Yeshivat
Migdal HaTorah
Haggadah Supplement
5783

על משקוף המגדל

This year's edition is sponsored by:

Pam & Dov Bluth

לעילוי נשמת
שמעון יוסף יצחק דב בן ברוך

The Savetsky Family

לעילוי נשמת
פרידא דאברא בת ירחמיאל
פרביש הירש בן שמואל לייב

Rudi Weinberg and Family

לעילוי נשמת
אהרון בן רחל
שרה בת רחל
Dedicated to the memory of siblings Arno Kahn and Ilse Buttenweiser z"l

As Holocaust survivors and family, they helped us keep the traditions of German Jewry during Pesach alive. May their neshamas have the highest Aliya.

A Yasher Koach to Rabbi Aryeh Sklar for his tremendous efforts in much of the editing

Table of Contents

"מפתחות למגדל"

Introduction to the Haggadah

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg ~ Rosh HaYeshiva

One of the great challenges of the Seder is to bring spontaneity and creativity to a night that is grounded in an all-too-familiar text and experience. The Seder is supposed to be so much more than rote and repetition. The night is defined by exploration and curiosity, uncovering new concepts and considering novel interpretations. This framing of the Seder night is very similar to the time in the Beit Midrash at Migdal. Our laboratory of ideas reflects the incredible insights developed, whether during shiurim or through peer-to-peer discussions. Every day, in a sense, captures the essence of the Seder night. All of us at Migdal are proud to share with you Al HaMashkof for 5783, and we hope you use the wonderful words of Torah from *rebbeim* and *talmidim* to help shape the learning of the night and lead to meaningful inspiration.

Bedikat Chametz: Searching for Focus

Aryeh Pasch ~ Shana Aleph, Baltimore MD

Bedikat chametz is the well-known practice to search for any remaining *chametz* in one's house. On the evening of the fourteenth, Jews search their houses for *chametz* by candlelight. The mitzva seems basic enough; after all, we are entering a *chag* where we are forbidden to have leaven bread, and it therefore makes sense to search out to make sure nothing remains. Yet there is an obvious question: if it is so important to find the *chametz,* would it not make sense to search during the day?

The source for searching at night is clear. The mishna in the beginning of Pesachim states that chametz is searched for on "*ohr le-arba asar*". The meaning of the term *ohr* is then debated in the gemara. Rav Yehudah defines *ohr* as night and Rav Huna defines it as light. After a lengthy back and forth, the debate then concludes with a *baraita* proving *ohr* means night. Reconciling the argument, the gemara explains it as a difference in the rabbi's vernacular where both define *ohr* as night. This presents another question in the gemara: why did it say *ohr*, which normally means "light," and not the regular word for night, *layla*? The gemara answers that *ohr* is a more refined term than saying *layla*, which has negative connotations.

We have established that *bedikat chametz* should take place at night. But why is this so? In the gemara in Pesachim, Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak explains that *bedikat chametz* should be at night because people are home and candles can be used to greater effect at night. This is still difficult, as it is hard to imagine that a candle has more "seeing" power than bright sunlight. The Rambam in the Mishneh Torah says the candle is necessary for "holes and hidden places" or other lower visibility areas. Perhaps we might suggest that the candle restricts the user's view to its small circle of light. This forces an extra level of concentration and precision, and makes the candle at night much more powerful.

On one level, *bedikat chametz* functions as a final Pesach check. However, I think there might be a deeper message here, the dominant theme being focus. What we are learning from the mishna is that one should not speak aimlessly. Be precise, say *ohr* instead of the problematic *layla*. The idea here is one should always be focused on how one speaks, being precise and careful with what one says. It could be this sets the proper tone of the Seder, where we gather together to discuss deep and important Torah ideas. While we should engage in praise and gratitude for the *geula*, we must be sure our wording is as careful and focused as possible.

Searching and Burning: What Do They Represent?

Joey Winer ~ Shana Aleph, Detroit, MI

Rabbeinu Bachaye, among others, alludes to a mystical idea of the search of *chametz* being introspective of our "spiritual *chametz*." The idea has a nice ring to it, and subsequently after hearing it, the listener can go home feeling they heard a good *vort* about the upcoming holiday. Does the idea really make sense in connection to Pesach? Pesach is a holiday about the exodus from Egypt. One is not allowed to have chametz because of the unleavened dough the Israelites left Egypt with. Practically speaking, it makes sense the rabbis would institute a search for *chametz* beforehand, *to make sure you don't have any chametz*! *Bedikat chametz* isn't a spiritual cleansing, because that could apply to any holiday, with no particular connection to Pesach. In fact, Jews already have another holiday for searching out and removing imperfections: Yom Kippur!

Faced with this dilemma, one has two options. Either one can dismiss the idea as foolish, or alternatively, one can assume there is a deeper idea and attempt to uncover it. Let's opt for the second.

Many commentators describe *chametz* as representing a bloated ego. Like a "puffed up" loaf of bread, we try to seem more grand in order to gain social status. Matzah, on the other hand, represents being humble, and

embracing one's true self; after all, it is the bread of the poor. The search for *chametz* is supposed to be parallel our own search within ourselves to remove our egotistical *chametz*. And when we engage in *biur*, the destruction of the *chametz*, we are engaged in the utter destruction of our arrogance and a knocking down of this "*chametz*."

If this modified interpretation of approach of the "internal search" is correct, we can show how this is directly and intimately connected to the Exodus from Egypt, thereby being very relevant to Pesach. There are three places in Tanach (Deuteronomy 4:20, I Kings 8:51, Jeremiah 11:4) where Egypt is referred to as the "*kor barzel*," the "iron furnace." Superficially, this means that the time in Egypt was difficult for the Israelites, and that they suffered as if they were in a furnace. Why use the imagery of an "iron furnace"?

A furnace is something that heats up a material to a very hot temperature, and in the process, removes the impurities. As we know, a core objective of the Jewish sojourn into Egypt was to be forged into a nation. In order for that to happen, they needed to suffer, while having their impurities removed (as a "proof", 4/5ths of the Israelites died in the plague of darkness, per the Midrash).

How does this relate back to the concept of *bedikat chametz*? *Bedikat chametz* can be seen as us undergoing what the nation went through on a personal level. When one removes their "spiritual *chametz*" he or she is "forged" into a new person. In order for this to happen

one needs to suffer by searching internally, as pointing out all of one's imperfections can be painful. Finally, one will have their impurities removed at the time of *biur*, when they throw their *chametz* away.

Tying together two seemingly unrelated concepts may be difficult at times, but it can often lead to a coherent idea. Because of the parallelism between the concept of *kor barzel* and *bedikat chametz*, one can bring clarity to this seemingly mystical interpretation of searching for *chametz*.

Why By Fire? Biur Chametz Explained

Yaakov Zerykier ~ Shana Aleph, Cedarhurst NY

Every year, fire departments around the world grit their teeth and prepare for what many see as a dangerous Jewish tradition. Who can blame them? It's one thing to gather families around countless crowded bonfires. It's quite another when those people are also throwing things in to fuel them. So why do we specifically **burn** *chametz*? Aren't there more economical, safer, and more environmentally friendly ways to get rid of our newly found leavened grain products?

Thankfully, there are. The idea of burning chametz originates from Mishna Pesachim (2:1), and like most issues, there is a *machloket*. According to Rabbi Yehudah, "It's not considered *biur [chametz]* unless you burn it." The *Chachamim* here disagree and provide more options: "[one may] even crumble it and throw it to the wind or cast it to the sea." As to which opinion we follow, the Rambam, in his Mishneh Torah (Chametz Umatzah 3:11), provides clarity. He actually copies almost verbatim the wording of the *Chachamim* in the *Mishna* proscribing their methods for the destruction of *chametz* among others. Thus, you don't have to burn it.

Now that we know how we can do it, we must ask a more important question. Why do we need to destroy our *chametz*?

The basis for our opposition to *chametz* on *Pesach* is biblical in origin. There are actually two separate prohibitions on *chametz* during the seven days of *Pesach*. There is the prohibition of "*bal yematzei*" ("Do not find [*chametz*]"), as well as "*bal yeraeh*" ("Do not see [*chametz*]"), both of which are found in *Parshat Bo*, Exodus 12:19 and Exodus 13:7, respectively.

However, this doesn't tell us why. For that, we must look at some *Rishonim*. The Rambam writes in his philosophical *magnum opus*, *Moreh HaNevuchim* III:46:

"Due to the fact that the idolaters would sacrifice only leavened bread and they would offer up all manner of sweet food and would smear their animal sacrifices with honey ... therefore, God warned us not to offer to Him any of these things, leaven or honey."

Essentially, per the Rambam, our refraining from leavened products is a way of reaffirming our rejection of Egyptian worship.

The *Zohar* (2:182) offers an alternative view: "Whoever eats *chametz* on Pesach is as if he prayed to an idol." The Zohar also goes on to associate *chametz* with other negative traits. The Zohar actually has a decent foundation, as we see a reference in the Talmud Bavli (Brachot 17a) which associates *se-or* (sourdough starter) with the evil inclination.

While we see many reasons offered as to the rationale for destroying *chametz*, let's be sure it is done in a safe and responsible manner.

Kadesh: The Sanctification of the Seder

David Ross ~ Shana Bet, Los Angeles CA

Kadesh operates with a dual function. It both sanctifies the night, and introduces the first of the four cups of the Seder. Where is the source for the obligation of drinking four cups? The Talmud Yerushalmi in Mesechet Pesachim offers the popular answer. The four cups were established to correspond to the four expressions of redemption: "*V'hotzeiti, V'hitzalti, V'gaalti, V'lakachti*", or "And I took you out, and I saved you, and I redeemed you, and I took you".

The Ohr Hachayim defines the first term, "*V'hotzeiti*'', as Hashem lightening the workload the Jews had to do in Egypt. Why would this be included in the redemption process? Rabbeinu Bechaye, as well as the Sforno, says that the cups are corresponding to the **stages** of the redemption of the Jews. For this first stage of redemption, they both define "*V'hotzeiti*'" as when Hashem took the Jews out of the service of the Egyptians while they were still in Mitzrayim. This raises another seemingly obvious question. Why did Bnei Yisrael need to be freed from slavery before they were taken out of the land? This question is strengthened when taking into account the position of Rabbeinu Bechaye, as he says that they spent

six months in Mitzrayim free. There must have been some purpose for keeping Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim after they were freed from slavery, or else seemingly Hashem would have taken them out immediately.

There are subtle details that may hint as to why Bnei Yisrael needed to either remain in their lighter state of slavery or bask in their freedom before leaving Mitzrayim. After Krias Yam Suf, we see that the Bnei Yisrael complain to Moshe about needing drinking water. Why would they complain after witnessing Hashem perform so many miracles through Moshe? Shortly after, Bnei Yisrael continued to complain to Moshe and Aharon, focusing on their lack of food. They even go so far as to say "if only we had died by the hand of Hashem in the land of Egypt". How could this nation that just experienced so many miracles be complaining about not having food and water, when all these miracles were happening around them? Did they not have faith in Hashem to give them their necessities? Furthermore, why would they desire to have died in Egypt, the land in which they had suffered and toiled tremendously?

The final question concerns the episode of the golden calf. When Moshe travels up Har Sinai to receive the Torah, Bnei Yisrael once again complain, only this time to Moshe's brother, Aharon. However, rather than asking for food or water, they demanded a new Moshe. Chazal explain that they really thought Moshe was taking so long to come down from the mountain because they had miscalculated. However, this doesn't seem to validate their request, creating a golden calf that will "be a god ". How could Bnei Yisrael think that this was acceptable?

Moshe is a day late, and in response to this delay they create something antithetical to the existence of Hashem, the same Hashem who took them out of Egypt and performed countless miracles for them?

At this point, we can try and understand why "*V'hotzeiti*'" was required. There were two parts to Bnei Yisrael's slavery in Egypt: there was physical backbreaking work, and there was the mental torture. The physically backbreaking work was clear. Bnei Yisrael were tasked to make huge pyramids, while the Egyptians slowly took away the supplies given to them, forcing them to scavenge for more supplies. The workload increased to the point where it was physically impossible to meet demands of the Egyptians. Chazal note that when Bnei Yisrael couldn't meet the allotted quota for that day's work, the Egyptians would use their babies as cement for the pyramids in place of the resources they didn't get. When their work is described as "avodat parech", or "backbreaking labor", Rashi comments that the Egyptians actively forced men to do women's work and women to do men's work. This demonstrated that part of the enslavement was breaking the Jews' spirit, putting them into a certain mindset. Here we see the mentally taxing work, as it was not only degrading, it was also counter to the normal experiential work of men and women. These descriptions give us a peek into the psyche of the Jew in Egypt.

Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological phenomena that occurs when captives or people being abused begin to develop connections or feelings towards the one harming them. After analyzing both the abuse rendered to Bnei

Yisrael, along with their reaction thereafter when they are set free, it seems apparent that Bnei Yisrael had some form of Stockholm Syndrome. After many years being enslaved in Mitzrayim, and being abused, tormented and ideologically devastated, the first step by Bnei Yisrael towards redemption was a shift in attitude. If they still desired to be in Mitzrayim, and had connections to their captors while being attached to their culture, even if they were physically taken out of Egypt, mentally they would always be there.

This is why Hashem first had to take them out of slavery, both physically and mentally. However, even when free, the years of unending trauma clearly remained with Bnei Yisrael. When confronted with hardships, they were so quick to turn back to their prior coping mechanism, back to their masters in Egypt. One could argue this was the real reason why Bnei Yisrael were not able to enter immediately into the land of Israel. Entering the Land of Israel marked the beginning of Bnei Yisrael acting more autonomously, which was impossible for a nation which was so steeped in a slave mentality. A nation of traumatized people, where the slave mentality could return at a moment's notice, was not a nation that was ready to enter the Land of Israel. It was also not a nation that could fully trust in their true master, Hashem.

The defining point here is that trauma often never leaves the victims. Bnei Yisrael were traumatized. This trauma warped their perspective and caused them never to be able to have full trust in Hashem or be capable of acting on their own accord. Recognizing how powerful this

state of mind helps tremendously in relating to the entire experience of *yetziyat mitzrayim*.

Why Four Cups of Wine? Who's Counting Anyways?

Ariel Schanke ~ Shana Bet, Hewlett NY

The very popular source for having four cups of wine are to match the four phrases in Exodus 6:6-7: "*Vegaalti,*" "*Vehitzalti*," "*Vehotzeiti*," and "*Velakachti*." This reason comes from the Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1), where we see other groups of four and subsequent explanations. It's interesting that throughout our version of the Gemara, no matter the reason, there's universal agreement that there are four, and only four, cups. But some Rishonim have a different text and claim that there are actually **five** cups. How could they possibly maintain such a position?

The Rif's version of the Gemara in Pesachim (Daf 118a) says we say Hallel on the fifth cup, where our version has the fourth. The Rosh also mentions the fifth cup, but acknowledges the existence of our version as well. Some suggest that the origin of this variation is the potential fifth phrase describing Yetziat Mitzrayim: "HaMotzi".

Our version is corroborated by the many expressions of "four" we have related to the Seder night, as well as the meaning of the number four. The Abarbanel, in commenting on the Mah Nishtanah, explains that there is a paradoxical nature to the Seder, and the Mah Nishtanah shows this dichotomy. Are we remembering slavery or celebrating freedom? Like a case in Bet Din, there are two

"witnesses" for each side, as is halachically required. On one side, Matza is Lechem Oni and Maror's purpose is bitterness. Both remind us of slavery. On the other hand, we dip our food multiple times and recline to demonstrate and celebrate our freedom. Of course, the answer is both, but Ma Nishtana shows us that both of these aspects are equally important and part of the Seder.

Here, too, the four cups are demonstrating a dichotomy. They represent freedom, but were we saved physically or mentally/spiritually? Again, the answer is both. Both sides have two valid witnesses. The first and third cups represent "ViHotzayti" and "ViGaalti", which are both physical. God freed us from our work and redeemed us from the Egyptians with the Makot. The second and fourth cups represent "ViHetzalti" and "ViLakachti", which are both mental. God removed us from the mentality of servitude and replaced it with a national identity. The Rambam in the Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Chametz u'Matza 7) explains we are obligated to discuss this duality. We must both tell over how God freed us intellectually from worshiping Avodah Zara to understanding Him and how we were freed from slavery.

But what about this potential fifth phrase? Later Halachic sources, like the Rambam (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Chametz u'Matza 8:10), and the Rama, compromise by allowing an optional fifth cup that you can drink if you say Hallel on it. The Vilna Gaon takes a different path and says that Eliyahu's cup is the fifth cup. We put it aside and wait for him to arrive and answer all halachic questions, including if we should drink the cup.

Symbolically, this lines up with the potential fifth phrase. Our redemption is incomplete and we are still in Galut. "*HaMotzi*", in a way, has yet to be fully fulfilled. When the redemption is completed, the fifth phrase will fully apply and we'll know halachically if we should have four or five. May we merit to drink the fifth cup of wine at our next Seder.

I've Got a Feeling

Mordechai Levoritz ~ Shana Bet, Brooklyn NY

The rationale of a woman's obligation in the four cups is not surprising at all. It is a time-bound positive commandment, which would mean a natural exemption. However, there is a clear reason offered as to why the obligation exists. In Pesachim (108a), R' Yehoshua ben Levi says that the reason that women are obligated in the four cups is because of "*af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*" – "they too were involved in the miracle." Is this a sufficient explanation? If we extrapolate, we would assume that the reason why women are exempt from certain mitzvot is due to some lack of involvement in miracles. Is this indeed the case? Rather than unpack the general nature of women's exemption from certain mitzvot, I want to examine the nature of their obligation of the four cups in particular, while adding a layer of meaning in the process.

This isn't the only place that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explains how women are obligated in a time-bound positive commandment. He also applies it to lighting Chanukah candles (Shabbat 23a) and reading the Megilla on Purim (Megilla 4a).

Another question we can ask is what does it mean that "they were in the same miracle"? Tosafot explains that women were placed in the same danger as men while saved by the same miracle, and must therefore

commemorate the event in the same way. But if this is the case, why is the rule of "*af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*'' so limited in scope? Why is it only applied to these three scenarios? Tosafot asks this regarding *matzah* on the first night of *Pesach* (*Megilla* 4a). Women have an obligation even though it's time-bound and positive. Yet the *sevara* brought by the *Gemara* is that there is a fundamental connection between the negative commandment with regard to chametz and the positive commandment concerning matzah, where anyone who is obligated in the former is also obligated in the latter. Why not just apply "*af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*", thereby automatically creating an obligation? Not only that, but matzah and the four cups recall the same general miracle, albeit different aspects. It seems odd to have this principle operate in one situation, but in a seemingly similar one does not seem relevant.

Tosafot offers two answers. The first is that the concept of "*af hen hayu be-oto ha-nes*" can only obligate women in **rabbinic** positive time-bound commandments. This is why we would need a *limud* directly from the Torah to obligate women in time-bound Torah commandments. The second answer is that there is a *gezeirat shava*, a connection between pesukim derived masoretically, between Pesach and Sukkot. Both are prescribed to start on the fifteenth of the months they are in, Nisan and Tishrei respectively. In this view, "*af hen…*" would be operative at a biblical level, but does not have the ability to override a *gezeirat shava.* This is why we need a special *limud* between chametz and matzah, which apparently has the authority to do as such.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l, however, introduces a third answer, one which changes the nature of how we understand how to apply "*af hen…*". The reason that *"af hen…"* cannot replace the fundamental connection between the obligation of chametz and matzah to obligate women is because *"af hen…"* can only engender a particular kind of obligation. Its basic structure is that since women were involved in the miracle, they should be involved in the ritual re-creation of the experience. Therefore, only mitzvot that in their inception have to do not only with a commemoration, but with a ritual re-creation that manifests in *pirsum ha-nisa*, can one then apply *"af hen…"* .

Let's turn to the mitzva of matza for a moment. Is the re-creation of the experience essential for its fulfillment? To answer this, the Gemara (Rosh Ha-Shana 28a) offers a case where Persians "coerced" someone to eat matza. In such an instance, since the commandment was to eat the matza, the person has fulfilled his obligation. This might not have been a pleasant experience, but this is still the performance of the mitzva. A clear derivation from this is that you do NOT need an experiential aspect. This is true even though there is an intended historic association to the unleavened bread that our forefathers had. The action and the fulfillment are one and the same.

On the other hand, the four cups of the Seder have an additional concept in play. The Rif has a *girsa* in the Gemara (Rif, Pesachim 23a) outlining what exactly one fulfills regarding the four cups in different scenarios:

"Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: the four cups need to have enough undiluted wine to dilute a significant cup. If you drink it undiluted, ***you fulfill the obligation of drinking the four cups, but not of experiencing freedom****. If you drink all four cups at once,* ***you fulfill the obligation of experiencing freedom, but not of drinking the four cups****."*

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l explains that while there is a formal obligation to drink four cups, there is a separate but integrated component of experiencing freedom while drinking them. So much so, in fact, that you can technically fulfill them separately! From here we can begin to see the broader picture. The reason that we use "*af hen…*" to obligate women in a time-bound positive commandment is to re-create and re-experience the freedom from Egypt, which does not necessarily manifest itself in drinking at particular times.

Practically this may not change the action one must do by the Seder. But now, before you take your first sip of wine, it is important to think about what it means to be a slave for a moment. And then think about the fact that you are sitting around the table with family and friends, enjoying a cup of wine, with at least three more to follow. This is an expression of freedom. If you miss out on this beautiful realization, you've missed out either on an essential part of the mitzva, or maybe even the entire objective. Have a wonderful Pesach, and may next year's celebration be in Yerushalayim.

Heseba: Too Scared to Lean

Aryeh Zucker ~ Shana Bet, Far Rockaway NY

The first mishnah of the last chapter of Pesachim states that one must lean when he eats at the Seder. Later on, the gemara (108a) goes into specific classifications of individuals; specifying those who must lean at the Seder and those who are exempt. There are a total of five cases that are mentioned: a woman sitting with her husband and a student in front of his *rebbi* don't need to lean yet, an important woman (even in the presence of her husband), a son sitting with his father and an attendant in front of his master, are required to lean lean at the Seder. Why is it that some people lean and others do not? Why isn't leaning a blanket idea that applies to everyone?

Let's first understand the nature of the obligation to lean. The gemara makes clear that in general leaning is an expression of freedom. Interestingly, for all of the cases above, the reasoning why they still lean or don't lean isn't explicitly stated. The only exception to this is for why a student doesn't lean, which is because of the fear that you are supposed to have of your *rebbi*. The *mefarshim* (*Rashi* and the *Rashbam* among others) give a similar reason for women. They say that she doesn't lean because of fear of her husband. The wording of the gemara for all cases is that they don't *need* to lean. Putting all of this together, one could ask why does one not lean if there is an issue of fear? When the gemara says they don't *need* to lean,

what does that mean? *Can* they lean? Do they fulfill a *mitzvah* if they lean? By the case of a student before his *rebbi*, it seems clear that he may not lean even if he wishes to because of the *chiyyuv* to fear your *rebbi*. The Rambam concludes that you do not lean unless your *rebbi* gives you permission, in which case the fear is removed.

Perhaps *Chazal* set up the *mitzvah* to lean as a *mitzvah* to do a specific action, namely leaning to your left. But if this were the case then fear is not a reason to prevent a woman from leaning in front of her husband. She should still be obligated to lean. Therefore, there must then be something more to the *mitzvah*. There must be a halachic identity of leaning which is different from the mechanical action of just leaning over. We know that you lean as an expression of freedom. Let us propose that the halachic leaning is one which has a character of freedom. If there is a lack in their freedom, naturally this *mitzvah* cannot be performed in its ideal form and thus they would be *patur*. This would mean that while the student may not be allowed to lean, if his leaning is one that expresses freedom, he would be fulfilling the *mitzvah* of leaning. Similarly women would be able to be *mikayem* leaning if they wanted to.

The problem with this explanation is that the mishnah, when saying that you must lean, specifies that this includes a poor person, someone who cannot lean in a way that represents freedom. Additionally, Tosafot explains that this is the very reason why the mishnah specifies the case of a poor man, as you might think that since he can't lean in a manner that expresses freedom the *mitzvah* of leaning won't apply to him. Thus, it

specifically tells you that he too must lean. This means that what makes it a halachic leaning is something other than it being an expression of freedom.

It must be then that leaning is a *mitzvah* because it is a property of this action to create an environment of freedom. But, when the leaning is unsuccessful and there is no freedom environment created, the leaning does not fulfill the *mitzvah*. The *mitzvah* is result oriented (towards a freedom environment) set up through a specific action (leaning to the left). The poor person, even though there is no luxury to start with, once he leans and does this act of freedom, creates the environment that *chazal* wanted there to be. In the cases where you lean to your right or on your back, since that is not the *ma'aseh* that was established as the way to perform this *mitzvah*, it is not recognized as a halachic leaning at all. However, in our cases, everyone is performing the *ma'aseh mitzvah*, but only some can get the *kiyum hamitzvah*. When there is a neutral environment, like by the poor person, or better, the leaning can be successful in creating an environment of freedom. But when there is actively an environment of fear working against and preventing the freedom that the leaning is trying to create, the *kiyum hamitzvah* will be unattainable and you would therefore be patur. By the student, he may not be *allowed* to but he still is *able* to perform the action of leaning. This is why the gemara uses the wording of not needing to lean, because even though for some it is impossible to achieve the result that the *mitzvah* requires, it is still always recognized as the halachic act of leaning.

Now that we understand the halachic structure of leaning, we can understand why some lean and some don't. The son leans because he doesn't have the problem of fear. Even though he fears his father, the Seder night is one of the father teaching the son about *yetzias mitzrayim* and actively making the free environment apparent to the son, so here the son feels free and can lean successfully. When the relationship between a man and his wife is one where the woman has a fear of him, she wouldn't be able to lean. But if she is an important woman, then that is a relationship where she doesn't fear him, and she would be able to be *mikayem* the *mitzvah* of leaning. Many of the *mefarshim* say that nowadays all women are important women.

Karpas: A Taste of Maror

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring ~ Educational Coordinator

Twice during the Seder, we eat halachically significant vegetables. The more important of the two is *maror,* which was part of the biblical commandment of eating the Pesach offering and is nowadays a rabbinic obligation. The lesser of the two is *karpas,* the vegetable we eat towards the beginning of the meal. *Karpas* is merely a means to get the children to ask questions. (Pesachim 114b) Oddly though, the Mishna (Pesachim 10:3) lists that one uses *chazeret* for *karpas,* the same lettuce that one can use for *maror.* The Talmud explains that really any vegetable can be used. The Mishna needed to teach that even when one has only lettuce, he should still have the two stages of vegetable eating. (See Pesachim 114a-b.)

