



PERSPECTIVES ON THE HAGGADA

A Positive Outlook Changes Everything

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There was light at the end of the tunnel for the Jewish people. They were enslaved for 210 years and finally Moshe is instructed by Hashem to inform the Jewish people they are going to be redeemed:

וגם אני שמעתי את נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים מעבדים אתם ואזכר את בריתי.

Moreover, I have heard the groans of the Jewish people whom Egypt enslaves and I have remembered my covenant.

Shemos 6:5

The Jewish people's response was indifference at best:

וידבר משה כן אל בני ישראל ולא שמעו אל משה מקר רוח ומעבודה קשה.

Moshe spoke to the Jewish people though they didn't listen to Moshe because of shortness of spirit and hard work.

Shemos 6:9

Seemingly they were so exhausted, they were incapable of processing or even believing their impending freedom. By contrast, in perek 4 in Parshas Shemos, the Torah seems to paint a different picture of Klal Yisrael's response to their impending freedom. As the pasuk tells us:

ויאמן העם וישמעו כי פקד ה' את בני ישראל. *And the people believed and they heard that Hashem had remembered the children of Israel.*

Shemos 4:31

In Parshas Shemos they eagerly anticipated and expected redemption by the hand of God, but a few chapters later, in Vaera, they were passive, perhaps indifferent, and essentially incapable of believing that they would actually be redeemed. How do we understand the difference?

Hashem commands Moshe to speak to Pharaoh that he send the Jewish people from his land:

בא דבר אל פרעה מלך מצרים וישלח בני ישראל מארצו.

Go speak to Pharaoh and he will send the Jewish people from his land.

Shemos 6:11

Typically, Moshe does as he is commanded by Hashem but here he demurs:

הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים.

Behold the children of Israel have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen as I have sealed lips?

Shemos 6:12

The commentators ask: doesn't a prophet have to be perfect? A prophet has to be wise and wealthy. He can't have any deficiencies. To compound the question, the Shelah asks: as Klal Yisroel stood at the foot of the mountain as they were accepting the Torah, every Jew was cured of their illnesses. If so, why wasn't Moshe Rabbeinu healed? Why was every Jew healed from their ailment and not Moshe Rabbeinu? Shouldn't Moshe Rabbeinu, the *adon hanevi'im*, the master of all prophets, be no worse than any other Jew who received a *refuah* for all their ailments. Moshe could finally have had his deficiency permanently reversed!

The Mishna Berura, 138:6, teaches us that we don't end any *aliyah* with a pasuk that speaks about something

bad. Understanding this halacha, Reb Eli Baruch Finkel asks how are we allowed on the weekday Torah reading to end the second aliyah of Vaera with the pasuk, “they didn’t listen to Moshe because of shortness of spirit and hard work”? Reb Eli Baruch explains based on the teachings of the Vilna Gaon that the Jewish people should have been enslaved for 400 years. However, due to back-breaking and debilitating work, the number of years was shortened to 210. Ultimately it was their back-breaking, intense labor that actually expedited their redemption! What was thought to be a negative was actually a positive, since it allowed them to leave earlier than anticipated. Reb Eli Baruch explains this is precisely why we are allowed to end the aliyah talking about the Jewish people’s intense labor — because their intense labor was their reason for their exodus out of Egypt 190 years earlier than expected. What is interesting to note is that our perspective or outlook on a situation actually can dictate halacha. Because we were able to take a negative situation and look at it from a different perspective, it allowed us to end an aliyah discussing our hardship without compromising on the halacha. This perhaps will help us understand why Moshe Rabbeinu was not healed at Har Sinai. The Ran in his *Droschos* (no. 5) teaches us:

והוסר ממנו בהשגחה גמורה הדיבור הצח, יען לא יחשב שהיות ישראל וגדוליהם נמשכים אחריו, היה לצחות דברו כמו [שיאמר] על מי שהוא צח הדיבור שימשיך ההמון אחריו, ושהשקר ממנו יחשב אמת.

