah* that we are celebrating on Shavuot. But few concepts are so poorly understood or appreciated.

I

***Yirah*: Fear of Retribution or Awe of the Divine?**

Our search for a precise definition of this mitzvah will begin with the preeminent codifier of Jewish law, the Rambam (Maimonides). These are his words:

Foundations of Torah, chap. 2

1. The venerable and awesome G-d commands us to love and ‘fear’ Him, as the Torah states, “You should love Hashem your G-d” (Deuteronomy 6:5)

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and “You should have *yirah* of Hashem your G-d” (ibid, 6:13).

2. How does one come to love and ‘fear’ G-d? When man contemplates G-d’s spectacular deeds and creations, and through them recognizes G-d’s immeasurable and infinite wisdom, suddenly man [finds himself] in love [with G-d], [inspired to] praise and glorify Him and filled with a desire to know G-d intimately. This [experience] was described by King David: “My soul thirsts for the Living G-d” (Psalms 42:3). When man thinks about these things, he is suddenly thrown back, frightened and terrified. He becomes aware of his smallness, lowness, and obscurity as he stands with his limited mind before the Perfect Knower [of All]...

The Rambam is defining the biblical mitzvah of *yirah*, and as the context makes abundantly clear, *yirah* is not fear of divine punishment. Rather, the Rambam is saying that when man is confronted by the majesty and infinite wisdom of G-d, he is awed into a spiritual state of shock. This is the kind of *yirah* that we seek.

In the Rambam’s view, not only isn’t fear of punishment a fulfillment of the mitzvah of *yirah*, it’s a sign of ignorance. “The only ones serving G-d this way are the ignorant...” (Laws of Repentance 10:1).²

The Ramchal³ echoes the Rambam’s sentiment:

“A simple fear of punishment, namely that a person is afraid to transgress the word of G-d because of the physical and spiritual punishments that exist for sins, is certainly easy [to attain] for every man loves himself and cares for his own soul. Nothing is a more effective deterrent than the fear of personal harm. But this kind of *yirah* is only appropriate for the ignorant... it is not the *yirah* of the devout or intelligent” (Path of the Just, chap. 24).

The Ramchal determines the true meaning of *yirah* to be awe rather than fear by virtue of its relative benefits:

“You see, the true *yirah* is being in awe before the exalted G-d, for it is awe that produces the reverence which brings man to

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feelings of love for G-d... This is as opposed to fear of punishment which is not fundamental and these advantageous traits do not flow from it..." (ibid, chap.19).⁴

We can bring further evidence that "*yirah*" means "awe" from a famous Talmudic episode: "Shimon HaAmsuni (others say Nechemya HaAmsuni) used to expound on the meaning of every preposition "את" in the Torah.⁵ (It was Shimon HaAmsuni's contention that each "את" indicates that an additional, unstated item should be added to the law of the verse.) But when he came to the ["את" in the] verse, "You should have *yirah* for Hashem your G-d," he retracted [all of his previous exegesis on the word "את"]. (Who else besides G-d could be included in the mitzvah of *yirah*? Once Shimon HaAmsuni saw that his thesis was false, he retracted his earlier teachings.)... [This was the situation] until Rabbi Akiva arrived and taught that the ["את" in the] verse, "You should have *yirah* for Hashem your G-d," comes to obligate *yirah* for Torah scholars" (*Baba Kama* 41b). Now, if *yirah* refers specifically to fear of punishment then Rabbi Akiva's suggestion is untenable. How could the Torah possibly obligate a fear of punishment from Torah scholars who are not empowered to punish anyone? Rather, Rabbi Akiva must have understood that the *yirah* of this verse is not fear, but awe or reverence – feelings that could, in theory, be mandatory when interacting with a Torah scholar.⁶

Despite the evidence, it would be false to define *yirah* simply as "awe." The truth is more complex than that. As much as the Rambam and Ramchal advocate awe and relegate fear to the immature and the ignorant, it is undeniable that the Torah⁷ and the Talmud⁸ wish to generate a fear of punishment in all people. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the father of the Mussar Movement, considered fear of punishment a noble goal and developed pedagogical tools to help people internalize and remain conscious of this fear.⁹ Even the Ramchal, for all of his fear bashing, openly admits that the spiritual journey of most people should begin with fear of divine punishment (*Path of the Just*, chap. 4). We cannot ignore the place of fear in Judaism.

How do we reconcile such radically different approaches to G-d? Are we to develop fear or awe? Can two different ways of relating to G-d be separate elements of the same mitzvah of *yirah*?

II

Unifying the Two “Yirahs”

Whenever we read the graphic biblical depictions of divine retribution for sin, we naïvely assume that G-d is trying to frighten us into submission. Observe the mitzvot of the Torah – or else. This is a popular misconception, based on a superficial reading of the text and a myopic view of reality. Judging by the world in which we live, G-d desires no such thing. If G-d wished to be a totalitarian dictator, He could probably do a better job of it. Bolts of lightning would vaporize sinners on the spot. Obviously, G-d is no more interested in rule by terror than He is in rote lip service. It is the service of the willing human heart that G-d desires, not forced worship. So why the threat of punishment? Why is G-d insulting us with threats? Doesn't He want us to be motivated by love rather than by fear?

In other words: How are we to reconcile the severe warnings of the Torah with our belief in a loving G-d? How do we reconcile the G-d of Justice with the G-d of Compassion? Judaism is supposed to be monotheistic.

The answer involves nothing less than changing our perception of G-d. The Torah tells us of several ways to relate to G-d, but the most basic is “You are the children of Hashem your G-d” (Deuteronomy 14:1). We are His children and He is our Father. Like any father, love and judgment often come hand in hand. “Just as a man might chastise his child, so Hashem your G-d chastises you” (Deuteronomy 8:5). Parental discipline is driven by a concern for the child's development and (hopefully) not by a pathological need to instill fear. Heavenly discipline is no different. In the words of the Ramchal: “Divine judgment and law have their source in G-d's love. He does not act as an enemy with a desire for revenge, but rather as a father who disciplines his son for his own good” (The Way of G-d, 2:8:1).

This idea is expressed in the basic credo of Judaism, the *Shema*: “Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). “Hashem” is the Tetragrammaton, Y-H-V-H, which refers specifically to the divine attribute of Compassion, while the Hebrew for “G-d,” “*Elokeinu*,” refers to the divine

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attribute of Justice.¹⁰ By saying: “Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One” we are saying that the G-d of Compassion *is* the G-d of Justice; it is all the same, One G-d of Compassion.¹¹ This is why “saying the *Shema*” is considered to be such a deep affirmation and acceptance of G-d’s sovereignty.¹² The *Shema* is thus appropriately introduced in the prayer service by the preceding blessing, “Blessed are you G-d, Who *loves* His nation Israel.”¹³

Divine Justice truly does flow from Divine Love, for it is never mere punishment for misdeeds. Through His judgment, G-d cures, purifies and elevates man. We may not always understand how, but all things in life flow from G-d’s love. Call it tough love, if you will, but people who have suffered can often look back and appreciate how they have grown from their experiences.¹⁴

Justice is an inescapable reality in any loving relationship. A relationship, by definition, means a commitment, and there are consequences when commitments are broken. Long ago at Mount Sinai, our people forged a unique relationship with G-d called a *brit* (covenant). This is not a casual friendship or a partnership of convenience. Such relationships are unfulfilling and usually don’t last very long. The *brit* is an eternal bond defined by commitment and responsibility. And, as in any serious relationship, there are certain expectations.

The warnings of the Torah are not there to frighten us. Rather, they are a testimony to the depth of our relationship with G-d. The covenant of Sinai empowers us. It imbues our every act and decision in life with significance. It is easy to think that nothing we do really matters, and that is why we need G-d’s attribute of Justice to inform us of how important, and even exalted, we really are. We are “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6) and as a result the choices we make have spiritual consequences. A “fear” coming from that perspective does not paralyze; it inspires and imbues life with meaning. In the end, fear of punishment can lead to a love of G-d. Although the Ramchal is right that a superficial fear of retribution does not develop into a deeper relationship, a proper appreciation of G-d’s attribute of Justice just might.

