

On the Study of Haggadah: A Note on Arami Oved Avi and Biblical Intertextuality

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[The verse (Devarim 26:7) states] “And he saw our affliction.” This refers to abstinence from marital relations as it states, “And God saw the Jewish people and God knew.”

Passover Haggadah

The essence of *perishus derech erez* (abstinence) is that the Egyptian oppressors disrupted Jewish family life. Because of the killing of their children, Jewish men couldn't live a normal life with their wives. The same happened under the Nazis just a number of years ago. But this basis of this passage in the Haggadah is cryptic. What did the *Ba'al Haggadah* feel the need to explain? How does he derive “this refers to abstinence from marital relations” from the Scriptural citation?

And the Egyptians treated us harshly and they tortured us and imposed hard labor on us. And we called out to God the Lord of our forefathers and God heard our voices and saw our torture and our toil and our pressure.

Devarim 26:6-7

וַנִּצְעַק (and we called out)—what did they complain about? They complained that they were tortured, וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ —and their *tefillah* was accepted. (And God heard our voices)—God was aware of the *inui*. Why did the Torah then have to say וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנֵינוּ (and

וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנֵינוּ - זוֹ פְּרִישוּת דְּרָדָה
אֲרַץ, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיִּרְא אֱלֹקִים
אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּדַּע אֱלֹקִים.
הַגְּדָה שֶׁל פֶּסַח

וַיִּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ הַמִּצְרִים וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ, וַיִּתְּנוּ
עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה. וַנִּצְעַק אֵל ה' אֱלֹקֵי
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת קוֹלֵנוּ, וַיִּרְא אֶת
עֲנֵינוּ וְאֶת עֲמָלֵנוּ וְאֶת לַחֲצֵנוּ.
דְּבָרִים כו:ו-ז

¹ This article is a transcription of portions of an undated *shiur* at Yeshiva University in the late '70s or early '80s. English translations were added by the editorial staff. Rabbi Holzer ('99YC, '05BRGS, '06R) is a surgical dermatologist in private practice in Miami Beach, FL.

[He] saw our torture)? Apparently וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנִינֵינוּ refers to a different *inui* than וַיַּעֲנֵנוּ. There are many kinds of *inuyim*, of torture.

It came to pass many days later that the King of Egypt died and the Jewish people were despondent because of the labor and they cried out and their cries ascended to God from the labor. And God heard their cries and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And God saw the Jewish people and God knew.

Shemos 2:23-25

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעֻקוּ וַתַּעַל
שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הָעֲבֹדָה. וַיִּשְׁמַע
אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ
אֶת אַבְרָהָם אֶת יִצְחָק וְאֶת יַעֲקֹב. וַיִּרְא
אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּדַע אֱלֹהִים.
שְׁמוֹת ב:כג-כה

The *za'akah* (prayer) concerned the *inui* that stemmed from the *avodah* (labor). וַיִּשְׁיִמוּ עָלָיו שָׁרֵי מְסִיִּם לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם (They placed on them taxation officers in order to torture them with their load, Shemos 1:11)—*sivlosam* and this *inui* are the same. The Jews complained about the fact that their labor was backbreaking, torturous, subject to Egyptian chicanery; they needed to fill a quota every day, and the work was not productive. Slaves become accustomed to their overall way of life and don't resent it, but they do resent unproductive labor, physical pain, the misery of having to deliver a quota of bricks every day, of working without pay, of being beaten. Those were the experiences included in וַנִּצְעַק אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ (And we called out to God the Lord of our forefathers). How do I know this? The Torah in Shemos records that וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל ה' (their cries ascended to God from the labor)—their cries rose *from the work*—they complained about all the aspects of cruel, unproductive physical *avodah*. The people complained about the *inui* from the *avodah*, and God accepted their prayer.