The Talmud then offers a case in which these two synthesize into one obligation: when one only has lettuce to fulfill both of these obligations. Two opinions are offered as to when one makes the blessing on the *maror,* considering that the food used for *karpas* is the same as that which will be used for *maror.*

> **[What] is** the *halakha* **where there is only lettuce** available? When should one recite each blessing? **Rav Huna said: One initially recites the blessing: Who creates fruit of the ground, over the bitter herbs,** i.e., the lettuce, **and eats**

them. **And ultimately,** after the *matza*, **one recites the blessing:** Commanded us over **eating bitter herbs, over** the lettuce **and eats** it. **Rav Ḥisda strongly objects to this** opinion: Do you think that **after one fills his belly with** lettuce, **he then recites** another **blessing over it? Rather, Rav Ḥisda said: Initially one recites** two **blessings over** the lettuce: **Who creates fruit of the ground, and:** Commanded us over **eating bitter herbs, and he eats** it; **and later** in the Seder **he eats lettuce without a blessing.** (Pesachim 114b-115a, William Davidson [Koren] Talmud)

Rav Huna rules that though one is physically eating the *maror* at the beginning of the Seder, one need not make the blessing on *maror* then. According to many commentaries (see, for example, R. David and Meiri), this is because he believes *mitzvot tzerichot kavana* - one does not fulfill obligations without intent. Thus, when one intends to eat the lettuce as *karpas* and not *maror,* he delays his fulfillment of *maror*, which enables recitation of the blessing later. Rav Chisda rules that one does not need intent. Thus, by eating the lettuce, one automatically fulfills both obligations. Therefore, he makes the blessing at the earlier point.

Tosafot, however, understands that according to both positions one needs intent to fulfill the obligation to eat *maror*. As such, one does not fulfill that obligation by eating the lettuce as *karpas*. Nevertheless, one is permitted to make the blessing at the earlier stage. This is puzzling, however. Blessings, under most circumstances,

must be recited immediately prior to the performance of the mitzvah. (Pesachim 7b) In this case, the blessing will be recited at *karpas* while the mitzvah of *maror* will not be performed until after *Magid*!

Tosafot explains that the blessing can nevertheless be recited because "he ate a little from it during the first dipping." He suggests a parallel case. Tosafot (unlike Ramban) believes that the primary mitzvah of *shofar* is fulfilled during the *Amida.* Nevertheless, one makes the blessing before the first round of blasts, and the fact that one is performing the **act of the mitzvah**, **though not truly fulfilling it,** is sufficient to permit the early recitation of the blessing.

The standard view follows Rav Chisda (Shulchan Aruch OC 475:2) and thus Tosafot's explanation this position can shed important light on *Karpas*, especially if we expand on Tosafot's position.

In addition to the simple understanding of the Talmud, that the *karpas* (either the eating of the vegetable before the meal [Rashi, Rashbam] or the dipping [Ran, Meiri] is meant to generate curiosity, others push the idea further. (Pri Chadash 473:6 specifically rejects adding meaning) Maharal (Gevurot Hashem 50) suggests that the purpose is to highlight the uniqueness of the *maror,* as *karpas* creates a situation in which dipping the *maror* is extra. As such, *karpas* begins the process of making the night special. If so, eating the *maror* as *karpas* does start the act of making *maror* unique. Therefore, even when one is not using lettuce for *karpas,* **one should be cognizant that the**

very act of eating this first vegetable sets in motion a night of surprises that enable true education.

Others note that one need not recline for *karpas* as the act of dipping the vegetable, especially in salt water, indicates this custom reminds us of the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt (see Peninei Halacha for a succinct statement of this). If so, ***karpas* is the conceptual start of experiencing the bitterness fully captured by the *maror*.**

Rav Uziel Eliyahu (https://tinyurl.com/yz5m3nbm) offers a fascinating formulation. He adds that one must eat something that captures bitterness because we "cannot speak about the salvation without **tasting a bit of the taste of the exile**" (emphasis added). As such, ***karpas*, like *maror*, is about tasting the bitterness so that our mouths are primed to discuss the miraculous Exodus.** According to these views, *karpas* is our chance to warm up for a night in which tasting *maror* and its opposite orient our worldview. Even when we do not use lettuce, we should embrace this opportunity.

Yachatz: When to Take a Break

Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Chait ~ Menahel

The Gemara in Pesachim 115b offers three different explanations on what the Pasuk of "*lechem oni*" is telling us. The first explanation is that it's bread over which one answers (*onim*) matters. Meaning that there must be bread (Matzah) on the table when the Haggadah is being said. A second explanation is that just as it is the manner of a poor person (*ani*) to eat a piece of bread, as a whole loaf is usually not affordable for him, on the Seder night we act in a similar manner i.e. eat a piece in place of a whole loaf (matza). A third explanation is that just as by a poor person the husband heats the oven and his wife bakes quickly before their wood is used up, so too here, when baking the matzah the husband heats the oven and his wife bakes it quickly so the Matzah doesn't rise.

I would like to explain the different ideas these three approaches convey. The fact that a poor individual has to heat the oven himself while his wife bakes the dough as quickly as possible to prevent the bread from rising, is a quality that is an integral part of the physical characteristic of the Matzah. The quality of the Matzah has to be one that shows from its physical character that it is a poor man's bread i.e. it did not rise.

The explanation that says that we should have a broken piece just as a poor man is custom to eat servings of fragmented pieces, is telling us that we must show the

concept of "poor man's bread", not from the quality of the object, but rather from the mannerism in which he eats. It's not necessarily the object that is showing he is a poor person but the manner in which he eats demonstrates he is in an impoverished state. A poor man often takes his whole bread and breaks it up to save some for a later meal. Here too, it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate this idea. We show this by having a half of a Matzah at the Seder.

The explanation that tells us that Matzah is the bread that is needed to recite the answers to the questions that are asked at the Seder table is saying that it is not the idea of being poor that is the essential quality of Matzah, but rather it is the channel that stimulates ideas relating to the Seder night. The mere presence of Matzah as a central position at the Seder causes us to talk about the story of the exodus from Egypt.

It is interesting to note that although most people have the custom to break the Matzah in half before we start Maggid, the Rambam (Hilchot Chametz V'Matzah 8:6) has the breaking of the Matzah not by Maggid but rather right before eating the Matzah and Maror. Why would the Rambam change the way of the normal custom? Why not have the broken piece in front of us when saying Maggid?

I believe the Rambam holds that each explanation of the gemara needs to be done at its time of fulfillment of that idea. When starting to say Maggid you only need that object that will be an incentive for one to talk about the story of *yetziat mitzrayim*. For that to be accomplished

you only need to have a poor man's bread. When having a bread that has not risen in front of you it stimulates one to get involved in the story of the Exodus. The idea of showing the manner of how a poor man eats pieces is not needed when talking about *yetziat mitzrayim*. When is it necessary to show how a poor man eats? Only when you are actually involved in the act of eating. So, the Rambam holds that there is no reason to have a half of Matzah at Maggid since at that time we are not eating the meal yet. If you would break the Matzah by Maggid it wouldn't be *nikar* you're breaking it to demonstrate the manner of how a poor man eats. Only before we actually start the Seudah do you need to now show the mannerism of a poor individual. Therefore, it is the start of the *seudah* that the Rambam holds is the proper time to break the Matzah.

Breaking Bread: A Lesson in Intention

Avi Grad ~ Shana Aleph, Cherry Hill NJ

Yachatz is one of the more obscure parts of the Pesach Seder. The exact practice is well known; you take the middle matzah, break it in half, and put the bigger piece away for the later Tzafun. What is not as well-known is the reason for *why* we do this. While the Torah and gemara don't always give reasons for the different mitzvot, that does not mean there are **no** reasons. Many times, these reasons are often just as important as the actual action and, when understood, either lead to a new and better practice or allow you to do the action with the proper intentions (or even both).

One example of this is Yachatz. A common reason for Yachatz is because the practitioner is like a poor person who puts food away for later when he may not have food. Without this knowledge the Halacha becomes decoupled from its meaning, but once it is understood one could fulfill the intent of the Mitzvah in addition to the physical actions. In addition, when this is understood, one could ask questions about it, such as where it is placed in the Seder.

The normal practice is to do it after Karpas and before Maggid. Why? It would fit better before we eat the

matzah to mimic what a poor person would do. It is only right at the time of the meal that the poor person would take the piece. Indeed the Rambam himself says (in Hilchot Chametz UMatzah 8:6) that "he washes his hands… and takes two matzot and splits one of them." If Yachatz was put before Motzi-Matzah like the Rambam intended, then it would help elucidate the true nature of the Halacha and help people connect the Seder more easily (understanding that the Rambam did not have Yachatz).

The Rambam discusses in many places how important the reasons for the mitzvot are. For example, for example, Hilchot Me'ilah 8:8, and Hilchot Temura 4:13, the Rambam writes at length how it is our responsibility to find reasons for mitzvot, even ones that seem difficult to justify such as the Para Aduma and the *korbanot* in general. He even says in the Guide for the Perplexed (III:48) that we "*pasken*" like the opinion in the gemara (Berachot 33b) that we can offer reasons for the mitzvot.

Learning about Yachatz allows someone to connect to the true meaning of the mitzvah and even a number of ways in which to perform it better. The same goes for all Mitzvot; it is important to learn about them especially if they are obscure.

Going Beyond the Story: How to Fulfill the Mitzvah of Discussing the Exodus from Egypt

Rabbi Dr. Ben Aaronson ~ Night Seder Coordinator

The Rambam outlines the mitzvah of discussing the exodus from Egypt, obligatory on the first night of Pesach:

"It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, as [Exodus 13:3] states: "Remember this day, on which you left Egypt," just as [Exodus 20:8] states: "Remember the Sabbath day."…Even great Sages are obligated to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. Whoever elaborates concerning the events which occurred and took place is worthy of praise." (Rambam, Laws of Chametz and Matzah, 7:1)

It is interesting that the Rambam goes out of his way to include "great sages". He does not need to tell us that "even great sages" need to keep Shabbat or wear Tefilin. But apparently one might have thought the the mitzvah of discussing the exodus from Egypt is a simple retelling

of the basic story. If this was the case, perhaps the Sages who are certainly familiar with the basic story would be exempt. We must therefore conclude that the mitzvah extends beyond a mere retelling of facts. And to the extent one elaborates in discussing the exodus, it is a superior performance of the mitzvah. This approach to discussing the exodus is incorporated into the very text of the Haggadah:

"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but God, our Lord, brought us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, then we, our children, and our grandchildren, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. [Therefore,] even if we were all wise, all men of understanding, all elders, all well-versed in Torah, we would still be commanded to tell about the Exodus from Egypt, for whoever tells about it at length, behold, he is worthy of praise.

Once Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon dined together [at the Seder] in Bnei Brak. They discussed the Exodus from Egypt throughout the entire night until their students came and told them: "Teachers, the time for reciting the Shemah in the morning has arrived." (Rambam, Laws of the Chametz and Matzah, Text of the Haggadah)

The Ritva, in his commentary on the Haggadah, explains a connection between these two paragraphs. Following the method used throughout the Talmud, the halakhic

formulation is illustrated with an account of specific events. A group of some of our greatest sages who certainly knew the basic storyline, nonetheless engaged in discussing the exodus the entire night. What were they discussing?

The Ritva suggests one approach, that they were discussing the laws of Pesach. Part of passing our tradition onto the next generation is not merely history but an active engagement in practice. This extends to the world of Halakha. We see this approach exemplified in the question and answer of the wise son:

"The wise son, what does he say? "What are the testimonies, statutes, and laws that God, our Lord, has commanded you?" You should thus reply to him, [teaching him] the laws of Pesach [until the final concept]: one may not eat any dessert after the Paschal sacrifice." (Rambam, Laws of the Chametz and Matzah, Text of the Haggadah)

The wise son asks, what are these different categories of mitzvot that we are engaged in this evening? The father responds with examples from the laws of Pesach. He teaches him Halakha –the corpus of Jewish law. The Vilna Gaon's text of the Haggadah includes the word "until 'one may not eat'", he continues until the final law of the Afikoman, the end of the meal. According to this approach, there is plenty of Halakha that could fill an entire night of study.

Another approach is that the story of Pesach serves as a springboard to all areas of Torah. This is a night of passing on our entire Mesorah–tradition. It includes history, it includes Halakha, and it also includes our philosophy. We can learn and study about how Hashem interacts with the world and intervenes in human affairs. This study is also infinite and could easily occupy our studies until the early hours of the morning. An extension of this is discussed by the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Solovetchik:

"Maggidim have a beautiful interpretation to this paragraph. They say this refers to the Pesah that preceded the outbreak of the insurrection on the part of Bar Kokhba against Rome. 'They would talk of Yeziat Mizrayim,' but it was not only the story of the past, what happened to Pharaoh and us so many thousand years ago; it was the story of the present and what was going to happen tomorrow. The study of the Exodus was supposed to guide them in their revolt. 'They would talk of Yeziat Mizrayim all the night.' It was a long night, and the Bar Kokhba revolt was planned at that Seder night. They studied Yeziat Mizrayim not only as an event of the past, but also as a clue and a key to the future. (Soloveitchik, p.40)

We are not only studying history, but we are analyzing and interpreting the timeless story of the Jewish people. It includes our political progression from slavery to freedom. And it includes our philosophical progression from idol worship to the service of Hashem. We extend the ancient story of our people into modern times. It

contextualizes our own challenges and struggles, and provides us guidance in navigating the present and the future. We engage in a discussion incumbent upon every generation, as the Haggadah itself states, "in each and every generation a person is obligated to demonstrate or experience as if he himself left Egypt", each generation is obligated to understand how the exodus from Egypt personally impacts them in their own time.

References

Maimonides, M., Touger, E., Kaplan, B., Abramson, Z., & Silverstein, S. (2007). Mishneh Torah. New York: Moznaim Pub. Retrieved from: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/682956/jewish/Mishneh-Torah.htm

Soloveitchik, J. D. & Genack, M. (2009). The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening : The Passover Haggadah : With a Commentary Based on the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. New York, N.Y: OU Press.

Freedom to Share

Doni Berenson ~ Shana Aleph, Los Angeles CA

Maggid starts off with *Ha Lachma Anya,* a paragraph describing the matzah that Bnei Yisrael ate in Egypt, and inviting all to partake in the eating of the poor man's bread. The wording includes: "*Kol dichpin yetei v'yechol*," "all who are hungry, come and eat it." Right away, there seems to be a problem: why would we invite hungry people into our homes to partake in such poor quality bread (i.e., matzah)? Matzah is a food item that symbolizes slavery and desperation. It doesn't taste very good and it symbolizes our history of enslavement. Why invite the needy to come have it specifically? And who would actually accept the invitation to have flat, stale *matzah*?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks writes a beautiful piece on *Ha Lachma Anya* in his commentary to the Haggadah. There, he notices that matzah both represents slavery, what Bnei Yisrael ate in Egypt as slaves, as well as freedom, what Bnei Yisrael ate as they left Egypt. How do we make that transition from slave bread to freedom bread? It is when we can and are willing to share with others. When we invite people to come eat matzah, we are showing a willingness to share the matzah, changing the matzah from a bread of oppression to a symbol of freedom. Rabbi Sacks says that a person who is unsure of tomorrow is not going to offer their bread to someone, but one who is willing to share has already demonstrated he is "capable

of fellowship and faith, the two things from which hope is born." Sharing, and the ability to do so, is the essence of freedom.

There is another way that sharing of food can be a symbol of true freedom. There is a famous Rambam in Hilchot Megilla (2:15) where he says that if someone doesn't have enough money to send *mishloach manot* to a friend, he should send him his own Purim *seuda* as *mishloach manot*, and vice versa, and that way they can both complete the mitzvot. This is a prime example of how sharing brings about freedom. When these two men decide to give each other their meals, instead of incurring any kind of financial/food related loss, they enable each other to do both mitzvot. They free themselves from the monetary shackles that were prohibiting them from doing both mitzvot. Poverty enslaves those who are affected by it; oftentimes poor people cannot enjoy doing mitzvot to their fullest extent. Judaism obligates those who can to give, whether it be through maaser, trumah, or any other form of tzedakah; we are encouraged to help those in need.

This is the idea of *Ha Lachma Anya*: not simply to let poor people share your food, but to allow them to fully partake in a mitzvah that they otherwise wouldn't have been able to do. When we don't just read the words, but take action in combating poor people's inability to do certain mitzvot, we are giving the highest form of tzedakah in my opinion.

Every Night is Different, But What Makes the Seder Unique?

Moshe Koppel ~ Shana Aleph, Bergenfield NJ

Maggid starts right after Ha Lachma Anya with a framework that carries throughout the entire night. A simple four questions guide the topic of conversation for the entire Seder. We see how this night is different, pointing out Matzah, Maror, leaning, dipping and, in the times of the Beis HaMikdash, the Korban Pesach. These allow the child who asks them to begin the discussion that is essential for the entire Seder, one that will be answered with Avadim Hayinu and Mit'chila Ovdey Avodah Zara.

It is interesting though that the first questions of the night are pre-written. Why is it that before the Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim begins we start with pre-scripted questions and pre-scripted answers? Does that not disrupt the natural flow of conversation?

The questions of Mah Nishtana function as more than just a prompt for the children to be curious. As the gemara in Pesachim 116a states, one must ask himself this set text even if he is having a Seder by himself, and even Talmidei Chachimim learning together must ask each other these questions.

But why are these four so important? For instance, the questions about dipping twice might not even come up naturally throughout the entire Seder night! And more intuitive questions, such as those regarding the Four Cups or the *charoset*, are not asked at all.

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, the Rashbetz, in his commentary to the Haggadah, asks this last question. He suggests that these four are the only four questions that reflect how this night is truly different from every other night, and all these questions pertain to objects currently on the table. Yet one of the cups of wine and the *charoset* are on the table at the time these questions are asked, and the obligation to have four cups of wine and charoset are unique to Pesach, so how is this a fitting answer?

I would suggest that beyond mentioning the differentiating factors of the Seder, the questions also act as a setup for the rest of the night. Each object or action mentioned in the four questions takes on a new identity during the Seder night to express *cheirut*, or freedom. The objects of the *mitzvot* of the night, such as matza and maror, become "halachic cheftzaot" that are eaten during the Seder. However, this is not the case for the wine or *charoset*. Instead, they represent halachic actions, to be done on the Seder night that are specific to Pesach.

Let's look at the *charoset*. We dip the *karpas* and maror (and matzah according to the Rambam), but this is not a reflection of something inherently different or special about the *charoset*. Rather, it is a secondary object that supports what is dipping into it. Wine is similarly

ordinary. Wine is drunk on every Yom Tov as part of Simchas Yom Tov, but on the Seder night the wine is specifically drunk while leaning. In the last perek of Pesachim, the Gemara describes the action of leaning as an expression of freedom. Here too, the object of wine is not becoming a new cheftzah for the Seder night; rather, there are obligations to drink the wine, while leaning, and it is that which we are asking about with Mah Nishtana. Of course, during the times of the Beis HaMikdash, we also ask about the roasting of the Korban Pesach, which is also a Cheftzah Shel Mitzvah on the Seder night, so it is also included in the questions.

From these questions we can see the way the night is framed. It is more than just telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim but also passing on the Mesorah by demonstrating a personal example of how the Halachic system works. We address the objects that teach about the Halachic system as soon as we start the Seder to introduce the night as more than just a history of the Jewish nation. Hopefully we can think about the subtle differences that make the Seder night different because the subtle differences show the complexity and wisdom behind the Jewish Halachic system.

Hashem's PhD in Psychology

Sam Savetsky ~ Shana Aleph,
Bergenfield NJ

Avadim HaYinu is one of the more perplexing sections of the Haggadah.

The very first line of the passage tells us that "***we*** were slaves" and Hashem "took ***us*** out." This ahistorical first-person perspective is deserving of exegesis in and of itself, but is made even odder by the very next line stating that Hashem took "***our ancestors***" out of Egypt. Was it us, or was it our ancestors?

If all of this were not strange enough, how do we understand the statement that if Hashem had not freed those ancestors, we and our descendants would still be slaves? One can propose that history would have been completely different had Egypt not fallen in power and stature after the Exodus, but such a claim does not truly stand up to historical analysis. Thus, the answer often given to that second question is that we would still be slaves *spiritually*, and would not be the Jewish nation we are today. This still leaves us with the first question.

I propose a unified answer to both questions: Hashem has a "PhD in Psychology".

In the modern world, we have organized a litany of mental health problems that arise as a result of traumatic

experiences. For example, there is Depression, a mood disorder characterized by feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness. Another example is Anxiety, a condition marked by excessive worry, nervousness, and fear. Anxiety can make it difficult for survivors of trauma to relax, sleep, and concentrate.

Being enslaved is certainly a traumatic experience, and first-hand accounts of escaped survivors often detail the trauma involved; everything from the slavery to attempting to escape and its aftermath. Running away in the dead of the night, leaving all your belongings behind, while terrified of being caught, is no easy matter to overcome for many victims of slavery. Hashem was certainly aware of this and "arranged" to have our Exodus overcome this barrier. At midnight on the 14th of Nissan the Jews were free to leave. However, rather than leaving at night like escapees, they left the next morning with all the wealth they could hold. When the Egyptians pursued them, Hashem put an end to them all. Hashem ensured that the psychological impact of slavery would have as little of a toll as possible.

How does any of this answer the questions from above? Ramban, in his commentary on Parshat Veira (Shemot 6:6), expounds on the four expressions of redemption found there. He explains that the meaning of "I will redeem you" is directly connected to the idea of Hashem's outstretched arm. Hashem did not just free the Jews, He extended His arm over them and protected them the entire way. Thus, when *Avadim Hayinu* states that Hashem took ***us*** out with an "outstretched arm", it is referring to the freedom Hashem gave ***us***. In other

words, it is a "mental" exodus that we share with our ancestors. We refer to the psychological trauma Hashem spared our ancestors and therefore prevented from being passed down to us. Thus, when the next line states, "had Hashem not taken ***our ancestors*** from Egypt", it is focusing on the physical exodus, the exodus that our ancestors alone endured. We then conclude by thanking Hashem for both Exodus', for had both not occurred we would still be under Pharaohs influence, if not physically, then mentally.

This idea is later repeated in the fifteenth chapter of Devarim, in the laws surrounding an *Eved Ivri*: "When you send [the ex-slave] out free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; you shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your winepress; from that with which God has blessed you shall you give to him."

We see that Hashem does not want a servant to leave their master's home empty handed and struggling. In fact, the very next line commands us to "remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you" and informs us that the exodus is why Hashem "[command's us] this thing today." Hashem recognizes the importance of leaving a less than ideal situation with one's head held high. Ultimately, Hashem understood the necessity of ensuring the overall trauma suffered by the Jewish nation was treated in the best possible way.

The *Kiyum* to Lose Track of Time

Ezra Feder ~ Shana Aleph, Far Rockaway NY

The Haggadah tells us a story of five rabbis in Bnei Brak who stayed up all night discussing *yetziat mitzrayim*, until their students came and told them that the time for *keriat shema* had arrived. At first glance, this story seems like a very nice example of what was just said in the last paragraph, that whoever adds in telling the story of *yetziat mitzrayim* is praiseworthy.

However, when you think about it a little more, this story seems strange. First of all, what exactly does it mean that whoever adds in telling the story of *yetziat mitzrayim* is praiseworthy? Does it mean in detail? Does it mean spending more time, even well into the night, telling the story? It's a bit ambiguous.

Additionally, the gemara records the debate between Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya and Rabbi Akiva as to when the *zman Korban Pesach* (and seemingly all the *mitzvot halayla*) ends. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said it was *chatzot*, while Rabbi Akiva said it was dawn. But both Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya and Rabbi Akiva were at this Seder which went way past *chatzot*. Why was Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya being praised for doing this if the time of the main mitzvah of the night, when we are supposed to tell the story, ended hours ago? It's as if we related a story on

Sukkot that a great rabbi once took the lulav even after Sukkot - it doesn't make any sense!

Maybe what this story is teaching us is exactly what it means to add more in telling the story. I don't think it means adding in time; once the *zman* has passed, the mitzvah is over. Instead, perhaps this story is telling you that the greater *kiyum hamitzvah* is to be totally involved in the mitzvah, so much so that you lose track of time and only stop when someone stops you. The more involved you are, the greater *kiyum*. The more enthusiastic you get, the more you lose track of where you are and when you are because you are so invested in the mitzvah and the story, the better your fulfillment of the mitzvah of *sippur yetziat mitzrayim*.

This is the point of the story in Bnei Brak, and what Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya was doing. He was so involved in the mitzvah that he lost track of time and went hours past the *zman hamitzvah*, which was a greater *kiyum* in the mitzvah itself. The fact that he went so long after is a *gilui miltah* to how much he was involved. To reach this level of immersion is something that all of us should strive for at our Seder.

Age is Not Just a Number

Eitan Schulman ~ Shana Aleph, Baltimore MD

While a lot of the Haggadah is full of ideas and stories found nowhere else, there are some, like the statements of Rabbi Elazer ben Azarya, that are taken straight from the Mishna. Rabbi Elazer Ben Azarya, despite being almost 70, could not figure out a good proof for the fact that you are supposed to remember the Exodus from Egypt at night. This troubled him until he heard from his colleague that when the Torah says that you should remember the Exodus "all the days of your life", the additional word "all" comes to teach you that you are obligated in remembering the Exodus even at night. While the story is about the Exodus, it seemingly has little relevance to Pesach itself. Everyone agrees that on Pesach, there is a mitzvah to tell the story of the Exodus, especially at night (the night of the Seder!). Why then does the Haggadah include this passage? Additionally, why include the seemingly extra details regarding Rabbi Elazer Ben Azarya, instead of the actual rabbi, Ben Azzai. After all, he is the one who figured out how to prove through interpretation to remember the Exodus at night?

There are a few approaches to solving this problem. The first approach is based on certain versions of the Haggadah that have Rabbi Elazer saying "to them,"; in other words, this was a response to the previous story, where the students told a group of rabbis - including Rabbi Elazer - that they had to stop their Seder because it

was time for Shema. While this technically answers both of our questions, it is relying on a word that is not found in the majority of the Haggadahs we have today, and still seems only tangentially related to Pesach night.