It turns out that the two types of *yirah* can live in peace. The mitzvah of *yirah* is both fear and awe. And taken together,

they define the unique relationship G-d established with the Jewish people at Mount Sinai.

III

The Advantages of Awe

“Moshe said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. G-d only came to raise you up. *Yirah* of Him will be on your faces so that you will not sin’” (Exodus 20:17). As the context makes clear, this *yirah* was not a fear of punishment; the Jews had done nothing wrong and they had nothing to fear. The Talmud explains that the “*yirah* on your faces so that you will not sin” refers not to fear but to an inhibiting shyness (*Nedarim* 20a). In Judaism, shyness is recognized as a precious virtue for it protects its bearers against wrongdoing. The purpose of the awesome revelation at Sinai was to instill an inhibition that would fortify the Jew in his struggle against sin.

But the awe-inducing revelation at Sinai was not just a sin deterrent. It served other functions as well.

The Midrash tells us that G-d offered the Torah to all the nations of the world, but they rejected it. He offered it to the descendants of Eisav and they asked Him, “What does the Torah say?” G-d replied, “Do not kill.” They said they weren’t interested. He offered it to the descendants of Yishmael and they asked Him, “What does the Torah say?” G-d replied, “Do not steal.” They, too, said they weren’t interested. This went on with nation after nation, until G-d finally offered it to the Jews (*Sifri*, Deuteronomy 33:2).

The *Sfas Emes*¹⁵ poses an interesting question. Was it fair that, when G-d offered the Torah to each nation, He revealed to them the law that they would have the most difficulty with, but when it came to the Jews, G-d didn’t tell them anything? Maybe if G-d had revealed to the Jews the one law that they would have the most difficulty with, the Jews would have also rejected the Torah.

With his original perspective, the *Sfas Emes* explains that G-d did reveal that one most challenging Torah concept to the Jews before giving them the Torah. G-d forbade them to touch the mountain (Exodus 19:12).

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The Jewish soul thirsts for intimacy with G-d. This longing for spirituality is a powerful engine and it hates to be restrained. But when G-d rested His presence on Mount Sinai, He commanded the Jews to stand back. He even forbade touching the mountain. This is the greatest challenge for the Jew.

G-d was telling us something about the Jewish soul. It can propel us to great heights, but it can also be misdirected and send us careening far off track. In our legitimate desire to forge a personal path to Heaven, we are in grave danger of getting lost. Running wherever our thirst for spirituality leads us is a mistake, for our passion for holiness, even our love for G-d, cannot be trusted to guide us faithfully.¹⁶ Rather, we should be constrained by *yirah* - awe. When we are in awe, we recognize that we had better just stand back. Internalizing this kind of humility before G-d is a basic prerequisite for receiving the Torah at Sinai.

There is more. Awe of G-d is indispensable for the study of Torah. In the words of the prophet Yeshayah, “Awe of G-d is [Torah’s] storehouse” (Isaiah 33:6). Rabbi Chaim Volozhner elaborated on this theme in his mystical classic, *Nefesh HaChaim*, and came to a profound conclusion: “The degree to which Man is able to amass and preserve the wealth of Torah is in direct proportion to the size of the storehouse of awe that he has prepared within himself” (*Nefesh HaChaim* 4:5). In other words, awe is the only operating system that can read and store Torah. If we lack the appropriate fear and wonder when we attempt to comprehend the Mind of G-d with the study of His Torah, then maybe we are not engaged in the study of Torah at all. The activity of Torah study is the process through which G-d speaks to us, and if we lack awe then we just aren’t listening. This is another reason why instilling awe was so essential when we stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.

IV

Remembering Sinai

G-d dreamed after Sinai, “If only their hearts would always remain this way, in such a state of awe...” (Deuteronomy 5:25). Spiritual, inspirational experiences, no matter how powerful,

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always seem to fade away. G-d did not want that to happen to the Sinai experience; the elevated state of the Jewish people at Sinai was just too precious to lose. So He created a mitzvah to preserve it:

Take heed and watch yourself very carefully, so that you do not forget the things your eyes saw. Do not let [this memory] leave your hearts all the days of your lives. Teach your children and your children's children about the day you stood before Hashem your G-d in Horeb. It was then that G-d said to me, 'Congregate the people for Me, and I will let them hear My words. This will teach them to be in awe of Me as long as they live on the earth, and they will also teach their children.'

Deuteronomy 4:9-10

Here we have a bona fide biblical mitzvah to remember Sinai and to teach it to our children (Ramban, *Forgotten Negative Commandments*: no. 2). By recreating the Sinai experience in our minds and in the minds of our children, we can utilize it as an effective tool to inspire awe of G-d. The Ramban reiterates the mitzvah this way: "... Be especially careful to remember how the mitzvot got to you, not to forget the Revelation at Mount Sinai, nor all the things which your eyes beheld there: 'The thunder and the lightning' (Exodus 20:15), 'His glory and greatness' (Deuteronomy 5:21), and the words which you heard 'coming from the fire' (ibid). Share all of these things which you saw with your own eyes at that glorious revelation with your children and your children's children, for all time. [The Torah] tells us the reason why G-d made this event – it was to teach them to have awe of G-d all [their] days and teach it to their children, generation after generation" (Ramban, *Commentary to Torah*, ad loc.).

Every holiday has its mitzvot: Pesach has its matzah and *marror*; Sukkot has its *sukkah* and *lulav*. What is the mitzvah of Shavuot? Remembering Sinai. It's a mitzvah! And many do it all night long.¹⁷

SHAVUOT: THE FORGOTTEN HOLIDAY OF AWE

The Ramchal stated the obvious when he observed that, without any effort on our part, we cannot expect that awe of G-d will enter our hearts by itself (Path of the Just, intro.). Luzzatto is right that awe will not appear on its own accord, but we know how to get there. We take the road through Shavuot to Sinai.

Awe is a precious commodity. Not only can there be no Torah without it, it is a value in and of itself. As we sing at the Pesach Seder, “Even if You had brought us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough!” This is what we are celebrating on the holiday of Shavuot – the unforgettable awe of the Revelation at Sinai.

¹ After Shavuot, Moshe ascended Mount Sinai. He returned forty days later, on the seventeenth of Tamuz, to find the Jews worshipping a golden calf. Moshe smashed the Tablets, punished the idolatrous Jews and ascended the mountain for another forty days to pray for forgiveness. Moshe went up a third time on *Rosh Chodesh* Elul to get a second set of Tablets. Forty days later on Yom Kippur, G-d finally forgave the Jews for the sin of the Golden Calf and Moshe descended with the second Tablets. It was on that Yom Kippur that Moshe finally began teaching Torah to the Jewish people. See Rashi to Exodus 33: 11.

² The Rambam does find fear of punishment useful as a short-term educational tool: “We educate children to serve G-d out of fear until they mature and serve G-d out of love...” (Laws of Repentance 10:1).

³ RaMCHaL is an acronym for Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746), the preeminent Jewish Italian philosopher and Kabbalist.

⁴ Ramchal describes *yirah* as a bridge to love, while the Rambam quoted earlier sees love as a bridge to *yirah*.

⁵ “אֵת” is a preposition used before a definite direct object; it has no equivalent in the English language.

⁶ Rabbi Akiva’s extraordinary position on the standards of respect due to Torah scholars can explain the tragedy that later struck down his own students. The Talmud records that twenty-four thousand students of Rabbi Akiva died in a plague sent by G-d because they did not show proper respect for one another (*Yevamot* 62b). (We mourn this loss every year during the *Sefirat HaOmer* period.) In light of Rabbi Akiva’s own standards, which obligate a *yirah* for Torah scholars on par with the *yirah* required for G-d, the severity of their punishment becomes understandable. Rabbi Akiva’s students would be bound by their master’s ruling (heard from Rabbi Yaakov Bergman).

⁷ See, for example, Leviticus 26:14-46; Deuteronomy 28:15-69; 21:21; 17:13, 11:16-17. See also the book of Jeremiah. Of course, the Torah balances punishment for sin with reward for mitzvot. See Leviticus 26:3-13; Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

SHAVUOT: THE FORGOTTEN HOLIDAY OF AWE

⁸ See, for example, *Avot* 2:1; 3:1, 5:10; *Shabbat* 2:6, 32b; *Kiddushin* 20a. The list is endless.

