

No. 1 ~ Spring 2004

FOCUS

A Pesach Reader

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A Haggadah Analysis

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In Loving Memory
of

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SHMIDMAN

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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.

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Preface

It gives us great pleasure to present the first edition of Focus, a new project of the Bay Area's Jewish Study Network. Focus is a forum for the rabbis of the JSN to present the community with a sample of their teachings in writing. It is most fitting that the first Focus is on Pesach, the celebration of the birth of the Jewish nation, and the renewal of the yearly cycle of Jewish festivals.

The six original pieces contained in this issue are personal expressions of the JSN's eclectic staff. The style, content and approach of each JSN rabbi is purely individualistic and Focus makes no attempt at conformity. You may even find that the pieces express conflicting views. This is the Jewish way.

What is unique about Focus is how it expresses originality within the framework of tradition. Classical Jewish learning does not stunt intellectual creativity; on the contrary, it elevates it to the level of mitzvah and transforms it into a religious responsibility and a holy endeavor. With Focus, the rabbis of the Jewish Study Network illustrate the beauty of our traditions and find new meaning and relevance in timeless Jewish observance. Most importantly, they demonstrate how traditional Torah study inspires creative thought.

These six short essays merely scratch the surface of what Pesach has to offer. But their combination of diverse interpretation and passion for tradition bring the nature of Jewish study into clear focus.

Wishing you and yours a meaningful Pesach,

Rabbi Joey Felsen
Founder
Jewish Study Network

Rabbi Dani Kermaier
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Back to the Future: The Matzah Time Machine

Rabbi Yisroel Gordon

Don't let the matzah fool you. Although it might appear quite thin and simple, don't judge it by its appearance. Its unassuming exterior conceals a depth and power unseen by the casual observer.

If we take the time to analyze our matzah, if we dare to break it open and discover its hidden dimensions, then this seemingly simple flatbread will transform itself into a spiritual wormhole and take us on a journey we will never forget. The matzah frees us of the constraints of time and space and allows us to simultaneously relive our past, appreciate our present, and experience our future. If we learn the matzah's secrets, if we learn how to bring it to life, then the matzah will become the time machine it was designed to be.

First stop on the magical matzah tour: Egypt. Three thousand years ago.

Freedom at Midnight?

“It was midnight. G-d killed every first-born in Egypt... [Pharaoh] sent for Moshe and Aaron during the night. ‘Get moving!’ he said. ‘Get out from among my

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people - you and the Israelites! Go!’” (Exodus 12:29,31). The game was over. The Jews were finally free.

Strangely enough, nobody paid any attention to Pharaoh. G-d had commanded the Jews to remain in their homes until daybreak (Exodus 12:22), so no one left before morning¹.

G-d redeemed us at night only to forbid us from leaving before morning? What is the point of that? Stranger yet, why do we celebrate the Seder at night if we didn't leave Egypt before dawn?

The Matzah Paradox

Everybody knows why we eat matzah at the Seder. In the Haggadah we quote the verse from Parshat Bo, “[The Jews] baked the dough that they had brought out of Egypt into (unleavened) matzah cakes, since it had not risen. They had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay” (Exodus 12:39). In other words, the Jews left Egypt in a hurry and had no time to let their dough rise. So they baked matzah. We eat matzah at the Seder to taste the bread of freedom that our ancestors ate when they left Egypt.

Right?

¹ The Talmud underscores this surprising fact: “Rabbi Abba taught, ‘It is uncontested that the Jews were redeemed at night, as the verse states, ‘Hashem, your G-d, took you out of Egypt at night’ (Deuteronomy 16:1). And [it is also uncontested that] the Jews departed from Egypt by day, as the verse states, ‘On the day after the Passover [sacrifice] the Israelites left with a high hand before the eyes of the Egyptians’ (Numbers 33:3)’” (Berachot 9a).

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If it were only that simple! Actually, we were given the mitzvah to eat matzah even before we left Egypt (Exodus 12:15) and the Paschal lamb that was eaten in Egypt was also eaten with matzah (Exodus 12:8). Clearly, the significance of matzah does not derive solely from the fact that the Jews ate matzah after the Exodus. Matzah must have had meaning prior to the Exodus as well. Indeed, the Torah describes matzah as “bread of affliction” (Deuteronomy 16:3)² and the Haggadah quotes this description in its opening paragraph³. Apparently, the Jewish slaves were fed matzah in Egypt⁴, as it is a cheap and filling food.

It seems that matzah is a bit conflicted. Not only does matzah remind us of our freedom; it reminds us of our slavery as well. Matzah’s duality expresses itself most vividly on the Seder night. On the one hand we eat matzah while reclining in the fashion of a free man, but yet we also eat matzah together with the marror⁵ reliving our oppressed life as slaves.

If we already have the marror to symbolize our suffering as slaves, couldn’t we find something better than the “bread of affliction” to symbolize our freedom?

² "להם עניי" - “Bread that recalls the affliction that we suffered in Egypt.” Rashi ad loc.

³ "הא להמא עניא" - “This is the affliction bread that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt...” Some translate it as “poor man’s bread.”

⁴ Ramban and Sforno to Deuteronomy 16:3. See, however, Maharal of Prague in *Gevuros Hashem* chap. 51 where he rejects the idea that the Jews ate matzah before they gained their freedom.

⁵ Originally eaten with the Paschal lamb (Exodus 12:8), marror is a bitter herb that gives us a taste of slavery. Romaine lettuce is commonly used, but it is a widespread custom to make it real bitter by adding fresh ground horseradish.

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How can the matzah be an effective symbol when it paradoxically represents polar opposites?

Digesting the Matzah

The Sefas Emes⁶ makes a remarkable but irrefutable statement:

“The truth is that matzah symbolizes both the slavery and the redemption. This is because it is incumbent upon us to praise G-d for the exile too. If not, why should we praise him for the redemption?!” (Pesach 5633).

Egypt was in the plans for a long time; G-d told Abraham centuries earlier that the Jews would be oppressed and enslaved⁷. There were lessons that G-d wanted us to internalize in a way that only the experience of slavery made possible. And the Jews learned the lessons well.

It was in Egypt that we became advocates of the disadvantaged⁸, supporters of the poor⁹ and champions of the

⁶ Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, the famed Rebbe of the Chassidic dynasty of Ger (1847-1905). The depth and originality of his teachings have universal appeal.

⁷ “Know that your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs... they will be enslaved and oppressed. But I will finally bring judgment against the nation who enslaved them, and they will then leave with great wealth” (Genesis 15:13-14).

⁸ “Do not pervert justice for the proselyte or orphan. Do not take a widow’s garment as security for a loan. *You must remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and Hashem your G-d then liberated you. It is for that reason that I am commanding you to do this*” (Deuteronomy 24:17-18).

⁹ “When you gather the fruit from your olive tree, do not pick the last remaining fruit, since it must be left for the foreigner, orphan and widow.

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foreigner¹⁰. Compassion, an unassuming nature, and kindness became the hallmark of the Jew (Yevamot 79a). In Egypt we evolved into the compassionate and empathetic people that we are today.

But that is not all. Egypt also taught us some basic theology.

We learned that G-d hears our prayers. We learned that G-d punishes evil. And we learned that, no matter how hopeless our situation may appear, G-d can save us¹¹. When we sing Hallel at the Seder we are saying that we understand that Egypt was not about pointless suffering, it was about learning and growth. Otherwise, why should we praise G-d for taking us out of Egypt if He was the one who put us there in the first place?

The duality of matzah teaches us not to be so shortsighted as to celebrate redemption without reflecting on what we have learned and how we have grown from our suffering. The matzah forces us to be conscious of our past slavery even as we recline in freedom, and to keep the hope for salvation alive even as we suffer through the maror¹². With the matzah the entire experience in Egypt, from slavery through redemption, is united and appreciated as the process

When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, do not strip the last grapes, but let them remain for the foreigner, orphan and widow. *I am commanding you to do this because you must remember that you were a slave in Egypt*" (Deuteronomy 24:20-22).

¹⁰ "Do not oppress a foreigner. *You know how it feels to be a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt*" (Exodus 23:9).

¹¹ The Talmud in Nedarim 32a, as explained by Maharal of Prague, *Gevuros Hashem* chap. 9, teaches that the purpose of the Egyptian exile was to instill faith and reliance on G-d within the heart of the Jew.

¹² In the mystical terminology of the Zohar (Tetzaveh 183b), matzah is the "remedy" for a heart that lacks faith.

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that forged and refined the Jewish character. It was under the oppression of the Egyptian exile that the Jews evolved spiritually into a nation worthy of the Torah.

The redemption of the Jews *from* Egypt cannot be viewed independently from the experience of the Jews *in* Egypt. On a deeper level, the true redemption of the Jews actually took place within Egypt before we physically left the country. In the darkness of midnight, inside the slave camp of Egypt, we gained our inner redemption. Only after that was achieved and appreciated could we march out triumphantly with the rising sun.

The Jerusalem Sandwich

At the Seder, we eat matzah by itself, we eat marror by itself, and then, we eat them together. After all, the matzah is only a simple cracker. It just begs for toppings.

But the matzah sandwich is more than just an unusual appetizer. It's the shuttle that's taking us to the next stop on our tour. Egypt recedes into the past as we move forward through space and time.

The year is 30 BCE and we find ourselves in Israel, in the majestic capital city of Jerusalem. The Temple stands in all its glory and we sit at the Seder of Hillel the Elder. The great master, his face shining with wisdom and sanctity, takes his matzah and makes a sandwich with a slice of Paschal lamb and some marror. We watch him eat and we do the same¹³.