A second approach goes further into this idea about Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya being special, and what exactly he meant when he said that he is like a 70-year-old. Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya was elected as the Nasi of the Jewish people while still at a young age. To accomplish this feat, G-d conducted a miracle that Rabbi Elazar's outer appearance would reflect the amount of work and maturity that he held internally (Brachos 28a). Despite being worthy of such a miracle, Rabbi Elazar still could not figure out a good proof of his view. An alternative explanation of the miracle is that it made his physical age match the amount of Torah he held, as he inherited the Torah of his father, which would amount to 70 years worth of Talmudic study. Despite having all this Torah, he was not able to bring a good proof for his view.

This is the version of events quoted by the Talmud Bavli. The Talmud Yerushalmi, however, while not disputing the miracle itself, does argue on when Rabbi Elazar stated the above. The Talmud Yerushalmi believes that Rabbi Elazar was speaking literally and that was the praise inherent in the statement. Despite being elected to a position of power at a young age, and having all the stress that goes with it, he was still worthy to live to an old age. And even though he was worthy of a long life, he still did not know a good proof for his words.

Coming back to how this is relevant, maybe the objective here is to demonstrate how different the Seder is in comparison. On all other nights of the year, it is a heated debate about having to remember the exodus, where even the greatest of sages struggled to find the justification they needed. However, on the Seder night, there is no question that you have to explain in great detail the events that allowed you to be free. Additionally, this may be a preparation for the fact that so much of the Seder is indeed different from a "normal" remembrance. The mitzvah on the Seder night is to tell the story, and that requires a much more intensive process. Rabbi Elazar teaches us to continue to search for a better understanding of the Exodus no matter how much you think you know or how great you are, as there is always more depth to understand.

Is the Wicked Son Also Wise?

Rabbi Aryeh Sklar ~ Alumni and Community Coordinator

Ever since the printing press was invented over 500 years ago, there have been an estimated 4,000 different editions of the Haggadah printed. It was, and continues to be, one of the most popular Jewish texts to go to print, and each year there seems to be dozens of new ones to hit the shelves. One of the most interesting aspects of the history of the Haggadah, to me, is how many illustrated haggadot there are, and what historical and cultural information we can glean from each haggadah's artistic choices. For example, there's the famous 13th century "Birds' Head" Haggadah (one of the oldest manuscripts of the Haggadah we have), which, as you may have guessed, depicts all the human characters with birds' heads; why the artist did that is anyone's guess (though there are likely answers). There are many other strange and illuminating manuscripts of the Haggadah, and I enjoy examining them when I get a chance around Pesach time.

One of the choices I find so fascinating is how those illustrators, before and after the printing press was invented, chose to depict the section of the Four Sons. How do you draw a wise son? Is he young or old? Does he have a beard? Glasses? A book in his hand? And then, how do you draw the wicked son? Does he have horns? Does he sport a goatee? Perhaps he is wearing those God-

forsaken jean-pants the young'ins wear today. The answer to this question by the Haggadah artist, especially in medieval times, often told you a lot about how their cultures saw the image of the wise and the wicked, the simple and the young. I think it would be a worthwhile mental exercise to consider for a few moments how you would depict these characters today - what choices would you make as an artist of an illustrated haggadah?

It was actually by comparing some of these historical illustrations that I came to a realization that helped me completely revamp my understanding of the Four Sons, and especially the wicked son. I was looking at an illustrated haggadah, and I saw the wise son and the wicked son, side-by-side. The wise son was sitting and reading a book. Meanwhile, the wicked son wasn't holding a spear or sword, or as a violent soldier, like so many other illustrations from that time period. Instead, curiously, he was just standing there in simple clothes, and a larger, fatherly figure standing over him with his arm outstretched, as if the father was about to strike him. Obviously, this was an attempt to depict the advice of the Haggadah to have the father "*hakheh et shinav*," which can be translated literally to "knock his teeth out." (By the way, the phrase does not mean to suggest child abuse, but rather it is often mistranslated and should be translated as "set his teeth on edge," as in, tell him what he doesn't want to hear. See the use of this phrase in Jeremiah 31:29-30 and Ezekiel 18:2.)

Besides how interesting that literal rendition is as an artistic choice, it helped me with a realization - the wicked son is not necessarily the opposite of the wise son.

We so often just think of them as flip sides of a coin, but there is no reason to think so. In this haggadah I was looking at, the plain-clothed wicked son was not shown as the violent opposite of the placid wise son, but simply a different character. Why was I so convinced they were parallel?

This new framework shook me. I realized that you can have a character who is both wise and wicked - these are not necessarily mutually exclusive ideas (I say "not necessarily" because probably to the Rambam, a truly wise person would also have a perfected morality, meaning that he cannot be wicked…). In fact, there is a great *derasha* by Rav Avigdor Amiel in his *Derashot El Ami* on Pesach where he explores the wise son *b'derech drush* as not a righteous fellow at all, but the "son who thinks he is wise," and who makes claims against the halacha because he believes the rational intellect is more important than his religion. It just goes to show you that you can begin to play with the categories and interesting truths begin to emerge.

If we're thinking about who would, in fact, be the opposite of whom, I'd ask you to consider how it actually makes more sense for the opposite of the wise son to be the simple son. The wise son knows the story. The Haggadah's answer for him is about the halacha, not even the story. On the other hand, the simple son doesn't know the story at all, and so his parents must tell him the story starting from the beginning. He's a simple kid who needs his parents' guidance. If this dichotomy is correct, then we discover something very interesting. If the wise son is meant to be the opposite of the simple son, then the

wicked son is meant to be the opposite of… the son who doesn't know how to ask? Why would that be? What could that mean?

One possibility is that the wicked son is the opposite of the son who doesn't know how to ask because the wicked son does actually know how to ask - perhaps too well! Perhaps all the wicked son does is ask. He is wise enough to find the answer, but he is content asking questions instead, without afterward gaining the understanding the questions are meant to probe.

In the yeshiva world, there's an old joke about what they call "the Abarbanel heretic." Don Isaac Abarbanel wrote a commentary to the Torah that is formatted in a particular way where dozens of questions on a given chapter are put forward first, and then the answers come after with expansive essays. However, since the Abarbanel asks so many questions, sometimes a person might get lost in the questions, think there is no way to answer these conflicts and contradictions, and give up trying to get to the answers afterwards - thus becoming "the Abarbanel heretic." These types of people think, out of ignorance and unwillingness to go further than the question, that the Torah doesn't make sense. "What is this service to you," they ask, similarly to the wise son, and then close themselves off to the answers of the wise son. A very different and shocking response is needed to break him out of his only-questions mindset. So, according to this approach, the son who doesn't know how to ask is happy, with no need to question, while the wicked son prods and probes with questions but doesn't

care about the answers. He knows how to ask. And that's it, unfortunately.

Another option presents itself. Perhaps, the son who doesn't know how to ask at least *knows* that he doesn't know how to ask. He knows his intellectual limits and waits for his parents to tell him the necessary information first. But the wicked son also has intellectual limits, and *nebuch*, he doesn't know what he doesn't know. He thinks he knows how to ask a wise question, but we can see his questions are phrased with heavy implications and assumptions. "*Lachem velo lo*," we declare - he has cast himself outside the family and the community. His questions are problematic and show so little understanding. In other words, if there is a son who doesn't know how to ask, the wicked son is the one who thinks he knows how to ask but in reality does not.

These are two powerful and important lessons derived from contrasting the wicked son with the son who doesn't know how to ask. Firstly, that Judaism loves questions and encourages curiosity and investigation; but only if one is willing to listen to the answers on the other end. If we get so stuck on asking questions and then shutting our ears, we may never grow and mature in our thinking and education. Whether it's in a class, a shiur, or even the rabbi's speech on Shabbat - if all we can say after is that we have questions, but no desire to clarify those questions and deepen our understanding, we are at risk of becoming the archetype of the Seder's wicked son.

Secondly, that "to know what we do not know" is also knowledge. We must be more like the son who doesn't

know how to ask. Let us not convince ourselves that we've thought of everything and our questions have no possible answers - for we don't necessarily see where our biases are and how awful our questions really might be. Hopefully we won't be so foolish as the wicked son, whose wickedness lies in his unabashed unwillingness to see his deficiencies in all humility. We should ask questions, but understand our educational limits without arrogance. With these two lessons, perhaps, we can ask all the questions we have about the story of leaving Egypt, and the mitzvot of the night, and therefore get the most out of our Seder.

From Disgrace to Glory: The Birth of a Nation

Eliezer Graber ~ Shana Aleph, West Hempstead NY

Following all the discussion concerning our enslavement in Egypt, the paragraph of "Metichelah Ovdai Avodah Zara" seems to be a little off topic:

"From the beginning, our ancestors were idol worshipers. And now, Hashem has brought us close to His worship."

Why do we care? Tonight is about leaving Egypt, so why are we all of a sudden mentioning an earlier time and comparing it to the present? This statement doesn't seem to be talking about Egypt in any way. However, stepping back and looking at the context might help understand its purpose.

The Gemara (Pesachim 116a) mentions "Metichelah" in regards to a Mishna on how the father should answer the children's "Mah Nishtanah".

The Mishna says, "According to the intelligence of the son, his father teaches. He begins with the Jewish people's disgrace and concludes with their glory."

The Mishna is telling us what the proper answer to the children asking "Ma Nishtanah" should be the vague

term "disgrace". In the Gemara, Rav and Shmuel argue as to what the Mishna means with this. Rav holds that "disgrace" refers to "Metichelah", where our ancestors were idol-worshippers, while Shmuel says it refers to "Avadim Hayinu", where we were slaves in Egypt.

At first glance Shmuel's opinion, which the commonly used haggada follows, seems to be more relevant. The Seder night is about remembering leaving Egypt. Isn't it more on topic to talk about how we were slaves in *Egypt*, rather than being the descendants of idol-worshippers who had nothing to do with the place?

However, if we look further into it, Rav's opinion becomes more relevant. Why were we even slaves to begin with? If we don't focus the Seder purely around leaving Egypt, but rather the entire Egyptian exile, then things start to come together.

In Parshas Lech Lecha, Hashem tells Avraham, (Genesis 15:13), "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs." This entire exile is planned well in advance. Hashem isn't just rescuing us from a situation that we "happened" to be in, but for some reason set the whole thing up to begin with.

Why is that? Why are the Jews being sent to Egypt to be enslaved?

That is the more precise question that I think Rav comes to answer with "Metichelah". Our ancestors had the wrong idea of how the universe functioned and the wrong way of life. Now that Hashem took us out of

Egypt, and He brought us to serve Him, the Jewish nation has much better ideas of religion and the universe.

There is still a critical question. Even before the exile to Egypt, Avraham himself had the correct ideas about Hashem. Why couldn't we also have the right idea about Hashem without having to go through the horror that was the slavery in Egypt?

The concern is that Avraham was an individual. While he was personally successful, he only passed on his fundamental ideas about Hashem to one of his sons, Yitzchak. Yishmael chose a different path. Yitzchak faced a similar challenge with his sons, with Yaakov continuing to serve Hashem, but not Esav. Even though all of Yaakov's children followed his path, they had their own problems, such as the brothers refusing to believe Yosef's dreams, ultimately leading to them selling him.

What Egypt allowed for was the forging of a nation. The entire nation went through the slavery, and everyone who left was saved by Hashem. The time in Egypt created a system and a people to propagate Avraham's ideas of monotheism throughout the generations. The goal of the Pesach Seder is to pass on this very mesorah. It's the renewal of the chain, and the continuation of the nation that serves Hashem.

While I think that Shmuel is trying to focus more on the direct gratitude we need to have for Hashem taking us out of Egypt, Rav is trying to highlight something else. When the children ask "Ma Nishtanah", Rav doesn't want to just tell them the basic facts, such as Hashem took

us out of Egypt. Rather, he wants the children to be taught something deeper, that the Egyptian exile is the driving force behind the formation of the Jewish nation as worshippers of Hashem.

Even though we follow Shmuel's opinion - perhaps the more direct answer is more appropriate for the children - we still mention Rav's opinion, albeit a bit later on in Magid. It's important to know that even though we have a Seder because Hashem took us out of Egypt, the reason why we were slaves to begin with is because our ancestors worshiped idols. Now, through the Egyptian exile, we have been brought to the service of Hashem.

It's important to keep this in mind throughout the Seder and remember that the purpose of this night is to reaffirm ourselves as part of the Jewish people and pass on the mesorah of serving Hashem.

Vehi Sheamda: God's Rebuke and Mercy

Joseph Masri ~ Shana Aleph, West Hempstead NY

"*Vehi sheamda*" describes how in every generation, the Jewish people encounter someone or a group of people that want to destroy us, and how God inevitably saves us. Many commentaries link *Vehi Sheamda* to God's promise of protection in the *Brit Ben Habetarim*. In Parshat Lech Lecha, it says "And [God] said to Abram, 'Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years'" (Genesis 15:13). God goes on to tell Avraham that in the end his offspring would be brought out by God's hand and be given the Land of Israel.

While it is very nice to be saved, why did the Jewish people need to be in jeopardy of being destroyed before being saved? Why couldn't God just protect the Jewish people from the people seeking to destroy before they became a threat?

An answer emerges when we look at the book of Shoftim, where the Jewish people are constantly oppressed and God saves them. Throughout Shoftim there is a clear cycle. First, the Jewish nation would sin and neglect God. Then a foreign nation would come and oppress them.

God would then choose a leader known as a judge who would bring the Jewish nation together to do Teshuvah. Finally they'd rise up against the oppressive nation and take back control of the land. And of course, after some time of prosperity, the Jews would neglect God and sin and so on. The lesson, of course, is that when things are good, when life is great and everything is going our way, we should still never take our situation for granted. There are so many things we take for granted nowadays, such as health, good education, access to technology, the State of Israel etc. We must do our part in working to better our situation. We need to do mitzvot and remember God because as soon as we forget God will have to remind us by almost destroying us.

While this has a good message, there is one philosophical issue to deal with - free will. God had promised Avraham that his descendants would be oppressed. So how could the Egyptians' punishment be justified if they were just fulfilling God's word? The Ramban (in his commentary to Genesis 15:14) brings up an idea that if a person does an act inherently wrong based on what God says should happen, it is not considered a sin as long as it is done for the sole reason being that God said so. The Ramban brings an example of when Nebuchadnezzar heard Jewish prophets call for him to destroy Jerusalem by God's word, yet he is still punished for doing so. The reason being that Nebuchadnezzar planned to destroy the entire land, not just Jerusalem and he exceedingly perpetrated evil against Israel while doing so. We can draw a parallel to the Egyptians. Previously, in the Brit Ben Habeterim, God told Avraham a nation would

enslave his offspring; why were the Egyptians punished for doing so? The *pasuk* says, "That nation that made slaves of them I will judge." What were the Egyptians being judged for? The Ramban answers that their punishment was warranted for the unnecessary evil they perpetrated, such as throwing the Jewish babies in the river and intending to erase the Jewish people from memory. It wasn't just oppression; that was decreed by God. It was all the extra evil they decided to do that caused their punishment.

According to the Ramban, the Egyptians weren't punished for the enslavement and regular abuse itself - that was something that God could not fault them for, because he promised Avraham it would happen. Instead, God only punished them for the "extra" stuff, when they went overboard. If so, we could derive an important lesson. If God punishes for these additional actions, we can assume He will reward those who seek to do "extra" good things. Thus, let us not sit and take our situation for granted - let's continue to do more, and strive higher, and then this will be the thing that will stand for us ("*vehi sheamda*") and bring God's protection when others try to destroy us.

The Maggid Transition

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsburg ~ Rosh HaYeshiva

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yaakov's primary mission was to build the Jewish nation. He carried with him the ideological foundations laid forth by his father and grandfather. The transition now had to extend beyond his direct family to a secure nation. The mission was in peril with the "death" of Yosef, but now, with news of his being alive and ensconced in Egypt, Yaakov was now able to refocus his attention on completing his mission. He was also aware of the future enslavement of the very nation he was tasked with building. Naturally, as a father, he wanted to be reunited with his long-lost son. Yaakov, though, had to consider the potential threats as well that awaited him in deciding to leave his current surroundings. The point of contention between Rashi and the other commentators concerns the nature of the danger. According to most commentators, the danger was sourced in the future physical subjugation of the Jewish people to the Egyptians. The strain placed on the people through the years and years of toil could very well destroy the nation. Rashi, though, sees the threat in more ideological terms. Leaving the Land of Israel meant leaving an island of ideological security, where the basic tenets of Judaism had been built and a small community developed. Moving the family to Egypt, the pinnacle of secular civilization, meant exposing them to a litany of potentially corruptive beliefs and practices. Naturally, Yaakov would be quite concerned about such a result.

God attempts to assuage Yaakov's concerns, reframing the issue in the context of the prophecy. Yes, the destiny of the fledgling Jewish nation was going to be one filled with peril. But, God promised that it would be a mere stage in their development, rather than their demise. The normal assumption, then, would be a certain resignation of fate demonstrated by Yaakov. However, there is an incorrect premise sometimes promulgated with the idea of prophecy. As we know, mankind was gifted with a concept of freewill. He can choose what type of life to live, strengthening his relationship with God or choosing to turn away. Yaakov was promised by God to be the future of the Jewish people; yet, when faced with an impending attack by Esav, he prepared himself for defense of his family. Yaakov surmised it could be possible that due to his actions, the Divine plan had shifted, and the prophecy altered along with it. The same type of thinking was taking place here. Yaakov understood that there was a Divine plan, but that did not mean he should abandon his responsibility as the ideological father. He never intended for his family to become a permanent fixture in Egypt, hoping that they would be able to insulate themselves from Egyptian influence and return back to the Land of Israel. As is noted above, the family set up camp in Goshen, removed as much as possible from mainstream Egyptian society. While Yaakov understood the prophecy as setting the stage for a difficult path, he did not abandon his role as the leader of the nation. He forged ahead, trying to build the strongest foundation possible, in the hopes that possibly the path laid out might be altered.

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

Why It's Great To Be a Firstborn

Josh Weichbrod ~ Shana Bet, Baltimore MD

After one of the most moving moments of Maggid, *Vehi Sheamda*, the Haggada seems to detour into the Declaration of the Bikkurim. We mention how Lavan was a villain much worse than Pharaoh, in that he treated Yaakov in such a way that he wanted to exterminate the entire Jewish people. This transition (if it can even be called that) raises multiple questions. Why is Lavan mentioned in the Haggada at all? What is his relevance to the Exodus? And speaking of Bikkurim, why is Lavan, and the Exodus, mentioned in the context of the First Fruits Declaration anyway? And lastly, why do we even read the passage of the Bikkurim at the Seder? Granted, we compare Lavan to Pharaoh, but that is where their similarities end.

The Minchas Asher (in his commentary to the Haggadah, on "Tzei Ulemad") explains that we just praised God for saving us in each generation, when there are enemies who plot against us to destroy us. He writes that there are *tzvei dinim*, or two types, of destructions. There is the physical destruction, personified by Pharaoh (killing all males), and the spiritual destruction, personified by Lavan (stopping the fulfillment of *mitzvos*). Pharaoh's ideals were also seen in Haman and Esav, who also plotted to physically destroy the Jewish people, while

Lavan's were seen in the Greeks, who didn't seek our physical destruction but our spiritual assimilation.[1] This is the reason we recite on the Seder night Lavan's desire to spiritually destroy us, even worse than Pharaoh, who desired physical destruction. He concludes with "ודו"ק", meaning that it is left to the reader to figure it out.

The Baruch Sheamar (in his commentary on *Tzei Ulemad*), acknowledges the issue, writing that this opening phrase of "*Tzei Ulemad*" means that there is so much on this, but this is not the place to mention it. But still, why is this mentioned at all? The Batei Nefesh (in his commentary ibid.) also states that *Tzei Ulemad* is not too connected to the Exodus, but when Chazal (in *Avadim Hayinu*) say "All who add on to the telling of the Exodus is praiseworthy", they mean that if more things, such as Lavan, are tied to the story, the better.

However, I would like to propose an answer that would connect these seemingly disparate parts. What connects the Bikkurim, Lavan, and the Exodus, in my humble opinion, is the concept of the firstborn. In the story of the Exodus, when God is telling Moshe about the last plague, He says (Exodus 4:22-23), "And you will say to Pharaoh, so says God, 'Israel is My firstborn son, and I have told you to send out My son and he will serve Me, and you have delayed the sending out. Behold I will kill your

[1] It seems that this is also the idea mentioned in Nach about Egypt vs. Assyria. However, see Rambam (*Iggeres Teiman* 10 on *Isaiah Yishaya* 54:17), where he explains the two different paradigms of wiping us out as either forcefully getting rid of religion or through logical arguments.

firstborn son'". From here we see that the concept of "firstborn-ness" is integral to the concept of the Exodus. What does this mean?

To add to the question, interrupting the story of the Exodus twice (Exodus 12:2, 13:12-13), is the commandment of sacrificing and redeeming firstborn animals, seemingly without much cause. Somehow, this concept is very important to the Exodus sequence, and is represented by this very strange and specific mitzva. Yet it makes sense when we realize the firstborn idea is central to understanding the story. Apparently we are being bid not just to see it in humans, but even in nature too, and treating it in a special way. What is the meaning of this?

We see the concept of "firstborn-ness" in fruits as well, through the Bikkurim. The Hebrew word "*Bikkurim*" indeed has the same root as "*bechor*", "firstborn". Here then is the connection between the Exodus and the First Fruits. But we are still left with one connection to explore. What does all of this have to do with Lavan? And, more importantly, what is special about the idea of firstborn from the perspective of the Torah and Chazal?

Before we get to Lavan, we have to take a step back and look at the origins of the Jewish people. Once Avraham recognized God, God decided that from his lineage would be the Jewish people. God intervened by the selection of Yitzchak, but Yaakov's right to be the patriarch was decided by whether he had the firstborn rights. Once Yaakov received it from Eisav, and got the blessings and declaration of the continuation of the

people from Yitzchak, he was sent away, for fear of his life. His acquisition of the firstborn rights were essential to his status as the father of the Jewish people.

But then he went to Lavan. And what happened there was the actual building up of the Jewish family - the *Bnei Yaakov*. This is the starting point for the creation of the Jewish people. Yaakov's "firstborn rights" were therefore essential to the story of Lavan, and what caused Lavan's attempted destruction of the Jewish people. From there, Yaakov descended to Egypt with his family, became slaves, and they were freed through the miracles of God.

Now, what was Lavan's exact involvement? The firstborn status is what caused Yaakov to go to Lavan, but that is not strong enough of a connection. However, we know that Lavan mocks the idea of "firstborn" when he tricks Yaakov into marrying Leah before the promised Rachel. When Yaakov comes to complain about the trick, Lavan (seemingly sarcastically) declares, (Genesis 29:26) "In this place, we don't marry off the younger before the older". Lavan was mocking Yaakov. He was saying, "You care so much about your firstborn status, so now you deal with the consequences of it".

This "mockery" of our firstborn obsession occurs elsewhere in Tanach. In Jeremiah (2:3), the Jewish people are called "*reishit*," "God's first ones". Much earlier, Bilaam calls a very different people a "*reishit*" - Amalek! What was Bilaam getting at with this description?

Perhaps it is to mock our "*reishit*" status.[2] Interestingly, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 105a) connects Bilaam to Lavan genealogically, and Targum Yonatan (on Numbers 22:5) says they are the same person - Lavan is Bilaam. It is clear that Chazal are telling us something about their personalities, and that the way they think and act are connected. This mockery of the idea of firstborn might be one of these parallels.

Let's discuss the Jewish view of the firstborn status, and that can help us understand how the Exodus, Lavan, and Bikkurim, are all connected. One important source about the firstborns is the fact that the firstborn were originally going to be the *kohanim* in the Beit Hamikdash. For example, Numbers 3:12 states, "I hereby take the Levites from among the Israelites in place of all the male first-born, the first issue of the womb among the Israelites: the Levites shall be Mine." Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 3:6) explain that originally, the firstborns of each family were set to perform the service to God, but because of the sin of the Golden Calf, the Levites took their place. Indeed, when Korach started his rebellion, the sons of Reuven joined him (Numbers 16:1); this is significant because Reuven was the firstborn, and perhaps they were fighting to try to reclaim priesthood too.

What was it about the firstborn that they had a quality that would have made them the *kohanim*? Also, why did they lose it through the sin of the Golden Calf? And why

---

[2] The Maharal explains differently and says that there are two types of first, the first connected to God, and the first disconnected from Him (Netzach Yisrael 10)

did it transfer to Aharon and his sons? I believe the idea of the firstborn is a certain level of closeness to God. Often, the firstborn is more loved by a parent than all the rest, because he or she is first (definitely not biased), and the firstborn son often has the role to help with the other children, to be a role model, and to connect the family. The idea seems to be that the priests, as the closest people to God, would be able to connect the rest of the people to Him. However, this closeness has a dark side. Through the sin of the Golden Calf, the firstborn used their closeness to divinity for idolatrous purposes. They showed that even though they were the closest "descendants" of God, and they were "God's firstborn," that didn't mean they were spiritually close to God. To be "spiritually close" means more than a personal status, but also a mission to help to link the nation to God. They are supposed to teach people how to be "like" God through actions, by modeling it themselves. The gemara in Sotah (14a) states that we can only be "close" to God by doing acts of giving; for example, clothing people like how God clothes us. The firstborn had failed in this mission.

Now we can understand why the firstborn lost the role of *kohanim*, and why Aharon and his children received this job. As we know, Aharon was a "*Oheiv Shalom ViRodeif Shalom*," acting like God as a lover of peace. This trait was passed down through his family, and at points where they lost the trait, like by the sons of Eli, they lost the priesthood too. So the family of Aharon became the firstborn in the spiritual sense, not the physical sense.