⁹ See R. Salanter's religious philosophy in his "Egeres HaMussar."

¹⁰ *Shemot Rabba* 3:6

¹¹ Heard from Rabbi Zelik Epstein.

¹² See *Berachot* 2:2, 13b

¹³ Evening service. In the morning service the *Shema* is introduced with the words, "Blessed are you G-d, Who chooses His people Israel with love."

¹⁴ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik compared our limited view of reality to looking at one section of the underside of a tapestry. From our perspective it may appear to be a mess, but we know that what we are seeing is the underside of a magnificent design.

¹⁵ Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (1847-1905), the legendary Chassidic Rebbe of Ger.

¹⁶ We don't need to look to the extremes of paganism for examples of this phenomenon. The tragedy of Aaron's sons (*Leviticus* 10:1-7) illustrates how an uncontrolled desire for even "kosher" spirituality can lead to unauthorized and thus forbidden forms of worship.

¹⁷ There is a widespread custom to study Torah all night long on the first night of Shavuot.

The Traditional Seder: A Halachic Guide

Rabbi Avi Lebowitz

As one of the most meaningful and memorable Jewish experiences of the year, the Seder grants us an opportunity to relive the Exodus from Egypt. But the Seder is about more than just the Exodus. At the Seder, every word we say, every song we sing and every ritual we embrace is saturated with 3000 years of tradition. Surprisingly, this seminal event is not run by a rabbi in the synagogue; we do the Seder ourselves, in our homes with family and friends. Every Jew is entrusted with the responsibility of passing the Pesach Seder on to the next generation.

The ideal Seder is a unique experience that connects us to G-d and our fellow Jews through song, feast and open discussion. Simply going through the motions of a set ritual is not our goal. But the traditional order of the Seder does serve as the framework within which we create our personal Exodus experience.

This guide serves as a concise, yet thorough, compilation of the laws and customs that pertain to the Seder. With its help, anyone will be able to participate in a traditional Seder with confidence.

The Day before Pesach

1. Starting from early morning on the day before Pesach, one should refrain from eating matzah in order to better appreciate the matzah eaten at the Seder later that evening.¹ Some products made from ground matzah are also included in this restriction.²

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2. One must abstain from eating *chometz*³ beginning 2 hours prior to midday and all *chometz* must be sold by approximately one hour before midday.⁴ This year, since the day before Pesach is Shabbat, one should rid the house of any *chometz* except for what will be used for the meals on Shabbat. In the San Francisco Bay Area, on Saturday April 23, 2005, one cannot eat *chometz* after 10:07am DST and one cannot benefit from *chometz* after 11:24am DST.

3. This year, when the day before Pesach falls out on Shabbat, there is considerable rabbinic debate as to the ideal method of eating the third Shabbat meal.⁵ Because of the many difficulties involved, many simply rely on the use of fruits and vegetables for the third meal.

4. It is a biblical obligation to eat matzah on the first night of Pesach. Ideally, one should be hungry and eager to eat the matzah at the Seder.⁶ It is therefore recommended that one abstain from eating any filling foods (such as products made from grains) late in the day on the day before Pesach. Some authorities even recommend abstaining as early as noon.⁷

Seder Preparation

5. Preparations for the Seder are normally done in advance so that the Seder can commence immediately upon nightfall.⁸ This year, the day before Pesach is Shabbat and one may not prepare for the Seder on Shabbat. One should therefore try to complete the Seder preparations prior to Shabbat. Any remaining preparations should be completed at the close of Shabbat after nightfall.

6. To portray ourselves as a free nation, it is customary to set the table with the finest dishes and cutlery available.

7. A “Seder plate” with six symbolic foods (*marror*, *charoset*, romaine lettuce, egg, *karpas*, and a shank bone) is the central feature of the Seder table. Even the organization of the foods on the plate has significance and their placement varies according to custom. One can find the various customs printed at the beginning of a Haggadah.

8. Most people place a roasted piece of meat on the Seder plate to

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represent the Paschal lamb and a hard-boiled egg to commemorate the Holiday sacrificial offering (*Chagigah*).⁹ Unless one intends to eat these items, they must be prepared before Pesach begins. This is because cooking or roasting is prohibited on the holiday unless the intention is to eat the foods the same day.¹⁰ This year the day before Pesach is Shabbat, so these items should be prepared on Friday.

9. Three whole *matzot* are placed at the head on the Seder table, one on top of the other.

10. The Seder should not begin before dark,¹¹ but rather immediately after nightfall so that the children will be able to remain awake for a significant portion of the evening.¹²

11. All people the Torah recognizes as adults (men at thirteen years of age and women at twelve) are equally obligated in all the mitzvot performed on the night of Pesach, including eating matzah and *marror*, drinking the four cups of wine, and telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt.¹³

Reclining

12. As a display of our freedom, we settle into our chairs and lean back. One should lean on something such as an armrest or a pillow; merely tilting one's body to the side is not sufficient.¹⁴

13. Reclining should be done specifically on the left side because leaning on the right presents a greater choking hazard. Furthermore, leaning on the left will leave the right hand available for eating.¹⁵

14. Ideally, one should recline when eating the Seder meal.¹⁶ Modern-day dining chairs are not designed for reclining and, as a result, reclining for the entire meal is not common. However, one must lean for the eating of matzah and the drinking of the four cups.¹⁷

The Four Cups

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15. Each of the four cups corresponds to a specific point in the Seder. Drinking four cups of wine consecutively one after the other is not sufficient to fulfill the obligation.¹⁸

16. Each of the four cups of wine should hold a minimum of 3.5 ounces.¹⁹ Ideally, one should drink the entire cup, but at the very least 1.8 ounces. According to some authorities, if the cup holds more than 3.5 ounces, the majority of the wine in the cup should be drunk, even though it will be more than 1.8 ounces.²⁰ The wine should be drunk at the normal drinking rate.²¹

17. Even one who is not fond of wine should push himself/herself to drink the four cups of wine on the Seder night.²²

18. Optimally, one should use red wine for the four cups, but white wine is also acceptable.²³ Some authorities require adults to drink wine with at least some alcohol content, to the exclusion of grape juice.²⁴

19. The Ashkenazic custom is to make a separate blessing of “*borei pri hagafen*” on each of the four cups of wine.²⁵ Sefardic custom is to recite the blessing only on the first and the third cups.²⁶

20. One should provide a cup of grape juice for each of the children present at the Seder to involve them in the Seder and teach them the proper way to perform the mitzvot.²⁷ Similarly, there is an ancient custom dating back to the Mishnah to distribute candy to the children to keep them awake and excited.²⁸

Let the Seder Begin

The Seder is traditionally divided into fourteen steps. We will follow this format.

• *Kadeish* – Reciting the *Kiddush*

21. Upon the recitation of *Kiddush*, one should have in mind (*kavanah*) that he/she is about to perform both the mitzvah of *Kiddush* and the mitzvah of drinking the first of the four cups.²⁹ This year, when the Seder falls on Saturday night, also keep in

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mind that we are fulfilling the mitzvah of *Havdallah* together with the *Kiddush*.

22. There is also a Torah obligation to tell the story of the exodus on the night of Pesach, though there is no *brachah* recited prior to performing this mitzvah.³⁰

23. Since Pesach falls immediately after Shabbat this year, we recite many *brachot* over the first cup. The order of these *brachot* is as follows: Blessing on the wine, *Kiddush*, Blessing on the candle, *Havdallah* (blessing to mark the close of Shabbat), *Shehechyanu*.

24. Many have a custom that the person leading the Seder does not pour his own glass of wine, but rather someone else pours it for him in a display of freedom and royalty.³¹

25. The drinking of additional wine or alcoholic beverages should be avoided so as not to become intoxicated and rendered unable to conduct the Seder properly.

• *Urchatz* – Washing

26. We wash our hands before *karpas*, but we do not recite the usual blessing on the washing since we are not going to eat matzah at this point.

