

The Cohen-Saban Edition


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HAGGADAH COMPANION

NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE SEDER WITH INSIGHTS AND ESSAYS
FROM SOME OF THE UK'S TOP JEWISH EDUCATORS



SEDER NIGHT RECREATES THE FORMATIVE MOMENT OF BIRTH OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

Each year we cross ages and cultures to rejoin the Israelites at the moment of transition from slavery to freedom. To this day, Seder night remains the most observed practice for Jewish families worldwide. Its story tells us who we are, why we are here and where we are going. It emphasises that which is unique about our Jewishness, and what it is that we must give to the world.

How does the Haggadah achieve this? What is it that we are intended to experience? And how is it supposed to relate to us personally in the 21st century? That is what we intend to explore and elaborate upon with this Haggadah companion...

THE ROYAL TOAST



As someone born outside the UK, I have a list of my favourite uniquely British moments. Right at the top is the Toast to Her Majesty at formal occasions. I always find it fascinating to watch and join in as everyone raises their glasses and chants in unison “The Queen”.

Whilst quintessentially British, it is not totally unfamiliar. One of my highlights of the Pesach Seder is the first step in the evening’s proceedings, when we all raise our glasses of wine and make a toast to Hashem and the Jewish people around the world.

The word Kiddush comes from the

same root as Kadosh (קדש) which can be loosely translated as holy. But what does holiness mean and why do we start our Shabbat and Yom Tov meals with this declaration?

The term ‘Kadosh’, refers to something that is set aside and special.¹ It is to “separate” from the regular monotony of our individual daily routine and join together as a group on an elevated journey. The journey of the Seder is the march to freedom.

Kiddush sets the tone for the evening and provides us with an insight into some of the attitudes that we can hope to gain from Seder night. Many families chant these familiar words in unison, ‘For we have been chosen and separated amongst the nations’ (כי בנו בחרת ואותנו קידשת מכל העמים).

We were enslaved in Egypt and have been persecuted throughout the ages, but have never lost sight of that which makes us unique. In Jewish thought chosenness is not a privilege to be enjoyed at others’ expense, it is a responsibility that impacts all that we do. As Jews, we hold ourselves to a moral standard that ought not be affected by the way that others treat us. We were freed from persecution to teach the world the value of freedom and to make the world a better, more moral and spiritual place.

**“AS WE MAKE THE
BLESSING ON THE WINE,
WE ARE STEPPING
INTO A JOURNEY
OF THOUSANDS OF
YEARS OF UNBROKEN
HERITAGE”**

As we make the blessing on the wine, we are stepping into a journey of thousands of years of an unbroken heritage with rich customs. Now is the time to start the meal, together sitting in unity not just physically with our nearest and dearest but conceptually with millions of Jews around the world sharing the same beautiful journey.

So as we raise our glasses, let us drink the toast to all of us for the journey we have travelled so far and for the path still to be forged.

RABBI DANI SMOLOWITZ

¹ See Tosfot Kiddushin 2b

KARPAS

כרפס



FROM EXILE TO REDEMPTION

RABBI ARI KAYSER

Once we have made Kiddush and washed our hands, we begin a series of activities that violate the normal pattern of Jewish festivals and provoke questions. That process begins with taking a vegetable and dipping it in salt water.

Whilst the overt purpose is to do something out of character, many see in the choice of taking a vegetable to open the proceedings as deeply symbolic.²

Pesach represents the start of spring, a time where the world begins to renew itself and regain its sense of vitality. The same is true for each and every one of us during this time; having just passed through the dark winter months, we can now emerge invigorated.

Eating the karpas symbolises mankind's journey from exile to redemption. This vegetable began its own growth during the thick of winter as a seed underground, out of sight to passersby. Over the process

"PESACH REPRESENTS THE START OF SPRING, A TIME WHERE THE WORLD BEGINS TO RENEW ITSELF AND REGAIN ITS SENSE OF VITALITY"

of the winter it slowly grew, receiving its nourishment from the earth around it, awaiting its time to sprout. Eventually, as the spring comes, that little shoot gently peeks above the earth, starting to realise its potential.

The Jewish people took this same journey. From the depths of darkness in slavery, they formed and shaped their identity as a nation, finally breaking through the barriers of exile and sprouting forth as free men and women. The redemption process is an organic one, evolving over stages, finding strength in the darkest of places.

Each of us may have our own 'dark times'; times when we feel that we have been thrown under ground and buried. Often from those depths of despair something deep within us can begin to sprout. It happened to the Israelites in Egypt. It happens in the natural world every year. And in starting with the dipped vegetable, we proclaim that it can happen, too, within each of us.



הא לחמא עניא HA LACHMA ANYA

THE BREAD OF AFFLICTION



We've made Kiddush and washed hands. We digressed slightly to dip a vegetable and to put away a piece of Matzah. Now the host picks up the Matzah. Usually that's the signal that it's time to eat. After all that is how we usually begin the Shabbat or Holiday feast, with the lifting the special Shabbat bread. But not on Pesach night. Instead it is time to tell the tale of what Matzah represents in our shared history.

The host continues "This is the poor bread that our ancestors ate while in the land of Egypt".

WHICH IS THE CORRECT REASON FOR OUR EATING MATZAH: IS IT THE POOR MAN'S BREAD, OR WAS IT BECAUSE THE BREAD HAD NO TIME TO RISE?

Is that so? Were we not taught in school that we eat Matzah because the Children of Israel rushed out of Egypt and they didn't have time to allow their dough to rise? To compound the question, the Haggadah itself gives this answer later on.

Which is the correct reason for our eating Matzah: is it the poor man's bread, or was it because the bread

had no time to rise?

Rabbi Yitzchak Berkowitz, based on the 16th century writings of the Maharal, explains that Matzah is indeed both, but not at the same time. The food can stay the same, but our attitude can change the way we relate to it. Seder

night involves a dramatic shift of attitude. That is expressed in the two different ways that we relate to the central food of the night - Matzah.