Our goal as Jews is to encompass both of these ideas of the firstborn. Both to be a people chosen by God first in time, but also to act as His firstborn and act like Him. This "*tzvei dinim*" of the firstborn explains many stories of firstborns. Perhaps the reason that Yitzchak loved Eisav more, while Rivka loved Yaakov, could also be the conflict between the ideas of firstborn, and that Yitchak could not see the spiritual firstborn-ness. This could also explain the confusion when Yaakov switches his hands when blessing Menashe and Ephraim; insofar as Menashe was the physical firstborn, Ephraim was the spiritual one. This could also explain why Moshe was told about the plague of the firstborns while he was still in Midian, followed by the Brit Mila story where Moshe fails to circumcise his son and almost dies. Targum Yonatan (Exodus 4:25) adds that the child in the Brit Mila story was Gershom, who was Moshe's firstborn. God might have been showing Moshe that the relationship of the nation of Israel to God as a firstborn is like that of Gershom to Moshe. He is showing the love that comes with it, along with its importance. In order for Moshe to warn Pharaoh of the punishment and its reason, Moshe has to know what it means.

Now we can see the Exodus in a new light. They went down in Yaakov's time because they were the firstborn, saved because of (and through) the firstborn-ness, and then, as a result, have to give the "firstborn" fruits. Since we were redeemed as firstborns, we must treat all types of firstborn as holy and belonging to God. On the Seder night, it is our duty to recognize and express our firstborn-ness in both ways, against our enemies trying to push it down. We are special because we are first chosen,

but that means very little if we don't also strive to be "like" God and do what He wants, so we can be "like" Him spiritually.

"I Said to You 'In Your Blood Live,' and I Said to You 'In Your Blood Live'"

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Chait ~ Rosh HaYeshiva Emeritus

"Then I passed by you and saw you downtrodden in your blood and I said to you 'In your blood live,' and I said to you 'In your blood live'" (Ezekiel 16:6).

The above passage from Ezekiel is found both in the Haggadah as well as part of the *berachot* that we recite at a Bris. It is an integral part of the *beracha* for when the child is named. The most astounding question is: What is the message of Ezekiel? Furthermore, how does this message equally apply to the Seder night as well as Bris Milah?

The Rambam in Morah Nevuchim (III:46) gives an astonishing answer, by quoting a midrash that says:

Many years of harsh slavery had its toll on the Jewish people both physically as well as spiritually, slowly the nation, except for the tribe of Levi, began to abandon the Mitzvah of Bris Milah. Finally, the first signs of the long awaited redemption appear with the beginning of the plagues. The tenth plague is about to appear and as rumor has it, this will be the most severe, "The Slaying of the Firstborn". Full of fear and agitation, the

congregation worries how will the Angel of Death know to differentiate between the homes of the Jewish people and that of the Egyptians? Terrified, they approach Moshe, and he assures them not to fear, as Hashem is going to give them the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach, and by placing the blood of the sacrifice on the doorpost as well as the lintels, this will prevent the Angel of Death from entering their homes. A sigh of relief spreads throughout the nation, but Moshe Rabbeinu immediately informs them that an *arel*, an uncircumcised individual, is disqualified from bringing the Korban Pesach. Shocked and stunned, all the men run to perform circumcision. The midrash says that from the mass circumcision the blood began to run from the homes to the courtyards to the streets and then everybody ran to offer the Korban Pesach and the blood of the Korbanos ran as well through the streets of Egypt. All the streets of Egypt were filled with blood of circumcision and Korban Pesach. The Prophet Ezekiel thus said, "I said to you 'In your blood live;' and I said to you 'In your blood live'."

The profound meaning of the words of Ezekiel can now be properly understood. It is our commitment to carry out whenever possible the fulfillment of these two most basic Mitzvot which guarantees our eternal survival. Bris Milah is our eternal commitment to serve Hashem, "For they (the Jewish people) are My (Hashem) servants" (Vayikra 25,41). We serve Hashem by fulfilling the commandments of the Torah. Korban Pesach signifies our belief in Hashem in His commitment to watch over us – Hashgacha Pratis (personal supervision over us). We are his "Chosen People" (*Am Segula*). Frequently throughout the Torah as well in our Tefilos we mention

the theme of the Exodus from Egypt. This explains why the quote from Ezekiel is mentioned both at a Bris as well as on the night of the Seder, to stress the importance of these two most basic commandments. This also explains why Milah and Korban Pesach are the only two positive commandments that a violation results in the punishment of *karet* (divine punishment of premature death).

Throughout the entire history of the Jewish people including the most difficult times during the long years of the Diaspora, the Jewish people on a whole maintained and observed the laws of circumcision. The Korban Pesach is dependent on access to the Temple Mount and during the years of the Diaspora it was not accessible for the Jewish people, but today being under Jewish sovereignty we eagerly await the return of the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach. May we merit the privilege to offer the Korban Peseach and recite with special meaning the words of Ezekiel, as we stand once again on the Temple Mount. This will be a true manifestation and testimony of our eternal bond with Hashem.

False Facts and Incorrect Impressions

Sammy Tisser ~ Shana Bet, Woodmere NY

In Maggid, the Haggadah goes through the different derivations of the story of the Jews in Egypt. One of these derivations is from the words, "*veyareu otanu hamitzriyim*," "the Egyptians did bad to us." How did they do bad to us? The Haggadah connects this to the specific *pasuk* in the story in Shemot when Pharaoh and the Egyptians say, "Let us be wise towards him, lest he multiply and if there should be a war against us, they will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the land."

The question is, why does the Haggadah think that this is the prime example of "the Egyptians doing bad to us"? This doesn't present them doing anything particularly bad, but just the beginning of their plans to start thinking of how to do bad to us, and how they thought that we would do bad to them instead. In fact, the other interpretations, "*vayetnu aleinu avoda kashah*" and "*vayanunu*", the Haggadah does find specific bad things that were done to us. So why, on the very words where it says that they did bad to us, are there no descriptions of specific things that they did bad to us? All they did was be scared and worried of what the Jews would do to them, since they thought we will join foreign armies and

fight against them and then leave. Why is that counted as a way that they did bad to us?

I'd like to pose another question. Why does it say "veyareu otanu" - which literally means, "they did bad [*in relation*] to us", and not "vayareinu lanu," which would mean "they did bad [*directly*] TO us?" The grammar of the Hebrew does not quite make sense.

I spoke this over with one of my *rebbeim*, Rav Ashi, and he said that one interpretation is that it doesn't mean that the Egyptians did bad things to us, but rather that they saw us as bad - in other words, they made us bad in their eyes. "Vayareiu Lanu" would mean that they did something bad to us specifically, but "Vayareiu otanu" means that they saw us as bad. They made all these false assumptions about us, making us evil in their eyes. The Egyptians convinced themselves in their own minds that the Jews are dangerous for them. They convinced themselves that we, the Jews, will join foreign armies and fight against the Egyptians, as it states "if there should be a war against us, they will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the land." These thoughts are false information. If you think about, this was the foundational cause that eventually made them do the actual bad things to us described later in the *pesukim*, such as making us do hard labor and making us suffer. They wanted to fight against us, because they looked at us as a threat to them, which was based on incorrect beliefs about Jews.

We can learn an important idea from this. We need to be very careful that our thoughts are based on facts, and not just make baseless assumptions and convince ourselves

that those facts are true without doing proper research. People make a lot of assumptions. This is very common when meeting new people and they always look at someone based on their "first impression" when people should keep an open mind because people could change. We shouldn't just think of people based on one experience, we should keep an open mind and know that people could change.

Purpose of Makkos

Avi Mann ~ Shana Aleph, Netanya Israel

When we think about the purpose of the Ten Makkot, the first thing that comes to mind is that the Makkos were used as a vehicle to free Klal Yisrael, as well as a punishment for the Mitzrim. However, there are a couple of problems with that approach. If the Makkos were supposed to free the Jews from Egypt, why weren't the Jews freed immediately? Why did they have to withstand the long process of the Makkos? Additionally, wouldn't one large plague be a sufficient punishment to the Mitzrim? Why were the Makkos structured in the way that they were?

It seems that there must be a deeper reason for the way that the Makkos were structured. The Makkos were carried out in such a way that there was no denying that God was behind them. Seemingly, the Makkos also served to teach the Mitzrim and Jews about God. I would like to expound on this idea with the help of the Ramban (Nachmanides).

The Ramban, at the end of Parshas Bo (commenting on Tefillin), mentions that Tefillin contain the passages about Yetzias Mitzraim along with passages from the Shema. Later in this commentary, he discusses false and heretical claims made by others. There are those who deny God, saying:"they denied the Eternal and said: It is not He [who called forth the world into existence]".

Others deny God's knowledge and say "How does G-d know? and is there knowledge in the most high?" There are also those that admit to God's knowledge, but they "deny the principle of providence and make men as the fishes of the sea [believing] that G-d does not watch over them and that there is no punishment or reward for their deeds, for they say the Eternal hath forsaken the land"

The Ramban explains that one of the objectives of the "wonders" in Egypt (the Makkos) was to prove all the heretical claims listed above as being wrong. Thus, the Torah says: "That thou mayest know that the earth is the Eternal's" (9:29). This teaches about the existence of a Creator of the world. Additionally, the Torah states:" that thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that that I am the Eternal in the midst of the earth" (8:18). The words "In the midst of the earth" prove that there is Hashgacha (providence), meaning that God has not simply left the world to chance, but rather, is in some way involved in the manner in which the world operates. Lastly, the Torah states: "That thou mayest know that there is none like Me in all the earth"(9:14). This shows that nothing or nobody can interfere with God's power, and teaches us the principle of Yichud Hashem (Oneness of God). These are three fundamental principles that are required to attain a proper recognition of God.

With the help of this Ramban, we can see that one of the underlying purposes of the Makkos was not only to punish Mitzrayim and free Klal Yisrael, but to help the Mitzrim and Jews attain a proper theology and knowledge of our Creator. The Makkos served as a lesson that there is a God, that He is involved in the operation

of our world, and that he is all powerful and nothing can interfere with His power. Only through the belief in these principles can one have true knowledge of God.

We still have one remaining question: wouldn't one plague have been sufficient in teaching this lesson? A possible answer to this question is as follows:

If there would have been only one plague, we would likely still be able to see that God exists, but the way that the Makkos were structured provides a much clearer expression of these ideas. The fact that there were ten separate plagues which differed greatly from each other amplifies God's power. Additionally, the Makkos all followed similar patterns. These Makkos show that God controls every aspect of the world, and leaves no doubt in the mind of anyone who witnessed them that God is all powerful. Therefore, I would say that the Makkos were designed to create the greatest possible expression of God's power over the world.

Along with these passages about Yetzias Mitzraim, our Tefillin also contain the passage of Shemah. The first passage of Shemah can also be interpreted as teaching us these three fundamental principles. The word "Hashem" can teach us that there is a Creator. The word "Elokeinu" means "our God", which shows that God is involved in our world. Finally, the word "Echad" teaches us about Yichud Hashem - that there is only one God.

The Ramban has helped us take these seemingly unrelated passages, unifying them into one Idea. We can now see the common theme of these passages: a proper

knowledge and understanding of God. Hopefully we can use this information to help us improve our relationship with God, and gain a greater appreciation of Him.

Frogs Are Better Than You In Every Way

Moshe Levin ~ Shana Aleph, Teaneck NJ

♫ "Frogs, here, frogs there, frogs are truly everywhere. Even in the furnaces, dying *Al Kiddush Hashem*."♫ No? You didn't sing this song as a child? These lyrics are actually based upon the following gemara (Pesachim 53b):

"What did Hananiah, Mishael, and Azaryah see that they delivered themselves to the fiery furnace for sanctification of the name [of God]? They drew an a fortiori *inference on their own from the frogs. The frogs, which were not commanded concerning the sanctification of the name [of God], it is written: "[And the river shall swarm with frogs, which shall go up and come into your house, and into your bedchamber, and onto your bed, and into the houses of your servants, and upon your people,] and into their ovens and kneading bowls" (Exodus 7:28). When are kneading bowls found near the oven? You must say that it is when the oven is hot. All the more so, we, who are commanded concerning the sanctification of the name."*

This means that the frogs in Egypt are considered the prime model of martyrdom, such that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azarya used them to determine whether they themselves should give up their lives *al kiddush hashem*. This seems like a strange paradigm!

Why are frogs, of all of God's creatures, associated with the highest sanctification of God's name: martyrdom? After all, they're just frogs, lowly creatures who eat, and are eaten, in God's glorious cycle of life. Something like a lion (which often symbolizes the Jewish people and Judah in particular) would be more fitting in a Midrash about martyrdom. So, why are frogs the ones compared with Jews?

We can answer this question by understanding the true meaning of the frog in the literature of Chazal. For example, in Perek Shira, which takes us through the animal kingdom and lists what that animal's song is, has this as the frog's song: "*Baruch shem kevod malchuto le'olam va'ed*," "*Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.*" What is the connection between this declaration and frogs?

The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni 889 (on the last verse in all of Tehillim) states:

The Sages said concerning King David that when he completed the book of Psalms, he became proud. He said before the blessed Holy One, "Is there any creature you have created in your world that says more songs and praises than I?" At that moment a frog happened across his path, and it said to him: "David! Do not become proud, for I recite more songs and praises than you. Furthermore, every song I say contains three thousand parables, as it says, 'And he spoke three thousand parables, and his songs were one thousand five hundred. And furthermore, I am busy with a great mitzvah, and this is the mitzvah with which I am busy: there is a certain type of

creature by the edge of the sea whose sustenance is entirely from [creatures living in] the water, and when it is hungry, it takes me and eats me, such that I fulfill that which it says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you shall heap coals of fire on his head, and Hashem shall reward you". Do not read 'shall reward you' but instead 'shall make him complete you."

What's fascinating about these two pieces is that they both refer to the "song" of a frog. What's even more remarkable is that according to the Yalkut Shimoni, the frog's song contains more words than David's Tehillim! How could the frog say something like this, and what do we make of the cryptic statement at the end as to how we should read the *pasuk*?

We all know the famous and tragic story of Rabbi Akiva dying with the recitation of Shema, a practice that has been followed by countless martyred Jews since then. It's a bit puzzling that the frogs in our story don't say that, but instead say "Blessed is the name of your glorious Kingdom forever and ever". I'd imagine that those are the frog's last words. It's the words that we say right after that great declaration of "Hear O Israel!"

But when thinking about it, the frog is a different species, metaphorically speaking. They don't relate to martyrdom in the same way we humans do. The fact that the frog had such a quick answer to David in that Yalkut Shimoni indicates that, above all, creatures recognize their place in God's kingdom and His circle of life. They already recognize God *and* their place in the world. We, as humans, are able to see God's manifestations in this

world and recognize him, but it's a whole other level to recognize *our* place and purpose in the world. Frogs are born with purpose, much like the angels, who we know, according to midrash (and we say in Kedusha), treasure and recite this declaration. Therefore, the frogs are able to croak this phrase out loud. We as humans, who need a whole life, 70 years, to figure out who we are, only deserve to say this phrase quietly.

This is why we should read the phrase as "complete you". The frog's purpose, which it knows, is completed when it fulfills the mitzvah of Martyrdom. Its song may be short, but that is because it gets the job done, as it says in Tehillim (65:2), "Silence is praise to You." One need not ramble on and on if he has all his intent behind it, like Moshe's prayer, which was only five words long: "Please God, please heal her" (Num. 12:13). This is what the frogs teach us. They are, in a way, better than us, as they have their purpose figured out. We have much to learn from them, and every time we think we have accomplished, recognize that there is always still so much to do. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov and Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman, both building upon a tradition found in the Tana D'beh Eliyahu and the writings of the Arizal, commented that the word *tzfarde'a* (frog) is a combination derived of *tzipor* (bird) and *de'a* (knowledge). Thus, a "frog" is a "knowledgeable bird", turning the *tzfarde'a* from an amphibian into a flying creature that could reach up to the heavens.

A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. (**A** **C**omprehensive **R**eview of **N**asi **Y**ehudah's **M**nemonics)

Yona Kelman ~ Shana Aleph, Southfield MI

For all that our Rabbis liked to write, at times they seem to take issue with using actual words. Most Halachic and Talmudic sources are overflowing with abbreviations. Many Rishonim are known by their acronyms, like רש"י, ריטב"א, and, of course, רמב"ם. Condensed phrases can be found throughout most of Jewish literature, and the Pesach Haggadah is no exception.

After debating how many plagues occurred in Egypt, the Haggadah lists the Ten Plagues in the order they appear in the Torah. Interestingly, it then presents a set of acronyms arranged by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi: דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב. At first glance, the mnemonic doesn't seem to add much; it simply serves as a more concise way to list the plagues. Worse, since we already *just* read the ten plagues, the acronyms seem redundant! Why was it necessary to include them in the Haggadah? To find the answer, we must look at Rabbi Yehudah's reason for creating them.

Rabbi Yehudah, known affectionately to his students and future generations as "Rebbi", served as the Nasi (a.k.a. patriarch) of the Jewish community during part of the

Roman occupation. The nation was tranquil while united under Rabbi Yehudah, and Torah scholarship in Israel was thriving. However, Rabbi Yehudah had the foresight to know that it wouldn't last for long. Up to that point, most Jewish law had to be passed down orally; only the Torah could be written and copied. This sentiment is stated in Gittin 60b: "Matters that were written you may not express them orally, and matters that were taught orally you may not express them in writing." Nevertheless, Rabbi Yehudah feared that if the oral Torah wasn't recorded, much of it would be distorted or forgotten. His most famous solution was the compilation of the Mishna, which still serves as the primary source of the oral Torah. However, he also developed another essential tool for memory: the *simanim*, or mnemonics.

Eruvin 54b relates Rav Hisda's declaration: "The Torah can be acquired only with *simanim*." Rabbi Yehudah apparently wholeheartedly agreed with such a sentiment. His mnemonics were often acronyms of phrases in the Mishnah and Talmud. A well-known example is in Mishnah Menachot 11:4, where he gives the acronyms זד"ד יה"ו to represent the dimensions of different loaves of bread that were used in the Beit Hamikdash (7x4x4 and 10x5x7). Rabbi Ovadia Bartenura, in his commentary to this Mishnah, comments that Rabbi Yehudah particularly liked to use mnemonics, and references Rabbi Yehudah's mnemonic in the Haggadah as proof!

The Otzarot Yosef makes a fascinating connection. According to Eruvin 53a, the people of Yehudah were much more particular and coherent in their words. Since

Rabbi Yehudah was from the tribe of Yehudah, the Otzarot Yosef surmises that he would have followed his tribe's customs. Therefore, he made use of the *simanim* to help those who were less knowledgeable to learn and remember Torah and Halacha!

Memory was clearly very important to Rabbi Yehudah, so it's only fitting that he'd help us fulfill the mitzvah to remember what Hashem did for us in Egypt. By making the Ten Plagues into *simanim*, he ensured that future generations could clearly recall them. Why was this an issue? If you look in Psalms 78:44-51 and 105:28-36, you'll find the list of plagues in a different order, with some even excluded. In the commentary attributed to Rashi on the Haggadah (see Haggadah Torat Chaim), he suggests that Rabbi Yehudah made his mnemonic to make sure we know the correct sequence. It is clear that Rabbi Yehudah wished for us to remember every detail.

Acronyms remain a great tool for memorization; however, they're not the only ones. Songs, stories, and poems are also beneficial. However, mnemonics are simple enough that they remain a reliable method to remember all sorts of information, from the colors in a rainbow (ROYGBIV) to halachot from the Mishna. Memory is an essential aspect of Pesach; indeed, the entire Pesach Seder is a reliving of the Jewish people's slavery and freedom. By eating Matzah, asking questions, and listing the plagues, we are able to understand and remember our nation's origins. Because of the Exodus, the Jewish nation has its ideals of freedom and gratitude; obligations to uphold the mitzvot; and a unique identity as a nation chosen by God. Every year,

we have the opportunity to recall the catalyst for these aspects of Judaism to remind us to fulfill our collective duties. Have a wonderful and **memorable** Pesach!

How Many Makkot Were There?

Eli Weiss ~ Shana Aleph, Seattle WA

In this section of the Haggadah, Rabbi Yosi HaGalili compares the "*makkot*" in Egypt with those at the splitting of the Red Sea. Analyzing the relevant *pesukim*, he creates a one to five ratio, concluding that there were ten *makkot* in Egypt and fifty at the Red Sea. At first glance, this teaching seems very peculiar. Firstly, what *makkot* is he referring to at the Red Sea? The Torah never mentions anything about *makkot* there. Furthermore, what's the significance of letting us know that there were more plagues at the Red Sea than at Egypt? What new insight does it offer us concerning the *makkot* in both places?

The answer may lie in understanding how the term *makkot* is being used. When we view the *makkot* as they took place in Egypt, it is clear they aren't simply a practical phenomenon, as Hashem could have just taken us out of Egypt forcibly. Rather, they served to teach us, as well as the Egyptians, along with the entire world, ideas and insights about Hashem. One example is how they reflect His complete control, His dominion over agriculture, wildlife, weather, and even life itself. Ramban discusses this point at the end of Parshat Bo (Shemot 13:16), demonstrating how this idea is alluded to in the *pesukim*:

"*That thou* [Pharaoh] *mayest know that I am the Eternal in the midst of the earth*", which teaches us the principle of providence, i.e., that G-d has not abandoned the world to chance, as they [the heretics] would have it; "*That thou mayest know that the earth is the Eternal's*", which informs us of the principle of creation, for everything is His since He created all out of nothing; "*That thou mayest know that there is none like Me in all the earth*", which indicates His might, i.e., that He rules over everything and that there is nothing to withhold Him.

As Ramban explains, the *makkot* demonstrated something more than G-d having created the world. He has the ability to control the world and chooses to at various times, never to permanently leave us to chance. The objective and function of the *makkot* is thus made clear: they serve as tools of education.

Understanding this as the objective of *makkot*, we can see that the two *pesukim* chosen by Rabbi Yosei HaGlili depict two "students" and the slightly different lessons each of them learned. In the first, the Egyptian magicians recognize that the plague of the lice must have been caused by G-d, as they were unable to recreate it. They saw that this was above the abilities of a human to control, as the tiny size of lice was too difficult to manipulate. Thus, they concluded that the cause must have been the "*etzba elokim*". However, they make no other philosophical statements, such as acknowledging their improper actions in their incorrect way of life. In contrast, during the plague of *barad* (hail), Pharoah expands this insight into God (Shemot 9:27): "*Pharaoh sent and called for Moshe and Aharon, and he said to them, 'I*

have sinned this time. Hashem is righteous and I and my people are wicked.'"

Pharaoh is clearly much more moved by this plague than the *chartumim*, recognizing the philosophy of Moshe is correct while his own is mistaken. However, the *chartumim* make no such statement. Rather, they essentially make a scientific discovery, whereby G-d was the cause of the lice. It's no different than stating that things are heavy because of gravity. This discovery results in no change in their way of life.

Furthermore, the *chartumim* minimize the plague, referring to it as "only" the finger of G-d, as opposed to the much more normal phrase "hand of G-d". Perhaps, this indicates that the plague had a minimal effect on the *chartumim*. They recognized this must be caused by G-d, but they were still resistant to fully accepting Him and therefore used the term "finger" which implies minimal involvement.

It could be that Rabbi Yosi HaGalili is pointing this out. In terms of education, the effect that the *makkot* had in Egypt wasn't the same as the effect of the splitting of the Red Sea. The *chartumim* had a recognition of G-d's control, but it was minimal and didn't change their whole outlook on life. Arguably, most Egyptians followed suit. On the other hand, when the sea split, the Jews saw "*hayad hagedolah*" and both feared and believed in G-d and Moshe, His servant". And in the very next pasuk, we see the nation engaging in shira ("*Az Yashir*"), filled with G-d's praise and a recognition of His control over the world, as evidenced by the splitting of the sea. From this

event we can learn the proper response to when G-d's intervention is manifest in the world. It is not enough to simply admit this was caused by G-d and recognize the "*etzba elokim*". Rather, we must proclaim it as the "*yad*" of Hashem and engage in Hallel, which includes praise and gratitude. Understanding this idea, it makes perfect sense that the next part of the Haggadah is *dayenu*, which expands on how we should relate to all of the many things G-d did for us. Learning from Rabbi Yosi HaGalili, we can all work on making the most out of experiences in our lives and learning from them. This especially applies to that which G-d has done for us.

Anthropomorphism and You: A Primer to Higher Education

Rudi Weinberg ~ Madrich, NY

Every year at my family's Seder table when we read the story of Rabbi Yose the Galilean (who we like to call Rabbi Jose after one of our doormen named José), Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Akiva talking about how many plagues the Egyptians were truly struck with by Hashem, I noticed that the Rabbis talk about how many plagues the Egyptians were struck with in anthropomorphic terms. They use terms such as the "finger of G-d", the "great hand of G-d" and the "outstretched arm of G-d" meaning that the finger of G-d corresponds to this many plagues while the hand corresponds to this many, and so on. **I always protest that they are forgetting the wrist of G-d, which must add at least another 50 plagues!**

But joking aside, why do these learned Rabbis talk about Hashem and the plagues using such anthropomorphic terms? This is problematic because it is a basic tenet of Judaism, included as the third of Rambam's thirteen principles of faith, that Hashem does not have a physical form. The Rambam goes as far as to say that people who believe that Hashem is physical are *Minim*, heretics (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance, 3:7)! However, one could easily think otherwise, for in the words of the Raavad (Rabbi Abraham ben David, France, b. 1125 - 27 - d. 1198), in his critique of the Rambam's categorization of such people as *Minim* says that "greater and better people

than you have thought this [that Hashem is physical] because they read the verses as they are." Therefore, this question of talking about Hashem in anthropomorphic terms goes much further than just the Seder Haggadah and to the very heart of all of Jewish belief and practice based on the *Torah Shebichtav*, the Written Torah. Knowing the problems inherent in discussing Hashem in such physical terms, why don't the Rabbis explicitly make clear that they do not intend to anthropomorphize Hashem so as not to confuse those at the Seder who may not know this very important fact?

This is not just a question about the Rabbis, but really for the entire Torah! There are innumerable times in the Torah when Hashem and his acts are described in physical terms. Why is this? The Rambam in his pivotal work *The Guide for the Perplexed* (written in 1190), explains that the Torah consistently refers to Hashem and his actions in physical terms so that the majority of people can know Hashem in a way they can understand:

> "*Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man* (Babylonian Talmud Yebamoth, 71a, Baba Metzia 31b). The meaning of this is that everything that all men are capable of understanding and representing to themselves at first thought has been ascribed to Him as necessarily belonging to G-d, may He be exalted. Hence attributes indicating corporality have been predicated of Him in order to indicate that He, may He be exalted, exists, inasmuch as the multitude cannot at first conceive of any existence save that of a body alone; thus that which is neither body not

> existent in a body does not exist in their opinion…To speak at length of this matter would be superfluous, were it not for the notions to which the minds of the multitude are accustomed." (*The Guide for the Perplexed,* I:26).