• *Karpas* – Vegetable Dipped in Saltwater

27. We dip the *karpas* vegetable (many use a potato or parsley) in salt water. Prior to eating the vegetable, we recite the standard blessing for vegetables, “*borei pri ha'adamah*.” One should keep in mind that this blessing also covers the *marror* eaten later in the Seder. The size of the vegetable eaten for *karpas* should be less than the volume of half an egg (a *kezayit*) so that it will not require a blessing after eating it.³²

• *Yachatz* – Breaking the Matzah

28. The middle of the three *matzot* on the table is broken in two

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pieces. The larger half is put away to be used later for the *Afikomen* and the smaller half is returned between the upper and lower *matzot*.

• *Maggid* – Telling the Exodus Story

29. Before telling the story of the Exodus we remove the Seder plate, so as to arouse the curiosity of the children. Some simply cover the matzah.

30. The second cup is poured (but not drunk) prior to the telling of the Exodus story.

31. As a rule, each time we lift the cup of wine, we first cover the matzah.³³

32. There is a biblical obligation on the night of Pesach to elaborate in telling the miraculous story of the redemption from Egypt.³⁴ We strive to appreciate the redemption as if we ourselves were taken out of Egypt.³⁵ One who elaborates beyond what is written in the Haggadah is praiseworthy. Thus, the Haggadah records that a group of sages became so involved in the telling of the story that they did not realize that morning had arrived.

33. It is imperative to recite the Haggadah in a language that is understood by all the people present at the Seder.³⁶

34. An essential teaching appears in the Pesach Haggadah towards the end of *Maggid*: “Rabban Gamliel said, whoever does not say three things on Pesach night, does not fulfill his obligation - the Pesach sacrifice, Matzah and Marror.” Aside from simply mentioning these three items, one should explain what they represent as printed in the Haggadah.³⁷

• *Rachtza* – Washing hands

35. Before we eat the matzah, the “bread” of the Pesach night, we wash our hands and recite the usual blessing, “*al netilat yadayim*.”

The Seder Meal

36. The Seder meal begins with the eating of matzah, *marror* and *Koriech*, a matzah-*marror* sandwich. The Torah defines eating as the consumption of at least a *kezayit* (literally, “about an olive”). This is equivalent to the volume of approximately half an egg, about one fluid ounce.³⁸

37. The matzah used for the mitzvah at the Seder is made from only flour and water. As for egg matzah, the custom of Ashkenazic Jews is to refrain from eating egg matzah throughout Pesach,³⁹ whereas Sefardim do eat egg matzah on Pesach. If one is either elderly or ill and cannot digest matzah, egg matzah may be eaten even according to Ashkenazic custom. However, it should be noted that even in this situation the biblical obligation of eating matzah on the first night of Pesach cannot be fulfilled with egg matzah.

• *Motzi Matzah* – The Biblical Mitzvah of Eating Matzah

38. The Torah obligates every Jew to eat at least one “*kezayit*” of matzah on the night of Pesach.⁴⁰ A *kezayit*, the volume of half of an egg, is approximately one half of an average machine-made matzah. It should be eaten relatively quickly.⁴¹ Ideally one should eat two *Kezaytim*, (the volume of an entire machine-made matzah) for *Motzi Matzah*.⁴²

39. The upper matzah and the middle matzah should be used now, but the lower matzah is used later for the *marror* sandwich.

• *Marror* – Bitter Herb

40. The ideal item to use for *marror* is “*chazeret*” – romaine lettuce.⁴³ One can also use endives or horseradish.⁴⁴ One *kezayit*, the volume of half of an egg (one fluid ounce), should be eaten.⁴⁵ The different aforementioned vegetables may be combined to add up to a *kezayit*.⁴⁶

41. If one will be using horseradish, it must still retain some of its sharpness. Therefore, if it is ground in advance, the container should be well sealed.

42. *charoet* is customarily made from fruits that represent the Jewish people. The *charoet* recipe is one of the few food recipes recorded in *Shulchan Aruch*. It is made from: apples, figs, nuts, pomegranates, and almonds.⁴⁷ It is spiced with cinnamon and ginger.⁴⁸ It is originally prepared as a thick mixture and prior to the dipping of *marror*, wine is added to make it thinner.

43. One recites a blessing of “*al achilat marror*” prior to eating the *marror*, but a “*borei pri ha'adamah*” is not recited since the blessing on the *karpas* covered the *marror* as well.

44. Since the *marror* represents the pain of slavery, it is eaten without reclining.

• ***Koreich* – The Matzah-Marror Sandwich**

45. The bottom matzah should be used for *Koreich*. One should eat a *marror* sandwich with a volume of one fluid ounce of matzah (one half of a machine matzah) and one fluid ounce of *marror*.⁴⁹ There is no blessing recited, but one reads the passage recalling that Hillel (circa 30 BCE) utilized a sandwich to perform the mitzvah of eating the Paschal Lamb with matzah and *marror* together.

46. Some have a custom to dip the sandwich in *charoet* as Hillel did (*Shulchan Aruch*), whereas others feel that it is not necessary to dip the sandwich in *charoet* since the matzah helps to reduce the strength of the *marror* (Rema).

47. The sandwich should be eaten reclining, even though we are consuming *marror*, because the matzah part of the sandwich requires reclining.

• ***Shulchan Aruch* – The Festive Meal**

48. Some have a custom to begin the meal with an egg as a sign of mourning over the destroyed Temple. We remember the Temple specifically on the night of Pesach since the first night of Pesach always corresponds to the same night of the week as Tish'a B'av.

The Seder Comes to an End

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• *Tzafun* – Eating the “Afikoman”

49. One should eat a *kezayit* of matzah while reclining at the conclusion of the meal. This is known as the “Afikomen” and it commemorates the Paschal lamb,⁵⁰ which was eaten after one was already satiated from the meal.

50. We try to maintain the “taste” of Afikomen in our mouths, so no other food or drink should be consumed after the “Afikomen”, with the exception of water and the two remaining cups of wine.

• *Bareich* – *Birchat HaMazon*

51. After the meal, the third cup is poured and the *Birchat HaMazon*, the blessing after the meal, is recited.

• *Hallel* – Songs of Praise

52. The Haggadah ends by completing the Hallel which we began before the meal, and by singing special songs composed for the Seder night.

• *Nirtzah* – The Seder Comes to a Close

53. We complete the Seder by reciting various songs of praise. It is customary to pour a cup of wine for Eliyahu the Prophet and open the front door to the house before we say the passage of “*shefoch chamatcha*.”⁵¹

Additional Laws and Customs of the Seder Night

54. According to Ashkenazic custom, it is forbidden to eat roasted lamb at the Seder because it appears as if we are eating the Paschal lamb in the absence of a Temple. The custom is to refrain from eating any roasted food that requires ritual slaughter.⁵² Thus, one may eat roasted fish, as fish does not require any form of ritual slaughter. Sefardic custom, however, based on the *Shulchan Aruch*, is that roasted lamb may be eaten provided that it was not

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roasted whole.

55. There is a dispute in the Talmud (*Pesachim* 120b) as to whether the Paschal Lamb may be eaten all night or if it must be eaten prior to midnight. It is thus preferable to eat the *Afikomen*, which corresponds to the Paschal Lamb, before *chatzot* (halachic midnight).⁵³ Some also try to conclude the Hallel before midnight.⁵⁴

56. For those living outside of Israel the Seder is repeated on the second night of Pesach as well.

57. For the remainder of the holiday, one is simply required to abstain from *chometz*, but there is no requirement to eat matzah.⁵⁵

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!

¹ Ramban and *Ba'al Hamaor* argue whether the restriction to eat matzah on Erev Pesach applies the entire day (possibly even beginning the night before; see, however, *Mishnah Berurah* 471:12 who cites many opinions that the prohibition begins the morning of *Erev Pesach*), or if it only begins simultaneously with the prohibition against eating *chometz*. Everyone agrees that the restriction of matzah on Erev Pesach is linked to the restriction of *chometz*. The *Ba'al Hamaor* connects the matzah to the restriction of *eating chometz*, whereas the *Ramban* links it to the *searching* for *chometz*. See *Igrot Moshe: Orach Chayim* 155. It should be noted that many have a custom to refrain from eating matzah 30 days prior to Pesach, and some start from the first day of Nissan. The various customs are based on the Talmud (*Pesachim* 6a) which discusses when holiday preparations should begin.