¹³ "This is what Hillel used to do. In the days of the Temple he would make a sandwich with the Paschal lamb, matzah and marror, in

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The marmor hits hard. It's the sharp flavor of pain, the taste of the whip of an Egyptian taskmaster. Fortunately, we have softened the marmor with some sweet charoset.

Charoset is a thick dip made from chopped apples and ground nuts, cinnamon sticks, and a dash of wine (Shulchan Aruch, Rama 473:5). Despite its winning taste, charoset evokes the oppression of slavery far more graphically than the marmor. It's designed to look like mortar (Pesachim 116a) and blood (Jerusalem Talmud 10:3)¹⁴.

This is bizarre. Of all things to take the edge off our marmor, we use charoset? We sweeten the bitterness of slavery with mortar and blood?! What's the sense of that?

Charoset is a complex food. It might be symbolic of slave labor, but its central ingredients are apples and nuts. And these fruits bring to mind, of all things, the loving relationship that exists between G-d and the Jews¹⁵.

"Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother was in travail for you, she who bore you was in travail" (Song of Songs 8:5). In the exalted poetry of King Solomon, G-d is our mother. And G-d suffered through a painful labor, so to speak, in order to bring the Chosen People into existence¹⁶. In the end, the Jewish apple was born¹⁷.

fulfillment of the verse (Numbers 9:11), "They should eat [the Paschal lamb] with matzot and marmor." Passover Haggadah.

¹⁴ Both symbolisms are quoted in the Shulchan Aruch, Rama 473:5.

¹⁵ "The Gaonic responsa (circa 670-1040 CE) state that charoset is made with the fruits that the Song of Songs compares to the Jewish people." Tosafot, Pesachim 116a.

¹⁶ G-d suffers with us in our exile: "I am with him in distress" (Psalms 91:15). Indeed, G-d told Yaakov, "I will go down with you to Egypt..." (Genesis 46:4).

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King Solomon also uses the metaphor of nuts to illustrate the beauty of the Jewish people: “I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley...” (Song of Songs 6:11)¹⁸.

The marror looks bad and it tastes worse. But the charoset reminds us that marror is only a root. You can't focus on the root and forget the fruit that it bore.

The charoset teaches us that although slavery, mortar and blood are horrific, ultimately they are only an external shell. Even if we can't see through it, even if we can't understand it, oppression does contain kernels of great value. The invisible essence of charoset is G-d's love for us; its

¹⁷ See also, “The fragrance of your face is like apples” (Song of Songs 7:9). The apple is a symbol of the Jewish people's faith in G-d and His Torah. “Rabbi Chamah the son of Rabbi Channinah taught, ‘What is the meaning of the verse: ‘As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved...’ (Song of Songs 2:3)? Why are the Jews compared to an apple? Just as the apple tree's fruit grows before its leaves, so too, the Jews [at Sinai] declared, ‘we will do’ [even] before they said, ‘we will understand (Exodus 24:7)’” (Shabbat 88a). In other words, our comprehension of the Torah's meaning or purpose is not a prerequisite for our acceptance of it. We know that limited human minds are incapable of fathoming the infinite Mind of G-d. However, mitzvot can be somewhat appreciated by experiencing them through observance. “We will do” and then “we will understand.” This expression of faith and humility is symbolized by the apple. See, however, Rabbenu Tam in Tosafot ad loc. who maintains that the word "תפוח" in this verse refers not to an apple, but to an *etrog*.

¹⁸ The Midrash explains: “Nuts are a metaphor for the Jews. Just as nuts can't be stolen because they make noise and [the thief] will be caught, so too with the Jew. Wherever the Jew goes, he can never claim to be a gentile. Jews are identifiable, as the verse states: ‘All who see them recognize them as the seed that G-d has blessed’ (Isaiah 61:9).” The Midrash continues, “Nuts are a metaphor for the Jews. If you pull one nut out of a pile, they all come tumbling down. So too with the Jews, when one is hurt they all feel it...”

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hidden reality is good and sweet. Mortar and blood is actually made of apples and nuts.

To eat charoset is to recognize that there is a G-d who knows what He's doing. No matter how frightening and hopeless life might appear, behind it all there is meaning and purpose. The affliction of exile is not pointless and it is certainly not an end in itself. It is just a root.

We should never eat marror alone. It's too dangerous. But if we eat it with charoset then we will understand that marror is a furnace that refines¹⁹. It is an educator that teaches us things that we just can't learn any other way. And it is the womb of the loving Mother that gave birth to the Jewish Nation. Only charoset can effectively sweeten our marror.

It turns out that marror and charoset are the perfect toppings for our matzah. Like any good topping, they help us appreciate the cracker itself²⁰.

We all need to experience our national past, and the matzah is the vehicle that takes us there. We need to see for ourselves that the totality of Jewish history, from torture and slavery in decadent Egypt all the way to freedom and independence in exalted Jerusalem, is really just one big sandwich. Being there fills our hearts with a love for G-d and an appreciation of life that can only be expressed by singing Hallel²¹. And it gives us the faith to swallow matzah, marror, and charoset as one unified whole.

¹⁹ "He took you out of the iron crucible that was Egypt..." (Deut. 4:20).

²⁰ The Mishna (Pesachim 10:3) defines marror as "פרפרת הפת" – "matzah dressing." See Tosafot Pesachim 114a.

²¹ Hallel, Psalms 113-118, is a song of thanksgiving sung on Jewish Holidays. It is an integral part of the Haggadah.

The Afikoman²² and the Last Hallel

The matzah, flavored with marror and charoset and soaked in the heavy wine of the Haggadah, begins to enter our hearts and minds. Drunk with Jewish history, we close our eyes and the greatest miracle of all, the validation of everything we have learned, finally comes into focus. It's 3000 years later, and a Jew sits at a Pesach Seder in Northern California! But time and place fade away again, as the last matzah, the Afikoman, carries us off on one last trip. It's time to put history behind and get a taste of destiny.

We are sitting at a Seder in Jerusalem rebuilt. The Divine presence has returned to the Third Temple, and our matzah has transformed into the Paschal lamb of the utopian future. Evil has been vanquished (שפוך חמתך), the great saga of Jewish history has come to a close, and the door is opened to welcome Elijah the Prophet.

From the vantage point of the end of time, G-d's guiding hand throughout all of our troubled history is clearly visible. With the wisdom of retrospect, it all seems so obvious now. Our questions dissipate and we sing Hallel as never before.

There's no need to wait for the great dawn of redemption. Even in the midnight of exile we can recognize G-d's presence. All we have to do is listen to our matzah.

It is in our hands to unleash the power of matzah at the Seder. It would be such a shame to miss the trip.

²² The last matzah of the night is called the "Afikoman," literally "dessert." In Temple times, the Paschal lamb was the last course eaten at the Seder. Today, the Afikoman matzah replaces the Paschal lamb (Rosh, Pesachim 10:34).

Seize the Matzah!

Rabbi Joey Felsen

Despite the growing disenfranchisement of world Jewry with traditional customs and rituals, Passover has remained the lead celebration that brings Jews back to their own touchstone - their people. There may be new innovations that people have introduced into their Passover experience, but many are still familiar with the traditional Haggadah. It is a script that has been followed for millennia and continues to leave itself etched in the hearts and minds of Jews everywhere. Perhaps it is precisely because of the fluency with which we read and reread the Haggadah that some of the subtle nuances have become over-shadowed, if not completely overlooked. An examination of these nuances yields meaningful insights.

It states in the Haggadah, "It is because of *this* that G-d did so for me when I went out of Egypt²³." Because of

²³ This is the statement that we supply to the child who does not know how to ask a question. Considering that we direct this answer to the child that has the most difficulty forming a question, it seems ironic that we are faced with a statement that is difficult to understand. The questions of the four sons are focused on understanding the symbolism of the Pesach Seder. The wise son asks what all the rituals are about on that night. The wicked son asks his question with a healthy dose of attitude and gets punished for implying that he is outside of the sphere of participation. Even the simple son is questioning what lies before him. The fourth son does not even know how to ask. And how do we intend to educate the

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what? The word “this” is demonstrative and points to that which lies before us. It implies that we were taken out of Egypt for the sake of the ritual foods that are placed on the table before us, i.e. matzah and marror. That seems a little far-fetched. After all, matzah and marror are the reminders of the experience of having left Egypt. They are the mementos of our tragic history of persecution at the hands of the Pharaoh and the great escape maneuvered by G-d. How can we say that we were taken out for the sake of these?

The answer to this question lies directly in the account of the Exodus that we find in the Torah. Chapter 12 opens up with a seemingly superfluous line. “G-d spoke to Moses and Aaron *in Egypt*, saying.” Of course they were in Egypt! They had not yet finished meting out the last of the ten plagues. To where would the scene have shifted? The chapter then describes the first commandment given to the nation as a whole, the commandment to keep a calendar and sanctify the new moon of the month of Nissan. (Nissan is the first of the months in the newly created Jewish calendar.) It then continues with the order to take a lamb and slaughter it. The blood is used to mark the doorposts so that the Jewish households are identifiable. The meat is to be roasted and eaten with matzah and bitter herbs.

Wait! What are we doing eating matzah with this lamb? The Torah states clearly, “For seven days you shall eat matzot, bread of affliction, because you departed from the land of Egypt in haste” (Deuteronomy 16:3). So why would G-d command us to eat matzah the night before when there was no rush.

last child? By telling him that it is because of this that we were taken out of Egypt.

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Stranger yet, we were supposed to eat this lamb fully prepared to steal off into the night. The verse states, “So shall you eat it; your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand, you shall eat it in haste; it is a Pesach-offering to G-d” (Exodus 12:11). What is the big rush? We don’t leave Egypt until the next morning, as it is stated, “On the *day after* the Passover [sacrifice] the Israelites left with a high hand before the eyes of the Egyptians” (Numbers 33:3).