In the beginning of the night, the poor man's bread represents the way the Jews viewed the physical world around them, tasteless. In the depth of slavery they had no desire for life or living. In modern parlance we might call it a national state of depression.

Chassidic writings often emphasize that the national story of slavery and

or the endless grind of meaningless existence, life is slavery indeed. All food, from the humblest of Matzah to the most lavish material provision, will taste of 'the bread of affliction'. Nothing will ever be enough.

On the other hand, one who has broken free from slavery experiences the world in a different way. They live a life prioritising love, giving, and making a difference over materialism, honour and power. Such a person sees and tastes the world differently. Material goods become a means and not an ends. We eat to have energy to do the great things we truly desire.

The Israelites left Egypt in a brief moment. That moment contained within it the sense of freedom to truly live for what matters most in this world - to serve as a partner with God Himself in bringing this world to perfection. In their rush to embrace the new world of possibilities, they were delighted to have the simplest of foods. They were focused on far more important issues. The food that would sustain them, humble though it may be, tasted of the moment of freedom itself.

To one who is a slave, nothing is enough. To one who is truly free, the simplest food can taste of eternity. Matzah starts the night as 'bread of affliction' and becomes the bread of freedom. It is not the Matzah that changes. It is us.

Seder night invites us to take the journey and to discover the taste of freedom.

RABBI MENDY BRUKIRER

MA NISHTANA מה נשתנה

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

The thematic number of the Seder is undoubtedly the number four. There are four cups of wine, four expressions of redemption, four questions, four sons, and four verses that we analyse in depth. Several sources suggest that in fact the pattern of four indicates thematic connections between each of these.³

I often wondered what connection there might be between the Four Questions – known as “Mah Nishtana” – and the Four Children discussed shortly afterwards in the Seder.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS ARE:

1. Why do we eat Matzah?
2. Why do we eat Maror?
3. Why do we dip twice?
4. Why do we lean?

THE FOUR CHILDREN ARE:

1. The Chacham – the wise child.
2. The Rasha – the wicked child.
3. The Tam – the simple child.
4. The She'eino Yodei'a Lish'ol – the apathetic child.

One thing an educator and a therapist have in common is the need to develop a sensitive ear. In order to uncover what is really troubling a client, it is crucial to listen deeply both to what they ask, but also to why they ask it. The same is true for a student who asks about a particular aspect or element of Judaism. To be effective educators, we need to sensitise ourselves to understand what it was that led to their question.

The four questions set up the scene. I believe that if we listen carefully to the four questions we hear the four different attitudes of the four children.

The wise child corresponds to the question about Matzah, because they intuitively understand that Matzah stands at the centre of the Seder, the Pesach story and the lessons learned from this time of year. They look at the religious practices and want to understand the meaning and depth behind them.

The wicked child is the one who asks about the bitter herbs. They ignore the deep life lessons and the inspiring experience of the Seder. Instead they focus exclusively on that which takes the most effort. In essence they focus on the pain as opposed to the pleasure.

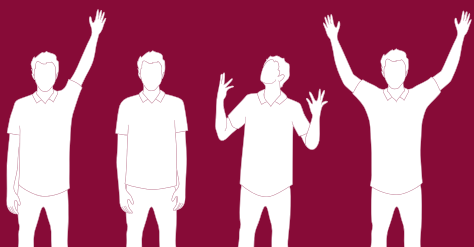
The third child, the simple one, asks the third question - about the dipping. They identify one of the most peripheral rituals of the Seder and chose to make that the focus of his question. They miss the opportunity to ask a meaningful question, instead focusing on a smaller and less significant detail. But there is an opportunity to use the peripheral elements to engage them in deeper discussion.

The fourth, apathetic, child asks the fourth question, about the relaxing posture of the evening. They seem quite pleased that some form of relaxation is involved in the Seder. They ignore, the good, the bad and ugly of the Seder and just want to chill out.

Each child can be educated. But first we must not simply try to answer their question. First we must try to ask not only 'what were they asking?' but 'what lies behind that question?'

On a night of education, the Haggadah may be teaching us that before we can become effective educators, we have to learn to become great listeners.

REBBETZIN SHIFFY SILVERSTONE



THE FOUR CHILDREN

The 'four children' conveys an impression of four different types of children, each of whom is sitting around the Seder table reacting differently to it. That picture is at best only half correct. The Haggadah's source is the four times that Torah refers to the questions a child might pose. Yet a study of those sources suggests something far deeper than meets the eye in the Haggadah.

For one thing these children are most certainly not asking about Seder night. The 'wise child' confronted by an external culture different to their own, starts to ask probing questions about what their parents see in Jewish observance in general. What prompts the wise question is not Matzah, but everything Jewish: Shabbat, Kosher, giving 10% of our income to charity and so forth. Likewise the simple child's question is prompted not by Seder night, but by observing the act of redemption of a first born boy. The 'evil' (or perhaps more fairly, the cynical) child's question takes place a few hours before Seder night, whilst observing masses of Jews ascending to the Temple and slaughtering the sheep in preparation for the Pesach meal. Indeed the only child whose educational message is presented, in the Torah at least, as being on Seder night, is the one who does not know how to ask.

What relevance, then, do these four children have to Seder night? Once again the Torah texts provide the insight. The questions may not be about the Exodus, but the answers are. The Torah is telling us that no matter what a child asks, no Jewish question can be answered if it does not start with the Exodus. It is that central and that critical. Without it

nothing else makes sense. With it we have the bedrock to face every question and address every challenge.

Yet that is not enough.

MISMATCHED ANSWERS

Although the Torah provides answers to each child, that refer back to the Exodus, the Haggadah at times seems to ignore the Torah's answer and inserts one of its own.

Take the wise child. In Torah the wise question, probing to grasp the deeper meaning of the 'testimonies, statutes and judgements' of Jewish law, is given a perfect 'Pesach' response: "You shall say to your child: 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand. Hashem performed great and destructive marvels against Pharaoh and all his household. He freed us from there in order to bring us to the land that He had promised to our ancestors. Then Hashem tasked us to observe His laws, to revere Hashem our God, for our lasting good and for our survival as is now the case...'"¹

Yet the Haggadah appears to offer a different approach: "So you should tell him as per the laws of Pesach, we do not have any desert after the 'afikoman' [final piece of the Pesach lamb (nowadays, the final piece of Matzah)]."