² However, matzah cooked in a liquid medium (such as cooked matzah balls) is not included in the prohibition, since that matzah will no longer be usable to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah on the night of Pesach (M.B. 471:20). Nevertheless, if one would simply mix ground matzah with sweeteners and bake it into a cake without using a liquid medium, it may retain its Halachic status of "matzah" and should not be eaten on *Erev Pesach* (Rema 471:2 and M.B. 19).

³ *Chometz* is prohibited from being consumed on Pesach (Exodus 12:20). Any combination of water and flour from wheat, barley, oats, rye and spelt that was left to rise for more than eighteen minutes is considered *chometz*.

⁴ Halachic hours are configured by dividing the time between sunrise and sunset into twelve equal parts. Each of the 12 parts is a Halachic hour. In the summer, when days are longer than in the winter, each Halachic hour (or "*shaot zemaniyot*" as they are called), is greater than 60 minutes. In the winter, when days are shorter, a Halachic hour is less than 60 minutes.

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⁵ As explained previously, matzah cannot be eaten all day, *chometz* cannot be eaten after midday and even egg Matzot may not be eaten according to Ashkenazic custom. See law #37. Some authorities suggest eating two morning meals with bread (*Magen Avraham* 444:1). Many others however, are of the opinion that the third meal must be eaten in the afternoon, so this is not a viable option (*Shulchan Aruch* *ibid*). The Rema concludes that the only viable method of eating the third meal in the afternoon is to limit the meal to fruits. Some suggest the possibility of not being required to eat the third meal in this situation and simply devote the time to Torah study. See *Aruch Hashulchan* 444:6, who limits the Zohar's statement that R' Shimon bar Yochai would learn Torah in place of the third meal to a situation when Erev Pesach fell out on Shabbat, because in such a situation there is no requirement to eat the third meal at all.

⁶ *Shulchan Aruch* 471:1 and M.B. 471:3. See also *Rashbam* in his commentary to *Pesachim* 99b who says that this is part of *hidur* mitzvah (optimal performance of the mitzvah).

⁷ Although in the section of *Shulchan Aruch* dealing with the Laws of Pesach there is no mention of such an opinion, in the Laws of Sukkah, the Rema cites this opinion. The *Chok Yaakov* and *Aruch Hashulchan* 471:2 explain that since one cannot eat *chometz* or matzah on Erev Pesach, and according to the Rema's opinion even egg matzah cannot be eaten, there is no reason to mention this in the Laws of Pesach. See, however, the opinion of *Noda B'yehudah* cited in note 39.

⁸ One may not begin the Seder before night (see note 11) because the *kiddush* must be done at a time when one can perform the mitzvah of matzah. The *kiddush* is also the first of the four cups and one must drink all four cups after Pesach has officially begun. See *Shulchan Aruch* 472:1 and M.B.

⁹ One can technically use any cooked food. The custom developed to use an egg, a "*beia*" in Aramaic, which alludes to the saying "*bai rachmana l'mifrak yasana*" – G-d wants to redeem us. The ideal piece of meat to use is a shank bone, symbolizing the mighty arm that G-d revealed in Egypt. It is customary to roast the meat which symbolizes the Pesach sacrifice, which had to be eaten roasted. The egg can either be roasted or cooked symbolizing the *Chagigah* sacrifice, but most people roast the egg as well.

¹⁰ Although one should eat the items on the Seder plate, rather than degrading the mitzvah by disposing of them (*Chayei Adam*, quoted in *Mishnah Berurah* 473:32), according to Ashkenazic custom the meat cannot be eaten on the night of Pesach since we do not eat anything that can be remotely confused with the Paschal lamb which was offered when the Temple stood. Some even recommend cooking both the meat and the egg rather than roasting them, in which case they do not resemble the Pesach offering and can be eaten at the Seder (*Aruch Hashulchan* 473:9).

¹¹ One must wait until *tzeit hakochavim* – stars coming out. This is understood to be approximately 40 to 50 minutes after sunset. The difficulty in determining this time precisely lies in an ambiguity found in the Talmud. All agree that as night falls there is a period known as *bein hashmashot* which is between sunset and nightfall and is considered neither day nor night. The objective is to figure out how long *bein hashmashot* lasts. The Talmud (*Pesachim* 94a) indicates that it lasts for the amount of time it takes to walk 4 *mil* (a *mil* is a distance that takes 18 minutes to walk), whereas the Talmud in Shabbat 34b indicates that it only lasts for .75 of a *mil*. Rabbeinu Tam, quoted in *Tosafot*, suggests that the 4 *mil* begins at sunset but *bein hashmashot* does not begin until 3.25 *mil* after sunset.

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Therefore, *bein hashmashot* begins about 58 minutes after sunset and lasts until 72 minutes after sunset. The Vilna Gaon takes an alternative approach, citing the Talmud in Shabbat as the primary source, concluding that *bein hashmashot* begins at sunset and only lasts for three-quarters of a *mil*. According to the Vilna Gaon, *tzeit hakochavim* should be about 15 minutes after sunset. The generally accepted custom is to assume that *tzeit hakochavim* is somewhere in between the two extremes mentioned above; therefore it is sufficient to wait 50 minutes after sunset. See *Igrot Moshe* O.C. 4:62.

¹² We go out of our way to prevent the children from falling asleep. The Seder is meant to be directed toward the children and their participation is strongly encouraged. The custom of "stealing" the *Afikoman*, which dates back to the time of the Mishnah, was instituted to encourage the children to remain awake and give them something to look forward to.

¹³ See Talmud *Pesachim* 43a that whoever is included in the prohibition against eating *chometz*, is included in the commandment to eat matzah. Rashi seems to understand that based on the same source, *marror* is also a Torah obligation for everyone equally (nowadays, when we don't have the Pesach sacrifice, all agree that *marror* is only a Rabbinic obligation). Some authorities understand that the source to include everyone in the mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus is based on its connection to the matzah, as the Talmud describes matzah as "bread that many words are recited over" (*Pesachim* 115b).

¹⁴ *Tosafot* in *Pesachim* 99b says that one might have expected a poor man to be exempt from the mitzvah of reclining because he does not have a couch and can therefore not lean in a way which represents freedom. The Mishnah teaches that the mitzvah still applies and he can recline on anything available, even if it does not represent freedom. This implies that reclining requires resting oneself on something rather than simply tilting to the side. Furthermore, the Talmud in *Pesachim* 108a mentions that some were accustomed to leaning on one another's knees. If it were sufficient to simply tilt one's body to the side, it would not have been necessary to lean on one another's knees.

¹⁵ The concern of a choking hazard would apply equally to a left handed person as it would to a right handed person, but the alternative rationale, that the right hand needs to be accessible, would imply that a left handed person should lean on the right. The *Mishnah Berurah* (472:11) concludes that the safety concern overrides the concern of convenience and that everyone should lean on their left side. Although the trachea and esophagus are positioned front to back rather than side by side, the understanding of our Rabbis is accurate. Upon consulting my father-in-law, Rabbi Dr. Yaacov Tendler, a pulmonary specialist, it was confirmed that the practice of leaning on the left rather than the right to prevent choking is common medical practice. Food that enters the trachea can usually be coughed out with ease. The concern is that food would get past the bronchi and into the lungs. Considering that the passageway of the bronchi leading to the lungs is much straighter on the right than on the left, there is much less of a chance that food will reach the lungs if one leans left, rather than right.

¹⁶ The Rema (472:7) recommends leaning for the entire meal. However, M.B. (473:71) quotes the *Sh'lah* as saying that the Haggadah should be recited with a serious disposition, not while reclining in a leisurely fashion. See, however, the *Meiri* in *Pesachim* 108a, who recommends leaning even for the recitation of the Haggadah.

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¹⁷ If one ate matzah without reclining, it must be eaten again properly. However, it is not necessary to repeat the drinking of the four cups of wine if one did not recline, since some authorities are of the opinion that leaning is not necessary nowadays (Rema 472:7).

¹⁸ If one must step out between the drinking of the cups (e.g. if one left after the third cup and returned for the fourth cup), the sections of the Haggadah missed must be recited prior to drinking the fourth cup.