The commandments that revolve around the Pesach offering are introduced before we actually experience the Exodus. Nevertheless, we are told exactly how to eat the offering and to include with it the symbols that are to become the icons of remembrance. It seems that a crystallization of memory into Jewish ritual and practice took place on that night. We were not introduced to matzah because we left Egypt in such a hurry, just the opposite; the matzah was *itself* the reason for the haste with which we left Egypt. There must be something distinctive about matzah that gives it a purpose beyond the association with the speed with which we escaped.

The defining characteristic of matzah is time. The only difference between matzah and chametz is a split second. If the dough is done rising in less than eighteen minutes than the result qualifies as matzah and one second too late produces chametz. There is really no other factor that distinguishes the two products.

It is important to take notice of the severity with which the Torah addresses the prohibition to eat chametz on Pesach: “...for anyone who eats leavened food [on Pesach] - that soul shall be cut off from Israel” (Exodus 12:15). The Torah goes on to forbid even ownership of chametz on

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Pesach: “No chametz may be seen in your possession, nor may leaven be seen in your possession in all your borders. And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of this that G-d acted on my behalf when I left Egypt’” (Exodus 13:7-8).

The prohibition against eating chametz is found elsewhere in the Torah. In Leviticus, we are instructed to bring meal offerings in the Temple, and practically all of these meal offerings must be made of dough that is not chametz.

What is the reason for this strict approach to fermentation of dough? A clue is to be found in the Talmud: One of the Sages, Rebbe Alexandri, composed a prayer that he used to say after the regular prayer service: “Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before you that it is our will to do Your will. What is preventing us? The leavening agent in the dough and the subjugation of Kingdoms. Let it be Your will that you should save us from their hands and we will return to do the laws of Your will with a complete heart” (Berachot 17a).

The leavening agent in the dough is that element inside each and every one of us that does not allow us to be proactive in doing what we know to be right. Inertia is a force that affects us all to greater or lesser degrees. There is something attractive about allowing ourselves to remain inactive at times that deserve a burst of energy and activity. As it says in the Midrash (see Rashi’s comment on Exodus 12:17): “A mitzvah that comes to your hand, do not allow it to become chametz.”

Matzah represents a rejection of this process of fermentation. Egypt was an experience that totally crushed the spiritual self of the Jewish people. The only way to break

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from that past was through a complete transformation. We were led out in haste because G-d understood that if we waited too long, our inertia would wear down our desire to leave and we would remain there forever. We had to dive into a new reality with urgency before we changed our minds.

Pesach is the festival that comes in the Spring. The Spring is the time when vegetation bursts forth from the Earth. The mitzvah of matzah comes at the same season with the same message. When you have an opportunity for personal growth, take hold!

Why *These* Four Questions?

Rabbi Avi Lebowitz

Each year, we look forward to the Seder with great enthusiasm and excitement. We follow every ritual exactly as prescribed, and perform the mitzvot in the year 2004 precisely the same way we did two thousand years ago. This is of course with one exception; we no longer have the privilege of savoring the holy meat of the Paschal lamb. The Paschal lamb was at one point the climax of the Seder and is now just a faint memory that we eagerly await to revive with the coming of the messiah. In fact, the famous four questions that every Jewish child is well acquainted with, originally made mention of the Paschal lamb.¹ Originally the third of the four questions was “Why is it that on all the nights of the year we eat roasted, cooked, and boiled meat, but on the night of Pesach we only eat roasted meat?”² However, since the destruction of the Temple, we are no longer able to sacrifice a Paschal lamb and this question is no longer a reflection of our peculiar behavior on the night of Pesach. Instead, we substitute with the question, “Why is it that on all the nights of the year we eat both sitting upright and leaning,

¹ Mishnah Tractate Pesachim 116a

² Tosafos *ibid* points out that the Mishnah seems to follow the opinion that even the other sacrificial meat that was eaten as the main meal together with the Paschal lamb had to be roasted over an open fire and not cooked in a liquid.

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whereas on the night of Pesach we eat only leaning”³

We may not be bothered with the question regarding leaning being omitted from the original version of the four questions, because all their meals were eaten while reclining. Therefore reclining would not qualify as a “difference” between the night of Pesach and the rest of the year.⁴

³ Rambam in his version of the Passover Haggadah substitutes the question about the Paschal lamb with the question about leaning. However, when the Rambam records the laws of chometz and matzah (8:2) he incorporates both questions into the "four questions" yielding a total of five questions. The implication of the Rambam is that, in the time of the Temple there were in fact five questions; but now that the question regarding the Paschal lamb is no longer applicable, the number of questions has been reduced to four (See responsa Chasam Sofer Y.D. 236 in response to his esteemed father-in-law, Rav Akiva Eiger, in reference to the possibility of the Paschal lamb being brought in the absence of the Temple, by ritually impure priests). It is also interesting to note that the Rambam changes the order of the four questions from the way they are recorded in the Mishnah. The Rambam seems to organize the four questions according to the format of the Seder, whereas the Mishnah seems to use an alternative format.

⁴ The custom to lean is to demonstrate freedom and was a rabbinic institution as discussed in Tractate Pesachim 108a. However, there is a discrepancy amongst the authorities as to the nature of this institution. The predominant opinion is that there is in fact an obligation to eat while leaning regardless of whether it is a socially accepted norm. There is a dissenting opinion (Ra'avya as quoted in Rema O.C. 472:4) who feels that leaning was only required in a time and place that it is a means of expressing aristocracy, therefore nowadays it is not a requirement. We may only rely on this opinion post facto (ibid 472:7), but we are required to make a concerted effort to eat while leaning. (It is important to note that the mitzvah is to recline on an object, not merely to tilt to the side. This can be clearly inferred from the Talmud inquiring whether a poor man who lacks proper pillows to lean on is required to lean.) The Rambam who seems to incorporate the question about leaning even in the original version of the “four questions” apparently felt that there is a noticeable effort to lean on the night of Pesach more than the rest of the year, and can therefore qualify as a “difference” on the night of Pesach.

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However, we are sure to be troubled with the choice of questions that were included in the four questions. After all, Pesach night is a time when we behave in the most obscure and mysterious way. We commence the Haggadah by standing in our private dining rooms, inviting any guests who wish to join us (maybe they even would if they could just hear the invitation), we pour red wine out of our cups during the recital of the ten plagues, we allow the children to stay up way past their bedtime to “steal” the afikomen, and we sing songs praising G-d for enslaving us for only 210 out of the 400 years.⁵ The 'real' question is not even mentioned in “the four questions”. Why **only** four questions, since there are really so many more questions that could be asked.

II

In preparation for Pesach we are always so busy with our spring cleaning and scrubbing down our glove compartments with a toothbrush that we often lose sight of some of the more important aspects of the holy days. On the Seder night we repeat a Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) without completely understanding its implications. Rabban Gamliel said, “Whoever does not say these three things on Pesach does not fulfill his obligation: Pesach, Matzah, and Marror”.⁶

⁵ The number 400 was told to Abraham in Genesis 15:13. However, in Exodus 12:40 the Torah uses the number 430. Rashi calculates that it was 430 years from when G-d promised Abraham that his children would inherit the land and 400 years from the birth of Yitzchak.

⁶ Ran in his commentary on the Rif explains that the Mishnah is simply stating that without mentioning these three items with their symbolism, one does not fulfill his obligation *properly*, but it is impossible to suggest that one does not fulfill his obligation at all. However, the Rambam records the Mishnah as is, which seems to indicate that it is to be understood literally, meaning, one who does not recite these three mitzvot

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The Mishnah then continues to conceptualize these three items. The Paschal lamb, which is called in Hebrew “Pesach”, represents that G-d passed over the Jewish households in his mission to kill the Egyptian firstborns. Matzah represents the redemption from Egypt without allowing time for the dough to rise. Marror represents the way in which the cruel Egyptians persecuted us and made our lives bitter in the land of Egypt. Upon studying this Mishnah somewhat more carefully we are struck with many difficulties.

In regard to the mitzvah of the Paschal sacrifice, the Mishnah states that its purpose is to remind us that G-d had passed over the Jewish homes without causing any harm. The source of this concept can actually be found in the Torah itself. The Torah (Exodus 12:26) writes, “And when your children ask you, what is all this work [that you are busy with in preparation for Pesach]. You should say to them it is the Pesach sacrifice that we bring because G-d passed over the

forfeits the mitzvah completely. It is important to note that even if this is to be taken literally, it is not clear to what mitzvah it is referring. One can deduce from the Rambam choosing to place this ruling in the context of the mitzvah to retell the story of the exodus from Egypt (Laws of Chometz and Matzah 7:5), that it is this mitzvah that one loses out on. One may suggest that in the opinion of the Ran who holds that the mitzvah is not lost entirely, yet not accomplished completely, that the statement refers to the mitzvah of pesach, matzah and marror. Perhaps a parallel to this suggestion can be drawn from the commentary of the Bach on the Tur O.C. 625 who claims that by certain mitzvot the concentration of the concept behind the mitzvah is imperative to its fulfillment. The Toras Chaim Haggadah in the name of the Rashbam seems to concur with this explanation. However, the Ritvah in his Haggadah also explains similar to the Ran and clearly delineates the reference to the mitzvah of repeating the story of the exodus. It is important to note that the Shulchan Aruch makes no mention of Rabban Gamliel's ruling, which indicates that it is not a practically accepted opinion.