This shows the importance of meeting people where they are. While in his view, the learned will either understand the deeper metaphysical meaning by themselves or if they are perplexed they will have to read his book, the common people and especially the children as represented in the Mah Nishtanah, do not see a problem with Hashem and His actions being described in physical terms. Since most people understand the Pesach story in these physical terms it helps them fulfill the purpose of the Seder which is being grateful to Hashem for the **physical** exodus from Egypt.

However, this still begs the question of if the anthropomorphic explanation of the Exodus is meant for the general public, what is the deeper answer that is more faithful to the complex metaphysical ideas being hinted at in this passage from the Talmud which relates an argument between Rav and Shmuel.

> "**Rav said** that one should begin by saying: **At first our forefathers were idol worshippers,** before concluding with words of glory. **And Shmuel said:** The disgrace with which one should begin his answer is: **We were slaves.**" (Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 116a)

The late great Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l interprets this debate as really about the same theme we are discussing: how to teach the story of the Exodus. While Shmuel says that we should begin the answer to the child by talking about how we were slaves in Egypt, he is talking about the simple physical explanation of the Exodus. But what Rav is saying is that we should teach the deeper metaphysical meaning of Exodus, which is that we were truly freed in a spiritual sense because we were leaving the realm of the idol worshippers to go to the land of Israel and be able to be monotheists and serve the one true God!

According to Rabbi Sacks, there are two different answers for two different kinds of people. There is the physical answer for the simple child, and the metaphysical answer for the wise child. Continuing in this vein, I believe that the Israelites were like the simple child when they witnessed the plagues and miracles firsthand. Perhaps the plagues and miracles of Hashem were so great, and the Israelites were so awed, that the only way they could even understand - let alone try to comprehend - and later relate their experience to their own children, was through describing them as the physical manifestation of Hashem in terms of his "hand" "arm" "palm" "finger" according to the perceived level of the miraculousness of the different plagues and miracles, like the approach of Shmuel.

Perhaps this explains why the Rabbis around their Pesach Seder continued to relate the story in that fashion, so that the next generation may understand and be able to appreciate the physical Exodus from Egypt. That is

why when we grow up and grow into the wise child, it is our duty to become learned and understand the deeper meaning of the plages, the miracles, and the Exodus itself not purely in the physical terms of the Rabbis at their Seder, but also in spiritual terms of Rav so that we may truly understand just how great were the plagues and miracles that Hashem brought on the Egyptians for **us when he brought us out of Egypt!**

I hope that you have all come away from this with a greater understanding and appreciation of Pesach and what Hashem **did for us** when we were taken out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom, from the realm of the polytheists to the Land of Israel where we were free to worship Hashem. I wish you all a happy and meaningful Pesach and next year may we all be celebrating together in Yerushalayim! And now onto one of my favorite songs, Dayenu!

Is Dayeinu Really Enough?

Aaron Feinerman ~ Shana Aleph,
Hollywood FL

One of the most famous songs that we sing on Pesach is Dayeinu. While it's clearly a fan favorite, I've always had a problem with it. It's very nice to say "It would have been enough" over and over to show our gratitude to God and everything He did for us in Egypt, but while this is an important idea to have, is it really true to say that it would've been enough if God didn't split the sea for us? We would have been killed or been re-enslaved by the oncoming Egyptians! Is it true to say that had He brought us to Har Sinai but had not given us the Torah, it would've been enough? We even go as far to say that had He not brought us into the land of Israel and not built for us the Beis Hamikdash, it would have been enough. Really? How can we say this? What would have been the point?

Let's say, hypothetically, that Bnei Yisrael would have died after leaving Egypt. Dayeinu, we declare. But what would have been the point of creating us in the first place? What would have been the purpose of choosing Avraham Avinu, and protecting his progeny? Doesn't God want us to fulfill His purpose for us being created which is to bring His honor into the world and worship Him?

God says so explicitly in Exodus 19:5-6, "Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, in *Mesilat Yesharim* ch. 1, goes even deeper and says that "man was created solely to delight in God and to derive pleasure in the radiance of the Shechina," and the way that he does that is through Torah and the mitzvot.

So, how could we say it would have been enough even if God killed us out in the desert? Or that it would have been enough not to have received the Torah? This means we have to dig deeper. What does "dayeinu" actually mean?

Let's say for example, you become sick and your friend offers to do all of your responsibilities. After getting over the cold, you want to thank your friend for everything he did. You have two options. You can just say "Thank you", or you can say "Thank you for doing my laundry, cleaning the house, etc." If I were to ask you which option shows more appreciation, we would all agree that it is option b, but why exactly is that? After asking myself this question and thinking about it for a while, I realized that yes, you could say thank you for everything you did, but if you thank that person for each specific thing they did, that shows that you remembered everything they did which means that it had an impact on you. Not only do I think that it's better for the sick person to thank his friend this way, but I think that the helping friend **deserves** a bigger appreciation than just a regular thank you since,

as stated before, they offered to help you in the first place. After all, what did the sick person do to deserve such a helping hand?

Perhaps this is the true meaning of "dayeinu." We've been assuming that "dayeinu" means it would have been enough for God to have just done that thing and no more. But that is not what it means. It means that it would have been enough means had God taken us out of Egypt and not split the sea it would have been enough **for us to show our appreciation and say thank you**. We're splitting each step and appreciating everything that God did.

After all, if I say that had you only come to my house to see how I was feeling but not cleaned the kitchen, it would've been enough. The question is who is it enough for? Is it enough for the friend to come and help or is it enough for me to say thank you. I believe that "Dayeinu" means that it is enough for me to be grateful and express my thanks.

I see a very fundamental lesson that can be learned here. Dayeinu is reminding us that even the smallest steps and blessings in our lives deserve recognition and gratitude. It's very easy to forget the small things that not only God does, but people do for us. We take them for granted when we really shouldn't. By counting the steps and all the things done for us, we can appreciate them that much more. I think that once you start to appreciate things, you'll come to enjoy life a lot more.

It's the Extras That Count the Most

Yoni Levy ~ Shana Aleph, Plainview NY

While it might be the time to sing Dayenu, there are several elements to the song that seem strange and demand explanation. First, why would we ever say "enough" to God's goodness to us? In other words, what are we actually saying when we declare 'Dayenu" - "it is enough for us"? Secondly, something jumps out in the very first stanza, where it says, "If He had taken us out of Egypt and not made judgments on them; dayenu." What does it mean to "make judgments" on the Egyptians? Thirdly, whatever it means, it doesn't seem that it was necessary for us to go free from Egypt. God surely could have removed us from Egypt without taking His vengeance on the Egyptians. Why did God do that, and why are we so grateful that this "judgment" was considered so important to feature in Dayenu?

We need to understand Dayenu in a new light. When we say Dayenu, we don't mean that "it" would have been enough for us. Rather, we recognize that Hashem didn't have to do any of the things He did for us. We recognize that from the perspective of God, all of these things He did were small in relation to the vast infinitude of the cosmos, and even just for our mission as Jews. To God, these are small details. Dayenu means, it would have

been enough from Your perspective, and the fact You did it anyway is cause for us to give thanks.

Let's ponder this for a minute. The Jewish people are miraculously free. Their Egyptian overlords are weak and scared. At the forefront of the Jewish people's minds, after having been abused for hundreds of years, is likely how much they want to give the Egyptians the proper punishments to fit all the millions of crimes they did. What should God do? He had a goal in mind, which was to fulfill His promises to Avraham and give the Jewish people a Torah, bringing them to Israel to build the Beit Hamikdash. From God's perspective, punishing the Egyptians was totally unnecessary. Why should God care about Jewish closure? Dayenu therefore says that even if something is a bonus, we want to thank God for it anyway. God did not have to obtain justice on our behalf, and yet He did. This judgment is that He punished the Egyptians measure for measure for their sins against the Jewish people. He did not have to do that. But it was a gesture to the Jewish people that He is committed to them and fulfills His will, and we should be thankful for that gesture.

We can see a similar idea when we celebrate the holiday of Sukkot. The main miracle that we are truly celebrating on Sukkot is the "*ananei hakavod*," "the Clouds of Glory." Why do we have an entire holiday celebrating one particular miracle in the desert, when we know that there were so many other miracles that took place? We miraculously had manna float down from the skies every day for forty years. Miriam had a miraculous well

providing water to the Jewish people. So why don't we have a holiday for any of those?

I spoke about this with one of my rabbis in the yeshiva, Rav Ashi, who suggested to me that perhaps the other miracles, food (manna) and water (Miriam's well), were our basic needs for life. Since we required them in the desert or we would have died, there is no holiday set aside for them; and so, they go relatively uncelebrated. However, the *ananei hakavod*, which helped to protect us, was an extra protection that Hashem gave us. The fact that He gave us something that wasn't absolutely needed is put front and center on Sukkot. Yes, we needed to survive the desert. But did we need the comfort of the clouds? We wanted it, and God provided, even though from His perspective, it was not necessary. So we celebrate.

Dayenu teaches us not only to be thankful for things that we absolutely need, but also for the extra details. It shows us that perhaps the extra things that we are given that aren't absolutely vital are even more deserving of thanks. We can use this idea all the time in our actual lives. Oftentimes, we only thank our parents for things that we absolutely need like feeding us or taking care of us. Yet, it's just as important, if not more so, to thank them for the little things that they don't have to do yet choose to do in order to benefit us, like making your favorite meal when any food would have sufficed. So let us say, thanks for all the small stuff - Dayenu!

Pesach Maror and Half of the Matzah?

Uriel Alpin ~ Shana Aleph, Brooklyn NY

Rabban Gamliel says, "Whoever has not explained the following three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his duty: Pesach, Matza, Maror." This part of Maggid always amazed and worried me, as Rabban Gamliel seems to tell us the whole Seder is invalidated and the mitzvah of telling the story (a Torah obligation!) is not fulfilled if we don't expand on these topics properly. That is a lot of responsibility!

So how can we better understand what these three mitzvot mean? What do they represent? In the Haggadah, Rabban Gamliel continues and says "Pesach, Matzah and Maror" are the three main themes of Pesach and the Seder: thankfulness to Hashem for saving us during Makkat Bechorot, the Exodus from Egypt, and the harshness and brutality of the slavery under the Egyptians. These ideas are central to understanding the story and importance of Pesech, but they also represent a more crucial theme to Judaism as a whole.

The Korban Pesach is representative of spirituality and monotheism. The Jews, after witnessing all the miracles God did for them, offered a Korban, the highest level of spiritual service they could do. The use of a lamb was a

direct denouncement of idolatry as well, since the Egyptians worshiped cattle. Inspiration to worship God, and denial of any gods besides for Him, is essential to the Pesach offering.

Maror is obviously representative of physical suffering, but also of atheistic impurity. The bitterness of the maror reminds us of the slavery the Jews were placed under for generations. Many had completely forgotten God and were immersed in physicality; they were literal property themselves, so it is no wonder.

Finally, although Matzah represents the exodus, arguably the most important event in Bnei Yisreol's history, it's still something of a mixed bag, a net neutral, if you will. The Zohar Chadash (Yitro 31a) says that the Jews were on the second to last level of impurity, and had they been one level lower they would not be worthy of redemption. On the other hand they were so zealous that they left Egypt with no provisions because of their immense faith in God. The Exodus led to Matan Torah, but also forty years of Exile. The matzah we ate on the day of redemption was the same matzah eaten during slavery.

Living your life purely in Maror is obviously completely wrong and living only through the Pesach is practically unattainable and not ideal either. At the end of the day we are human, and the Torah knows this. This is why we have the idea of teshuva and the importance of providing for your family over the study of Torah. We cannot exist as purely physical or spiritual beings. Matza, which is where we belong, is the balance we need to strive for.

The Rambam explains this idea in Hilchos Deyos. Every person is different, especially in their Middos. There are people who are quick to blow their fuse and become exceedingly angry, and some people don't get angry at all. The Rambam says both extremes are not correct. We must walk the Derech Hashem, which is this balance Matza teaches us. Sometimes an extreme is warranted, but to constantly lean to one side is not the Derech Hashem. The Rambam quotes the pasuk [Bereishis 18:19] where Hashem says he cherished Avraham for teaching his household Tzedakah and Mishpat. These concepts are mutually exclusive. Tzedaka seems to imply leniency while Mishpat is rigid Justice. There are times for charity and there are times for justice and Avraham stressed the point of staying in between these two ideologies.

It's fascinating how Judaism blends the ideas of Pesach (spirituality) and Maror (physicality) together. We have mitzvot to have meals of basar and yayin on Rosh Hashana and only a few days later we refuse to eat to atone and embrace spirituality on Yom Kippur. What's beautiful is that both of these extremes are spiritual services.

Right after we split the middle matzah in half we recite *Ha Lachama Anya*. "This year we are slaves, next year we will be free people." Matza is half bread of the slaves and half bread of the redeemed, and only when we put these two seemingly contradictory ideas together do we get the full Matza. "Pesach Matzah Maror" is so important because it not only represents the spiritual journey and identity of the Jews in and out of Egypt; it also represents

the integral idea of spiritual balance we need to find as Jews today.

The Duality, Dichotomy and Dialogue of the Pesach Seder

Jake Frenkel ~ Shana Aleph, Woodmere NY

Rabban Gamliel says that there are three things that one must say at the Seder to fulfill one's mitzvah: Pesach, Matzah, and Maror. Then the Haggadah goes on to describe the reasons for each one. Many commentaries have delved deeply into these reasons, and I would like to discuss them, starting with Matzah.

Rabban Gamliel says that the reason we eat matzah on Pesach is because prior to leaving Egypt we didn't have enough time to let the dough rise into actual leavened bread. The question is, how can he say this so simply when we know that there is actually another reason behind the mitzvah of *achilat matzah*? It's not just because of the dough on the way out of Egypt, but also the matzah we ate in Egypt itself! In fact, we gave a completely different reason at the beginning of Maggid, in *Ha Lachma Anya*: "This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in Egypt." So which one is it?

The Marbeh Lesaper (on the Haggadah) explains that what Rabban Gamliel is trying to convey is the reason for specifically the Afikoman. Meaning, his question isn't why we fulfill the mitzvah of matzah on the night of Pesach, nor why we eat matzah throughout Pesach.

Instead, he wants to know why there is the Afikomen at the Seder (representing the Pesach offering). Tht is why he provides a reason of the matzah we had when we left quickly from Egypt and couldn't let rise - this represents the Afikomen. *Ha Lachma Anya*, on the other hand, is about the actual mitzvah of *achilat matzah* - and that is because of the *matzah* we ate in Egypt.

This leaves us with a question: Why do we have these two reasons and this split in the first place? The Marbeh Lesaper suggests that it is to convey two different messages/purposes of the matzah eating which corresponded to what occurred at the time of the Beit Hamikdash. At the beginning of Pesach in Temple times, they would eat just the matzah to fulfill their mitzvah of *achilat matzah*. But when it was time to eat the *korban pesach,* they would eat it with matzah again. Where did this second eating come from? The Marbeh Lesaper says that it is in order to fulfill both of the historical significance of the matzah - not just "bread of affliction," but also the "bread of redemption." The main mitzvah of matzah represents the bread of affliction, but the Afikomen (i.e. the *korban pesach*) represents the Exodus and freedom of the Jewish people from slavery.

The afikoman and matzah as a whole represent the dichotomy of slavery and freedom. This is on display throughout the entire Pesach story. We constantly remind ourselves of slavery, while declaring ourselves free. We lean for a cup of wine, and then eat bitter maror. It is especially interesting that Hillel would put the matzah, maror, and pesach together. Maror represents slavery and its bitterness, but it is put in dialogue with

the *korban pesach* in *Korech* to make a tasty sandwich which only a free man would be able to enjoy, turning the *maror* into a delicious condiment (see Ibn Ezra on Exodus 12:8).

On the flipside, the pesach normally represents freedom, but it also has some bitter connotations. We know that even keeping and eating sheep was normal for the Jewish people in the times of Yosef, but was hated by the Egyptians of his time, causing tremendous separation between Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians. The Torah tells us (Genesis 43:32) that when Yosef brought the brothers in to eat with him in Egypt, "They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians." The reason given for this is that the Jews were shepherds, and the Egyptians venerated the sheep and lambs that the Jews would eat. Thought about in this way, the sheep is actually one of the basic causes for Egyptian "antisemitism" that possibly led to the enslavement itself. When we eat the pesach offering, we might think of this bitterness as well.

Therefore, we have shown that slavery and freedom are often two sides of the same coin. Rabban Gamliel chose one side, but each has an idea connecting it to either slavery or freedom. The matzah represents both the bread of affliction and redemption, the Pesach represents both freedom and bitterness, and the Maror represents both the bitterness of slavery and the condiment of freedom. These dual meanings serve to remind us of the complexity of our history and the ongoing struggle for

freedom and redemption. As we celebrate the Seder and fulfill these mitzvot, may we continue to strive towards a world free from oppression and full of redemption.

B'chol Dor Vador: How We Were at the Exodus

Binyamin Friedman ~ Shana Aleph, St. Louis MO

The Mishnah in Pesachim 116b states, *"In each and every generation a person must view himself as though he left Egypt, as it is stated: 'And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: It is because of this which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8)."* This text goes directly into the Haggadah, right after Rabban Gamliel's three requirements of Pesach, Matzah, and Maror.

The requirement to view oneself in a specific way is very distinctive. It seems strange that we should basically "pretend" like we left Egypt. Is this supposed to represent a deeper truth or is it merely symbolic, a way to connect with the Seder?

The Chida in the Marit HaAyin (his sefer on the *aggada*), brings both of these possibilities. He says that God actually redeemed us, and it's not just pretend - we just need to recognize it happens. There is a kabbalistic concept that our souls become embedded in the *klippot*, impure shells, each year before Pesach. God frees us by extracting our souls from the *klippot*, writes the Chida, every year. According to this interpretation, we view ourselves this way because we are actually freed each year. That said, on the other hand, there is a clear symbolic meaning behind this command. If God had not

taken our ancestors out of Egypt, there would have been no future for the Jewish people.

These answers are logical but seem a bit lacking. There are many formative events in history that have shaped the destiny of our people, but the Exodus has a uniquely central theme in Jewish prayer and thought. It is referenced in Shema, all the festivals, and many times connected to various mitzvot. The language is almost always the same; God took *you* out of Egypt, not *your ancestors*. Given this theme's prevalence, I would like to offer a more in-depth way of viewing this command which fits into some fundamental aspects of Judaism.

Let's take another look at the two explanations of the Marat HaAyin. The first idea referenced the *klippot* and showed that somehow all future Jewish people were in Egypt, and by extension at Har Sinai. In fact, the connection to Har Sinai is integral to the Exodus as the Torah truly created the Jewish nation.

This idea of this continuity with future generations is expressed in Deuteronomy 29:14, that the covenant was made "*both with those who are standing here with us this day before our God and with those who are not with us here this day.*" This verse describes how the covenant applied to future generations as if they were there. And this concept is more abstract than literal generations.

The Gemara (Shabbat 146a) derives something deeper about this connection from the same verse (albeit in an interesting aggadic context). Rav Ashi says about converts that "*even though they were not [at Mount Sinai],*

their guardian angels were." So even converts are connected to the events at Har Sinai, despite the fact that their obligation seemed to have not existed at that point.

In some real sense, Har Sinai connected all future Jews at a single point in time. This connection is an essential aspect of Judaism, how community and a shared experience links the Jewish people together. Even a convert, by practicing the Torah and integrating into Jewish community can tap into this shared experience.

Community as a major theme is consistent with events in Tanach. The Torah establishes early on that entire nations can be held responsible as single units with shared destinies, with the generations of Migdal Bavel and the Mabul. This is a powerful principle, which can sometimes go against our normal intuition of justice.

So really this first explanation, that we were all freed at the Exodus, can be viewed as a demonstration of communal connection at a single point.

The second explanation is that we view ourselves as having personally left Egypt to fully appreciate the ongoing consequences of the Exodus. The Haggadah says outright that we would still be enslaved to Pharaoh if Hashem hadn't freed our ancestors. Arguably, all the miraculous events in Jewish history which have led to the modern Jewish nation and Israel began when we left Egypt.

This fits in very well with the Torah's approach towards the Exodus and Har Sinai. A crucial aspect of the Exodus

is passing the story to the next generation, that "*you should tell your son on that day*." The story of the Exodus, transmitted through many generations, is one of the big themes of Tanach. It's clearly repeated many times in the Torah, stressing its importance.

This ongoing connection to previous generations is an important principle of Jewish faith. The uniqueness of the Exodus is that it includes a command to be told over. It definitionally exists over a period of time, continuing throughout history. The integrity of the *mesorah* is a foundation of our belief and many people view it as a unique aspect of Judaism.

In this sense, we were actually at Har Sinai because we know its events to be true through an ongoing chain of testimony. We know it to be true as if we had been there. The second explanation shows how our freedom at the Exodus is a demonstration of an ongoing communal connection.

These two interpretations of *b'chol dor vador* are not separate as they initially seemed, but actually two parts of the same concept: instant versus ongoing communal connection. The command to view ourselves as if we had personally left Egypt is the command to acknowledge community and *mesorah*, the vital pillars of Judaism. Together they connect us to our past and to the present. That's the deeper meaning of *b'chol dor vador*, to remember where we come from and how it links us to the Jewish nation.

Why is this Hallel Different From All Other Hallels?

Abie Moskovitz ~ Shana Aleph, Brooklyn NY

Everything in the Seder is a very set structure, with logical arrangement and placement, starting with *Kadesh* and ending with *Nirtzah*. In fact, the word Seder itself means "order." With that in mind, why is Hallel split into two parts, starting at the end of Maggid and resuming after the meal? This just seems to make chaos out of order. So why does it get split?

Firstly, we must analyze what Hallel is in the first place. Hallel was originally intended for days commemorating each Festival or miraculous deliverance from national peril (Pesachim 117a). So important was it to appreciate and commemorate these miraculous events that the leaders of the Jewish people would keep a list of all the days commemorating the deliverance of the Jewish nation from major threats, the anniversaries of which were converted into minor holidays on which fasting and eulogies were forbidden, called *Megillat Taanit*. So, how does Hallel relate to this theme of deliverance and festivity?

It's important to realize that the Haggadah itself seems to be split into two parts, just like Hallel. The first part of the Haggadah, which is highlighted by Maggid, deals with the entire story of the redemption from Egypt. This is

reflected in the first two paragraphs of Hallel that we recite in the first part of the Haggadah, which reference the Exodus, Splitting of the Sea, and Giving of the Torah - basically the historic destiny and salvation of the Jews. In these paragraphs we are thanking Hashem for those aforementioned acts, as since we view ourselves as actively leaving Egypt, we must thank Hashem for the goodness we have received (Rav Soloveitchik as quoted in the Rav Schachter Haggadah).

Immediately after we say these two paragraphs we make the bracha on the second cup of wine in which we say "*Asher Ge'alanu*" and eat the Matzah and Maror, both of which commemorate the past redemption. In this sense, these paragraphs of Hallel are actually just a continuation of Maggid, rather than a new segment of the Seder. Towards the end of the Seder, however, we are no longer focusing on the past and instead look at the present and towards the future, most notably when we say "*L'shana haba b'yerushalayim*!"

It is through this lens that we mention the mighty acts of Hashem in the second part of Hallel, as these acts require us to praise him (Rav Schachter Haggadah). We are not mentioning the goodness He bestowed upon us during Yetziat Mitzrayim, but rather in this Hallel we praise Him for the mighty acts he does for the Jewish people in general. From there we segue into the references of forthcoming salvation - the coming of Messiah and the Resurrection of the Dead - and how it connects us to God today and prays for our future salvation. Therefore, the splitting of Hallel is intentional - each part fulfilling its role, moving us from past to future.

This theme, of past glory and future redemption, can be represented from another angle. Rabbi Shimshon Pincus notes very interestingly that Hallel is not the only thing broken in the Seder - the Matzah is also broken at Yachatz and eaten as part of the Afikomen. He suggests that this can symbolize how our redemption is not yet complete. We need to merge the past with the future using the present - our presence at the Seder. And soon we will be able to sing a full Hallel in the time of our final Redemption, may we see it speedily and in our days.

Rachtzah: Physical and Spiritual Hygiene

Max Grill ~ Shana Aleph, Long Beach NY

Finally, Rachtzah is here, which means we are about to eat something real - *matzah* - and not just *karpas*. But what is Rachtzah? Why do we wash our hands? What's it all about? The historical answer is that the rabbis of the gemara (as seen in Chullin 106a) commanded it to protect the *kohanim* - if everyone washed their hands for bread, the *kohanim* who have to eat *terumah* with clean hands will remember as well. But that can't only be it. Firstly, it seems to make no sense, since the decree is really about the *kohanim* eating *terumah* - so why command regular Jews eating non-*kodesh* bread? Secondly, it can't be a simple protective decree, since the gemara (Sotah 4b) states that failing to wash one's hands before eating bread "uproots a person from the world." In that gemara, a rabbi even describes someone enjoys bread without washing first as if he was with a prostitute. So, it seems there must be something more going on here. What is it?

People often distinguish between physicality and spirituality. Famously, Plato, Aristotle, and other philosophers ancient and modern discussed an issue called the "Mind-Body Problem," also called Dualism. Many believed they were completely separate. But did the rabbis think that? Rachtzah is evidence that they saw the physical and spiritual as intertwined and inseparable.

Think about it: Rachtzah accomplishes two things; washing hands isn't just spiritual purification - it also has an advantage in physically cleaning our hands from filth and germs before we eat. We are combining the physical and the spiritual into one action.

Our tradition is filled with times to wash ourselves that grants us both spiritual cleanliness but also physical cleanliness as well. We wash our hands every morning, out of fear that we may have touched unclean areas of our body during our sleep. We also wash by going to the mikvah when we become unclean, whether because we came in contact with a dead body, or touched an insect, and so on. These were times of uncleanliness, both physically and spiritually, and there is a requirement to wash.

Keeping ourselves clean is a very important part of being Jewish. When we wash, we do it to purify ourselves, not just in the preparation to do mitzvot, but it has also helped us in other situations as well.