Through divine providence, [Moshe Rabbeinu] was not eloquent in speech, so that nobody thinks that the Jewish people and its leaders followed because of his eloquent speech, like they say that an eloquent person can attract followers and even falsities can appear like the truth.

The Ran explains that Moshe Rabbeinu had to have a speech impediment in

order for people to realize the Torah is sweet because it is inherently sweet regardless of who is transmitting the Torah. Even a person who is unable to speak can still deliver a sweet, beautiful Torah. What was originally thought to be Moshe’s weakness was actually the reason he was chosen to be the transmitter of the Torah. What we perceive as a negative is actually a positive. If Moshe’s speech impediment would have been healed, perhaps he never would have been the one to give over the Torah to the Jewish people. Moshe himself understood that to truly sanctify G-d’s name, he needed this impediment. Our perspective can change reality. It impacts our observance of a halacha and it allowed Moshe to be the transmitter of the our timeless Torah.

The ability to look with an *ayin tov* (positive outlook) takes constant work. Rabbi Yakov Kamenetsky in his classic work, *Emes L’Yaakov*, quotes the medrash in *Shemos Rabbah* that the Jewish people were given Shabbos as their day of rest and it was on that day that the Jewish people would inspire themselves with stories about the redemption. However, Pharaoh took away that day and they no longer had the opportunity to read those *megilos*. I believe that this is what changed between Parshas Shemos, where Klal Yisrael believed in the redemption, and Parshas Vaera where they didn’t believe redemption was coming. Initially, they were excited, they had a positive perspective because they trained themselves to think in a positive way. They read stories about the *geula* and they saw there was hope. But Pharaoh did not want them to have hope and he took away their day of hope, and by doing so they could no longer see the world with an *ayin tov*. Life has its challenges, but little do we realize if we change our perspective and see hope, it can change the narrative from being hopeless to being hopeful.

We Are Survivors!

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I am writing these words two days after the tragic news of another terrorist attack in Israel. We were inundated with images of innocent men and children whose lives were taken way too early by people whose hatred for the Jewish people far exceeds their own love for their families and their own lives. As their loved ones cried as these holy kedoshim were being buried, we too could not help but feel the incredible loss for klal Yisrael and the loss of future generations that could have come from them.

This is nothing new. At one of the most intense moments of the Pesach Seder, we cover the matzot and lift a full glass of wine, and say the paragraph of *Vehi Sheamda*, which includes the lines, “For it was not one alone who rose against us to annihilate us, rather in every generation there are those who rise against us to annihilate us, but the Holy One, Blessed is He, saves us from their hand.” Some will even sing these words with a beautiful melodious tune. Why are we raising a glass at this moment? Why are we singing words that testify to the fact we have enemies who want us destroyed?

Avraham was referred to as an Ivri, Hebrew. The word Ivri comes from the word “*ever*”, the one who stood on the other side. All the world stood on one side, and he stood on the other. This isn’t a geographical statement, it means that Avraham had principles that set him apart from the rest of humanity at that time. Nimrod, seeing a threat in this independent thinker threw Avraham into a fiery furnace, which he miraculously survived. In much the same way, this ability to be isolated from the rest of the world, is how the Jewish

people, Avraham's descendants, were also isolated in Mitzrayim and thrown into a *kur habarzel*, a smelting furnace, which purified them. This insistence on being different, via dress, language and names, while maintaining a higher moral ground and ethical standards, elicits a visceral hatred in those who do not.

According to the midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 44:22) during Avraham's prophetic vision at the Covenant Between the Parts, God promised Avraham that he would exact retribution from the Egyptians and eventually free his offspring from slavery. This promise included salvation from future exiles too. God assured Avraham that "And also the nation that they serve I too shall judge" (*Bereishit* 15:14) The word "also" includes all the future kingdoms and nations that will persecute the Jewish people throughout our history, will not escape punishment, and, adds Rashi, that our enemies will be paid back for their cruelty. So it is only because of the promise that Hashem made to Avraham, that Hashem saves us from their hands and punishes them.