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Jewish homes when he was slaying the Egyptians.” One who is familiar with the Torah is aware that it is not at all common for the Torah to prescribe the reason for doing a mitzvah. We accept to do the mitzvot because we believe they are G-d given, not because we are content or in agreement with the concept they symbolize. Why then does the Torah deviate from its norm and offer us the reason for the mitzvah of the Paschal lamb?

In regard to the mitzvah of eating matzah, the Mishnah paraphrases the Torah and explains that we eat matzah because the mad rush out of Egypt did not provide sufficient time for the dough to rise and as a result, our ancestors were forced to eat matzah. Although the Torah does in fact testify to the historical authenticity of the Jews leaving Egypt without allowing time for the bread to rise (Exodus 12:34-39), the Torah itself never claims that this is **the** reason we eat matzah on Pesach. As a matter of fact it is impossible to say that this is **the** reason for eating matzah since the commandment to eat matzah and not chometz was given to the Jewish people prior to leaving Egypt. How can the Mishnah claim that the purpose of matzah is to recall the rush of the exodus when in fact the mitzvah to eat matzah preceded the exodus?⁷

⁷ The Torah (12:39) states, "They baked the dough that they brought out from Egypt into matzah and not chometz, because they were exiled from Egypt without having sufficient time for the bread to rise". The verse seems to imply that the eating of matzah as opposed to chometz was purely for practical considerations, not for the sake of the mitzvah. This is the opinion of the Ran (Pesachim 116a) that had there been sufficient time, they would have baked chometz bread to be used on the night following the exodus. The Talmud (Pesachim 96a) teaches that the requirement to abstain from chometz in Egypt only lasted a night and a day. The underlying assumption of the Ran is that even on the one day they did not eat chometz, there was no prohibition in Egypt against

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Furthermore, the Torah offers an alternate explanation as to the symbolism of the matzah, saying that it is eaten to remember the poor man's bread we ate under the Egyptian persecution.⁸ How can there be dual concepts behind the

baking and owning chometz. It is only a result of insufficient time to allow fermentation that they resorted to baking matzah. Seforno's commentary to Torah supports this opinion (see Tzlach who adamantly disagrees with Ran and concludes that the prohibition ended with sunrise on the fifteenth). Ramban in his commentary on the Torah contends that they did not abstain from baking chometz for merely practical circumstances. The commandment in Egypt already prohibited them from eating, and **even baking and owning chometz** for at least the first day, leaving them no choice but to bake matzah. The verse states they baked matzah "because not chometz", meaning that they baked matzah because they were banned from baking chometz. The Torah by mentioning the hastened departure is only trying to explain why the matzah was baked on the road and not in Egypt prior to the exodus. The Daas Zekanim and Orach Chaim also support the opinion of the Ramban, that Chometz was prohibited from being baked on the day they embarked from Egypt. Rabbi Menachem Spira (of the JSN) pointed out to me that the version we have of Rabban Gamliel in the Haggadah clearly contradicts the opinion of the Ramban because it claims that matzah was a result of the speedy departure. The Chizkuni also seems to point out a discrepancy between the Haggadah and Ramban's interpretation. In light of all that was mentioned, the simplest approach to reconcile the commandment to eat matzah foreshadowing the reason delineated in the Torah, is found in the Abudraham's commentary to the Haggadah in the name of Rav Yosef Kimchi. He suggests that the mitzvah was given in Egypt with the understanding that they will leave in a hurry without enough time for the dough to rise.

⁸ In Deuteronomy 16:3 the Torah refers to matzah as "poor bread" and Rashi comments that it is to remind us of the poverty that we were subjected to in the land of Egypt. Based on Rashi the more common definition is "bread of affliction". However, the Talmud in Pesachim 36a seems to understand the term "poor bread" to be referring to the actual bread, not the state of the people eating the bread. Namely, the bread itself should be "poor" and made only from the most basic ingredients. This understanding fits the verse quite well because the next phrase is

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eating of matzah? Some commentaries explain that there are two concepts that we try to commemorate. The actual commandment that was given in Egypt to eat matzah all seven days (and refrain from chometz) is to commemorate the poor mans bread that we ate in Egypt before the exodus was even a dream. However, to commemorate that alone it would suffice for the Torah to prohibit the consumption of chometz and simply encourage the eating of matzah, as is accepted throughout the entire seven days of Pesach. The additional mitzvah that is present on the first night of Pesach, which requires and obligates us to eat matzah, is to commemorate the rush out of Egypt without allowing enough time for the dough to rise.⁹ If this is the case, we must then understand why the Mishnah chooses to draw our attention to the secondary aspect of eating matzah, the rushed exodus, and not the primary aspect of remembering the poor mans bread that we ate under persecution?

In regard to the mitzvah of eating marror the Mishnah says that it is to remind us how the Egyptians made our lives bitter in the land of Egypt. Although this in and of itself seems plausible, the order in which we mention all of these

"because we left Egypt quickly", meaning that the bread should be "poor" and baked from the simplest of ingredients because we are commemorating the bread that was eaten upon leaving Egypt in a rush without having a chance to spice it up and make it more palatable.

⁹ Haggadah Maaseh Nissim from Rav Yakov M'lisa offers this explanation in the name of the Haggadah Maaseh Hashem. According to this explanation there is a definite purpose in not only refraining from chometz for seven days, but actually in eating matzah. This explanation supports the opinion of the Vilna Goan who felt that although one is not *required* to eat matzah all seven days of Pesach so long as one abstains from chometz, by eating matzah one does in fact fulfill a mitzvah. The Baal Hameor at the end of Pesachim apparently also agrees to the Vilna Goan, which can be inferred from his question of why we do not make a blessing on matzah all seven days as we do the first night.

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mitzvot is inappropriate. If the marror is in fact present to remind us of the suffering and anguish in Egypt, it is more logical for marror to precede the matzah and the Paschal sacrifice, which were both representative of later stages in the redemption. Why then do we not speak about the marror, and also eat the marror, prior to the pesach sacrifice and the matzah, which both represent stages of freedom?¹⁰

III

In order to answer these questions we must preface with a concept integral to our perception of mitzvot. One of the climactic points in the Haggadah is the prophetic insight into the four sons. The wicked son asks his question by saying “What is this work that **you** are so involved in?” As innocent as the question may seem, the tone is clearly antagonistic. The Torah itself informs us of the proper response. “You should tell your son on that day saying, ‘It is for this that G-d has done for me when we left Egypt’”. Rashi

¹⁰ Rav Yechezkiel Landau in his renowned commentary on Pesachim (Tzlach) poses this question. His approach is based on two Midrashim that rationalize the exodus taking place 190 years before it was originally planned. One Midrash says that the intensity of the labor allowed 400 years worth of labor to be completed in just 210. An alternate Midrash explains that the Jews completed the debt of 190 years of slavery throughout the course of history. The statement of Rabban Gamliel is coming to support the rationale of the first Midrash over the second. Through reading the statement of Rabban Gamliel we are forced to ask ourselves why does the matzah precede the marror, to which we respond that the marror which represents the excessive bitterness and severe persecution beyond what was originally anticipated is what allowed the redemption to take place. Therefore we mention marror at the very end because the redemption at this particular time was a result of the sever bitterness symbolized by the marror.

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comments that the message we relay to the wicked son is, that it is because “this” namely, the mitzvot of pesach, matzah, and marror that G-d has taken me out of the land of Egypt.¹¹ The Torah does not tell us that we have the mitzvot because we were taken out of Egypt, **but rather because of the mitzvot we were taken out of Egypt.** Attempting to classify the cause and the effect is often confusing. The challenge of the wicked son is based on the underlying assumption that we keep mitzvot to commemorate the exodus. Based on the premise of the wicked son, it is rational to ask: Why then must you continue to do this in year 2004? The reasons that were compelling two thousand years ago are no longer applicable. To this we respond that his premise is wrong. We don't keep mitzvot because of the exodus but rather the exodus occurred so that we may keep these mitzvot.¹²

¹¹ Ramban and Rashbam both simplify the verse by reading it as one sentence. The connotation is that because of all the miracles and supernatural phenomenon that G-d has done for me upon leaving Egypt, I am committed to all these various mitzvot. Rashi disagrees and reads the verse as the words sound, that because of the "this" which must be referring to mitzvot, G-d has taken us from Egypt. See also Rashi Exodus 12:13.

¹² The explanation above is elaborated on in the Beis HaLevi. He makes a note that in the following verse we find the Paschal lamb called a statute. This is difficult to comprehend because the term statute is usually reserved for commandments that are beyond human comprehension such as the red heifer. (Even in the context of koshering the vessels of Midyan, where the Torah uses a similar term, it can be understood to be making a reference to the concept of ritual immersion of new utensils prior to their use, which is not a rational concept and can be called a statute.) But the Paschal lamb is not a statute at all, it is a process of negating the idolatry of the Egyptians. The Beis HaLevi explains that this is all part of the message we instill in the heart of the wicked son. Each and every mitzvah that we have, must ultimately be perceived as a statute, otherwise we are likely to limit the parameters of the mitzvah based on our false

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IV

We can now return to answer the questions on the statement of Rabban Gamliel. First we asked, why the Torah elaborates to explain the reason for the Paschal lamb; namely that G-d passed over the Jewish households. Rav Yechezkiel Landau (Tzlach on Pesachim) points our attention to the context. The Torah prefaces the commandment of the Paschal lamb by stating that the mitzvah of the Paschal lamb only applies after we enter the land of Israel. The child is therefore puzzled when he sees the Paschal lamb being observed in Egypt and he asks, “What is this work that you are doing?”. Our response is that it is a pesach offering that we are preparing so that through the merit of being occupied with the mitzvah, G-d will have compassion on us and pass over the Jewish households. The Torah does not supply us with the reason for keeping the mitzvah and is not rationalizing the mitzvah with the event, but rather instructing us to teach our children that by involving ourselves with this mitzvah we will merit the event to come to fruition. Once again the mitzvah is the cause and the event is the effect.