In fairness, the problem of the 'wise child' may not present a severe difficulty. The source-text of the Haggadah is the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, dating back between fifteen hundred and two thousand years. In the days it was written, 'the laws of Pesach' referred to one

source: the Mishnayot (the redaction of the Oral Torah and Rabbinic law) of Pesach. When the Haggadah says that you should deliver the wise child's response, 'in accordance with the laws of Pesach,' it undoubtedly refers to the final chapter of those laws, which runs through an outline of our Haggadah text. The final teachings are introduced by the words, 'we do not have any desert after the 'afikoman'.' In other words the text is not denying us the Torah's response. The Torah is giving us an abbreviated response that contains within it all the key messages that should be addressed to any child asking a wise question. But on Seder night we should give a more elaborate and developed version of the Torah's answer, exploring each aspect of it.

So the Haggadah's alteration of the Torah's answer is neither a shift of theme nor of focus. Instead it suggests that the whole of the Haggadah is an elaboration of the way that we educate a 'wise child'.

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE EVIL CHILD

However the situation is far worse when it comes to the 'evil' child.

There the Torah's answer and that provided for in the Haggadah do not match up. To the seemingly reasonable question, 'What is this service to you?', the Torah offers us to "...tell your child: 'this is a Pesach offering for Hashem because He passed over our houses when he brought a plague upon Egypt and saved our homes'..."² Nothing in the Torah's message quite prepares us

¹ Deuteronomy 6:20-24

² Exodus 12:26-27

³ Ibid.

⁴ Talmud Pesachim 116a

⁵ Exodus 4:22

for the Haggadah's strike: '[the child] said "[what is this service] to you?" - note 'you' excluding himself. Thus he has denied something fundamental. Likewise you should 'blunt his teeth' and retort, 'It is because of this that Hashem acted for me when He brought me out of Egypt' - 'me' and not him. Had he been there [with that attitude] he would never have been redeemed."

What prompts the Haggadah to ignore the Torah's gentle response in favour of delivering a sharp shock to the system? And if the Haggadah is correct that this child needs something stronger, why did the Torah abstain?

But the problem only seems to worsen when we realise that the Haggadah has not merely inserted a substitute answer; it directly plagiarised it from a different child, the one who does not know how to ask. "For the one who does not know how to ask, you should initiate for them as it says, 'tell [lit. do Haggadah for] your child on that day: Because of this Hashem acted for me when He brought me out of Egypt'."

Several commentators offer a compelling approach. The 'evil' child is also a child who does not know how to ask questions. The Hebrew word for question 'sho'el' implies a personal need. We ask because we are seeking something. We are searching for depth, meaning, understanding and identity. Like the English word 'quest' that is at the root of 'question'. But the word 'sho'el' is not present when the Torah describes the 'evil' child. 'When your child will utter to you: what is this service to you?'³ It is a pseudo-question. A cynical attempt to throw a mocking statement, with a question mark thrown onto the end. But there is no searching or seeking.

Indeed the Haggadah will eventually offer the very reply that the Torah gives. But first it must address not the question, but the questioner.

Still there can be a certain discomfort at the Haggadah's suggestion for

handling the 'evil' child. Worse, the very notion of labelling a child evil seems highly problematic. Indeed labelling any child seems far too dismissive for either contemporary sentiment or for Torah itself. Until we realise that the Torah never actually offers such labels. There is no such thing as a child who is purely wise, nor one who is purely evil, nor one who is just simple. And there is certainly no such thing as a child who does not know how to ask questions - at least not one capable of understanding the answer that Torah and Haggadah provide.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE LABELS

From the context of Torah it is clear that any child could ask the wise question. Under the right circumstances any child indeed might. And the same goes for each child. Indeed if a child represents the paradigm of the questioner, then the four children express elements of each one of us. All of us have aspects of wisdom - a desire to seek deeper understanding; all have aspects of cynicism; all have a simple side that just wants more information; and all of us have an aspect to us that has stopped seeking and searching.

Seder night is a night for children. But it is also much more. It is night that demands that each of us becomes a child. Each of us must become a questioner.

'If there is no child an adult should ask the questions... and if there is only one adult they must ask the questions...' ⁴

WE ARE ALL CHILDREN

On second thoughts that should hardly surprise us. After all Seder night commemorates the creation not so much of a 'Jewish nation' as it does of the 'Children of Israel'. God

refers to the nation as 'My child, My firstborn, Israel'.⁵ In our very founding we are children. Excited, curious, seeking and searching.

To re-enact the Exodus is to offer us an experience to climb to heights of unimaginable scale. It is an opportunity to open up worlds that we thought were unimaginable, and to achieve a freedom we thought impossible. The Haggadah will serve as our guide. But the journey is not one of information. It is one of wonder. And that requires us to be children. All of us.

Armed with that insight, the whole first section of the Haggadah becomes clear. We do all we can to provoke questions but we do not answer the questions. Instead we tell the questioner that we needed questions because tonight there is an enormously important discussion. Effectively we tell the child 'it was so you would ask, seek and search'.⁶ That is not a trivial question-baiting; rather it is a deadly serious attempt to shift our modality.

To emphasize the point the Haggadah transported us to a room where the very Rabbis responsible for composing the source texts we use, could still not exhaust their discussion of it. Moreover, they tell us, it will be discussed even in the Messianic era! Finally the Haggadah addresses the four sons. It tells us that the extent to which we approach like the wise child, the Haggadah is there for us. To the extent to which we approach as a simple child, there is what for us to gain and grow. But the extent to which we think like the cynic, or to the extent to which we have stopped seeking and searching, we could read the entire Haggadah and simply miss everything.