¹⁹ See M.B. 481:1 and 271:68 for the relative sizes of the Talmudic measurements. Each of the four cups must be a *rivi'it* (*Shulchan Aruch* 472:9). *rivi'it* = .25 of *lug*. *Lug* = volume of 6 eggs. Thus, a *rivi'it* = 1.5 eggs. I determined through the displacement of water that the volume of an average Grade A large chicken egg is 2 fluid ounces. Thus, a *rivi'it* = 3 ounces.

Alternatively, the volume of a *rivi'it* can be calculated as follows: the size of a kosher *mikvah* is 1x1x3 *amot*. An *amah* is the size of two average men's shoes (see *Shach* Y.D. 201:6). The average shoe size may have increased over the years; we can assume we are dealing with a shoe of approximately 10 inches. Therefore, if we assume an *amah* is 20 inches, the *mikvah* size will be 20"x20"x60" = 24,000 cubic inches = 103.89 Gallons = 40 *seah* (Talmudic volume of *mikvah*). Thus, 1 *seah* = 2.59 Gallons = 6 *kav* = 24 *lug*. Therefore, 1 *lug* = 13.8 fluid ounces, and .25 *lug* = *rivi'it* = 3.46 fluid ounces. (It should be noted that Rabbi Moshe Feinstein recommends using a 24.5 inch *amah* for a *mikvah*, which will raise the volume considerably).

The volume of a *kezayit* is between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of an average chicken's egg (*Shulchan Aruch* 486). Conforming to the Halachic rule that we follow the more stringent opinion by biblical mitzvot (*Avodah Zarah* 7a), we assume that a *kezayit* is half an egg. Additionally, some claim that the eggs reduced in size over the years so that a *kezayit* would be the size of a whole egg (assuming it was originally a half of an egg – see *Tzelach Pesachim* 116b). For the mitzvah of eating matzah in *Motzi Matzah*, which is a Torah obligation, we try to eat a "large" *kezayit*, the volume of a whole egg (between 2 and 2.3 fluid ounces, depending on our two approaches above). For *marror* and *Koreich*, which are only Rabbinic in nature, a "small" *kezayit* is sufficient. Additionally, since they are only Rabbinic mitzvot we can also be lenient and rely on the opinion that a *kezayit* is $\frac{1}{3}$ of an egg. However, since a blessing is recited over *marror* using G-d's name, one should try to use a *kezayit* that is $\frac{1}{2}$ of an egg (*Mishnah Berurah* 486:1). However, one who is ill can surely rely on the opinion which holds $\frac{1}{3}$ of an egg. Also, for *Koreich* everyone can rely on that lenient opinion because no blessing is recited.

The Tzelach's assertion that the size of eggs reduced over the years is based on the following calculation: the Talmud teaches that the amount of dough needed for the mitzvah of separating *Challah* is equal to an *Omer*, which is $\frac{1}{10}$ of an "ephah." $\frac{1}{10}$ of an *ephah* is equal to the volume of 43.2 eggs (*ephah* = 3 *seah* = 18 *kav* = 72 *lug* = 432 eggs). However, when we calculate the volume using the linear measurements that are deduced from *mikvah*, our results are different. As we mentioned, a minimum *mikvah* of 1 x 1 x 3 *amot* contains 40 *seah* of water (40 *seah* = 240 *kav* = 5,760 eggs). Based on the accepted conversion of 24 thumbs per *amah*, the size of a *mikvah* will be 24 x 24 x 72 thumbs, which is 41,472 cubic thumbs. Now, if 40 *seah* is 5,760 eggs, then 1 *seah* is 432 eggs. When we divide 41,472 by 40, we are left with 1036.8 cubic thumbs. Therefore, 1036.8 cubic thumbs hold 1 *seah*. 3,110.4 cubic thumbs hold 3 *seah*, 432 eggs. 311.04 cubic thumbs hold 43.2 eggs. When the

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Tzelach measured the volume held by a 311.04 cubic thumb vessel he found that it was the volume of 86.4 eggs. The conclusion is that either thumb sizes are approximately a quarter larger than what they once were or egg sizes are half what they once were (an increase of approximately one quarter the length of each side of a cube, yields slightly less than double the volume). He assumes that thumb sizes could not have increased so much, so egg sizes must have reduced in size by half. Therefore, he concludes that if a *kezayit* was originally half of an egg, it is now an entire egg so that the amounts calculated above will be consistent with one another. It is imperative to note that many authorities disagree with the approach that eggs reduced in size over the years, as we have no historical evidence to make such an assertion. Furthermore, some authorities suggest that the volume sizes offered by the Torah were given in egg and olive sizes because they do not change over the course of time. In *Jewish Action* (Winter/2003), Rabbi A.Y. Greenfield proves that the sizes of the egg remained relatively constant from the time of the receiving of the Torah until the present day (approximately 46 ml which is 1.6 ounces, slightly less than the amounts listed above). The discrepancy discovered by the *Tzelach*, which led to his conclusion that eggs decreased in size, was based on the assumption that people became smaller since the time of the Mishnah. However, if we assume that the opposite is true and people have become larger, we can then say that egg sizes remained constant and have a plausible explanation for the discrepancy in the measurements.

The *Tzelach* records that the volume of 43.2 eggs that he used at the end of the 1700's yielded slightly less than a Czech "*Pinta*". I found that the Czech *Pinta* is 1.949 cubic decimeters, or 1,949 ml. Dividing this by 43.2 (eggs), we can determine that the size of the egg used by the *Tzelach* was only 45.1 ml. As I mentioned above the size of our grade A large chicken eggs is 2 fluid ounces, 60 ml. Therefore, the measurements offered by the *Tzelach* are based on the assumption that a *kezayit* is constant and the size of the eggs fluctuates. Those that disagree with the *Tzelach* either hold that the size of the egg remained constant and a *kezayit* is half of an egg or that although it may have changed but we always determine a *kezayit* based on the egg available, therefore a *kezayit* will still be half of an egg. It follows that even if we are going to abide by the more stringent opinion of the *Tzelach* and use an entire egg to measure a *kezayit*, there is no rationale to use anything larger than a 45ml egg. Hence, a *kezayit* will be 45 ml, which is 3/4 of our 60 ml eggs. A large *kezayit* will therefore be only 1.5 fluid ounces. On the other hand, if we are to follow the dissenting opinions, who feel that we always measure a *kezayit* based on the eggs of our day, the *kezayit* will be 1/2 of our egg which yields 30ml or 1 fluid ounce. Upon experimentation by the crushing of a machine-made matzah, I determined that one-quarter of a machine made matzah is about 15 ml. Therefore, for the *kezayit* according to the *Tzelach*, one should eat three-quarters of a machine made matzah, and according to the more lenient opinion one must eat half of a machine made matzah.

²⁰ If possible, one should try to drink the entire cup of wine each time. If that is too difficult, he can drink most of it (*Shulchan Aruch* 472:9, M.B. 30). One must drink at least 3 ounces of the fourth cup. This is done in order to be able to recite a *brachah* after drinking, for which one must drink a *rivi'it*.

²¹ Although the amount of time allotted for the consumption of solid foods is 3 to 4 minutes, liquids are different. One should drink the required amount in the time it takes to normally drink 3.5 fluid ounces. See Mishnah Berura 472:34. This might be as short as 20 seconds.

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²² The Talmud (*Nedarim* 49b) mentions that Rabbi Yehuda would abstain from wine all year with the exception of *Kiddush*, *Havdallah*, and the four cups on Pesach. After drinking the four cups he would suffer from the effect of the wine until Shavuot, 49 days later. Nonetheless, he would push himself to drink the four cups of wine each year.

²³ There are two criteria for choosing the ideal wine: one should use the most valuable wine, and among wines of equal value precedence is given to red wine. The advantage of red wine is that it reminds us of the Jewish blood that was spilled by Pharaoh. However, the *Mishnah Berurah* (472:11) points out that if there is concern of a blood libel, as was common in Eastern Europe, one should abstain from using red wine to alleviate any suspicion.

²⁴ Although many authorities consider grape juice to have the same status of wine both in terms of making a "*borei pri hagafen*" and in terms of *Kiddush*, the four cups on the night of Pesach are different. The Talmud (*Pesachim* 108b) states that the four cups represent freedom, which may demand specifically an alcoholic grape product – see Rema 483:1.