The second question is why Rabban Gamliel focuses our attention on the matzah that represents the expedited exodus and not having time to rise, instead of focusing our attention on the matzah representing the poor man’s bread, the bread of affliction that we were commanded to eat while

confidence of fully grasping the fundamental concept behind the mitzvah. The Beis HaLevi has a similar approach in Parshat Ki Tisa where he explains that the sin of the Golden calf was a pursuit of spirituality without a divine commandment connecting the action to G-d. Therefore, when the Torah teaches about the building of the Mishkan it makes a definite emphasis on each detail being a command from G-d.

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still in Egypt. This question can be answered together with the question of why marmor is put at the end when chronologically it belongs first. Rabban Gamliel went out of his way to show us that the marmor is absolutely out of order. The pesach sacrifice represents the night prior to leaving Egypt. The matzah represents the actual leaving of Egypt and not having enough time for the bread to rise. At that point when we mention marmor we are struck by the irrational order. Had the matzah represented the bread of affliction, marmor would not be out of order at all. Rabban Gamliel wanted us to realize that marmor is out of order because it awakens us to accept a double redemption. We first speak of the pesach and matzah which represents one redemption. We then speak about the marmor, which represents slavery and was inherently followed by a second redemption. Rav Yakov M'lisa (Haggadah Maaseh Nissim) explains that we are being taught that the redemption celebrated through the pesach and matzah is not just freedom from physical persecution. Rather we are celebrating a much deeper and far more meaningful redemption. It is a celebration that G-d has chosen us for His nation and accepted us as His faithful servants. The freedom from persecution is a nice secondary bonus, and that is represented by the marmor that comes at the end. But, the redemption represented by pesach and matzah precede the marmor. Therefore, they do not represent the physical freedom from the stage marmor represents, but rather our spiritual freedom which started our eternal intimate relationship with G-d and His Torah. This spiritual freedom is the primary celebration of the evening, and is only realized by matzah symbolizing the rushed exodus, thereby causing marmor to be out of order.

Rabban Gamliel says that one who does not mention the pesach, matzah, and marmor in that order has not fulfilled

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his obligation. The requirement on the night of Pesach is to realize that G-d has taken us out of Egypt to perform his mitzvot and has transformed us into his servants. It is only through mentioning pesach, matzah and marror specifically in that order, that we realize the essence of our redemption.

V

It is with this cognizance that we ask the four questions. Sure, there are many deviations in our behavior and variations in our practice on the night of Pesach. Yet, most of these changes in the way we conduct ourselves are not significant.¹³ We try to focus our attention on the mitzvot of the night and invoke our minds to understand their importance. It is for the purpose of keeping the mitzvot that G-d has taken us out of Egypt, as Rashi explained. The retelling of the exodus is not to dramatize the course of events that led to our redemption. We try to focus on the mitzvot which were the very purpose of the redemption, and thereby obtain a more lucid understanding and appreciation for all that G-d has done for us. The dialogue in the Haggadah is mitzvah-centered. We expound upon the mitzvot and delve into their roots. It is for this reason that the four questions focus specifically on the mitzvot that we are actively performing and relentlessly pursuing on the night of Pesach. The first two questions focus on the mitzvot that are from the Torah itself. Then we shift in the next two questions to learn about the rabbinic mitzvot, such as dipping and

¹³ Tosafos Pesachim 115b (also 114a) comments that we try to act in an abnormal way to attract the attention of the children and inspire them to ask questions even on the trivial differences as a means of leading them into realizing the real differences. See also Rashbam who offers a different interpretation.

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reclining, to show our allegiance to the scholars of the Talmud and place our utmost confidence in their meticulous analysis of the Torah. By asking the questions on the rabbinic mitzvot, we allot respect and deference to those mitzvot introduced by the Rabbinic authorities.¹⁴

VI

Perhaps we find difficulty in celebrating our freedom from Egypt since we were immediately subjected to the mitzvot without ever experiencing any true freedom. Regardless of whose domain we are in, we are simply followers instructed to follow a list of rules. Is this really something to celebrate!? We prefer to think of ourselves as an emancipated people, but ideal freedom should allow us the autonomy to live as we choose without being subject to restrictions and constraints in every facet of life. Yet, when we ponder the concept of freedom we begin to realize that it is not as glamorous as we may have thought. The Mishnah is Avos (6:4) says that there is no true free person except for one who is steeped in Torah study. As odd as this may seem, the Maharal in his commentary to Avos explains that even a

¹⁴ The explanation above is an elaboration of the commentary found in the Haggadah Maaseh Nissim. Based on this, he continues to explain the retort to the four questions. Why do we have so many mitzvot on the night of Pesach? Because, we were once slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. During that period we were forced to do work that was not only difficult and menial, but we also had no understanding of why the forced labor was necessary. It is with that understanding that G-d took us out of Egypt, that we would do G-d's work even if we don't completely understand it. G-d replaced Pharaoh with the expectation that just as we worked for Pharaoh without challenging the decrees that we did not understand, so too we must work for G-d and keep even the mitzvot that are beyond our limited comprehension.

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king does not have complete freedom. The king may not have to follow orders from others, but he has a constant apprehension of being overthrown and confuted by his underlings. The pressures with which a king has to deal do not allow him to live a stress-free life; he is just as bound to his pressures as the slave who serves him. The Mishnah teaches that although it is impossible for one to be absolutely free without any fears or inhibitions, the closest that one can actually come to such a state is complete envelopment in Torah study and the tireless pursuit of mitzvot. Everyone is a slave to someone or something, but to be a slave to G-d rather than “a slave to a slave” is far closer to experiencing absolute freedom. This unique type of individual answers to none other than G-d himself. This is the freedom that we celebrate on Pesach.

Freedom to Recline or Reclining for Freedom?

Rabbi Yaacov Benazaquen

On the first night of Pesach, millions of Jews will be conducting what is known as the Pesach Seder, literally the Order of Passover. The Haggadah lays out the program for the night. Among other things, we are commanded to relax and lean to the left as we eat matzah and drink four cups of wine¹. A careful analysis of this unusual mitzvah raises a fundamental question about the nature of mitzvot in general.

Let's take a look at the Talmudic passage that discusses this mitzvah:

The Sages taught that it is necessary to recline for the eating of matzah but not for marror. Rav Nachman once said that one must also recline to drink the wine of the Seder, yet on another occasion he said that one need not recline to drink the wine. [The resolution of this apparent contradiction is that] each statement actually refers to a different set of two cups of wine².

The Sages debated [over which two of the four cups was Rav Nachman referring to when he

¹ The Meiri is of the opinion that there is also an obligation of reclining for the reading of the Haggadah.

² Two cups of wine are drunk before the meal and two after the meal.

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required reclining.] Some argued that since the first two cups are drunk at **the beginning of redemption**³ one should recline while drinking these cups rather than the last two cups which are drunk when **we are already redeemed**. However, others argued that since, at the beginning of the Seder we proclaim, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt,” **we are not yet redeemed**; so we need not recline. We only need to recline at the end of the Seder when **we are already redeemed**. Since both arguments are valid, the accepted halachah is that we are required to recline for all four cups of wine⁴ (Talmud Pesachim 108a).

Rashi⁵ explains that we recline when we eat matzah because it is a reminder of the redemption, but we don't recline when we eat maror because it is a reminder of the oppression. Clearly, reclining symbolizes emancipation. Reclining when eating matzah would enhance the experience of freedom associated with the matzah, whereas reclining when eating maror would bring up contradicting feelings of bitterness and freedom.

³ The meaning of the bolded expressions will become clear in the course of our analysis.

⁴ Rabenu Nissim notes that this is a case when we deviate from the principle of *safek drabanan lekulah*, i.e. whenever there is a situation of doubt in rabbinic law one may be lenient. Since reclining is only rabbinic in nature, and we don't know which set of two cups requires reclining, we should not be required to recline on any of them. He argues that this case is an exception because if we are lenient we will completely annul the rabbinic mitzvah of reclining on wine. We are therefore stringent. He also adds that since reclining does not pose much difficulty it is therefore appropriate to be stringent.

⁵ The most important and studied Biblical and Talmudic commentator. He lived in 11th century France.

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In light of Rashi's comment that reclining symbolizes emancipation, we gain new understanding of the underlying debate between the Sages in the Talmud. We have seen that the Sages argue about which cups of wine need to be drunk reclining. The real debate is as follows: Is reclining at the Seder a way to generate and inspire feelings of freedom or is reclining a mode of expressing an already achieved state of freedom?

If reclining is intended to generate and inspire feelings of freedom, then it is appropriate to recline while drinking the first two cups of wine. These cups are drunk at the beginning of the Seder, which is focused on the Jewish experience in Egypt. How we got there. What we did there. What the Egyptians did to us. And finally, what G-d did to the Egyptians to get us out. This part of the Seder recreates the process of redemption so that we can feel part of the Jewish People's emancipation. This represents the opinion of the sages that state that one should recline when drinking the first two cups of wine.

If however, reclining is a form of expressing our state of liberation, then it is appropriate to recline while drinking the last two cups of wine. These cups are drunk at the conclusion of the Seder, which focuses on expressing gratitude and praise for the freedom achieved in the first part of the Seder. Singing the praises of G-d as we drink wine, while reclining, is a powerful way to express the state of freedom that we feel at this time.

The fact that the Talmud considers both arguments shows that they are both valid justifications for promulgating a rabbinic decree. The Sages might have instituted reclining either as a means to engender the feelings of freedom or as a means to express the emancipation that we feel after concluding the first part of the Seder. This question is

unresolved and therefore the Talmud rules that it is necessary to recline for all four cups of wine.