What then is it that we must seek and search for? What, indeed, is the nature of the journey that Seder night seeks for us? Now we are ready to go and discover...

RABBI DANIEL ROWE

8 ⁶ In the section beginning "we were slaves", we say, "even if we were all wise... and knew all of Torah, we have an obligation to speak about the Exodus..."

“IN THE BEGINNING OUR
ANCESTORS WORSHIPPED IDOLS”



SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET

“THROUGHOUT LIFE WE ACCUMULATE
A TIMELINE OF EVENTS WHICH HAVE
HAPPENED TO US. SOME ARE MORE
MEMORABLE THAN OTHERS, SOME WE TRY
TO FORGET, BUT ALL OF THESE CONTRIBUTE
TOWARDS WHOM WE HAVE BECOME.”



This part of the Haggadah similarly marks our ascent from the ignominy of idol worship to the pinnacle of human attainment, servants of the true God. This is in accordance with the Talmud which dictates that the evening begins with our shame and ends with our praise. But why would the Haggadah want us to revisit shame on the night which celebrates our freedom?

This recollection of where we came from to whom we became is crucial to the mitzvah of the Seder night and teaches us an invaluable ethical lesson. Any celebration of good fortune or great personal achievement requires of us to recall our less enviable previous status. It is this which enables us to place our rejoicing into perspective ensuring

that we don't get carried away with our success.

Throughout life we accumulate a timeline of events which have happened to us. Some are more memorable than others, some we try to forget, but all of these contribute towards whom we have become.

When things are going well in life it is all too easy to get carried away and forget what once was. The human disinclination to recall hard times is one of our self protection mechanisms which helps to preserve our self confidence.

However, tonight is about remembering our national journey and the process which led us to this moment in time whereby we

sit as a family and recall our survival and success against all the odds. Our dedication to becoming a monotheistic nation despite our ancestor's roots being steeped in polytheism and idolatry.

If there is one thing which the Haggadah can teach us it would be the following. That no matter who you are, where you come from, your family background and all your previous actions and life moments, there is always hope to turn it around and become something great. It is sometimes from our deepest shame that our greatest praises can emerge.

BENJAMIN HARRIS

THE PROMISE

My grandfather, Moshe Chaim Gefen, was taken from Auschwitz , along with 300 other Jews to a nearby labour camp, Tshiben, for slave labour in a Nazi run factory. Two weeks earlier that camp had been holding captive many English prisoners of war who were released the day before the Jews arrived. The allies knew that the English POWs had been released but didn't know that Jews had arrived there from Auschwitz, and one night dropped bombs over the camp. While the Nazis hid in their deep trenches, the Jews ran and hid themselves in the pits created by the bombs. Miraculously, almost none of the Jews were injured.

The bombs destroyed and burned the entire factory. The refinery went up in flames and many of the camp guards died in the attack. My grandfather relates that after the attack a Nazi officer screamed at them saying "You miraculous Jews, you just keep on living!"

The great 'singing Rabbi', Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach in a heart wrenching song, 'The Last Seder in the Warsaw Ghetto' vividly portrays the question that was on the minds of so many during the war. A small child adds his own question to the Mah Nishtana: will I or anyone else will be around to ask these questions next year, or indeed any father to answer the questions? The father answers honestly, "I don't know if I will be alive, I don't know if you will be alive, but I know there will always be a Jew somewhere asking the questions of the Ma Nishtana".

In the words of Mark Twain "The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal, but the Jew. All forces pass, but he remains".

Singing והיא שעמדה, we raise our glasses and celebrate the miraculous survival of the Jewish people despite the odds stacked against us.



**“THE JEW SAW THEM
ALL, BEAT THEM ALL,
AND IS NOW WHAT HE
ALWAYS WAS...”**

RABBI ZVI GEFEN

THE FOUR VERSES

THE CORE MESSAGE

THE FARMER'S DECLARATION

The four verses that form the core of Haggadah, read as follows:

'An Aramean misplaced my ancestor, and he went down to Egypt, where he became a great, powerful and numerous people. The Egyptians acted badly to us, afflicting us and oppressing us with hard labour. We cried out to Hashem, God of our ancestors, and Hashem heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our labour and the pressure we were under. Hashem brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand, an outstretched arm, great acts of awe, signs and wonders...'

Together they weave together a tapestry that depicts the journey of Seder night...

WHY DID WE NEED TO GO INTO EGYPT?

Lurking in the background throughout Seder night lies an obvious challenge. We are gathered to thank God for deliverance from Egypt, but who got us there in the first place? As the Haggadah itself declares, God's covenant with Abraham was predicated upon not only one emergence from Egypt, but on going down there in the first place!

It turns out that in Egypt we lost forever the ability to accept the world based on paganism, power and oppression. We gained a depth of commitment to something far

greater. It is this journey that the four verses focus us on.

In the retelling of the Haggadah, there are four stages. Each is expressed by one of the verses from the farmer's declaration. The first stage was the effort of the first three generations who collectively helped develop the family of Egypt. Together they developed the spiritual equivalent of a gene - something that could be inherited and passed on.

The second stage was the planting of the family into Egypt. Like a seed that decomposes before sprouting, in Egypt they lost all ability to exist. Physically, an enslaved Semitic group would never emerge from Egypt as an independent, recognisable entity. But they lost something far deeper. According to the Talmud, they lost any right to exist to the point where the angels could not discern a spiritual distinction between Egypt and Israel. In Kabbalistic language they sank to the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity. No laws that govern the world could have allowed for the possibility of the emergence of Israel. The seed had utterly decomposed.

But there was a third stage, and it is expressed in the third verse. When the physical and spiritual laws tell us we will not exist, the only hope is to reach for something greater than both. 'We cried out to Hashem, God of our ancestors'. The ancestral gene, the ability to leap to the Source of all creation, came to the fore.