²⁵ The Vilna Gaon explains that the recital of the Haggadah constitutes a significant break so that a new blessing must be recited even on the second and fourth cup. The *Magen Avraham* asserts that since each cup is an independent mitzvah, it is appropriate for each cup to have its own blessing.

²⁶ The reason Sefardim make a blessing on the first cup is that no blessing on wine has yet been made, and they require a blessing on the third cup because it follows the *Birchat Hamazon*.

²⁷ *Shulchan Aruch* 472:15. Although this is recommended, the M.B. (472:46) argues that it is not imperative. Furthermore, the child does not have to consume as much wine or grape juice as an adult (M.B. 472:47).

²⁸ *Shulchan Aruch* 472:16. Ideally we encourage the children to remain awake for the entire Seder, but at the very least they should remain awake until after "*avadim hayinu*," the response to the four questions asked by the child (M.B. 472:50).

²⁹ There is a debate between the authorities as to whether or not one must have proper intention in performing a mitzvah. Some assume that a Biblical mitzvah requires intent whereas a Rabbinic mitzvah does not require intent. See *Shulchan Aruch* 60:4 and M.B. 60:10. Both the mitzvah of *Kiddush* and the mitzvah of the four cups are Rabbinic (unless it is Friday night in which case the mitzvah of *Kiddush* is a Biblical obligation). The mitzvah of eating matzah is a Biblical mitzvah and would require intent. See *Shulchan Aruch* 475:4.

³⁰ Many suggestions are given as to why there is no *Brachah* recited for the retelling of the Exodus story. Rabbi Yaacov M'lisa in his commentary on the Haggadah, "*Maaseh Nissim*," quotes some authorities who claim that there is no *Brachah* made because there is no minimum requirement for how much discussion one must have to fulfill the mitzvah. He suggests a different explanation: the mechanism for retelling the story was made in the format of a blessing – the blessing on the redemption of the Jewish people which we make prior to drinking the second cup. Since we never find a blessing on a blessing (e.g. the Rabbis never instituted a blessing upon performing the mitzvah of *Birchat Hamazon* since it itself is a blessing), therefore no blessing is made on the performance of this mitzvah.

³¹ See Rema 473:1. However, the *Aruch Hashulchan* (473:6) feels that this is a display of arrogance; all people are equally free on the night of Pesach, so why should one pour for another? Therefore, he asserts that everyone should pour their own cup of wine.

³² If one were to eat a piece the size of a *kezayit*, it would be questionable whether a blessing

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must be made afterward or whether one can rely on the *Birchat Hamazon* recited after the meal. To avoid the situation we try to eat less than a *kezayit*, which does not require an after-blessing. However, if one ate a larger piece of *Karpas*, he should not make a blessing afterward; rather he should rely on the *Birchat Hamazon*.

³³ *Aruch Hashulchan* (473:23) explains that the Hebrew word for nature is “*hatevah*,” which has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for G-d, “*Elokim*” (86). The numerical value of the Hebrew word for cup, which is “*kos*,” is also the same. Each time we lift the cup, we implicitly declare that nature is a hidden act of G-d, because nothing happens by itself. This is an integral theme of the Pesach night. It is worth noting that this numerical equivalence is only accurate when we add the letter “*heh*” (the), to the root word “*tevah*.”

³⁴ Many commentaries discuss the difference between the nature of the mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus on the night of Pesach and the general mitzvah that applies every night to just mention the Exodus. See *Brachot* 12b. The *Minchat Chinuch* (Mitzvah 20) suggests that normally we can simply mention the Exodus to ourselves, whereas on the night of Pesach it is imperative to teach our children about the Exodus. The most commonly accepted suggestion is that on all other nights it is sufficient to merely mention the Exodus, but on the night of Pesach we must elaborate and speak about all the miracles performed for the Jewish people. In truth, it is not clear that the verse “Remember this day that you left Egypt” (Exodus 13:3), which is used as the source for the daily obligation, actually creates a Biblical obligation to mention the Exodus each day. The *Tzelach* (*Brachot* 12b), *Keren Orach* (*Brachot* no. 19) and the *Ohr Sameyach* (Halachot of *Shema*) infer from the Rambam’s omission of the daily mitzvah in his list of mitzvot that we do not consider the daily mentioning of the Exodus to be an independent mitzvah. Therefore, the only time that there is an independent mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus is on the first night of Pesach.

³⁵ The source of this obligation is the Mishnah in *Pesachim* 116b. In standard editions the requirement is to view ourselves as if we left Egypt. However, based on the Rambam’s edition it seems that the requirement is to relive and almost act out the Exodus from Egypt. See Rabbi Moshe Adatto’s article for more on this idea.

³⁶ Some do not make an effort to translate the Haggadah because they rely on the translations that are found in the Haggadah itself that are accessible to all (*Aruch Hashulchan* 473:20). Ideally one should certainly try to translate the Haggadah in order to involve all of the participants of the Seder.

³⁷ The Rambam (Laws of *Chometz* and matzah 7:5), who records this verbatim from the Mishnah, implies that it is to be taken literally, that one does not fulfill the mitzvah of telling the Exodus story unless these three things are mentioned. However, the Ran (*Pesachim* 116b) does not take this statement quite as literally and understands that although the optimal performance of this mitzvah requires the recital of “Rabban Gamliel”, one can still fulfill the mitzvah even if it is omitted. See Maharshah (*Pesachim* 116b), who comments that the mitzvot of Pesach, matzah and *marror* seem to be different than other mitzvot in that we must understand their symbolism at the time of performing the mitzvah. This implies that the Maharshah understood that the “obligation” that Rabban Gamliel was referring to was the obligation to eat the Passover sacrifice, matzah and *marror* respectively, and not the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus. See *Bach* 625:1 for other situations where this type of intent is required in order to fulfill a mitzvah.

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³⁸ See endnote 19.

³⁹ The Rema (462:4) clearly prohibits the use of egg matzah on Pesach due to a concern that liquids other than water act as a catalyst in expediting the leavening process. Following this argument, the prohibition of egg matzah would be directly linked to the prohibition against eating *chometz*. Therefore, the prohibition of egg matzah should begin at the same time as the prohibition against eating *chometz*. See M.B. 471:10. However, the *Noda B'yehuda* (O.C. 21) claims that the custom to refrain from using egg matzah only applies with the start of Pesach, when the prohibition against *chometz* is more severe. According to both of these opinions egg matzah does not have the status of matzah in regard to the prohibition against eating matzah on *Erev Pesach* even before the time that one must stop eating *chometz*. The Vilna Gaon (444), on the other hand, prohibits the use of egg matzah the entire day of *Erev Pesach* because it is similar to regular matzah. Nonetheless, in case of illness or if one cannot digest matzah, the Rema is lenient and permits the consumption of egg matzah on Pesach, provided that the matzah is made solely from eggs or fruit juices without any water being added. The combination of water and eggs or water and fruit juice is assumed to certainly expedite the *chometz* process.

⁴⁰ If one does not have a full *kezayit* of matzah for each member of the household, one of the people present should forfeit their share so that everyone else can fulfill the mitzvah properly by eating the amount of a *kezayit*. In a situation where there is not enough for anyone to eat a full *kezayit*, it is questionable whether a minimal mitzvah is accomplished by eating less than a *kezayit*. See *Sha'arei Teshuva* 476:2 and *Maharatz Chiyus to Yoma* 31a.