Torah Laws and Rabbinic Decrees

It is a Talmudic maxim that the standard procedure for formulating rabbinic legislation is to mimic the familiar patterns of Biblical law rather than creating new legal concepts⁶. This means that the nature of rabbinic decrees should parallel the nature of Biblical laws. Since the Sages thought that the original decree of reclining could have been either expressive or inspirational in nature, it follows that we should be able to identify some Torah laws which are expressive of a feeling or situation, and others which are geared toward generating certain feelings or states of mind.

Expressive Mitzvot and Inspirational Mitzvot

Let us take a look at some examples of Torah laws that are based on the ideas we have discussed. We are commanded to stand up when an old person or a Torah scholar walks by or enters the room we are in⁷. The act of standing up generates in us the feeling of respect and honor that the Torah wants us to have for these people and what they represent. Likewise, the Torah commands us to leave the lands fallow during the year of *shemita*⁸ (sabbatical year) as a means to internalize our dependency on G-d for our sustenance. These are two examples of biblical mitzvot which are clearly designed to inspire.

⁶ See example of this in Pesachim 30b.

⁷ Leviticus 19:32 and Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 244:1.

⁸ Leviticus 25:3

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We also find examples of biblical mitzvot which do not come to generate any new feelings but rather express a preexisting emotion. Some early halachic authorities⁹ consider the requirement of tearing one's clothing, following the death of a close relative, a Biblical obligation. It is quite obvious that someone who has just lost a close relative doesn't need much assistance to feel torn and disconnected from him/her. Nonetheless, the tearing of one's clothing is a way to express and channel the feeling of sadness and sorrow in a therapeutic way.

The ability of our actions to inspire us can not be underestimated. In the immortal words of the Chinuch¹⁰, "Our hearts follow our deeds." As we have seen, the Torah itself utilizes this powerful tool. There are situations when our hearts are so far removed from what they should be feeling that we are simply incapable of connecting without the assistance of mitzvot. The ninth of Av and the night of the Seder are cases in point.

Mourning and the Ninth of Av

On the Ninth of Av we commemorate the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (70 CE). The rabbis established many practices of mourning for the weeks prior to this date. The intensity steadily increases until we reach the height of mourning on the ninth of Av itself. The goal on this day is to feel the state of *galut* (exile) in which we live. This is in stark contrast with the ideal state of *geula* (peace and autonomy) that we enjoyed in the land of Israel before the destruction of the Holy Temple. It is difficult to mourn for any loss two

⁹ The Tur Y.D. 340 quoting the Ramban.

¹⁰ The Sefer Hachinuch is a classic work on the 613 mitzvot by an anonymous writer in thirteen-century Spain.

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thousand years later, but the laws and customs of the period leading up to the ninth of Av help us achieve this mood. Let's try and understand how this works.

In the laws concerning mourning over the loss of a loved one, the greatest intensity applies on the very first days following the loss. The first week has special laws, some of which apply through the first month; a few extend until the first anniversary of the passing, when the mourning period fades away. This pattern differs radically from the laws of mourning associated with the ninth of Av. This stems from the fact that, unlike when a loved one is lost, we don't naturally feel the loss of the Temple. We did not live during the time that the Temple stood, so we have no direct way of understanding the loss it signifies to the Jewish People. But we can generate in ourselves these feelings by behaving like mourners. Acting like a mourner makes a person feel like one. By following the laws of mourning that apply to the period leading up to the ninth of Av we begin to feel like mourners. We realize that something very important is missing in our lives. Our hearts are then able to grasp an emotional memory of this tragic event of our history.

Celebrating and the Pesach Seder

On the night of the 15th of Nissan, we commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. On that night there is a difficult goal to achieve. The Haggadah states, "In every generation a person has to see himself as if he personally left Egypt. For G-d did not only redeem our forefathers from Egypt, He took us out too, as it says, 'and He took us out of there in order to bring us, to give us the land that He promised our forefathers (Deuteronomy 6:23).'" Indeed, in the Talmudic passage we presented earlier we saw that the first section of the Pesach

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Seder is about us still being **slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt** and the end of the Seder is about being **already redeemed people**. Somewhere in the middle we must have gotten out, and this is the goal mentioned in the Haggadah. How are we to fulfill this seemingly impossible obligation? How can I feel as if I was taken out of Egypt?

To close our eyes and meditate just won't do the job. The only way to succeed in this task is with the assistance of all the inspirational mitzvot of the night.

We use the marmor to make us feel destitute and bitter first, to transport us to those days of enslavement. Then we call upon the matzah to transport us to our quick exit to freedom. Finally, we take part in a relaxing feast where we eat and drink reclined, just as our emancipated forefathers did so long ago. The reclining, the four cups of wine, the matzah, the marmor, the four questions, and the detailed retelling of the Exodus combine to recreate the story and bring it to life. This enables us to truly feel as if we ourselves left Egypt.

The final goal of the night is to thank G-d for having taken not just our forefathers out, but also **us**. After experiencing a personal redemption through the mitzvot of the Seder, and after feeling what it was like to be taken out of slavery just as our ancestors were, we will spontaneously burst out in song, praise and thanksgiving for the great salvation G-d has brought about for us.

Pesach and the Ninth of Av

We find a very peculiar detail built into the Jewish calendar. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 428:3) writes that the first day of Pesach always occurs on the same day of the week as the ninth of Av. This is not a coincidence. It is based on a verse: "He filled me with bitterness, sated me with

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wormwood (Book of Lamentations 3:15).” The Midrash explains that the bitterness refers to the marmor of Pesach and the wormwood is a reference to the mourning of the ninth of Av (*Midrash Rabbah* ad loc). This connection is powerfully articulated in one of the most well-known *kinot* (lamentations) recited on the day of Tisha B’av. The *kinah* contrasts the joyous Exodus from Egypt with tragic Exile from land of Israel.

Pesach and Tisha B’av are on the same day?! How incongruous to commemorate *galut* (exile) on the same day of the week that we commemorate *geula* (redemption)! What is the meaning of this?

Freedom can only be as great as the enslavement was bitter. And Exile is only as tragic as home was sweet. We need Pesach to grasp the catastrophe of Tisha B’av, and we need Tisha B’av to bring Pesach to life.

Inspired by the mitzvot of the Seder night, we experience our first Exodus to freedom. But the memory of Tisha B’av reminds us that we were exiled from Jerusalem and we are in need of a new Exodus. It is with this in mind that we conclude the Pesach Seder with the hopeful prayer, לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה, Next year in Jerusalem!

The Secret of the Firstborn

Rabbi Menachem Spira

The Exodus from Egypt, and the understanding of its significance, is a pillar of Judaism. Appropriately, we find many commandments throughout the year that remind us of the Exodus and the miracles that occurred at that time.

There is one unusual mitzvah that at first glance seems to be just another one of the many mitzvot that commemorate the Exodus. Yet upon deeper analysis, we will discover that it actually is in a class by itself.

The Torah states in Exodus:

“It shall come to pass, when G-d will bring you to the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your forefathers, and He will have given it to you; then you shall set apart every first issue of the womb to G-d, and of every first issue that is dropped by livestock that belong to you, the males are G-d’s. Every first-issue donkey you shall redeem with a lamb or kid; if you do not redeem it, you shall axe the back of its neck. And you shall redeem every human firstborn among your sons. And it shall be when your son will ask you at some future time, ‘What is this?’ you shall say to him, ‘With a strong hand G-d removed us from Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it happened when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to

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send us out, that G-d killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of man to the firstborn of beast. Therefore I offer to G-d all male first issue of the womb, and I shall redeem all the firstborn of my sons. And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and an ornament between your eyes, for with a strong hand G-d removed us from Egypt.’” (Exodus 13:12-16)

After the Exodus from Egypt, G-d commanded Moshe the laws regarding firstborn males of people and animals. Based on the above text, it seems that this commandment is not effective until the Jewish people enter the land of Israel. Yet the Talmud states that the Jews were already subject to its terms in the desert. Why then does the text apparently subject this commandment to entering the land? Rashi (R' Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105) in his commentary on this verse resolves this question. He explains that in fact the Jews had this mitzvah in the desert even before entering the Land. The verse is informing us that by fulfilling this commandment in the wilderness the Jewish people merited to enter and settle the land of Israel.

This however, presents a new problem. Why is entering the land dependant upon the sanctification of the firstborn?

To understand this question, one must first analyze the historical reason for sanctification of firstborns. Superficially, we assume that we must show appreciation to G-d for having saved the firstborn of the Jews, even though He killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. Yet a careful reading of the sanctification verse does not allow for this interpretation. The text flatly states that G-d killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. There is no mention that the

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firstborn of the Jews were “saved.” Therefore, it seems, we sanctify the firstborn because G-d killed *their* firstborn, not because He saved *ours*. What then is the connection between G-d killing the Egyptians’ firstborn, and the Jews’ sanctifying theirs?

In addition, why did G-d target the firstborn? Why impose sentence solely based on an accident of birth, rather than upon merit or blame? This is not the first time we hear mention of the firstborn. When G-d first charges Moshe to go to Egypt, his message to Pharaoh is, “...*my firstborn son is Israel...Send out My son that he may serve Me-but you have refused to send him out; behold, I shall kill your firstborn son.*” This unique association is further emphasized by the special nature of the Tenth Plague. Of all the 10 plagues G-d brought on the Egyptians, the slaying of the firstborn is distinguished from the rest, both as the final plague and as the catalyst for the actual redemption. Why is it the only plague with a special memorial?