CITIZENS OF THE FUTURE

It is easy to miss the significance of the three steps. The net result is that what was created in Egypt was not like any other polity, not even with the addition of a covenant. What is created in Egypt is a people whose existence cannot be supported by the world as the world is now. In a sense a people who do not belong fully to the world, but exist within the world solely through a relationship with the Creator of the world. The Creator of the world had a dream for the world. That dream is the way the world will be in the future. In the depth of slavery in Egypt, Israel became a people who simply could not exist in the world as it was then, nor even the world as it is now. In calling out to God, we asked to become citizens of the world that He dreams of; the world that will be. We became citizens of the future.

It is the ability to visualise a world of possibilities different to those that seem achievable today that is the secret of true freedom. Political liberty frees us from the shackles of another to pursue the desires of the self; but true liberty frees us from the shackles of ourselves to pursue the possibilities that lie beyond the self.

GOD'S RESPONSE

But the leap from us to God is only one part of the story. God's response forms the fourth stage. It was the ten strikes (or plagues) that set us free. That is where the Haggadah turns to next...

RABBI DANIEL ROWE

THE TEN PLAGUES



THE TEN PLAGUES & THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: DECREATION & RECREATION

With ten utterances God brought the world into existence.. With ten plagues He struck Egypt...' (Ethics of the Fathers, ch.5).

The great Kabbalistic Midrash, the Zohar, sees the ten plagues as a reversal of the ten steps of creation. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905) in his famed work 'Sfas Emes' both wrote that the order was a precise reversal of the order of creation. Thus if the last thing created was the instruction to man to produce life, the first thing undone in Egypt was that water, source of life, became the blood of death. If the second last stage of creation elevated man above animal, in the plague of frogs animals no longer feared man, and so forth.

The Egyptians were obsessed with 'ma'at' - order. The role of the Pharaoh was to intercede with the gods to ensure the smooth flow of nature. Like most ancient nations they worshipped the natural order of things. Power defined what was right.

Their morals and ethics were likewise shaped by an obsession of power. The powerful was the good. They had contaminated the ten steps of creation, and so those ten layers were peeled back all the way. The second step in creation, 'let there be light' was undone in the second last plague of darkness. Then at midnight on the very first Seder night the very moment of 'reishit' - 'first' - is undone with the destruction of every 'reishit', every 'first creation' of each family in

Egypt. The laws that the Egyptians worshipped and the power structures that allowed for oppression and immorality were removed. A new creation would enter the world. A nation that would not define itself by the laws, limits and power-structures of nature, but by a different order...

**"WITH TEN UTTERANCES GOD BROUGHT THE WORLD INTO
EXISTENCE... WITH TEN PLAGUES HE STRUCK EGYPT..."**

Later in the Haggadah we will sing 'Dayenu' - thanking God not only for taking us out of Egypt, but also for bringing us to Sinai and giving us the ten commandments. If the ten plagues offer a de-creation, then the ten commandments offer a re-creation.

In place of the 'the beginning' we have 'I am God who took you out of Egypt.' In place of light we have monotheism; in place of God using words to make a habitat in which man could dwell, the words of man through the prohibition of blasphemy becomes a habitat in which God could dwell. Where creation has plant life and the growth of the harvest, food, wealth and productivity, Shabbat tells us to take a day to avoid farming, labour, income and control over nature. In Joseph's dreams, the sun and moon represented father and mother. In place of the sun and moon of creation, we have honouring parents in the commandments.

Where creation had animal life, the commandments have the preservation of human life. Where animals were separated into different mating groups, 'each according to their species', humans create the integrity of marriage partners. Where man is taken from the dust

of the ground, man gets the right to possess the earth - the right to private property and thus the prohibition of theft. Where man's very existence is testimony to God ('the image of God'), the commandments tell us to ensure we never bear false witness. Finally the command to 'fill the earth and dominate it' is replaced by the biggest root imperative: to allow humans to live together, work together and build the world together - do not covet that which is someone else's.

Humans are the only creation capable of living above the natural order. The recognition of a higher moral order gives meaning to existence and is the truest liberator from oppression.

RABBI DANIEL ROWE

THREE CRUCIAL LESSONS

AFTER READING OUT THE TEN PLAGUES WE FIND OURSELVES WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE LITTLE MORE THAN A MEMORY AID. WHY DO WE NEED IT AND WHAT IS IT MEANT TO REPRESENT?

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz (1550-1619), known by his magnum opus, *Kli Yakar*, explains that the mnemonic teaches us that ten plagues are divided into three categories, and each set of plagues came to teach Pharaoh one principle.

The first set - Blood, Frogs and Lice - were there to teach Pharaoh about the existence of Hashem. The first set of plagues thus begins with the verse "With this you shall know that I am Hashem" (Exodus 7:17).

The second set - Wild Beasts, Pestilence and Boils - were to teach Pharaoh that Hashem is intricately involved in the world and the lives of

each individual. This set of plagues differentiates between the oppressed Israelites and the Egyptian oppressors (Exodus 8:18), to show that Hashem in fact does involve Himself in the lives of people on Earth. He acts not only on a country as a whole, but distinguishes communities and individuals.

The third set Hail, Locusts, Darkness, Death of the Firstborn, was there to teach Hashem's omnipotence. Pharaoh believed there was more than one power, therefore this set of plagues states "In order that you may know that there is none like Me in all the world" (Exodus 9:14).

To believe in God is to believe in the possibility that things can be different to how they are today.

To believe that God cares about everyone and everything is to believe that everyone and everything is here for a purpose. Each of us can make a positive difference in the world.

To believe that there is none but God means that there is no moment in our lives that cannot be deeply meaningful and infinitely significant.

RABBI ARI KAYSER



SPREADING THE LOVE

In this famous song we sing, "If You would have brought us close before Mount Sinai it would have been enough."

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrahi raises a perplexing question. When we were ever brought close to Sinai? To the contrary, when the Jewish people were given the Torah, they were told to keep a distance from the mountain?

Her resolution to this dilemma is that the beautiful words of Dayeinu are not referring to the Jews being brought closer to the mountain. Rather, we were brought closer to each other, standing together at Sinai. This is one of the key purposes of the Exodus from Egypt - to create a unity among the Jews. Before Sinai we stood "Like one person with one heart".