⁴¹ As with any mitzvah involving eating, one should eat the entire *kezayit* at once (*Beit Yosef*; see, however, *Aruch Hashulchan* 475:4, where he questions this practice). However, even if it is eaten slowly, one must eat the matzah in what is known as *kedai achilat pras*. A *pras* is the equivalent of 4 eggs according to Rashi (8 *kezaytim*) and 3 eggs according to Rambam (6 *kezaytim*). The amount of time it takes to eat a *pras* of wheat bread when eaten with relish while reclining (see Mishnah *Negaim* 13:9, *Bartenurah* and *Tosafot Yom Tov* who explain that eating with relish reduces the amount of time) is the amount of time one has to consume one *kezayit* of matzah. The Torah recognizes any eating within this short amount of time (approx. 3 - 4 minutes) to be one act of eating. If one eats very slowly and does not finish the entire *kezayit* within this amount of time, it is equivalent to stretching the eating of matzah over the course of a few hours, which obviously is not considered one act of eating. See *Minchat Chinuch* (Mitzvah 313), where he explains that the amount of time it takes to eat a *Pras* is determined based on the particular food that is being eaten. Therefore, matzah, which clearly takes longer to eat than a piece of white bread, would have a longer time span in which the *kezayit* has to be completed. Similarly, wine, which takes longer to drink than water, would have more time from start to finish. As mentioned above (Note 21), the time span of 3 - 4 minutes is only for solids, but 1.8 fluid ounces of wine have to be drunk in the amount of time it takes to drink 3.5 ounces. See *Shulchan Aruch* 612:10.

⁴² See *Shulchan Aruch* (475:1) that ideally one should eat two *kezaytim*, one for the blessing of *Hamotzi* and one for the blessing of *Achilat* matzah. However, it is not clear why one must eat a separate *kezayit* for the *Hamotzi* (see *Biur Halacha* 475:1 who raises the question and *Aruch Hashulchan* 475:5 who attempts to answer it). Practically speaking, we eat a large *kezayit* to fulfill the Torah obligation of eating matzah. In endnote 19 I determined the

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large *kezayit* to be three quarters of a machine-made matzah. However, this is for the Torah obligation of matzah. In terms of the *minhag* (custom) to eat two *kezayitim* one can certainly rely on the small *kezayit*. Therefore, it is sufficient to eat a total of one whole machine-made matzah.

⁴³ Many refrain from using romaine lettuce because it tends to be infested with small insects. However, romaine lettuce that has been thoroughly checked is ideal to use.

⁴⁴ There are some who require the use of horseradish that has not been ground, since by grinding it, it loses its potency (Haggadah *Maasei Nissim*). However, the *Chayei Adam* (in *Nishmat Adam* 34) is adamantly opposed to this position, and the majority of the authorities strongly recommend grinding the horseradish because otherwise it is potentially hazardous to one's health (M.B. 473:36). Furthermore, some argue that in order to fulfill the obligation of eating *marror* it must be eaten in an edible manner such as ground up, rather than eating it in a way that is dangerous and does not constitute eating at all (*Biur Halachah* 475:B'tibul; see also *Biur Halachah* 473:5 where he questions the *Pri Megadim* who seems to doubt this premise). However, see Rashi *Sukkah* 13b who writes that *marror* is not supposed to be an edible item (*Tosafot*, on the other hand, assumes that *marror* must be fit to eat).

⁴⁵ See endnote 19.

⁴⁶ If one does not have any of the five vegetables outlined in the Mishnah, they should eat any bitter herb. By doing this, one would at least be commemorating the concept represented by the *marror*, even though they are not actually performing the mitzvah of eating *marror*. Therefore, if one is in this predicament, he should not recite the blessing on the *marror*. See Rema 473:5 and *Biur Halachah*. We find a similar concept regarding the laws of *Lulav* and *Eitrog*. See *Shulchan Aruch* 651:12.

⁴⁷ Most of the fruits mentioned are mentioned in verses in "The Song of Songs" (written by King Solomon), comparing the Jewish nation to the various fruits. Almonds (*shekaydim*) do not have a corresponding verse, but we make a play on the word "*shekaydim*," which means anxious, symbolizing that G-d was anxious to redeem the Jewish people even before the set time. See *Mishnah Berurah* 473:49.

⁴⁸ The reason for putting ginger in the *charoset* is because of its appearance. When ginger is not fully ground but rather left in its natural stringy state it has the appearance of straw that was used to make the mortar for building in Egypt – see *Mishnah Berurah* 473:50 and *Sha'arei Tzion* 68 quoting the *Maharil*.

⁴⁹ The *Rosh* comments that we eat a *kezayit* of *marror* only because we mention the term "*achilah*," eating, in the blessing. The term eating connotes a *kezayit*. It would follow that for *Koreich*, on which no formal blessing is recited, one can use less than a *kezayit* of *marror*. However, the overwhelming majority of authorities does not take the words of the *Rosh* literally and require a *kezayit* of *marror* for the *Koreich* sandwich. See *Sha'arei Teshuva* 475:1 and *Igrot Moshe* O.C. 3:66.

⁵⁰ See *Maharatz Chiyus* to *Nida* 6b, who quotes Rabbi Yaakov Emden as claiming that the Paschal lamb is considered a communal sacrifice and can be brought even in the absence of a Temple. Clearly, this is not the accepted practice.

⁵¹ There seems to be a common misconception in relating the opening of the door, to the cup poured for Elijah the Prophet. However, these two customs seem unrelated. The Rema (480:1) explains that the custom of opening the door is to remind ourselves that we trust in

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G-d watching over us on the night of Pesach and pray that in the merit of this trust the Mashiach will come. Whereas, the pouring of a cup for Elijah the Prophet is recorded in *Mishnah Berurah* (480:10) as showing our faith in G-d that he will ultimately send Elijah to redeem us just as he redeemed us from Egypt.

⁵² The Halachic definition of cooking is using hot water as the medium in the food preparation process, whereas roasting refers to cooking with direct heat. Therefore, even a pot roast may constitute roasting, as far as this custom is concerned. (We find a similar application in the laws of Shabbat). If one is planning on eating a pot roast, there should be some water added so that it will be considered cooking rather than roasting. See, however, *Aruch Hashulchan* 476:2, who feels that if meat is roasted using a method that is not fit for the Paschal lamb, there is no concern of confusion and should therefore be permitted.

⁵³ *Chatzot* is the midnight between sunset and sunrise. This Pesach (2005), *chatzot* is 1:05am DST on the Seder night in the San Francisco Bay Area. In a situation where the Seder is running late, two prominent authorities (*Avnei Nezer* and Rav Chaim Soloveitchik) introduce a creative solution. They assume that the prohibition against eating after the *Afikoman* is only during the time where one can still eat the *Afikoman*. Therefore, five minutes before “midnight” one should eat the *Afikoman* having in mind that this should count as *Afikoman* only according to the opinion that *Afikoman* must be completed by midnight. Once midnight has passed they can continue their meal without concern of violating the prohibition of eating after the *Afikoman*. The rationale is that according to those opinions that the *Afikoman* can be eaten all night based on their stipulation they have not yet eaten the *Afikoman*. According, to the opinion that *Afikoman* can only be eaten until midnight, there is no prohibition to eat after midnight. It is clear that this is only a viable solution if we are to assume that the prohibition to eat after the *Afikoman* is bound to the time of eating *Afikoman*. It is entirely possible that even though the mitzvah of eating *Afikoman* is only until midnight, the prohibition against eating afterward lasts the entire night.

⁵⁴ The source for reciting the Hallel before midnight is the Rema 477:1, who quotes the *Ran*. See *Aruch Hashulchan* (477:4), who states that he does not understand the reason for Hallel to be finished by midnight. It seems that the source lies in the Talmud in Tractate *Brachot* 9a, where the recitation of Hallel on Pesach night is grouped together with *Shema* and the eating of the Pesach sacrifice. The first opinion in the Talmud asserts that the whole group can be eaten until morning. However, afterwards the Talmud quotes an opinion that holds that the Pesach sacrifice must be eaten by midnight. The Rema might understand that this second opinion’s ruling that midnight is the end time really applies to the entire group, including Hallel. Therefore, Hallel should preferably be completed by midnight, just as we try to finish the *Afikoman*, which is in place of the Paschal lamb, by midnight.

⁵⁵ The Vilna Gaon and many other authorities feel that although one is not required to eat matzah throughout Pesach, if a person goes out of his way to try and eat matzah, he has performed a mitzvah – see *Aruch Hashulchan* 18. This idea can also be inferred from a question raised by the *Ba’al Hamaor* at the end of *Pesachim*. He wonders why we do not recite a special blessing on the matzah all seven days of Pesach. Clearly, that question rests on the premise that a mitzvah is fulfilled, otherwise there would be no reason for such a blessing.