One example of this is back in the 14th century during the Black Death. The plague infected most people in Europe and killed almost 40 percent of the population. Jews were blamed for causing the plague since they got infected less than most other people. But in fact, what saved them was cleanliness! Things like cleaning up for Pesach helped, but washing ourselves and being clean was one of the most important reasons for why we survived through this time. Most people today wash their hands regularly and maintain good hygiene. But back then no one knew why the Jews weren't getting infected as much as

everyone else. Not only were we accused of starting the plague because of how much less we got it, we were also persecuted because of it. Only after, we figured out that it was our tradition of washing ourselves that stopped us from getting the disease.

Rachtzah is a message. The rabbis decreed the washing of hands to tell us that a simplistic belief in Dualism, that the spiritual and physical are completely separate and distinct from each other, is not the correct approach. Spirituality and physicality are both present in our lives, and there is no complete distinction between the two. One command to wash one's hands accomplishes the cleanliness of both. This is why there are promises to be removed from the world if one doesn't wash, and all the other sources which make failing to wash a terrible sin - for one is risking not only their spiritual but also their physical lives as well. Washing for bread is quite the symbol!

So, let us wash our hands for matzah, and remember that we are more than the sum of our parts. The mind and the body are integrated and essential for each other. And by washing the hands, our souls are purified, and our bodies are cleansed. Now is the time to eat matzah!

An Analysis of Matzah

Eli Orenbuch ~ Shana Bet, Queens NY

Everyone is used to the feeling of trying to choke down that final mouthful of matzah, which was made all the more harder to swallow by the dry feeling created by the previous pieces eaten in order to reach a full *kezayit*. So, the question has to be asked: Why can't we just eat reasonably sized, nice, soft, fresh, hot laffa? What makes our matzah so cracker-y anyway? Well, the easiest answer is that this is flour, water, and heat, but there are more questions to be answered. The history of *Matzah* is long, complex, and, at first glance, not easy to follow (it certainly cannot be done in 18 minutes!). This difficulty may lead to some misunderstandings about the nature of soft matzah, as will be explained later. However, before any of that, what is the source for matzah?

The *mitzvah* to eat *matzah* first appears in *Shemot* 12:8, where *Bnei Yisrael* are commanded to eat the Korban Pesach, along with *matzah* and *maror.* However, there is no explanation in the Torah for the process of making this thing we call "*matzah*", nor are there any descriptions of what it should look like. Additionally, even in early Jewish literature such as the Midrash and Mishna, there is a lack of specifics of *matzah*-making. Presumably this is because no one ever needed it explicitly written down - they knew what it was, and they made it every year! It can be assumed that *matzah* recipes were passed down from parent to child, again and again. Whether some had soft *matzah* and some had hard *matzah* is immaterial to us.

It is clear that in the last few hundred years, there was a shift to using only hard cracker-like *matzah* in the vast majority of the world. What caused this change? Some background information is still necessary.

At this point, a definition of *chametz* needs to be established. Without going into too much detail regarding the biology and chemistry that takes place in the baking and fermentation process, when flour is mixed with water, the carbohydrates and proteins that are found in the flour begin to react. They break down and release carbon dioxide gas, which gets trapped by the now sticky gluten, forming gas pockets that cause the dough to rise, as well as alcohol, which quickly evaporates. When working with dough for *matzah*, it must be constantly kneaded to ensure that the dough does not rise. The *Shulchan Arukh* (*Orach Chaim* 459:2) states that the dough becomes *chametz* if it is left to rest for the amount of time it takes an average person to walk a *mil*, which the *Shulchan Aruch* (as well as many before him) defines as 18 minutes. This means that *matzah*, to be kosher for Pesach, only requires the lack of the *chametz* process that would normally occur in the dough, and nothing more. Does that necessitate a cracker *matzah*? Not necessarily.

Let us just note that there are several possible variables of *matzah* recipes that can change its texture and taste. *Matzah*, everyone agrees, consists of flour, liquid, and heat. Beyond this, there are several factors to account for, and they change based on where and when one lived. For example, the type of oven, the temperature of the oven, the ratio of flour to water, how thick the *matzah* was

intended to be, how the dough was kneaded, and the general climate of the region. Each of these variables change the resulting *matzah* drastically, impacting its thickness, crunchiness, dryness, shelf life, and taste.

Another change that happened to *matzah* is that hard *matzah* went from very thick to very thin only recently. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (O.H. 458:4) says that the *minhag* to bake *matzot* before Pesach originated in the times of the *Tur* (1270-1340), where there arose a *chumra* in Spain to bake all the *matzot* for Pesach before the holiday. The reason for this was to take advantage of the ability to nullify *chametz* before Pesach if there were to accidentally be a tiny amount of it baked into the *matzah* (*bitul* does not occur on Pesach). These *matzot* were thick, but the *Aruch HaShulchan* notes that as their *matzot* would cool, they would become very hard, and therefore very difficult to eat because of their thickness. Despite this drawback, by the 18th century, this *chumra* had spread to just about every Jewish community, except for Yemen, where, according to *Rav Yichye Kapach*, not only is it allowed to bake *matzah* **on** *Pesach*, but there is an **obligation** to do so (as quoted by his grandson *Rav Yosef Kapach* in his commentary on the *Rambam Hilchot Shvitat Yom Tov 1:1*, referencing *Shemot 12:16*). This *chumra* to make matzah in advance of Pesach led to a need for longer-lasting, more easily edible, and dryer *matzah*, since if one were to make soft *matzot* before *chag*, it would get moldy or stale within a few hours or days (depending on the climate). If you made harder *matzah* as the *Aruch HaShulchan* suggested, the *matzah* was very difficult to eat due to its thickness.

Another *chumra* that developed at a similar time was based off an interpretation of the *Rema* (*Orach Chaim* 460:4) when he says to make the *matzot rakiken*, "thin" *matzot*, with the reason that they are slower to leaven than other breads. While this does not necessarily indicate super thin *matzot* (like we have now), according to later sources the Rema was taken to mean that one should make their *matzot* thinner than a regular loaf of bread (an *etzbah* thick, which is thicker than soft *matzot* today). This was still a very likely driving force behind the move to thin *matzot* due to *halachic* concerns.

Because of this desire for hard, thin, dry *matzot*, a need came about to make the dough as dry and thin as possible. This is because the drier the dough was before it went into the oven, the less time it needed to be in the oven to extract all the moisture from the dough. If there was any moisture in the center of the *matzah*, even a very very thin wafer matzah, the *matzah* would still come out soft, and then very quickly become stale and tough, making it very hard to eat.

Chumra after *chumra* arose in the aftermath of the Rema. He had recommended (Orach Chaim 459:2) to knead the dough as fast as possible, as there are concerns that the heat of one's environment may cause the dough to rise, or that one may come to delay kneading the dough for more than 18 (or 24) minutes. However there are downsides to this issue, notably a reduction in the quality of the dough produced in *Ashkenaz*, which is proven by an emergence of the *minhag* of *gebrokts* (for a more in depth view of the *minhag*, see *Gebrokts and Korech: Minhag and Meaning* in The Migdal Haggadah Supplement of

5782). This was brought up by *Rav Schneur Zalman* in the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, where he explains that for this exact reason, many *matzot* have dry flour in or on them after being baked, but specifies that it is only an issue when dry batter is used. It is very intuitive that if there is less water for flour to react with and less time is spent kneading the dough, the resulting product will be a dough that is not well mixed, with clumps of unreacted flour still in the dough. This interpretation is shared by the *Machatzit ha-Shekel* (*Sha'arei Teshuva* (458:1)) and the *Mishna Berura* (458) who both cite this as the reason for *gebrokts*, although both note that there is no longer a concern for this being the case because of how thin the *matzot* were in their time.

So why is it that we have not advanced in the *matzah*-baking process to allow for soft *matzah*? One explanation is the change in who supplies the *matzah* today. The switch from an agriculture-based society to a trade-based society in the last few centuries made it less common for an individual to make his own *matzot*, instead relying on dedicated bakers to supply *matzah*. These bakers now had to meet the demand of the community, meaning that the *matzot* had to have a long shelf life, which necessitated drier *matzot*. This very possibly could have led to a practical issue where even if there was a recognition of the decline of the *matzot*, there was not much that could be done about it. This can be seen in the writings of various *poskim*, who blame the decline in dough quality on a reduction in the skill of bakers of the period. Clearly there was an understanding that something was going wrong in the process, but for any number of reasons, there was not a realization by any of the *poskim* that

maybe the *chumrot* they accepted upon themselves were a big part of the problem. An exception is *Rabbi Yosef Molcho* (*Shulchan Gavo'ah* 469:16) who advocates for a return to wetter dough, due to the concerns with the reliability of the mixing of flour in a dry dough, but the *minhag* has not changed.

Another factor that is that it is now possible to make extremely thin *matzah*, which makes it easy to eat and similar to a cracker. As technology advanced, new ovens were developed that were hotter, and new methods of preparing dough that allowed for large scale *matzah* baking operations to service massive urban centers, both of which introduced new challenges and questions. It still remained that the most reliable and scalable way to make *matzot* was to make them thinner and dryer. For this reason, even if one thinks that soft *matzot* are the most authentic way to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *matzah*, there is no practical way to make them in a manner that ensures everyone is keeping the *halachot* of *Pesach* to their fullest. They cannot supply such *matzot* to all the Jews across the world.

It is always important to examine the evolution of our *minhagim* with respect and appreciation for the hardships that every generation had to face. Even if some practices may not make sense in our times, we should honor the traditions of our ancestors and preserve their legacy. At the same time, we should also look inward and forward to face the new and unique challenges of our times with courage and creativity.

Learning from the Suffering of Bitterness

Gavriel Lowell ~ Shana Aleph, Memphis TN

As you are likely aware, Maror is required to be in the Seder. Though its form may differ, whether it be in the form of horseradish or romaine lettuce, its purpose remains constant. The consumption of Maror is intended to provide an experience of bitterness, allowing us to empathize with the mental and physical anguish of the Jewish people in Egypt. As the Mishna in Pesachim (memorialized in the Haggadah) states, "The reason for bitter herbs is because the Egyptians embittered our forefathers' lives in Egypt, as it is stated: 'And they embittered their lives with hard service, in mortar and in brick'."

I find it strange that we often choose to dwell on past suffering. Why do we do this? We did not recently experience this suffering; it's so far in the past. Is it not better to move on? Why focus on the bad when we can look forward to the good? Why does our people suffering in the past affect us now and what good does it do for us to relate to it?

I think that by looking at the ideas of Viktor Frankl, we can better understand the focus on suffering and bitterness of maror on the Seder night. Viktor Frankl was

an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who survived the Holocaust and wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning.* In the book, Frankl argues that humans have an innate need to find meaning in their lives and that this need is so fundamental that it can even sustain them through the most extreme forms of suffering.

Frankl suggests that suffering is an unavoidable part of the human experience, and that it can
be used as a means to find deeper meaning and purpose in life. He believes that when we face suffering, we have a choice in how we respond to it. As he says, “If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an eradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete.” We can either allow ourselves to be consumed by our pain, or we can use it as an opportunity to grow and become better people. It completes us, it makes us whole.

One way in which Frankl argues that we can find meaning through suffering is by developing what he calls a "tragic optimism." Tragic optimism is the belief that even in the face of extreme suffering and adversity, there is still meaning and purpose to be found in life. It is the ability to maintain hope and optimism even in the darkest of circumstances.

Frankl's message in *Man's Search for Meaning* is that suffering is an inevitable part of the human experience, but that it can be used as an opportunity to find deeper meaning and purpose in life. By maintaining hope, developing relationships with others, and finding ways

to contribute to the world around us, we can find meaning even in the most difficult of circumstances.

This can help us understand the purpose of eating the bitter Maror. Maror serves as a means for us to further our understanding of suffering. It enables us to derive significance and direction from the hardship endured in Egypt and comprehend why we voluntarily subject ourselves to discomfort now. By utilizing Maror, by inducing suffering from the bitterness, we not only enable ourselves to further relate to the suffering people of the past but also recollect and continue to learn from its significance. It maintains our hope to continue forward, learning from the past. This process enables us to continue comprehending the suffering experienced in Egypt and, through our own suffering, gain insight and understanding into historical experiences of suffering.

The Meaning of Korech: Freedom, Struggle, and Divine Intervention

Elliott Lehrer ~ Shana Aleph, Woodmere NY

After having fulfilled the mitzvot of matzah and maror, we then move on to Korech. Here we learn that the great Hillel HaZaken would, in the times of the Beit HaMikdash, combine the Pesach, matzah, and maror, into a kind of sandwich. In our modeling of this version of the mitzva, we leave out, of course, the Korban Pesach.

When we crunch into our matzah and maror sandwich, it immediately brings forth the question: Why are we doing this? Why is remembering Hillel's sandwich so important? Furthermore, what was the reason Hillel himself combined them instead of just eating it all separately? In fact, when you think about it, it sort of feels like a contradiction. Why would he eat the bitter maror together with the Pesach on the Seder night, when he's celebrating his freedom? Shouldn't he have specifically avoided maror at this moment, when sweet liberation should be the theme of the night, and not slavery?

To answer this question, we must go deeper. What do each of these mitzvot represent? I spoke this over with a

rabbi of mine at Migdal, Rav Ashi, and we thought of three themes, each symbolized by the mitzvot in the sandwich, and each aspect having a part to play. Once this is clarified, we can understand why it is so important for them to be put together.

The matzah represents freedom. The Torah describes (and we repeat in the Haggadah) that we eat matzah because we rushed out of Egypt and "the dough didn't have time to rise since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay" (Exodus 12:39). This indicates that the Jewish people were ready to leave at a moment's notice when God freed them. Thus, matza symbolizes freedom from slavery.

The maror, on the other hand, represents the bitterness of the slavery while we were in Egypt. The taste of it is bitter, just like how harsh the conditions were for the Jews when they were enslaved. The Haggadah says "This maror that we are eating, for the sake of what? For the sake that the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt."

Finally, the Pesach represents God's involvement in the Exodus and His intervention to get the Jewish people out of slavery to freedom. The first *korban Pesach* was eaten even before the Jewish people left Egypt, close to the end of our time enslaved. The night that the Jews ate their first Pesach, God passed over them in their houses, protecting them from the Plague of the Firstborn. As the Torah states, "It is the Passover sacrifice to God, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when smiting the Egyptians, but saved our houses" (Exodus 12:27).

Hillel brought these components together, interpreting the verse in the Torah as a command for the future, "They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8). But it's more than that. Hillel understood that each component of the sandwich represents a different aspect of our redemption from Egypt. The matzah represents freedom and success, the maror represents slavery and struggle, and the Pesach represents God's intervention.

When we put these together, we get the totality of Jewish history and belief, as well as a message for our own lives, of the highs and lows of existence. Struggle and hardship are a fact of life, and sometimes, we experience lows that we must overcome. But we often have highs in our lives, triumphs, success. The overarching message is whether the good or the bad, God's intervention is always there, in the background, and we can trust that things will work out alright for us with God's help. We put the matzah (the highs) with the maror (the lows), and say that God is there as well, represented by the Pesach. This is a religious viewpoint symbolized by the most Jewish thing of all - the sandwich.

This is an important message. But there is a wide gamut of views on Divine Providence in Jewish philosophy, and the message of believing "nothing happens without God's direct involvement" is not accepted by many of our *rishonim* (of whom I generally align). For example, the Rambam believes that God intervenes only for those who have attained a high level of intellectual and moral

perfection (see *Guide for the Perplexed* III:18). For most people, God lets nature take its course and does not interfere with their choices or consequences. Therefore, according to the Rambam's approach, we should not rely on miracles or expect God to save us from our troubles. Rather, we should use our intellect and morality to guide our actions and seek God's will. We should also appreciate the natural order that God created and see His wisdom and kindness in it.

If so, the Pesach needs to symbolize something deeper than "merely" divine intervention. Rather, it represents our search for God, and the Truth. It represents a belief in our ultimate free will and the ability to make moral choices. It represents wisdom itself and our quest for it. When the Jewish people ate the Pesach lamb that fateful night so many years ago, they were expressing their belief in God and the responsibility of living up to His commandments and ethical systems. They probably talked about the commandments, and undoubtedly argued (as Jews tend to do) regarding their purpose. They thought about God and how He created and displayed absolute mastery over His world. As we eat Korech at our Seder, we should remember that God is always in our thinking, but He also gives us free will and responsibility. We should thank Him for both His intervention and His non-intervention, and strive to become closer to Him through our deeds and thoughts.

Freedom from Order

Noam Narrowe ~ Shana Bet, Bala Cynwyd PA

Shulchan Orech, also known as the "finally we can eat" part of the Seder. The part that every kid that has no idea what is going on is waiting for - when we finally are free to leave the table and stretch our legs and eat an actual meal. It's such a nice feeling of being liberated from the Seder of the night, but have you thought about that feeling? Throughout the Seder and the Haggadah it has *brachot* and passages to read or commentaries, and yet when it comes time for Shulchan Orech there is nothing. Zip. Bupkis. Nil. Zilch. Perhaps this is intentional and is meant to bring about a reaction, and it does subconsciously.

Within Pesach and the Seder itself there are many many things that we are told to do whether we recognize it or not. Following the Haggadah and reading all its passages is something we just follow to remind us of being back in Egypt and the story of our people. That is something that it does quite well. We go by the order (which is the translation of Seder) that we always have reading how we left Egypt and became free, yet Shulchan Orech has none of that. We are liberated from reading the Haggadah and just enjoying our meal, and the relief or freedom you feel is an intentional and crucial part of the experience. Within our Haggadah as we go through it is the order, and in that case then Shulchan Orech when you are free from that is the Disorder. Could it be that the

order that we feel only makes the feeling we get from being free to eat all the more powerful?

Another part to take into account is the freedom we have when it comes to our meal. Every family has their own tradition and custom, and yet they still follow the framework of the Haggadah. But when they reach Shulchan Aruch they all break off to do their own thing that's unburdened by any text. Shulchan Orech is a very fun and freeing part of the Seder partially because it is so subjective compared to the objective orders of the Seder. There is no proper meal to have or any obligatory foods you have to eat during it and that power of choice you have allows each family to have their fun without having to follow any instructions. After all, there is nothing that defines being free then being able to eat what you want and when you want it.

This little break from the ritual of the night is something that can be learned from as well. From the disorder that is Shulchan Orech to freedom which is the theme of the night, there is a noticeable connection to, but it is not only limited to Pesach. This period of disorder is something that can be found in our everyday life as well. We should find the gaps in the monotony and order of our lives and appreciate them, but we should also recognize that why it is so nice is because we have the order to compare the freedom to. When going through hard or boring tasks you should keep the relief we feel when we are freed from it in mind, because that feeling is what true liberation is like.

Tzafun: A Hidden Redemption

Daniel Berkovich ~ Shana Aleph, Woodmere NY

Tzafun is a part of the Seder that is often overshadowed by other parts of the Seder. Everyone knows about how the maror symbolizes the bitterness of the time we spent as slaves, and that the matzah didn't have time to rise during our redemption. But what about Tzafun? Is it simply dessert? Is it just an excuse to spoil our kids with presents while also getting them to be involved?

Indeed, there are several interpretations as to the symbolic significance that Tzafun has in the context of redemption. Some suggest that it comes to represent the salvation that was hidden from us in our years as slaves. The afikoman is hidden while we discuss all of the troubles we had in our "stay abroad" in Egypt, and only after we fully discuss what happened does the afikoman get revealed. We find the afikoman and indulge in it, symbolizing the freedom we found after years of oppression.

Another thought takes an even more elaborate approach to the afikoman. We split the matzah at Yachatz into two, one piece smaller than the other. The small piece is left out while the larger is set aside. The left-out piece symbolizes the reward we get in this world, whereas the

larger piece represents the reward that was set aside for the World-to-Come.

Some take this representation even further. Some hold that the break of the matzah represents two parts of redemption itself. The smaller piece represents the story of the Seder, in which we discuss and give thanks for the past redemption. The larger piece is set aside for the redemption yet to come, but that's hidden away, just as the day of the final redemption, the times of Mashiach, is hidden from us. The sizes also come into play, as the redemption of Mashiach will be a greater redemption than the one we had in Egypt.

Perhaps a more mystical approach to Tzafun is that it represents the evils hidden away in our heart. We take the middle matzah, and literally break it open, sifting through the different parts of our emotions. Only when one has the proper intentions, can the matzah represent the mentality of freedom, instead of one of servitude. At the beginning of the Seder the matzah is referred to as the "*lechem oni*", bread of our affliction, but later on it transforms to become the bread we baked in our haste towards freedom. The afikoman sits in between these matzot, imploring us to destroy the hidden evils in our heart which makes all the difference between being a slave and a free man.

Many of the more well-known parts of the Seder showcase the obvious nature of the holiday. The slavery, the bitterness and the story of redemption. But that's only the surface level. While the more understood and flashy parts of the Seder relay the basic stories, there is always a

deeper, hidden message behind it. It is Tzafun, literally meaning hidden, that takes this role of delivering this more hidden message.

Matzah and Manna: A Divine Relationship

Yosef Pechter ~ Shana Aleph, Philadelphia PA

Birkat HaMazon centers around having gratitude to God for giving us food and supplying us with sustenance. We say this blessing after we have a meal with bread in it, to signify how grateful we are for some of the everyday things we take for granted, and food in particular.

On Pesach, we have a Seder to commemorate our liberation from slavery in Egypt, in our becoming a free people with our own land. A central theme of Pesach is how we show gratitude for every single miracle and blessing that the Jewish people received during the Exodus. If you think about it, Birkat Hamazon at the Pesach Seder accounts for double the gratitude - we have a blessing of gratitude on a night of pure gratitude. It is yet another opportunity that we get to express our thanks to God for all of the miracles and blessings that we receive, even in our daily lives.

But this begs the question: What is the purpose of saying Birkat Hamazon on Pesach, if the entire Haggadah and the entire theme of the night is to say thank you to God for all He has done for us?

Perhaps we can answer this question by examining the verse in the Torah. The Torah (Devarim 8:10) tells us, "When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you." Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary on this verse, says the following fascinating comment:

> "This is the commandment of the *Birkat Hamazon*, the *beracha* to be said after eating bread. This creates the certainty of belief of God's most special providence, which was gained through the open miracle of the manna. By making a *beracha*, this is maintained in the midst of the normal human social food situation, as if every piece of bread is a direct gift from God, like the heavenly manna once bestowed upon those wandering in the wilderness."

According to Rav Hirsch, we should think of every piece of bread we eat as akin to miraculous manna, as if God had dropped it from the heavens for our benefit. When we thank God, we recognize this truth. Now let's think about matzah. Is anyone grateful for matzah? The Jewish people ate it as "poor man's bread" in Egypt. They ate it on their way out only because it didn't have time to rise. Matzah is not exactly the most thank-worthy of breads. It certainly does not remind us of the manna in the desert, which was described as sweet and honeycomb like. Matzah hardly fits that bill.

Perhaps this is why even on Pesach, at a Seder full of thanks, we still say Birkat Hamazon. The idea is that we should treat even matzah, the lowliest breadstuff, as a

uniquely bestowed piece of manna given to us directly by God. It doesn't matter that matzah is not sweet, or fluffy, or necessarily enjoyable. It provides sustenance - as part of a staple food group. Matzah is easy to make, it doesn't take time to rise, it tastes delicious as part of matzah brei (with honey!). I'd go so far as to say that in very certain contexts, matzah can be even better than regular bread! Birkat Hamazon at the Seder allows us to recognize this, and even be grateful for the small things in life, such as matzah. So too, in our everyday life, we should treat even the smallest things as God's good will unto us and always express our thanks.

What Connects Shefoch Chamatcha and Hallel?

Emanuel Saitskiy ~ Shana Aleph, Brooklyn NY

We just finished up with our meal, concluded it with Birchat Hamazon, and poured our fourth cup of wine. We are about to continue with the second half of Hallel, but before we do, we encounter a paragraph, "*Shefoch Chamatcha,*" that asks God to "pour forth Your wrath upon the nations that do not recognize You, and upon the kingdoms that do not invoke Your name." Why is there a need to place this paragraph here, right before we go on and continue praising Hashem with the second half of Hallel? There are various answers given by mefarshim to this question. However, I will only give two: one applicable to Sephardim specifically and one that can be understood universally.

One answer is given by Rabbi Yehuda ben Yakar (in his commentary to Hallel found in the Torat Chaim Haggadah). Rabbi Yehuda ben Yakar points out that while we would normally recite a bracha of "*Ligmor et HaHallel*," one cannot legitimately do so at the Seder since at the end of maggid we will not complete the Hallel. Thus, the Haggadah makes an intentional hefsek between the end of the first part of Hallel (ending in "Bitzeit") which we concluded during Magid and the second part of Hallel (Lo Lanu). So since we're not

finishing the entirety of Hallel in one sitting, we cannot recite the bracha of Ligmor. The paragraph of Shefoch, serves this purpose.

While this answers why we create this split here, it only applies to Sepharadim, but does not apply to Ashkenazim, whose bracha on Hallel is, "Likro et HaHallel," "to read the Hallel." How would Ashkenazim, or more universally, everyone, answer this question?

In *Shemot* 17:16, the Torah states, "And he said, For there is a hand on the throne of Y-H, a war for Y-H-V-H against Amalek from generation to generation." Many commentaries have asked why the pasuk uses only part of God's four-letter name, and not the full name (which appears as well in the pasuk). Rashi tells us the reason for this is because, "The Holy One, blessed be He, swears that His Name will not be perfect nor His throne perfect until the name of Amalek be entirely blotted out. But when his name is blotted out then will His (God's) Name be perfect and His throne perfect." God is therefore "waiting" for Messianic times to properly deal with Bnei Yisrael's enemies.

When we say *Shefoch Chamascha*, we know that right after we finish this paragraph we resume the second part of Hallel. What is the connection? The theme of the second half of Hallel is praising Hashem and asking for the Moshiach to come and we see that from the gemara in Pesachim 118a, Rav Yochanan states that the verse of Lo Lanu alludes to the war of Gog and Magog which is the final war that is supposed to take place before the Jews

are redeemed by mashiach. The reason why we mention *Shefoch Chamascha* prior to saying the second part of hallel is because we are recognizing that in order for the messianic age to start we must do our part and pray to Hashem that he deals with all those who desecrate His name.

Now that we see this I think we can all use this paragraph as a moment where we put in extra *Kavanah* because without Hashem's help we will never be able to free ourselves from our enemies. This paragraph serves as a perfect opportunity when a person can cry out to Hashem and beg him to help us destroy those who are out to annihilate the Jewish ideology. Hopefully with the *zechut* of all our *tefillot* this will quicken the arrival of mashiach.