On Seder night, it is this closeness that permeates everything. Our doors are open to those who are hungry, we find extra chairs and tables to seat extended family and friends. Parents listen to their children's questions, and answer them according to their

unique personalities, intellect and needs. Children have the opportunity to connect to their parents and grandparents, who in turn remember their own sources of inspiration. It is a night of unparalleled closeness.

Pesach is a time for family and friends to get together. The original Pesach meal on the night of our exodus was made up of families or groups of families. Whilst it may at times feel

challenging, there is something so special about sharing Pesach together. The love and unity of Seder night can grow into the love and unity of all of Israel, and eventually the whole world.

For that we say 'Dayeinu' - that alone would have been more than enough!



"ON SEDER NIGHT, IT IS THIS CLOSENESS THAT PERMEATES EVERYTHING. OUR DOORS ARE OPEN TO THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY, WE FIND EXTRA CHAIRS AND TABLES TO SEAT EXTENDED FAMILY AND FRIENDS"

REBBETZIN ANNA ROSS

“IN EVERY GENERATION...”

THE POWER OF RESPONSIBILITY

If we were to write a CV of our job on Pesach night, it would be summed up in the verse Exodus 13:8 “And you shall tell your children on this day saying, it is because of this God did for me when I went out of Egypt”.

The Haggadah says that ‘in every generation each person is obligated to see themselves as if they came out of Egypt’. Its source? This verse. Everything in this verse here is speaking about each one of us. Not everyone collectively, but each person specifically. “You shall tell your children.. God did this for me when I went out of Egypt”.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005) points out that the same happens with the ten commandments. Although many of the commandments are in the plural, the ten that God gave at Sinai are all in the singular. The intention is for each one of us to feel that the responsibility lies with us as an individual. It is me the person, not ‘us’ the collective.

The Torah states explicitly that certain plagues distinguished Israelites and Egyptians. The Midrash states that during the plague of darkness, a Jew and an Egyptian might be standing

next to each other, in the exact same location yet one experiences darkness and the other enjoys light.

It is easy to miss the point of the message. In each case it is the same. It is to tell us, in the words of the Talmud that each person is obligated to say, ‘the world was created for me!’ It is my responsibility.

It is easy to debate what laws a society should have. But it is more difficult to be the person who obeys those rules if everyone else is not. That is why the ten commandments are given in the singular. Each person must feel it as their own responsibility no matter what else anyone else is or is not doing.

It is easy to learn the Exodus story as a story about a whole group of people. Easy to learn it about our ancestors. With the experience of slavery comes a responsibility: to stand against oppression everywhere. With witnessing the intervention of God comes the responsibility to live lives God would be proud of.

The Haggadah wants the messages of Seder night to be personal.

RABBI JONNY ROSS

“IT IS EASY TO DEBATE WHAT LAWS A SOCIETY SHOULD HAVE. BUT IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO BE THE PERSON WHO OBEYS THOSE RULES IF EVERYONE ELSE IS NOT.”



MATZAH מצה

THE MYSTERY OF THE MATZAH

The Zohar describes Matzah as the 'bread of faith'. Somehow it contains the secret of emunah-faith.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the people had not intended to take provisions for the journey with them, they had wanted to leave with nothing in order to demonstrate their total faith. But they did not know when the redemption was due. Having eaten their Seder-meal, redemption had not yet come, and as the hour got late, the people began to waver ever so slightly. They took out dough to prepare the morning meal. Then came the sudden moment of the Exodus. Their hastily prepared midnight feast, was flung over our ancestors shoulders yet mysteriously never rose.

What is the deeper significance of this?

In our everyday lives, we don't sit back and wait for miracles, rather we maximise our efforts and work hard for that which we pray. Ordinarily the miraculous hand of God works through human courage. But it took a one-off show by God to demonstrate that in reality God does not need our

"OUR LIMITS ARE NOT THE ULTIMATE LIMITS; JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE TO US DOES NOT MEAN THAT IT CANNOT HAPPEN. JEWISH HISTORY ATTESTS TO THIS AGAIN AND AGAIN"

acts in order to make the miracle happen.

In an apocryphal tale, there was a person searching frantically for a parking spot. Late for a crucial meeting, and driving round every block, they could find no space. In desperation the driver turns to heaven and

shouts, 'God if you get me a parking spot, I'll never speak a bad word, I'll eat kosher, I'll pray more, I'll give 10% of my money to charity...' All of a sudden, right in front of them, a car pulls out leaving them with a perfect parking space. The relieved driver looks up to heaven and says. 'God, deals off, its all ok, I managed to find one myself!'

On Seder night, through the Matzah, this wondrous bread of faith, we are transported back to the birth of our nation. We refresh the core faith of Judaism, that though we are called upon to always do our best, there is nothing that is beyond God's ability.

We learn that our limits are not the ultimate limits; just because something seems impossible to us does not mean that it cannot happen. Jewish history attests to this again and again.

In the words of David Ben Gurion, 'a Jew who does not believe in miracles is not a realist.'

RABBI ADAM ROSS

BITTER HERBS מרור

WHEN LUXURY BECOMES SLAVERY



WHY DO WE EAT MARROR?

Vegetation was in abundance in Egypt. The civilisation grew along the Nile, giving it an abundant and, generally, predictable abundant fertility. Its vegetation was so rich that when some Israelites complained to Moses about the harshness of the Sinai desert, they referred to the rich vegetable diet they remembered from Egypt. But the vegetables we have on Seder night must be bitter to recall the bitterness of slavery.

The two are not necessarily distinct. We were enslaved and well fed at the same time. Feeding slaves is an investment in their manpower. It is also an investment in their loyalty. When God promises to remove us from slavery, he talks about bringing us out from 'under the burden of Egypt.' Some Chassidic readings point out that the Hebrew could also read: 'from under the tolerance of Egypt.' It is hard to keep a slave who is dissatisfied with their condition. But it is human nature to accept and to get used to situations.