Furthermore, the commandment to sanctify the firstborn also has details which are difficult to understand. Although the firstborn of all kosher animals fall within the sanctification obligation, amongst non-kosher animals, only the firstborn of donkeys must be sanctified and redeemed. (Since it is non-kosher, and thus cannot be sacrificed directly, it must be redeemed and replaced with a sheep, a kosher animal, which is then given to the kohen.) What distinguishes the donkey from the myriad non-kosher animals? In a terse explanation, Rashi quotes the Talmudic simile comparing the Egyptians to donkeys. This simile needs clarification, as does this seemingly vague response to a complex question.

Finally, the text itself is perplexing. The phrase, “...*and it shall be, when your son will ask you...*” is

highlighted in the Haggadah of the Seder night as a question of one of the Four Sons. The Four Sons are clearly inquiring about the Exodus and its commemorative rituals; that is why they appear in the Seder text. Yet the question of this Son seems to be directed at the specific commandment of sanctifying the firstborn, not a commandment associated with the Seder night.

We must therefore conclude that the commandment to sanctify the firstborn is intimately connected to the Seder night, and is not just another one of the many commandments that remind us of the Exodus.

Another perplexing part of this text is the seemingly unconnected association with Tefillin. We can simply explain its placement here, because this section is one of the four sections emplaced within the Tefillin. The real challenge is understanding the connection between Tefillin and the sanctification of the firstborn.

The portion immediately preceding our text also deals with Tefillin, and is one of the sections placed in it. Why is there a need for more than one mention of the Tefillin, and what is the significance of the differences in the reference to the Tefillin?

In this portion, there is the commandment to place the Tefillin “*on your hand*” (ידך). This is the typical spelling of the Hebrew word. In the next text, the same commandment appears, yet, “on your hand” is spelled differently (ידכה). The Talmud explains that this spelling mandates a rule concerning daily practice. “ידכה” can actually be broken into two words “יד כהה,” meaning, the ‘weak hand.’ Halachically, Tefillin are placed on the weaker arm. This requirement begs to be understood, in terms of the differences and the significance of the weaker arm. The actual reference to the Tefillin worn on the head also varies. In one portion, it is

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referred to as a “*reminder between your eyes.*” In the next portion, the verse terms it an “*ornament.*” How do we resolve these differences?

In order to understand all of the aforementioned questions, we need to analyze the role of matzah in the holiday of Pesach. The Torah’s apparent reasoning for eating matzah is stated, “...*because of it, for seven days you shall eat matzos, bread of affliction, ...for you departed the land of Egypt in haste (Deuteronomy 16:3).*”

It does not seem logical that a lack of time for dough to rise, resulting in flat baked matzah, should be the central focus of our holiday, the “Holiday of Matzah.” Is this not taking a minor detail and magnifying it as theme of the day?

Rather, we can understand that the concept of haste is a central theme in the Exodus from Egypt. The Maharal (R’ Yehuda Loewe ben Bezalel 1526-1609) explains that haste is the symbol of a spiritual reality. Conversely, palpable substance of physical reality is weighted down, and therefore moves more slowly. The Maharal’s analogy gives a new perspective to the story of the Exodus.

The Exodus marked the divinely ordained and directed birth of the Jewish nation. This was an unnatural occurrence. According to the normal cycle of the world, the Jews should never have left Egypt, nor continued to survive throughout history. Thus, the existence of the Jewish people is beyond nature. It is part of a spiritual reality and thus becomes an intrinsic characteristic of who we are. Accordingly, when the Jewish people left Egypt, they walked out quickly, in accordance with *their* reality, a spiritual reality. If the existence of the Jewish people is not natural, it is the purely spiritual force of G-d that keeps us alive. It is now clear that the matzah, the symbol of haste, is a major theme of the Exodus, for it is the essence of our formation.

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This concept is directly juxtaposed to the perspective of Egypt. Previously, Rashi was quoted comparing ancient Egyptians to donkeys. The Hebrew word for donkey (חמור) comes from the root word (חומר) meaning “matter.” The donkey symbolizes a creature that is completely physical. It is slow moving, stubborn, and difficult to budge, which Maharal explained is the essence of purely physical beings. Yet the Jews are leaving Egypt as a new creation, a nation that recognizes their success as spiritual and coming from G-d, rather than physical and a result of their own power.

With this new insight into the dichotomy between the Jewish people and the Egyptian people, we can understand why G-d targeted the firstborn in the final plague. The firstborn is the symbol of foundation, a beginning upon which to build and the representation of the nation and family. G-d strikes the firstborn in order to negate the core of the people. For the Egyptians, their firstborn, was representative of their physical strength and prowess. G-d strikes at this symbol to show that there is another reality. Our reality recognizes a higher strength, G-d, and therefore we understand that it is not by our own might that we live. The killing of the firstborn is indeed the final blow, by destroying the previously held notion of personal strength and glorification and exalting the recognition of G-d and His Omnipotence.

We sanctify our firstborn in concurrence with this idea, an acknowledgment that the Egyptian conceptual firstborn was slaughtered. It was at this point that we, the Jewish people defined our firstborn as the representation of a higher ideal: G-d as the source of everything in this world.

Hence, the commandment to sanctify our firstborn is not merely an associated point, but a very central theme of the Exodus. When, during the Seder, the Son asks about this

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commandment, he is actually discovering the main theme of the event.

In this context, we can comprehend the role of the commandment to sanctify every firstborn as a merit for entering the land of Israel. Our entire entitlement to the privilege of living in Israel is based upon our understanding of the description of the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 11:12), “*A land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it.*” We recognize that Israel is the center of G-d’s divine presence and accept that our existence is in His hands. Those who failed to acknowledge this did not merit entering the land both in the time of Moshe and later in the times of Ezra.

We can now understand the connection of firstborn to Tefillin as well as the aforementioned discrepancies in the chapters included in the Tefillin. In the second paragraph, we mention the commandment to sanctify every firstborn. We thereby define the essence of a person. A person is not just his own physical entity, rather he is a being completely dependant upon, and consecrated, to G-d. This is why we place Tefillin on the weaker arm, to emphasize that the strong hand of G-d is what gives us strength, not our own might. When a person internalizes this idea, it helps beautify him, like an ornament that lends added beauty to the wearer. Therefore, it is in conjunction with this paragraph that Tefillin are described as an ornament.

The first paragraph of the Tefillin fills another purpose. In this paragraph it is written, “*And you should tell your son on that day, saying, ‘it is because of this that G-d acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.’*” Rashi explains that we tell the son that the Exodus occurred so that we could keep the commandments. The primary function of this paragraph in the Tefillin is to constantly remind us that the

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Exodus was not an end in itself, but was rather for the purpose of bringing us to fulfilling the Torah. That paragraph indeed continues, “*and it shall be for you a sign on your arm, and a reminder between your eyes so that G-d’s Torah may be in your mouth.*” Ramban (R’ Moshe Ben Nachman 1194-1270) explains that “*in your mouth*” implies,” at the ready to fulfill commandments, because He is our master.” Both paragraphs in the section on Tefillin obligate us to remember Egypt, each in order to fulfill different purposes.

We understand now that the commandment to sanctify every firstborn is a theme of our lives. The Exodus from Egypt marked an epiphany in which the Jewish people established before the world that we accept G-d as Omnipotent and guide our lives by that understanding. Tefillin, in which the connection between the Exodus and this definition of a Jew is expressed, is a reminder and an adornment which beautifies and enriches our lives and our bodies.

This idea is the force behind the structure of the Seder. It is a night that we do everything differently and in a purposefully unusual manner; yet we call it a “Seder,” by definition, an organized event. We eat marror, to experience bitterness; we drink wine to feel like carefree people. All of such actions are out of the ordinary, unnatural, even contradictory. These are all devices intended to help us recapture the feeling of the Exodus. In the Haggadah we state: “In every generation it is one’s duty to regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt.” Thus the Seder night is not a memorial; we do not accomplish our duty by only remembering. That is enough for an event relegated to the annals of history. We are celebrating the outcome of an event that still affects our lives today. We constantly re-

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live that Exodus, the moment of our recognition that G-d is the source and purpose of our existence.

The wise son of the Haggadah asks this question. *“What are the testimonies, decrees, and ordinances which Hashem, our G-d has commanded you?”* The answer we give him is strange: *“Therefore explain to him the laws of the Pesach offering: that one may not eat dessert after the final taste of the Pesach offering.”* How does this capture the reasoning for all the mitzvot? Furthermore, why is this the summation of the Pesach offering laws? The Pesach offering is the all inclusive symbol of the Seder. Once we have gained the experience and understanding inherent in the Seder, we don’t want to eat anything else. Rather we want to leave this event with the “taste” of the offering in our mouths, with the acquisition of our affirmation of G-d as a result of the Seder process.

We end our Seder having encapsulated both sections of the Tefillin that are previously mentioned. We fulfill the first portion of the Tefillin, the encouragement to remember in order to fulfill mitzvot. We use those actions to acquire the ‘taste’ of the second portion, the essence of who we are, and our connection to G-d. This is the taste we relish from the Seder, and thus it stays with us long after the holiday ends. The constant reminders throughout the year of the Exodus are intended, in part, to revive that taste throughout the year.

A Haggadah Analysis

Rabbi Dani Kermaier

The picture perfect Seder has a venerable grandfather leading it from the head of the table as cherubic little grandchildren fall asleep in their seats. These children aren't falling asleep out of boredom. In fact, children gain immensely from the Pesach Seder, captivated by its exciting story of devastating plagues and national redemption. But as the lively discussion carries on well into the morning hours, tired little eyes surrender to sleep.