Since the Torah writes וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת קִלְנוּ (and God heard our voices), the statement וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנִינֵינוּ (and saw our torture) is unnecessary. Therefore, וַיִּרְא refers to God “seeing” a different matter, one about which they didn't complain. This matter was not included in their prayers, it was unknown to them or, if known, it was a secondary concern, thought to be minor; but God saw that which they did not emphasize. One aspect of bondage worried the people most—work, מִן הָעֲבֹדָה—but there was a different experience of which the people were unaware, one that caused them to suffer, that inflicted pain upon them, even as this kind of suffering was not experienced as a major evil by the people themselves. When God came down to redeem them, וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים, He saw something that they did not see; וַיִּדַע אֱלֹהִים—He knew something that they did not know—that it is not the physical slavery, but an aspect unknown to them that nonetheless, in time, would destroy *Knesses Yisrael*. That *anyenu* is פְּרִישׁוֹת דְּרָדָה אֶרֶץ—how the Egyptians attempted to dissolve the Jewish family.

God is omniscient; he felt the people's distress and pain about matters that they didn't mention. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* liberated the Jewish people because they were slaves and oppressed, but he saw something they didn't see.

[The verse (Shemos 3:7) states] “And God said: I have surely seen,” it doesn't say, “I have seen” but rather, “I have surely seen” (using the same verb twice). God told Moshe: You see one perspective, but I see two.

Shemos Rabbah 3:2

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' רָאָה רְאִיתִי, רְאִיתִי לֹא
נֹאמַר אֲלֵא רָאָה רְאִיתִי, אָמַר לוֹ
הַקַּב"ה מִשֶּׁה אַתָּה רוֹאָה רְאִייה אַחַת
וְאֲנִי רוֹאָה שְׁתֵּי רְאִיוֹת.
שְׁמוֹת רַבֵּה ג:ב

You see the most conspicuous afflictions, but I also see the torture and pain that is private, in your intimate life, that which you don't emphasize, that of which you are not aware. This interpretation is not a *derashah* (homiletic interpretation), but rather *peshat* (literal understanding) in the verse—for without this explanation, there is no need to mention Divine *yedi'ah* (knowledge) after His having heard, וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם (Shemos 2:24). The message is that those small matters that undermine human dignity are more responsible for Divine action and redemption than the slavery itself.

[The verse (Devarim 26:7) states] “And our toil.” This refers to the sons as is states (Shemos 1:22) “Every son who is born shall be thrown into the river and all daughters shall live.”

Passover Haggadah

וְאֵת עֲמָלָנוּ - אֱלֹהֵי הַבְּנִים. כָּמָה
שָׁנְאָמֵר: כָּל הַבֵּן הַיְלֹוֹד הַיְאֵרָה
תִּשְׁלִיכֵהוּ וְכָל הַבֵּת תִּחְיֶיוּ.
הַגְּדָה שֶׁל פֶּסַח

וְאֵת עֲמָלָנוּ - אֱלֹהֵי הַבְּנִים (And our toil. This refers to the sons)—I understand this passage in the same spirit as the preceding. The edict concerning the sons was issued 80 years before Moshe's mission, when Moshe was a baby; the decree had long been abandoned, and the Jews of the Exodus were the third generation on. The Pharaoh who had issued that edict had died, and the Jews had forgotten about his decree; their cries concerned only the whip of the oppressor that cracked over them if they did not deliver their quota. The fact that 80 years before there had been a holocaust of children—this, they had forgotten. It is not yet 80 years since the Holocaust we witnessed, and how many have forgotten? Chazal raise the possibility that the Pharaoh of the Exodus killed children as well—regarding מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם (The king of Egypt died), Chazal (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:34) understand that Pharaoh became a leper and killed children for his therapeutic baths. The Jews understood that edict very well, since it concerned their own children. But the Haggadah cites כָּל הַבֵּן הַיְלֹוֹד הַיְאֵרָה תִּשְׁלִיכֵהוּ (Every son who is born shall be thrown into the river)—those children were the ones killed 80 years ago! But God remembers אֶת עֲנִיָּנוּ וְאֵת עֲמָלָנוּ (our torture and our toil)—not those killed now, but even a decree which was abandoned, archaic by this time, even though the people didn't mention it. Who remembers the Holocaust now? Even people who lost close members of their own family don't remember; even those who themselves went through Treblinka or Auschwitz—many have told me that their feelings are dulled, that they don't remember, that they don't **want** to remember it.