That is true not merely for national slavery. It is true for all sorts of personal limitations that share much in common with slavery.

TRANSCENDING PERSONAL LIMITATIONS

During the eighteenth century, both the Chassidic movement and its intellectual rival - the Lithuanian school - brought to the fore an idea that had laid in the background of Torah commentary. That is the idea that what occurs to us as a nation, occurs in microcosm to each individual. The national wars of Israel and their struggle with enemy forces, manifest in inner struggles individuals have with negative and self-destructive drives. The national Temple of God can be manifest in building ourselves as personal Temples of God, and so forth. In those teachings, another dimension to the Egypt saga was brought into focus.

Each of us, the teaching goes, is also a slave. The Hebrew word for Egypt, 'Mitzrayim' has the precise same letters as the Hebrew word 'Metzarim' – limitations. Each of us experiences limits that make us do things we do not want to, or prevent us from becoming that which we dream of. Just like Israel became free from Egypt, so too, each Pesach we have an opportunity to become free.

But the first rule of becoming free is to recognise just how damaging the slavery is. God had to take us out from the burden of Egypt, but He first had to take us out from the tolerance of Egypt. How many addicts vaguely recognise that they are in some form of predicament, but live in denial. Facing up to the painful truth that their lives have become devastated and that change is necessary, is a terrifying first, but critical step. The same is true for all sorts of character flaws, imaginary limits and other inner demons that keep us trapped in self-destructive behaviour and mediocre achievement.

Marror forces us to take the substance of comfort. It takes the vegetation that provided comfort and abundance in Egypt. The bitter vegetable tells us that some comforts, some abundance is what helps us tolerate what should be intolerable. Israel tasted freedom because they were willing to leap to God. They were willing to detach from the present and embrace the dream of the future. But they could not do so until they had fully ingested just how bitter and painful the present actually is.

If true freedom entails a life rooted in the future, then it's true pre-requisite is to taste the bitterness of what is missing in the present. The Marror leads to the Pesach where we reject the power-systems of Egypt. The Pesach leads to the Matzah where we taste the freedom of timelessness. Together they make the meal that allows each of us to transcend our own personal slavery and to taste the moment of freedom.

RABBI DANIEL ROWE



THE TASTE OF HARMONY

**“SANDWICH THE BAD WITH
THE GOOD AND CHANNEL IT
FOR THE POSITIVE”**

We live in an age of radicalisation. Of extremism. Everything is seen in either black or white and people are forced to choose between different values but *Korech* comes to teach us that it doesn't have to be that way.

As individuals, we are each made up of many elements, our personality, temperament, skills and capabilities. Many believe that to achieve growth and perfection we must build our positive traits and eradicate the negative ones. This is only partially true.

Matzah symbolises our spiritual side, our desires for greatness, humility and kindness. Maror symbolises the physical. Some sources go so far as to relate it to our negative inclinations. Vegetables in Egypt were a sign of the wealthy bounty of the fertile Nile soil. But like so much materialism, for us they became the bitter taste of slavery. Materialism and the physical pursuits can start as wealth and the pursuit of luxury, and end up as a form of slavery.

We would have thought that spiritual growth involves separating the Matzah from the Maror; the physical pursuits from the spiritual ones. Instead, we sandwich that together with Maror. Korech teaches us that instead of attempting to uproot the evil inclination entirely, a better way to deal with it, is to “Korech”, to sandwich the bad with the good and channel it for the positive.

As a society, we must remember the words of King Solomon “Do not be overly righteous” (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

One who does so, will isolate themselves from the world, and from themselves. “Beautiful is Torah with the way of the world” (Ethics 3:2). Taking Judaism seriously means taking our material drives and instincts and finding a way to integrate them with our higher drives. Alone they may taste bitter, but sandwiched within our higher drives they can help us to be more balanced, more reasonable, and more wholesome people.

Inner balance and harmony lead to a more tolerant, less extreme worldview. And then we can start to do a broader ‘korach’ - allowing a national integration bringing together people who are of greater and lesser spiritual inclination.

Hillel, the great spiritual teacher who lived most of his years in poverty, also taught the need to care for one's physical needs. He once told his students on his way to the bathhouse that he was about to perform a great mitzva - taking care of his body. He likewise taught us never to reject anyone, but to “Love peace and pursue peace” (Ethics 1:12). It is Hillel's sandwich that forms a metaphor for his worldview.

May we taste, with Hillel, the joy of our multifaceted selves, and our multifaceted world.

REBBETZIN LIAT MAYERFELD

WHEN EATING BECOMES A SONG OF PRAISE

This is the part we have all been waiting for. But why stop, literally in the middle of saying Hallel, to have a feast? Surely the spiritual journey we are on, is about distancing ourselves from the shackles of base desires such as gourmet dishes and luxurious hors d'oeuvres?

It is specifically on an evening such as this, that we must be reminded of the place of physical pleasure in the life of a Jew. Judaism recognises the centrality of elevating every facet of life, including even seemingly base acts such as eating.

It is specifically on this night, when we relive the journey from slavery to prophecy that our ancestors embarked upon, that we remind ourselves of our own ability to elevate the mundane to supernal heights. Each meal that we eat can be a lowly act of carnivorous devouring. But it can also be an act focused on attaining the energy needed to do tremendous

good in the world over the coming hours or day. Each great tasting food can fill us with selfish gratification, or it can help us to appreciate the beauty of creation, and the hard work and effort that others may have put into it. In the middle of singing our praises to God we stop, because it is at this point that we are now able to eat in the desired frame of mind.

Rebbetzin Shoshana Gifter relates how she once she and her husband, the famed Rosh Yeshivah Rav Mordechai Gifter, considered throwing out their dining room table which was getting rather shabby after years of constant use. In the end they decided not to. "We have shared so many family meals, meaningful discussions, and uplifting songs around this table, how can we even think of getting rid of it". To them the physical table that had helped make so much good happen, was itself synonymous with the inspiration that was shared around it.