Hallel: Singing Low, Singing High

Rabbi Yechiel Weicz ~ Afternoon Ra"m

Reading and singing Hallel, one can't help but notice the various darker nuances of the Hallel - it is not all rosy and joyful. There are quite a few heartfelt pleas, words of hope for the downtrodden and a tangible yearning from despair in the *perakim* of Tehillim that we say.
We read about the "*even maasu habonim*," the stone that the builders rejected and the "*hamavta lechasidav*," the death of his faithful ones. As a matter of fact, most of Hallel has a sadder side to it. "*Min hameitzar*," crying out to God from the straits, and "*kol haadam kozev*," all men are liars and cannot be trusted. Even the traditional tune that we use for Hallel is emotional, yearning and dark.

What's all this heartache and yearning doing in Hallel - isn't this supposed to be a joyful and happy prayer?

Hallel is made up of chapters of Tehillim, Psalms. It is the story of King David and his heartfelt yearning towards God. King David's life was full of many ups, but also many downs. He wrote about all his emotions - he felt they were all holy. His pain and his joy. They were all formulated into a song for and to God.

David Hamelech lived a life of Teshuva - not only for specific sins and situations that might have happened to

him, but a life of Teshuva in general. Rav Kook writes that Teshuva isn't just a process that we do after sinning, but it is a way of life. A life of yearning to be close to God, to understand Him and strive towards Him. Teshuva Meahava, Teshuva out of - or because of - love, isn't sin-oriented, but God-oriented. It isn't about the sin that I may or may not have done, that's certainly important; but the words of Hallel, the Teshuva of King David was much more than that. It was and is a yearning towards God. Teshuva isn't a means to an end; it is a goal in itself. This is Hallel.

A life with meaning and a life that pulls us and pushes us closer to a goal is worth living. Hallel reminds us that there is real joy in pursuing and yearning such a life. And it does come with the occasional down. Moreover, it is those *even maasu habonim*, those stones that have tripped us up in the past that give us the push to continue to grow.

There are those of us that don't allow ourselves to be sad. We immediately push the sad feelings away and don't allow ourselves to feel. King David explains and teaches us here that you can only appreciate the high if you allow yourself to feel the low.

If I am able to be heartbroken, then I can also feel joy. Only if I have *min hameitzar karati*, I am calling out to you from the darkness, can there be a real *hodu lashem ki tov*.

Chasal Siddur Pesach

Rabbi Aryeh Wasserman ~ *Dean of Students*

חָסַל סִדּוּר פֶּסַח כְּהִלְכָתוֹ, כְּכָל מִשְׁפָּטוֹ וְחֻקָּתוֹ.
כַּאֲשֶׁר זָכִינוּ לְסַדֵּר אוֹתוֹ, כֵּן נִזְכֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ

"The Pesach Seder has been completed as per halachic mandate, as ordained by all its rules and laws, just as we have merited to perform the Seder, so too let us merit to do it."

Question:
What does this song mean? Didn't we just finish the Seder?
What is meant then by "so to let us merit to do it"?

At this juncture of the Seder, we continue with the final and newest addition to the canonical liturgy of the Haggadah. Many of the songs in this section, the section coined Nirtzah, were added on later and taken from other sources, repurposed for the sake of the conclusion of the Seder. The introductory piyut to this section is no exception.

Chasal Siddur Pesach is in fact a section of a longer piyyut borrowed from the longer "קרובה" composed for Shabbat HaGadol. A קרובה is a unique piyyut, (liturgical poem) which was specifically written as an addition to the amidah at certain auspicious occasions. While in most communities these additions have fallen out of practice,

there are certain sects of chassidim that still recite these piyyutim during the chazzan's repetition on Shabbat HaGadol and a few other special Shabbatot. (The Bostoner Rebbe's shul in Boston is an example of this.) Although it is not common practice, it is worth noting the significance of this piyyut, in light of the fact that it was included by these sects as an introduction to Kedusha. Many opposed this practice, since it is a significant hefsek, (interruption) at a point when we are generally very hesitant to add any additional liturgy, the fact that there was an established practice to do so regardless of this concern speaks to the importance of this prayer.

The קרובה in question is titled "אלקי הרוחות לכל בשר", an elaborate summary of the entirety of Pesach - from preparation before the holiday through completion of the Seder. Composed almost a thousand years ago by Rabbi Yosef Tov Elem, (Joseph Ben Samuel Bonfils), in France, despite its current obscurity to the masses, it garnered the attention of significant talmidei chachamim, including several tosafists.

The structure of the poem is an alphabetical acrostic describing the process of searching and destroying the chametz before Pesach making up 22 stanzas of four lines each. The next 18 stanzas describe the night of Pesach itself, following an acrostic of the author's name, יוסף הקטן בר שמואל, followed with the concluding word חזק. After all of this poetic description, this section of the קרובה ends with our verses, which in the context of the original poem actually means:

"We have completed reviewing the order of events of Pesach according to halacha, as ordained by all its rules and laws, just as we have merited to orally organize these halachot, so too let us merit to perform them."

When looking at the verses in the original context, the question is resolved. Let us all merit, to look at all parts of the Seder in context and by doing so merit to greater clarity and understanding.

Next Year in Jerusalem: A Celebration of Future-Mindedness

Meir Rudenstein ~ Shana Aleph, Hollywood FL

The Pesach Seder is well-known for being filled with symbolism and metaphorical rituals, designed to create a more impactful spiritual experience that is reliving our nation's leaving of Egypt. The Haggadah is the script that guides us through that journey. So we must consider the choice of the Haggadah's conclusion to such an integral part of the entire Pesach experience: "*L'shanah Haba B'Yerushalayim,*" "Next year in Jerusalem!"

At a first glance, the words of *"L'shanah Haba"* seem simple in nature. They seem to only present the basic desire to go to Jerusalem and to practice our religion in our country. While this may not seem like the deepest line to close off the Seder's main text, however, like many of the things we do on Pesach, there is a lot more to it than first meets the eye.

"L'shanah Haba" always stood out to me at the Seder (not just because it meant I could finally go to sleep) because it's a song that looks to the future, unlike so much of the Seder that is about remembrance. "*L'shanah Haba"* seems to have its purpose in sparking hope at the end of a long night of recounting the journey to freedom of our exodus

from Egypt. Even as a young kid who didn't understand the words, I could feel the ring of joyfulness in the way people around the table sang "*L'shanah Haba*", the song about our homeland, our future, and even our destiny.

Yet there is much more meaning to the "*L'shanah Haba*" than just the emotion it carries and the national triumph it represents. We are also expressing how we seek to return to Jerusalem as the ultimate spiritual center, the place where Hashem's presence can be felt the most. We seek to go to Jerusalem because we really seek to become closer with Hashem. Seen in this way, it's actually a deeply religious declaration. As we sing, and even dance, at the end of the Seder, we are declaring how we wish to be closer to God, not just in the physical sense, but also spiritually. The words of "*L'shanah Haba*" aren't just about travel and national destiny, but our holy religious desires. It's about showing how we understand that a spiritual closeness to Hashem is what we look for every year.

When we say "*L'shanah Haba B'Yerushalayim*," we are (perhaps unwittingly) making a commitment. After all, the implication of this line is that we will be in Jerusalem next year on the Seder night in order to take part in the future redemption, eating of the Pesach offering in the Holy Temple. However, it's not as simple as that. If we really hope to bring this to fruition, we are saying that we want to do full *teshuvah*, not just as individuals but as a nation as a whole. The Rambam says in Hilchot Teshuva that the Messianic age can only come if all of Israel repents. If so, we are not just hoping for a better tomorrow, we are making a commitment; to ourselves, to

those around us, and to God. We are saying we are ready to begin a journey of personal growth and transformation. "*L'shanah Haba*" is about recognizing that we aren't perfect, at least not in the present. We must accept that, and try to change.

As the Seder draws to a close, let us take a moment to reflect on the powerful words that have touched our hearts and souls. Let us carry this strength within us as we move forward into the coming year, with renewed purpose and intention. May we find joy in the simple moments of life, and may each experience be a reminder of the blessings that surround us. Let us strive for spiritual growth, for it is through this journey that we will find true fulfillment and happiness. And as we come together to celebrate this holiday, let us never forget the ultimate redemption that we pray for with all our hearts.

Veamartem Zevach Pesach: Why Me?

Michael Speiser ~ Shana Aleph, West Hempstead NY

Every Pesach there is always one line that bothers me: "Tell your child on that day: 'This is because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8). We say this line, as we try to imagine what it was like to be enslaved in Egypt, to witness all the miracles Hashem performed for us there, and finally to leave Egypt. However, we can't remember it, so we have to imagine it, because we did not personally leave Egypt - our great-great-great ancestors did. So, why do we use this personal language of me and I, when *I* had nothing to do with it?

I think a potential answer can be developed from an often-overlooked part of the Seder. Nirtzah is a section full of seemingly interesting poems and songs. Some of them, most of us know and love such as "Chad Gadya" or "Echad Mi Yodea". However, there are many other sections that get overshadowed by these parts of Nirtzah. One of these undervalued sections is "Vaamartem Zevach Pesach." This section can provide tremendous insight into our question, and with a little bit of elaboration give us a different outlook into how we view the Pesach night.

For those who don't know, "Vaamartem Zevach Pesach" lists out a bunch of different historical events and miracles that happened on Pesach, and concludes each paragraph saying, "And you shall say, It is the sacrifice of Pesach." So, why do we care about these other miracles happening on this day? Why does it matter if Sodom was destroyed on Pesach or if Hashem revealed himself to Avraham on Pesach night? Pesach is about the Exodus from Egypt and our gratitude to Hashem for it. Why on Pesach of all nights should I care about all these other "minor" miracles that took place throughout Jewish history?

There is a tremendous value and insight these events can teach us, if we just take a step back and look at it from afar. When we take this entire section as a whole, we see a Pesach that isn't one dimensional; we see a Pesach that isn't about one event from our past but a continuing line of God's miraculous presence. Hashem didn't just come down once and save us, but He keeps helping us from generation to generation, continuing the miracles and showing us His true greatness. The last line of this section is, "These two [plagues] will you bring in an instant to the Utsi [Esav] on Pesach; embolden Your hand, raise Your right hand, as on the night You were sanctified on the festival of Pesach. And you shall say, 'It is the Pesach sacrifice.'" This last bit isn't an event from our past, but an event that will take place in our future. When we say Hashem took *me* out of Egypt, we aren't being figurative, we are alluding to the fact that God isn't done with us. God is still performing miracles for us and still saving us from oppression. Pesach isn't about thanking God for one past event, but instead thanking God for the continuing

miracles and feats he is performing for us even to this day.

This is why we use such personal language when we talk about leaving Egypt. It was not one foreign event that took place thousands of years ago. Rather, it is a continuing series of miracles and events that are still happening to this day. We can learn from "Vaamartem Zevach Pesach" that Hashem is never far from us. Judaism is not a religion based only on past events, but a continuing series of miracles that we need not take for granted. God has not abandoned us. We just need to take a step back and realize how close He is and how much He is doing for us, throughout every generation.

Vayehi Bechatzi Halayla's Missing Miracle

Ezra Reiss ~ Shana Aleph, West Hempstead NY

As part of Nirtzah, we recite the poem/song of "Vayehi Bechatzi Halayla." In it, we thank and acknowledge God's power and His interaction in our world through the performance of miracles that happened specifically at night. We begin with how Avraham defeated the Five Kings at night, continue with Yaakov defeating the angel at night, and then it moves on to one of the greatest miracles in the story of Pesach, the miracle of *Makkat Bechorot*. Following this miracle, the poem moves on to discuss miracles in the books of *Neviim*, such as the story of Sancheriv.

What is most conspicuously missing from this list of miracles at night is one of the most famous of all! What happened to the miracle of *Kriyat Yam Suf*! After all, the Torah tells us (Exodus 14:21), "Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and God drove back the sea with a strong east wind **all that night**, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split." If so, the miracle took place at night, and yet, the author of Vayehi Bechatzi Halayla chose not to include it. Why is that?

A simple answer presents itself, which is that Vayehi Bechatzi Halayla only talks about miracles that happened on the original Pesach night. Obviously, *Kriyat Yam Suf*

happened several days later, after they had left Egypt and had been in the desert for a bit wandering around. So, perhaps that is why it is not mentioned. However, I would like to suggest something deeper.

If we analyze the different stanzas in Vayehi Bechatzi Halayla, we may find a common theme within the text. The miracles on this list do not seem so miraculous at all! For example, let's look at the story of Avraham and how he defeated the Five Kings. Yes, it was a great feat; four kings defeating five kings is unusual and even incredible. But it does not have to be a miracle. Another story is how Avimelech and Lavan were frightened by God appearing to them in their dreams. While prophecy is somewhat miraculous, this can very easily be described as a psychological event that's happening to them due to various forms of guilt. Yaakov beating an angel is also not necessarily miraculous - perhaps *tzaddikim* are stronger than angels in a physical match. Lastly, let's look at the greatest miracle described in this song - *Makkat Bechorot*. This was a plague that's described in very natural terms - maybe it was an epidemic. So, it seems that Vayehi Bechatzi Halayla lists many miracles which really depend on a person's perspective, whether they believe it is a miracle where Hashem is involved, or they believe it is just a "coincidence." If so, perhaps *Kriyat Yam Suf* was not included because it was such an obvious and open miracle that it is not up to our perspective to wonder how to view it.

This distinction could explain why Vayehi Bechatzi Halayla is focused on the theme of "night." What does night actually represent? Generally, night gives off the

idea of something hidden. In fact, most violent crime occurs between 6:00 pm and 11:00 pm. The reason for this is because in darkness it is much easier to get away with things and hide it from the public. This might be why we focus on miracles that happen at night, because these stories are ones of hidden miracles. All the miracles within it can be argued for that it was just an anomaly or abnormality but justifiable through science. However, as we said, when it comes to *Kriyat Yam Suf*, this is not the case; no one can deny its miracles.

It is interesting to note how the Midrash emphasizes even further miracles, and Rashi quotes these as well, regarding the openness of the miracle of *Kriyat Yam Suf*. For example, the midrash describes how, when the water split, it is described as "*vayivku hamayim*." Rashi says that this means all the water in the world split as well at the same time, meaning everyone saw the miracle wherever they were. Now that is an open miracle!

We thus see how important it is to view the events in our daily lives with a God-consciousness. Many times, these events may be seen as just an anomaly or coincidence, but you should try to recognize that it may be Hashem helping us through non-open miracles.

Adir Hu - Expanded Edition

Koby Desmond ~ Shana Bet, Seattle WA

When first approaching the song Adir Hu, it's difficult to understand what the author is attempting to get across to us. The lyrics of the song are rather sparse, with each stanza listing one or multiple descriptions or characterizations of God and then ending with "*yivneh beito b'karov*," "may He rebuild His house soon," but aside from that, the song doesn't go into much detail on what these descriptions may mean or what we are asking God for at the end of the Seder night. The following poem I have written is an attempt to expand on the theme of Adir Hu by giving the best contextualization possible for these characterizations - where they may be found describing God in Tanach. In addition to this, each stanza is an attempt to define how these characterizations are perceived in God as He goes about bringing the Jews from exile to the Holy Land and rebuilding the Temple, a juxtaposition found in the original *piyut* with the repetition of the request for God to rebuild His house speedily.

(Note: the *pesukim* providing context for the descriptions of God are always to be found in the last line of every stanza. There are a few descriptions (such as **vatik**, **zakai**, or **lamud**) which never appear in *pesukim* linking these characteristics to God, either because they are a form of Hebrew which was not in common use in the times of Tanach or because they are actually Aramaic. In those cases the author has written entirely original stanzas

which attempt to illustrate God in those terms. In one case found in the second stanza the author added one word onto the beginning of the *pasuk* to better help with the flow of the poem.)

אֵ-ל אָדוֹן וְנִפְלָא, הָאוֹמֵר לְבָן אָדָם תִּתְאַמֵּץ
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מֵרֹאשׁ, וְחִשַּׁב אֶת הַקֵּץ[3]
לְעַם מִתְאַנֵּחַ תְּתֵּן יְשׁוּעָה, לַעֲבָדֶיךָ מְנָה תְּחַלֵּץ
ה' אֲדֹנֵינוּ מָה־אַדִּיר שִׁמְךָ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ[4]

All-powerful and amazing Hashem, Who instructs man: "take courage!"
Who was since the beginning, and determined the end
Grant salvation to a sighing people and release Your servants from foreign nations
Hashem, our master, how **regal** is Your name throughout the land.

אוּלָם בָּנוּי מֵאֲבָנִים טוֹבוֹת, בַּיִת עוֹלֶה עַל קַרְקַע שֶׁל עֲצִים
חַלּוֹנוֹת וְקִירוֹת, גַּג וּדְבִיר, וְכָל חַדְרֵי הַבַּיִת בְּזָהָב מְצֻפִּים[5]

---

[3] A reference to what we say in the paragraph "*Baruch shomer havtachato*" in Magid, which is that God calculated when the end of the exile would be and when he would be able to fulfill his promise to Avraham made at the brit bein ha'betarim.

[4] Tehillim 8:2

[5] These lines contain references to the First Temple built by King Shlomo. See Melachim 1 Perek 6.

הָאֵר פָּנֶיךָ[6] לְעַם נִמְשָׁל לְךָ לְכַלָּה[7], מֵאָז יוֹם חִתּוּנִים קֵרוֹבִים מִכְּרוּבִים[8] וְדוֹדִי
שׁוֹקָיו עַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ מְיֻסָּדִים עַל־אַדְנֵי־פָז מַרְאֵהוּ כַּלְּבָנוֹן בָּחוּר כָּאֲרָזִים[9]

A hall built of precious stones, the house rising above a floor of wood
Windows and walls, the roof and the sanctuary, and all the rooms of house were coated with gold
Shine Your face to a nation compared as a bride to You, from the day of the wedding closer than keruvim
And my beloved's legs are like marble pillars set in sockets of fine gold, His appearance like Levanon, more **choice** than cedar.

הָא-ל הָאֶחָד וְהָרִאשׁוֹן, אֲשֶׁר מִלְּבַדּוֹ אֵין אַחֵר
נָא אַל תּוֹסִיף לַעֲזֹב אוֹתָנוּ כְּהֶפְקֵר
וְלִקְהַל קְדוֹשֶׁיךָ תָּשׁוּב, וְשׁוּב בָּנוּ הֱיֵה בּוֹחֵר
גָּדוֹל ה' וּמְהֻלָּל מְאֹד וְלִגְדֻלָּתוֹ אֵין חֵקֶר[10]

The Singular God and the First, besides Whom there is no other

---

[6] A reference to Bamidbar 6:25.

[7] At the time that the Torah was given, Bnei Yisrael are said to have "married" God (see Bamidbar Rabbah 9:45). Even though they immediately made the Eigel haZahav afterwards and are then considered to have been adulterous, it says in Bamidbar Rabbah 20:19 that God's affection for them had still not diminished.

[8] As brought down in Yoma 54a, the relationship between God and B'nei Yisrael is compared to the image of the *keruvim* embracing each other. This line comes to suggest that the relationship is perhaps even closer than that, but that is one way for us to think of it.

[9] Shir haShirim 5:15

[10] Tehillim 145:3

Please, do not continue to abandon us as ownerless
And return to Your holy community, and choose us again
Great is Hashem, and exceedingly praiseworthy, and to His greatness there is no investigation.

הַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר מִלְּפָנָיו רַק רְעָדָה
שָׂכָר מַסְפִּיק לָנוּ הוּא לִתֵּן הוֹדָאָה
תִּזְכֹּר אֶת עֲדָתְךָ, אֲשֶׁר לְךָ כְּשִׁפְחָה
דּוֹדִי צַח וְאָדוֹם דָּגוּל מֵרְבָבָה[11]

The Awesome One, before Whom there is only trepidation
It is enough of a reward for us to give thanks
Remember Your congregation, who are like a maidservant to You
My beloved's skin is clear and ruddy, **distinguished** among thousands.

הַמַּבִּיט לָאָרֶץ וּלְמַעֲשָׂיו, וְאָזְנוֹ שׁוֹמַעַ אֲנוּשׁ בְּלַחֲשׁוֹ[12]
מַאֲרִיךְ אַפַּיִם, וְרַק לְאַרְבָּעָה דּוֹרוֹת יָשִׁיב גְּמוּל חֵטְא הָאָדָם בְּרֹאשׁוֹ[13]
יוֹרִישׁ לְעַמּוֹ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּמִיד עֵינָיו בָּהּ[14], וְיִשְׁכּוֹן עוֹד בְּמְכוֹנוֹ
מִי־זֶה ו בָּא מֵאֱדוֹם חֲמוּץ בְּגָדִים מִבָּצְרָה זֶה הָדָר בִּלְבוּשׁוֹ[15]

The One Who looks upon the earth and His creations, and His ear hears a man's whisperings
Who delays in anger, and Who only pays man back for his sins for three generations

---

[11] Shir haShirim 5:10

[12] A reference to Pirkei Avot 2:1.

[13] A reference to Shemot 34:7.

[14] A reference to Devarim 11:12.

[15] Yeshayah 63:1

Shall inherit for His nation the land which His eyes are constantly on, and He will dwell again in His sanctuary
Who is this Who comes from Edom, of red-stained garments from Bozrah, this One **magnificent** in His raiment?

אֲדוֹן הַצְּבָאוֹת, בְּיָמָיו הוּא עַתִּיק[16]
נָאֶה לָנוּ לְדַעֲתוֹ, וּבוֹ לְהִדָּבִיק
תָּשִׁיב הַבָּנִים לִגְבוּלָם[17], וּלְבָנֶיךָ תַּחֲזִיק
אַתָּה אֲשֶׁר שָׁנֶיךָ מֵעוֹלָם, וּלְקִנְיָנֶיךָ וָתִיק

The Lord of Hosts is ancient of days
It is pleasant for to us to know Him, and fitting to attach to Him
Return the children to the land, and strengthen Your children
You Whose years span from eternity, and Who is **faithful** to Your possessions.

הַבּוֹרֵא הַנִּשְׂגָּב עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָמִים
אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְהִבְדִּיל בֵּין הַמַּיִם[18]
תּוֹלִיךְ אֶת עַמְּךָ מִמִּדְבָּר[19] הַשְּׁבוּיִם
זַכַּאי הוּא לָנֶצַח וּפָעֳלוֹ תָּמִים[20]

The creator Who is exalted over all worlds

---

[16] One of God's titles in Aramaic is "Atik Yomin," or "One of Ancient Days."

[17] A reference to Yirmiah 31:17.

[18] A reference to Bereishit 1:7.

[19] A reference to Tehillim 136:16, which we say as part of Hallel during the Seder.

[20] A reference to Devarim 32:4.

Who fashioned the land and divided between the waters
Bring Your nation from the wilderness of captives
He is eternally **faultless** and His actions are perfect.

הַשּׁוֹפֵט הָעֶלְיוֹן מֵעוֹלָם וְעַד עַכְשָׁו
צוֹדֵק בַּדִּין וְנוֹשֵׂא פָּנִים[21] לְדַלָּיו
יְסָלַח עֲוֹנֵינוּ וְלֹא יַרְבֶּה לְיַסֵּר אֶת בָּנָיו[22]
צַדִּיק ה׳ בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו וְחָסִיד בְּכָל־מַעֲשָׂיו

The Supreme Judge from always until now
Who is righteous in judgment and shows favor to His unfortunate people
May He forgive us our sins and not increase in administering punishment
A Righteous One is Hashem in all His ways and **generous** to all His creations.

תַּצִּיל אֶת יְשׁוּרוּן מֵאוֹם עַזֵּי פָנִים וּבְנֵי בְלִיַּעַל
כִּי צָרוּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְעֵשָׂו אֶת יַעֲקֹב אָכָל[23]
תַּשְׂרֶה שְׂכִינָתְךָ עָלֵי אָרֶץ וּתְמַלֵּא אֶת הַהֵיכָל
טָהֳוֹר עֵינַיִם מֵרְאוֹת רָע וְהַבֵּיט אֶל־עָמָל לֹא תוּכָל[24]

Save Yeshurun from the brazen faced nation and a godless people
For they have hemmed in Yisrael, and Eisav has devoured Yaakov

---

[21] A reference to Bamidbar 6:26.

[22] A reference to Devarim 8:5.

[23] A reference to Yirmiah 10:25, which we say after pouring the Kos Shel Eiliyahu during Bareich in the Seder.

[24] Chavakuk 1:13

Let Your presence settle upon the land and fill the sanctuary
You Whose eyes are too **pure** to see evil and Who is not able to look upon wrongdoing.

הָרַחוּם תְּחַשֵּׁב אֶת עַמְּךָ כְּאָנוּס וְלֹא כְּמֵזִיד
וְתַחְזֹר לְבֵיתְךָ הַקָּדוֹשׁ שֶׁתִּבָּנֶה בֶּעָתִיד
תְּזַרֵּעַ לָנוּ הַגְּאֻלָּה וְתָקִים אֶת צֶמַח דָּוִד[25]
אֵ-ל שַׁדַּ-י הַנּוֹתֵן לָנוּ כּוֹחַ לְהִתְחַדֵּשׁ, אֶל-הַ הַיָּחִיד

O Merciful One, consider Your nation as those forced to sin and not deliberate
And return to Your holy house, may it be rebuilt in the future to come
Sow for us the redemption, and grow the sprout of David
El-Shaddai Who gives us strength to renew, the **singular** God.

נָא אַדִּיר וְאָדוֹן הָסֵר מַעָלֵינוּ הַכְּאֵב
וְלִמְעוֹנְךָ הַמְּרוֹמָם תָּשׁוּב וְעַל כִּסְאֲךָ תֵּשֵׁב
וּמֵאִתָּנוּ תְּקַבֵּל אֶת סֵדֶר הַקָּרְבָּנוֹת שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לְךָ עָרֵב[26]
הֵן־אֵ-ל כַּבִּיר וְלֹא יִמְאַס כַּבִּיר כֹּחַ לֵב[27]

Please powerful master, remove the pain from us
And return to Your lofty abode and sit on Your throne
And accept the service of offerings from us, may it be pleasing to You

---

[25] A reference to Yirmiah 23:5, which is reflected in the bracha of "Et Tzemach David" which we say every day in Shemoneh Esrei.
[26] A reference to Malachi 3:4, which we say in a Yehi Ratzon at the end of the Shemoneh Esrei.
[27] Iyov 36:5

Behold, God is **mighty**, and does not reject; **mighty** in strength, and in heart.