The Seder is for adults too. The Haggadah is a work of art waiting to be unveiled. There are countless nuances and subtleties hidden in the narrative of this masterpiece. An interactive Seder filled with meaningful Haggadah conversation transforms the night from mere ritual into a forum for the exploration of Jewish identity.



הא לחמא עניא – This is the unleavened bread that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt...

Many commentators take note of the fact that the main reason we eat matzah on Pesach is not because our forefathers ate it in Egypt, but rather because we had to rush out at the time of the redemption and didn't have time for it

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to rise. If this is the case, why does the Pesach Seder start with a declaration describing the matzah as the unleavened bread our forefathers ate while they were in Egypt? It should be noted that the Egyptians fed the Jewish slaves matzah, as it kept them satiated for longer than ordinary bread.

The *Binyan Ariel* explains that this invitation is sensitive to needy individuals and is designed to make them feel comfortable in our homes. By mentioning the matzah we ate in Egypt and sharing our common past as slaves, we empathize with our needy guests and make them feel at home.

The Haggadah is not addressing the reason for eating matzah on Pesach. Rather, the Seder opens with a statement which reflects our deep love and caring for our fellow Jew.



מה נשתנה הלילה הזה – Why is this night different than all other nights?

The Gemara states that there is an obligation for there to be an actual question and answer routine that is integral to the Pesach Seder. This is typically fulfilled with the Four Questions, and the overall give and take of the lively Seder conversation. The continuation of that Talmudic statement is quite curious. The Gemara relates that even if one is alone one must ask and answer as this is the obligation of the day. This piece of Talmud begs for interpretation.

The answer is fundamental to our general approach to all Jewish practice. There is more than meets the eye! The Pesach Seder is the reenactment of our birth as a people and the beginning of our commitment to keeping all the mitzvot. But this is insufficient. It is our responsibility to delve

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deeper and explore the “why” and “how”, and not to act out of routine. Our purpose in life is bringing depth to a superficial world through our intellect and understanding. Going through the motions of a Seder without hearing the message of matzah and marror leaves our mission unaccomplished. The questions and answers develop our understanding and appreciation for the reasons behind all the mitzvot of the night. The Four Questions focus on these mitzvot, spurring us on to understand and appreciate the “why” as well, for that is who we are!



עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים – We were Slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt....

There is a conflict in the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim 116a) between the famous Talmudic sages Rav and Shmuel. The Pesach Seder was to follow the principle, “commence with our disgrace and finish with our praise”. They debated exactly what constitutes our humble beginning, with which we start the Seder. Rav was of the opinion that it is our ancestral connection to pagan idol worship. Shmuel countered that our being slaves is the opening of the recounting of the Pesach story. Both agree that the Haggadah begins with “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt...” their argument is about whether it is a way of introduction or part of the actual recounting of the Pesach story.



When reading this paragraph in the Haggadah, one can't help but question, “Who says?” It starts off, “We were

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slaves to *Pharaoh in Egypt* and G-d took us out ... and if G-d hadn't taken out our forefathers from Egypt. We, our children and our grandchildren would still be enslaved to *Pharaoh in Egypt*." Why emphasize the fact that we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt (that's where Pharaoh's are usually found)? And even if we were to remain slaves there as a result of G-d's not taking us out, who says Pharaoh would still be the ruler and who says we would have even remained in Egypt?

Some have taken the approach that, due to our tenuous position of straddling the spiritual fence inches from the point of no return, the damage of not being taken out would have meant eternal enslavement to the debased society that was Pharaoh's Egypt. Whoever the ruler and whatever the nation, we would have been enslaved to that moral and ethical corruption that would have tainted our bloodstream forever. The Haggadah continues with this idea:

“And even if we are all wise, all erudite, all elders, all fully versed in the entire Torah it is a mitzvah upon us to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt. And the more one engages in the recounting the more praiseworthy.”

If we were to consider ourselves intellectually able to rise above the ethical, moral, and spiritual contamination that we would have endured if G-d hadn't taken us out of Egypt, the Haggadah informs us that we are mistaken. It would have been impossible to overcome, and therefore we would still have to recount the story of the Exodus and even develop it at length.



ברוך המקום ברוך הוא - The Four Sons: The wise son, the wicked son, the simpleton and the son who doesn't know how to ask.

The wise son asks with enthusiasm, referencing different nuances in halachah, and we respond to him in kind.

The wicked son, however, chooses attacking words and receives quite a rebuke. He asks, “what is [all] this work that you [are doing]?” We reply that since he has “removed himself from the group (i.e. Jewish community), he has therefore denied G-d’s existence. Dull his teeth and tell him, “We are doing this [work] because G-d took me out of Egypt. However, if you had been there, you wouldn’t have been redeemed.” A pretty harsh retort. However, where is the indication that the wicked son denies G-d? What is the correlation between his divorcing himself from the community and his denying G-d’s existence?

The answer to this question will also explain the strong retort. The wicked son knows the source of the mitzvot of Pesach that he is questioning, which he mockingly called “work.” He is casting doubt on the veracity of the Torah from which the mitzvot stem. In response to this, the Haggadah teaches us that to doubt the divine inspiration of the Torah is to deny G-d’s very existence. It is *the Torah* that binds us together as a people and *the Torah* which guides us in G-d’s ways. We “dull his teeth,” metaphorically taking the wind out of his sails, by informing him that, “if he would have been in Egypt he wouldn’t have been taken out.” We are essentially telling him that his very existence in the world today is a direct result of the faith of his own ancestors.



ברוך שומר הבטחתו לישראל – Blessed is the One who keeps his promise to the Jewish People...

We praise G-d for redeeming us, honoring His pledge to our forefather Abraham that after a 400 year exile as strangers in a foreign land, our slavery and suffering would indeed come to an end. What is praise to one person is an insult to another. To praise G-d for keeping His word seems to indicate that G-d isn't always honest! We even expect humans to keep their word, isn't it a given that G-d keeps his promises?!

The text of Haggadah itself supplies the answer:
“Blessed is the One who keeps his promise to the Jewish People, Blessed his He. G-d *calculated* the end of the Exile in order to fulfill that which he swore to our forefather Abraham at the Covenant of the Halves....”

G-d redeemed us early, after two hundred and ten years instead of the four hundred years in his pledge to Abraham. A promise can only stay true so long as all the key elements still exist. If G-d hadn't taken us out of Egypt early, we would have disappeared as the Jewish nation, losing our identity and assimilating into Egyptian culture. At the end of the four hundred year period, no one could accuse G-d of not fulfilling His word to redeem an extinct people. We praise G-d for going above and beyond his promise and redeeming us early, ensuring that His word could be fulfilled and thereby bringing the Jewish people into existence.



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והיא שעמדה לאבותינו ולנו – And it is this [G-d's promise to Abraham] which stood by our forefathers and us...

At this point of the Seder all stand raising up our filled goblets of wine and unabashedly ring out the age old melody of “*V’Hi SheAmdah*”. These emotion filled words sum up our repetitive history in a few short lines.

“And Your promise to redeem us and make us into a nation has protected our forefathers and us as well. For there was not only one attempt to annihilate the Jews. In every generation, there are those who rise up to destroy us and G-d saves us from their hands.”

Let us close our eyes and see the Jewish families laying down their lives together **as Jews** during the Crusades. **As Jews** during the Inquisition. **As Jews** during the pogroms of Europe. **As Jews** during the Holocaust. **As Jews** during the Intifada. **As Jews...!**

“But in every generation there are those who rise up to destroy us”

Let us raise our goblets of wine in praise of G-d. Despite anti-Semitism, the Jewish nation survives and will continue to survive. That same promise to our forefather Abraham that led to our redemption from Egypt has been honored throughout our history and will be honored yet once again in our time.

“... and G-d saves us from their hands.”



אלו עשר מכות שהביא הקב"ה על המצרים במצרים – These are the ten Plagues that G-d brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt....

Being that G-d is a true and fair judge, both His reward and punishment are accurate and fair. G-d's perfect justice is always measure for measure. When the Egyptians were punished with the ten plagues, each punishment was specifically designed for a different wrongdoing:

The Midrash relates...

1. דם – Blood

Some Jews were enslaved as water carriers, yet the cruel Egyptians forbade them to bathe even when they drew water. Therefore all their waters were rendered unfit for bathing and turned to blood.

2. צפרדע – Frogs

The Egyptians relentlessly taunted the Jews day and night. The frogs therefore came and croaked at the Egyptians all day and all night.

3. כנים – Lice

Some Jews were enslaved to sweep the refuse from the market places and stables which were infested with lice. Egypt was therefore infested with lice.

4. ערוב – Wild animals

Jews were selected to catch wild animals for the Egyptians without protection. More often than not, the Jews became the prey and not the pursuer. Therefore wild animals invaded Egypt.

5. דבר – Pestilence

Since they used Jews in place of animals to plow and heard their flocks, they were punished by losing their animals to sickness.

6. שחין – Boils

The constant beatings and whippings resulted in boils upon the bodies of the Jews. Therefore the Egyptians were afflicted with boils.

7. ברד – Hail

They regularly stoned us as we worked. Therefore G-d pelted them with hail.

8. ארבה – Locusts

The Jews were forced to plant and care for the Egyptian fields yet never saw the fruit of their labor. Therefore the locusts came and devoured the produce so the Egyptians wouldn't benefit from it either.

9. חשך – Darkness

The Egyptian tyranny was so great the Jewish outlook on life became bleak and without light or hope. Therefore G-d removed every trace of light from Egypt for three days, literally leaving them in the dark.

10. מכת בכורות – Plague of the Firstborn

Since the Egyptians routinely singled out the beloved amongst the Jews to be executed, they therefore lost all of their firstborns.

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