So the people didn't mention this edict in וַנִּצְעַק (we cried out), but as for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*—all those matters, He remembered. They complained about the wounds that the oppressor inflicted the day before, מִן הָעֵבֹודָה (from the labor), but there were many items, cruel, tragic items that they forgot. One of them was the tragedy of the little children thrown into the Nile—80 years later, who is supposed to remember? But *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* remembers. That is *peshat* in אֶת עֲנִיָּנוּ וְאֵת עֲמָלָנוּ.

I want to tell you something else. Everything which is Torah is not simply to be read, but also understood. *Sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (the recounting of the Exodus), in particular—*sippur* means not to be recited, but understood.

A story is told of R. Eliezer, R. Yehoshua, R. Elazar ben Azaryah, R. Akiva and R. Tarfon who were reclining in Bnei Brak and recounting (*mesaprim*) the Exodus the entire night.

Passover Haggadah

מְעֹשֶׂה בְּרַבֵּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבֵּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבֵּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן
עֲזַרְיָה וְרַבֵּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבֵּי טַרְפוֹן שֶׁהָיוּ מְסֻבִּין בְּבְנֵי
בְּרַק, וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל אוֹתוֹ
הַלַּיְלָה.

הגדה של פסח

What is the meaning of *mesaprim*? It means that they tried to understand, to study in depth. To understand the Haggadah well is a part of the *kiyum* (fulfillment) of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The backbone, the center of the Haggadah is the portion of *Arami Oved Avi* (Devarim 26:5-8); if you omit *Arami Oved Avi*, the Haggadah is merely a collection of introductions. All of the Haggadah leads up to *Arami Oved Avi*; the moment it is finished, we say *Rabban Gamliel Hayah Omer*, and proceed to Hallel.

We recite the parsha of *Arami Oved Avi* when bringing *bikkurim* (first fruits), but in *hava'as bikkurim* (bringing the first fruits), the obligation is limited to reading the parsha. Although the text is the same, the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* has no *shiur* (fixed amount). Our job is not simply to read the text of *Arami Oved Avi*, but to supplement it with *Torah SheB'Al Peh* (oral tradition) whenever there is an interpretation.

In order for Hallel to be justified, every year one must detect something new in the Haggadah. One must understand *Arami Oved Avi* using the method of parallelism—to take the same word, and look it up in another story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* in the Torah. By studying both stories at the same time and creating cross-references from one story to another, we understand better the semantics, the words of *Arami Oved Avi*. In our example, we detected the superfluity in 'וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת עֲנִינֵנוּ and וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנִינֵנוּ in the context of *Arami Oved Avi*, but we needed to corroborate the difference between them by comparing them with parallel *Pesukim* in Shemos: וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם... וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּדַע אֱלֹהִים. One must compare the parsha of *Arami Oved Avi* with the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* in Shemos. By following these parallel *pesukim*, I gain better insight into *Arami Oved Avi*.

The mitzvah of Haggadah is to understand in depth the parsha of *Arami Oved Avi* by employing the comparative method, by interpreting *Arami Oved Avi* in the light of the *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* in Shemos. Usually people don't try to study *Arami Oved Avi* in depth and get involved; it's very difficult. Sometimes we don't understand the relationship, or the concept behind [the verse linkages]. When I speak about the Haggadah, I try very hard to get to *Arami Oved Avi* and to clear up these points. I'm now at the end of *Arami Oved Avi*; it took me several years. There are some very difficult passages, and the matter requires a lot of study. I've spoiled you. You yourselves, in the manner that you work on a Ramban, you should work on the Haggadah, to understand what the relationship is between the *parshiyos* in Shemos and *Arami Oved Avi*.