חֲמֹל עַל תַּלְמִידְךָ הָאָהוּב וְהֶחָמוּד
אֲשֶׁר הוּא לְעוֹלָם נֶגֶד עֵינֶיךָ צָמוּד
תַּמְתִּיק לָנוּ אֶת חַיֵּינוּ בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה וְתַלְמוּד
חָכָם מִכָּל הַחֲכָמִים אֱלֹקִים שָׂפִיר וְלָמוּד

Have pity on Your beloved and adored student
Who is always present and standing before Your eyes
Sweeten our lives with words of Torah and teaching
Wiser than all, superb and **knowledgeable** God.

ה' הוּא גִּבּוֹר חַיִל; נֶגֶד אוֹיְבֵינוּ הוּא יִשְׁלֹף חַרְבּוֹ
וּכְאִישׁ מִלְחָמָה הוּא יֵצֵא בְּתִפְאֶרֶת כְּלֵי מִלְחַמְתּוֹ
וְאֶל עִירוֹ הוּא יָשׁוּב וְיִקַּח אֶת שְׁלָלוֹ
יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ עוֹלָם נָעֶד אָבְדוּ גּוֹיִם מֵאַרְצוֹ[28]

Hashem is a valorous warrior; against our enemies He shall unsheathe His sword
And like a man of war, He shall go out to battle in the splendor of His battle garments
And He shall return to His city and take His spoils
Hashem is **king** eternally; nations are driven from His land.

אַתָּה מֵעַל כָּל עוֹף וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף אֲשֶׁר יְעוֹפְפוּ בְּכָנְפַיִם
וְגַם אַתָּה גָּבֹהַּ מִשָּׁמַיִם הָעֲלִיוֹנִים וּמִמְּשָׁרְתֶיךָ הַלּוֹהֲטִים[29]
תַּשְׁקִיף נָא מִמְּעוֹן קָדְשֶׁךָ[30] עָלֵינוּ בְּרוּאֶיךָ הַשְּׁפָלִים

---

[28] Tehillim 10:16

[29] A reference to Tehillim 104:4.

[30] A reference to Devarim 26:15.

כִּי גָדוֹל ה' וּמְהֻלָּל מְאֹד נוֹרָא הוּא עַל־כָּל־אֱלֹקִים[31]

You are above any flying animals and winged birds that fly in the sky
You are even higher than the highest of heavens and Your flaming servants
Look down upon us from Your holy abode on us, Your lowly creations
For Hashem is great and exceedingly praiseworthy; He is more **awesome** than any power.

מְקוֹר הַחַיִּים וּבַעַל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת הַטּוֹב וְהַמֵּטִיב[32]
אַל תִּזְנָחֵנוּ כִּי נָמוֹט וְנֶגֶד שׂוֹנְאֵינוּ עֲמֹד לָרִיב
תְּכוֹנֵן אֶת צִיּוֹן עִירְךָ וְאֶת גְּבוּלוֹת אַרְצֵנוּ תַּרְחִיב
אֱלוֹקִים הֶחָזָק וְהַיָּשָׁר ה' הַקָּדוֹשׁ וְהַסַּגִּיב

Source of life and master of souls, the One Who is Good and Does Good
Do not abandon us when we stumble, and stand up to fight against our enemies
Gather in Tzion Your city and expand the borders of our land
God Who is strong and just, Hashem the holy and **sublime** one.

אָנָּא רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֲשֶׁר זִיו שְׁכִינָתְךָ כִּזְרִיחַת הַחַמָּה
מִי יַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי כַּעַסְךָ וּמִי יָקוּם בְּתוֹךְ שַׁלְהֶבֶת שֶׁל חֵמָה

---

[31] Tehillim 96:4

[32] This is a title of Hashem found in the *beracha* of the same name which was instituted when Hashem made a miracle to prevent the bodies of those slain in the Battle of Beitar from rotting (Berachot 48b).

תְּגַלֶּה אֶת זְרוֹעֲךָ לָעוֹלָם וְתַבְעֵר אַפְּךָ עַל אֻמָּה הָרְשָׁעָה
מִי זֶהּ מֶלֶךְ הַכָּבוֹד ה' עִזּוּז וְגִבּוֹר ה' גִּבּוֹר מִלְחָמָה[33]

Please merciful and gracious one, Whose presence glows like the shining of the sun
Who can stand before Your anger, and Who can stand in a blaze of wrath
Reveal Your arm to the world and let Your anger burn against the nation of wickedness
Who is the king of honor? Hashem is a **powerful** and heroic one, Hashem is a man of war.

הָאֱלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה לִפְנֵי שֶׁנִּבְרָא כָּל הָעוֹלָם כֻּלּוֹ
מָה אֱנוֹשׁ כִּי תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ וּבֶן אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵהוּ
וְאַף אַתָּה תִּפְקֹד וְתִזְכֹּר אֶת כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּעַמְּךָ בְּרֹאשָׁו[34]
פֹּדֶה ה' נֶפֶשׁ עֲבָדָיו וְלֹא יֶאְשְׁמוּ כָּל־הַחֹסִים בּוֹ[35]

God Who was before the world and its entirety was created
What is mankind that You should remember it, and any person that You should count him?
Yet You shall count and remember each one of Your nation according to his head count
Hashem is a **redeemer** for the souls of His servants, and none that take refuge in him shall be ashamed.

---

[33] Tehillim 24:10

[34] A reference to the Machatzit haShekel found in Parashat Ki Tisa (Shemot 30:11-16).

[35] Tehillim 34:23

דַּיָּן הָאֱמֶת, אֵין שֹׁחַד יְסַלֵּף דְּבָרֶיךָ[36]
וְכָל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם שָׁוִים בַּדִּין לְפָנֶיךָ
אַל נָא יִהְיֶה עַמְּךָ כִּרְשָׁעִים בְּעֵינֶיךָ
צַדִּיק אַתָּה ה' וְיָשָׁר מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ[37]

True Judge, no bribe can distort Your words
And all those that pass through the world are equal when judged before You
May Your nation not be viewed as evil in Your eyes
Righteous are You Hashem, and just are Your laws.

יָדַעְנוּ אֶת אֲמִתְּךָ רַק אַחֲרֵי שֶׁמִּמְצָרַיִם יָצָאנוּ
וְעַתָּה אֲנַחְנוּ שְׁרוּיִם בְּשַׁחַת וּבְקֶלוֹן שֶׁל גָּלוּיוֹתֵינוּ
תֵּן בְּלִבֵּנוּ אַהֲבָה וְיִרְאָה וְכָל פֶּה יְיַחֶדְךָ צוּרֵנוּ
אֵין־קָדוֹשׁ כַּה' כִּי אֵין בִּלְתֶּךָ וְאַיִן צוּר כֵּאלֹקֵינוּ

We knew of the Truth of You only after we left Egypt
And now we are sunk in the corruption and degradation of our exile
Put in our hearts the love and fear so that every mouth may unify You, our Rock
There is none as **holy** as Hashem, and none as independent as our God.

אֵ-ל חַנּוּן אֵין אָדָם יָכוֹל לְהַעֲרִיךְ וְלִמְדֹּד אֶת טוּבְךָ וְחַסְדֶּךָ
תַּרְאֶה לָנוּ שׁוּב אֶת חֶמְלָתְךָ כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַרְתָּ בַּמִּדְבָּר שִׁמְלָתְךָ לֹא בָלְתָה מֵעָלֶיךָ[38]
תְּבִיאֵנוּ לְהַר קָדְשֶׁךָ[39] וְשָׂמָה נַעֲבָדְךָ בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם וְנִשְׂמַח בְּבֶן יִשַׁי מְשִׁיחֶךָ

---

[36] A reference to Devarim 16:19, although the point here is to show that God cannot be swayed by bribes as opposed to humans.

[37] Tehillim 119:137

[38] Devarim 8:4

[39] A reference to Yeshayah 56:7.

כִּי אֵ-ל רַחוּם ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לֹא יַרְפְּךָ וְלֹא יַשְׁחִיתֶךָ וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח אֶת־בְּרִית אֲבֹתֶיךָ[40]

Gracious God, no man can value or measure Your goodness and kindness
Show us again Your compassion, as You said in the desert "your clothes did not wear off of you"
Bring us to Your holy mountain and there we shall worship You with a complete heart and we shall be rejoice in the son of Yishai, Your anointed one
For a **merciful** God is Hashem, He shall not weaken You and He shall not destroy You, and He shall not forget the covenant of Your fathers.

הַמּוֹלֵךְ בְּכָבוֹד עַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵּבֵל
רַק אַתָּה יָכוֹל לָשֵׂאת אֶת הַסֵּבֶל
אָמְנָם נָכוֹן לְיַסְּרֵנוּ, אַךְ אָנוּ כְּבָר יְגֵעִים מֵהַהֶבֶל
חָלִלָה לָאֵ-ל מֵרָשַׁע וְשַׁ-דַּי מֵעָוֶל[41]

The one Who rules in honor over all the dwellers of this temporary world
Only You can bear the burden
In reality, You are correct in punishing us, but we are already weary of the depravity
Being evil is too much of a desecration for God, and too much for One Who is **abundant** in giving to be unjust.

הָאֶחָד וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְרוּם הָעוֹלָם הוּא מַשְׁקִיף
הַמָּקוֹם הַיּוֹדֵעַ הַכֹּל אֲשֶׁר אֵין אִישׁ יָכוֹל לִבְרֹחַ מִמֶּנּוּ וּשְׁכִינָתוֹ אֶת הָאָרֶץ מַקִּיף
הוּא יִנְחִילֵנוּ הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ וְעַל בָּנֵינוּ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם הוּא יוֹסִיף[42]

---

[40] Devarim 4:31

[41] Iyov 34:10

[42] There are many examples to be found in the Chumash (as well as some in Nevi'im) of these two promises which Hashem made to

שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ וְקָרֵב הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂמַח וְנָשִׂישׂ בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם, אַתָּה ה' הַתַּקִּיף

The Singular and Holy One, Who surveys from the heavens of the heavens and the height of the world
The Omnipresent One Who knows all, from Whom no one can flee and Whose presence surrounds the land
He shall inherit for us the land He promised to our forefathers, and He shall increase our children until they are greater than the sand of the sea
Hear our voice, and bring the days when we shall be happy and rejoice in Yerushalayim, Hashem, The One Who **Prevails**.

Avraham. Some examples of these are the episodes of the Brit Bein haBetarim, where God informs Avraham of the future slavery in Egypt and the eventual redemption(as well as telling him his children will be greater in number than the stars), which is found in Bereishit 15:1-21, and the promise God made to Avraham after the Akeidah, found in Bereishit 22:17, where God promises Avraham his children will be more numerous than the sand on the shore.

Who Knows One? Which One?

Gabe Small ~ Shana Aleph, Pittsburgh PA

Disclaimer: While I am trying to show differences in languages, I may have not translated perfectly.

"Who Knows One?" is a song dear to many Jews' hearts. But did you know that not every version agrees on what each number represents? I'm not just talking about slight differences like "two are the luchot that Moshe brought" versus "two are the tablets of the covenant," depending on how you sing it. Rather, I'm talking about differences of what the number represents in the first place. If you think about it, there are many groups of things in Judaism, and many options of what the number 2 could represent besides the *luchot*. For example, it would not be surprising to find a version that instead of the two *luchot*, it's "two are Moshe and Aharon." There are of course slight differences, but I'll focus on the major ones. Let's run the numbers.

1. Everyone agrees that one is Hashem, so no need to go into more detail on that.

2. Regarding the second verse, I have already mentioned the main difference where most languages I've seen say that two are the *luchot*, Ladino versions generally say "Moshe and Aharon." Interestingly, the only reference to Rafael Baró's Ladino version from *Oracions en català dels conversos jueus*, by Jaume Riera i Sans, does not have

anything representing two, though I was unable to find the primary source.

3, 4, 5. Three, four, and five have the classic answers of forefathers, matriarchs, and the five books of the Torah respectively, with the main difference being if the names are listed out or not.

6. At six, there are two versions again. Most languages have the classic answer of the six books of the Mishnah, but many Ladino versions have instead the number of the weekdays (excluding Shabbat) as the answer.

7. At seven, they all agree again, saying they are the days of the week (some say "including Shabbat").

8. For eight, almost every version has Brit Milah, with the exception of the aforementioned Ladino version which has "*Los vuyt dies del marit*," which refers to "eight are the days of marriage," which may be talking about the wedding day and the seven days of *Sheva Berachot* that follow.

9, 10. Nine and ten both refer to the same thing in all versions, nine being the months of pregnancy, and ten being the Ten Commandments.. Notably, Ten is the last stanza in the version from Israel S. Révah's *Antonio Enríquez Gomez: Un écrivain marrane*.

11. Eleven is split, with most versions saying that eleven are the stars ("of Joseph" or "of the sky"), but two versions, the versions from Isaac Maimon's & Isaac Arose's Passover Agada in Hebrew with Ladino and

English Translation (the Turkish Version and Rhodes Version), have the brothers without Joseph as the answer.

12. Twelve representing the tribes of Israel is true for all of the versions, though the two just mentioned specify "with Joseph." Two Ladino versions, Tolosana Monçonís' version and Rafael Baró's version from *Oracions en català dels conversos jueus* by Jaume Riera i Sans, both end at twelve.

13. There are actually three or four versions of what thirteen is. Hebrew, English, one Yiddish, and Isabel Martí y Cortés' from *Oracions en català dels conversos jueus* by Jaume Riera i Sans, all have the thirteen attributes of Hashem as thirteen. A different Yiddish version and an unattributed Ladino version both have the age of *bar mitzvah* as thirteen. Judeo-Georgian and the two versions from Isaac Maimon's & Isaac Arose's Passover Agada in Hebrew with Ladino and English Translation (the Turkish Version and Rhodes Version) have the Rambam's Principles of Faith as thirteen (the *Ani Maamins*). Lastly Angela S. Selke' The Conversos of Majorca has "the thirteen words of truth" as thirteen which may refer to the thirteen attributes of Hashem or something else entirely.

Most versions end at thirteen, but Angela S. Selke's The Conversos of Majorca's version ends at fourteen, with fourteen being the articles of faith. What this means is unclear. It may be referring to the fourteen articles of Christian faith. Why would Christian beliefs be in a Haggadah? It is important to note that this Haggadah was a version from conversos, so perhaps they tried to

throw the Christians off by basically declaring at the end that Christianity is the superior religion (*chas v'shalom*). It may instead be referring to the Rambam's Principles of Faith, and maybe the people who sang this version had an extra one that we don't have. Alternatively it may refer to his Mishneh Torah, which has fourteen books. I am not certain myself as to what it is referring to.

Learning about different variations can teach you about the cultures they come from. It was interesting to find out, for example, that since Ladino versions come from Sephardi cultures, they tend to put more of a focus on the Rambam, the great Sephardic rabbi. Pesach is all about the common backstory for all Jews, so it is a perfect time to learn about the parts that are not common to everyone.

Source: https://www.jewishlanguages.org/echad-mi-yodeah

Chad Gadya: Not Just A Kid's Tale

Simon Pinter ~ Shana Bet, Lawrence NY

This poem is centered around an idea I had a while ago. It's the experience of the goat of Chad Gadya, watching the whole song unfold, and what its thought process would be like as it watches: the sense of confusion, wonderment, betrayal, and finally the briefest instant of understanding, as God arrives and puts things into place. I hope that as you read this poem, you can reflect on moments in your life where maybe you too felt like this kid, and now you can look back with better understanding.

Structure:

Color (or when printed in B&W, font style) represents the rhyme of final syllable
Designed to be sung like the first verse throughout
Number of rhymes
Green: 10 - old - Regular text
Blue: 19 - ating - Bold
Orange: 15 - aining - Underline
Red: 11 - eeling - Italicized
Turquoise: 7 - using - Bold and underline
Purple: 3 - -ightening - Light fill color

Verse 1:
Freshly sold, freshly sold
The jaws close in, I'm stuck there, waiting

Worse than told, worse than told

Verse 2:
The eater's bit, its strength deflating
Shimmy out as pain's abating
Feel so cold, feel so cold

Verse 3:
As biter's hit with painful caning
Want to go but hesitating
Want to see what's aggravating
Watch unfold, watch unfold

Verse 4:
Fire, water comes down raining
Ox drinks up, water attaining
With each step, the pain's pulsating
But each step keeps complicating
So I'll hold, so I'll hold

Verse 5:
The ox is cut, then eerie feeling
Death arrives, there's no refraining
Thinking's warped, I watch It reigning
Stay or flee, I'm alternating
What comes next, tension's inflating
Uncontrolled, uncontrolled

Verse 6:
Now comes the truth, a grand revealing
God shines down with light, repealing
Death is slain, just God remaining
Rise up as my strength's regaining

Feel His light there, coruscating
Fills my heart, His love placating
I'm consoled, I'm consoled

Verse 7:
A wonderous maelstrom, so confusing
At its end I'm left there, reeling
Yet I'm better, thanks to healing
God moves back, as if awaning
Please don't leave, I cry out, straining
But I'm late, it's passed orating
Feel a void, it's too frustrating
So I scold, so I scold

Verse 8:
Sit and think, my rage diffusing
Look all over at past bruising
Realize that He'd been there, steeling
Helping me, but still concealing
Every instance, His maintaining
Only here from His sustaining
Only love, He can't be hating
Glimpse the light of His creating
I behold, I behold

Verse 9:
Realization smacks light lightening
All the while, was abusing
When I turned and felt accusing
Then was numbed and left unfeeling
Emptiness had left me kneeling
It was always Him retaining
I was kept by His ordaining

Just a glimpse of calculating
Left me awe-struck, captivating
In His fold, in His fold

Verse 10:
E'en the premise feels so frightening
And yet too I feel life brightening
Sense regained, it's so enthusing
Now I know and feel His choosing
I'm so grateful for His dealing
All is covered with His sealing
Even when there seems like staining
Or you're trapped and feel profaning
Sit and stay, there's help in waiting
When you know, it's liberating
I've been sold, I've been sold

A Night to Remember and a Song to Sing

Dovi Deutsch ~ Shana Bet, Woodmere NY

You've done it. You've gotten to the end of the Seder. Now what? Apparently, by the looks of many haggadot, it's time to read Shir HaShirim. When did this custom begin? And why (do some people) do it? Mesechet Soferim (18:14), an early post-Talmudic source, recommends reading Shir HaShirim the last days of Pesach (and interestingly, does not mention reading it in *shul* on the Shabbat of Chol HaMoed). The Rema mentions the custom to recite it on the Sabbath. It is only in the late 19th century that there is a record of the practice to read it at the Seder before one goes to sleep (see Chayei Adam 130 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 119).

Despite the late appearance of the custom, many have noted the numerous parallels between Shir HaShirim and the Exodus narrative. Shir HaShirim Rabbah (1:9) interprets the verse (Shir HaShirim 1:9) "*I have likened you, my beloved / to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots*," to be referring to the Egyptian chariots drowning during *Kriyat Yam Suf*. Machzor Vitri takes this a step further and argues that the whole of Shir HaShirim actually alludes to the four stages of *Geulah*. Others, such as the Otzar Dinim HaMinhagim, pick up on the abundance of springtime imagery throughout Shir HaShirim and relate it to Pesach, since

the holiday must occur during the spring season (see Devarim 16:1).

There are many ideas and themes in Shir HaShirim that parallel and enhance ideas explored during the Seder: the relationship between *Bnei Yisrael* and God, the construction of the narrative of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and *Shir HaShirim*, and the literary motifs employed in each. Before we explore these ideas in depth, it's important to understand what exactly Shir HaShirim is and the purpose it serves in the Biblical canon.

At first glance, Shir HaShirim seems quite out of place in our Biblical canon. Not only is it one of the only texts in the canon without *Shem Hashem* (the other famously being Megillat Esther), but the contents within seem nothing like the rest of Tanach. It explores the blossoming romance between two unnamed characters, the male *Dod* and the female *Raya.* Their desires and lustful yearnings are intimately explored through a series of vignettes. It's not just a love story, but a deeply erotic and sensual tale. Seemingly, it is more akin to a Danielle Steel novel than the other divinely inspired works of Shlomo HaMelech.[43]

As with any work of poetry, understanding Shir HaShirim only on a purely *pshat* level does the work a huge disservice. In fact, Chazal explicitly warned against this approach, claiming that anyone who treats Shir HaShirim in that manner "introduces evil to the world" (Sanhedrin 101a). The book is seen as a holy one. Mishna

[43] According to tradition, Shlomo HaMelech authored Shir HaShirim, Mishlei, and Kohelet

Yadayim (3:5) quotes Rabbi Akiva's opinion about Shir HaShirim: "The whole world is not as worthy as the day on which Shir HaShirim was given to Bnei Yisrael. For all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies!"

Chazal instead understood the text both in its plain meaning as a love story and as an allegory for the relationship between God and the Jewish people.[44] The power of the metaphor lies not just in the emotional intensity that romantic love elicits, but also in the type of relationship that it creates. A person's familial relationship is not by choice; he or she is born into it. However, in a romantic relationship, a person **chooses** to give his or her love to someone else. It's not an obligation that's been thrust upon him, but a covenant entered willingly.

The concept of love for God is certainly not foreign to Judaism, and the Rambam indeed recognized the importance of this emotion in the relationship. He writes in the Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Teshuva 10:3) that *Ahavat Hashem*, love of God, should be like (or even more than) the "like a love-sick individual, whose mind is at no time free from his passion for a particular woman, the thought of her filling his heart at all times, when sitting down or rising up, when he is eating or drinking." The Rambam explicitly connects this to Shir HaShirim, "The entire Shir HaShirim is indeed an allegory descriptive of this love."

---

[44] The "husband/wife" metaphor appears many times throughout Nach, Most notably in the prophecies of Hoshea, Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel, etc.

As all great poetry tends to do, Shir HaShirim allows one to get lost in its evocative and sensual imagery, and channel that experientialism towards God.

Although this relationship is certainly evident in Shir HaShirim, it is not readily apparent in the Exodus narrative itself. One point of contention that comes to mind is that despite how we declare "Dayenu" at the Seder for God having taken us out of Egypt, during *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, we exclaimed just the opposite sentiment to Moshe at the Red Sea: "Were there not enough graves in Egypt?" (Exodus 14:11).

Furthermore, in Yechezkel, the eponymous prophet admonishes the Jewish people for worshiping Avoda Zara in Egypt and relays that God only took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt "for the sake of My name" (Yechezkel 20:7-9). That diction seems to imply that it was a sense of obligation that God redeemed the nation, not any sort of love. So how could it be that the love described in Shir HaShirim between the *Dod* and the *Raya* is meant to parallel the love God had for us during *Yetziat Mitzrayim*?

If we analyze some of the literary tools employed in Shir HaShirim, this contradiction all but disappears. One of the narrative devices in the tale is the ebb and flow of the relationship between the *Dod* and the *Raya*. The "will they/won't they" dance the two of them play not only draws you into the drama of it all, but also works on a metatextual level. Sometimes, the *Raya* wants to be with the *Dod*, but the Dod is unavailable, and sometimes the *Dod* wants to be the *Raya*, but the *Raya* is unavailable. In a similar way, the relationship between God and Bnei

Yisrael has its ups and downs, with the Jewish people often straying from God and then returning to him as we know from the Exodus narrative.

The parallels between the Shir HaShirim are not merely textual but exist within the construction of the narratives as well. The Mishna in Pesachim (10:4) teaches us that the proper way to tell over the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is to start with the degradation of the Jewish people and end in its glory. The Gemara (Pesachim 116a) elaborates on this with Shmuel understanding the degradation to be the slavery the Jews endured in *Mitzrayim* and Rav taking it to mean that the Jews were *Ovdei Avodah Zara*.

Meanwhile, Shir HaShirim begins with the *Raya* seemingly embarrassed of her own sun-tanned appearance after being forced to work her brother's vineyards and leave her own vineyard unkempt (Shir HaShirim 1:5-6). Rashi understands this allegorically to refer to the Jews being *Ovdei Avodah Zara*, similar to the approach of Rav.[45] In the *pshat,* the *Raya* was degraded by her work and her appearance, and in the *drash,* the Jews were degraded by idol worship.

As previously mentioned, Pesach itself is heavily associated with the spring season. The relationship between the *Dod* and the *Raya* develops opposite the

[45] Incidentally, we hold like Shmuel and begin the tale of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* with our enslavement. This doesn't negate the parallel, as we can understand the Raya being forced to work her brother's vineyards in a similar way to Bnei Yisrael being forced to work for Pharaoh.

changing of the seasons. As the dead of winter blossoms into spring, the love between the *Dod* and the *Raya* blossoms into a deeper connection with one another. In a similar way, retelling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* deepens our own connection with HaKadosh Baruch Hu as we recall the wonders and miracles He's done for us.

Another enduring motif is that of Eretz Yisrael. Shir HaShirim doesn't just take place in Eretz Yisrael, but it uses the land to further its themes. Throughout the poem, both the *Raya* and the *Dod* dotingly compare each other to the beauty of the land. "My beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna / in the vineyards of Ein Gedi" (Songs 1:14). "Your hair is like a flock of goats / that trail down Mount Gilead" (Songs 4:1). You're meant to see the land in the same way the *Dod* and the *Raya* see each other. The actualization of the beauty of our relationship to God manifests in the land of Israel. The Seder ends with a call of "Next Year in Jerusalem." Without an emotional core, that cry rings hollow. The longing and desire that the *Dod* and the *Raya* feel towards each other you should feel towards the Promised Land.

Our Sages tell us that the Seder is meant to be experiential. We're not meant to view it as an intellectual exercise and understand the story in the abstract, but feel it deeply and personally. It's very easy to understand the story in the abstract, but to actually feel it in an experiential manner is no simple task. Perhaps that's the

reason Shir Hashirim came to be read during Pesach.[46] Great art is capable of moving even the most rational of Migdal men to tears. When utilized properly, it allows for one to get swept up in their emotions and channel them towards something holy.

[46] It is for this reason I would align with the custom cited in the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch et al. and read Shir HaShirim during the Seder. If for no other reason, "So the children will ask."