**"IF THERE IS ONE
SUPPER OF THE YEAR
TO APPRECIATE THE
BEAUTY THAT HASHEM
HAS ENABLED US TO
EXPERIENCE IN OUR
LIVES, THEN SEDER
NIGHT IS IT"**

If there is one supper of the year to appreciate the beauty that Hashem has enabled us to experience in our lives, then Seder Night is it. Through having this kind of consciousness about the world and our actions in it, we can transform our mundane tables, into a Seder Table full of meaning and purpose.

RABBI GIDEON GOLDWATER



HALLEL הלל



THE SONG AND THE ECHOCARDIOGRAM

Words take on a whole new dimension when they are put to music. Songs evoke powerful emotions that can have an everlasting impact. Plato said “Every heart sings a song.”

Hallel is the penultimate stage our epic journey. After a night of insightful questions, intense discussions and meaningful answers accompanied by mouthfuls of Matzah and Maror all washed down with four glasses of wine, we break into heartfelt song.

We serenade our Seder with songs of thanksgiving for safely delivering us out of slavery and express our passionate longing for a safe arrival to the land of Israel, and a heartfelt prayer for Israel to achieve its potential for greatness and morality.

Singing has its time and place. The angels are told by God that they could not sing as the Egyptians drowned. Shortly afterwards the Jews sing the famous Song at Sea in celebration of their miraculous redemption.

Music is in many ways the language of emotion. The Jewish journey has

different psalms and different songs for each stage of that journey. Even within the Hallel that we read or sing on Seder night, are different tones expressing different feelings.

There are times for lows and times for spiritual peaks. Sometimes they can be brought together in a single verse: Even ma’asu habonim, hayta lerosh pinah. “A stone that was disregarded by the builders, became the cornerstone of the new building”. Out of the slavery of Egypt comes the redemption. Then there are times when our growth needs to hold steady.

If you didn’t know better and you looked at an echocardiogram, you would think that the patient was in real trouble when the monitor beeps and bounces up and down. Whereas, if you saw a flat line, you would think all was calm and fine.

The songs of Hallel teach us that the combination of the highs and the lows, are necessary to succeed in anything.

The message of the Torah is clear and harmonious. Keep the balance. Challenge yourself to become greater than you think is possible, then allow the growth to become part of who you are. You will see the tune of life help you in all of your endeavours and you will begin to really sing.

**“AFTER A NIGHT OF
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RABBI MOSHE MAYERFELD

LOCKED IN THE PRISON OF FREEDOM

In the Pesach prayers, we refer to this period as the 'Time of our Freedom.' On a basic level, we are referring to our freedom from slavery in Egypt, which we commemorate each year with the long-awaited Seder. However, this 'great escape' took place more than three thousand years ago. How can we ensure that the national story of our Exodus stays relevant for us today? Furthermore, when the Jews left Egypt, though they were indeed fleeing from a crucible of darkness and evil; immediately following they were given the Torah, their biggest 'burden' yet. This seems to jar with the story of a 'free' people.

The gift of freedom is one that many pursue their entire lives. For some, it's an arduous physical journey of escape from hostile regimes, while for others it's the persistent battle to conquer their own inner demons. To embark on the path to freedom, you must know what you are leaving from and where you are leaving to.

When Moshe gave the Ten Commandments to the Jewish People, the Torah writes "The Tablets engraved on both of their surfaces;

they were engraved on one side and on that." (Exodus 32:16) Our commentators note that the Hebrew word for "engrave", 'חָרוּת' is very similar to the word 'חֵירוּת' which means "freedom." It is strange to note that an act as final and irreversible as that of setting in stone could be related to the seemingly opposite concept of freedom.

Ten Plagues and the Splitting of the Sea, was in order for us to receive the Torah, the Divine instructions for our lives, the system which allows us to live life to the fullest.

On Seder night, when we sit as a family in our gleaming homes, recounting the ancient story of our people, away from the madness of today and the

"TO EMBARK ON THE PATH TO FREEDOM, YOU MUST KNOW WHAT YOU ARE LEAVING FROM AND WHERE YOU ARE LEAVING TO."

The answer lies in the definition of real freedom. We sometimes think that removing obligation and responsibility will liberate us. But in doing so, we are merely subjugating ourselves to our own human desires and shortcomings. The secret to attaining true freedom is to be committed and bound to a truth bigger than ourselves. Leaving Egypt was only the first stage of the process. The whole purpose of the Exodus along with the

magnetic pull of the consumer world we live in, our priorities suddenly become so clear. Let's not let it go by. Let's use it as a time and opportunity to reflect on what it is that is holding us back from becoming truly free.

REBBETZIN TAMAR GOLDWATER



"AND IT HAPPENED AT MIDNIGHT"

OPENING OUR EYES

This song describes the many times God saved the Jewish people in the middle of the night. One reason we celebrate Pesach at night is because the Jewish people saw God at night. At this darkest time, when everything around is unclear and appears to indicate the absence of God, they drew close to Him, and this faith brought the redemption.

**THIS SONG DESCRIBES
THE MANY TIMES GOD
SAVED THE JEWISH
PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE NIGHT**

The end of the song, describing the era of Mashiach, is perplexing "Bring the day that is neither day nor night". What does this mean?

The Maggid of Radin told a story of several men who went on a long journey across Russia.

It was the middle of winter and they had a special sledge pulled by two horses. They started the journey at night, spoke for a while before drinking some wine to warm their bones and fell asleep.

Morning came, but the travellers were sleeping. The days were short and when the travellers awoke it was already dark again. They spoke for a few hours, drank some wine to warm themselves and once again fell asleep, eventually waking when the darkness

had once again fallen. Frustrated they called to the driver, "Why is the night so long?". The driver replied "If only you would have only opened your eyes, you would have seen the daytime too."

In our life we have the dark times, where things seem to make no sense. We have the day times, when everything seems clear. The Messianic era that we sing of is neither. It is when all the darkness the Jewish people have lived through will be seen in a new light. That is what we sing for.

Today, our challenge is to begin to open our eyes in anticipation.

REBBETZIN ANNA ROSS



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