The Klausenberger Rebbe related that once he was languishing in a Nazi slave labor camp, and he was approached by a professor who asked him derisively, "So what do you have to say about the lot of the Jews now?"

He responded, "It will be good. I am not a prophet, rather my conviction is based on historic fact. How many nations have resolved to annihilate the Jewish people. Consider how many millions of Jews have already perished in sanctification of God's name at the hands of mighty empires and nationalities. Empires and nationalities, of which there remains no living trace today. The Jewish people continue to exist, their many persecutions and travails notwithstanding. There are today sizable families who trace their ancestry to a particular grandfather, who had

perished some generations earlier in sanctification of God's name, even as his executioners, and their commanders have fallen into total oblivion. Although I cannot tell you what will happen to me personally, I am nevertheless certain that the Jewish people as a whole, will survive, and will witness the downfall of their adversaries. I can guarantee this based on thousands of years of Jewish history, persisting to this very day." Lowering his head, the professor conceded the point to the Rebbe.

The first word of the stanza, "*vehi*" "it is this" signifies something very important about our survival abilities throughout the galut. The Abarbanel views the word *vehi* as a numerical acronym for the secret of Jewish survival. The Vav refers to the six orders of the Mishnah, the foundation of the Torah She Ba'al Peh. The Hey refers to the Five Books of Moses, Torah SheBichtav. The Yud is the Aseret Hadibrot which contains within it all the mitzvot of the Torah. Finally the Aleph refers to the ultimate One, God, that gave them to us. That is what stands before us, and permits us to keep enduring the long galut, our loyalty to the Torah, Hashem and His mitzvot.

The ability to raise our cups while reciting this passage may be because we have a greater vision than the galut we are currently in right now. We raise our cups to the future and the ultimate salvation that will arrive when Mashiach reveals himself and ends the end of every galut we have ever been through.

May we see the final redemption come to fruition very soon and end the galut speedily in our days.

The Plagues of Yam Suf

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Among the more puzzling segments of the Haggadah is the section dedicated to contrasting the number of plagues (although here "beatings" or "pummelings" might be a better fit than "plagues") that God brought upon the Egyptian nation and on its army on land and at sea. Surely those who added this tannaitic discussion to the Seder text had more in mind than a quick multiplication quiz.¹ Not all haggadot had this segment. The Rambam's haggadah goes straight from *Detza'ch Ada'sh Beacha'v* to "Pesah, Matza U'maror," as does Rav Natronai's haggadah and other versions. The counting of the makkot on the sea is found in the haggadot of Rav Saadya and Rav Amram. The recounting by the three tannaim was apparently added to the Seder, presumably at one of the Babylonian yeshivot, along with the ever popular "Dayyenu" during the Geonic period.²

If the makkot at the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds) was going to be included — and certainly if they were to be contrasted with those makkot in Egypt itself — then the discussion clearly needed to be placed precisely where we find it, following the enumeration of the ten plagues. The debate between Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Eliezar and Rabbi Akiva assumes that there were makkot at Yam Suf, a fact they derive homiletically from Exodus 14:31

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ה'
במצרים.

And Bnai Yisrael saw the great hand that

Hashem had performed against Egypt.
(Robert Alter translation).

We will discuss this argument later on.

As we attempt to understand what relationship existed between the plagues God inflicted on Egypt and the destruction of its army at sea, we are interested in understanding how the tannaim read the Biblical chapters, what lessons they drew and why the passages in *Mekhilta* were incorporated into the Haggadah.

The makkot were inflicted by God to punish the Egyptians for how they treated their Jewish guests — for the slavery (*avdut*) and the affliction (*inui*)³ — and to force Pharaoh's hand to free them. Beyond that, though, the Torah makes clear that there was also an educational component for Jews and Egyptians to learn about Hashem. Both needed to learn who God was and about the extent of His power and His requirements for humankind. Bnai Yisrael had to further recognize the special providence He was providing them in preparation for developing the covenantal relationship promised to Abraham.

What did each population know, or not know, about Hashem prior to the makkot? Let's look at what both know prior to the makkot.

When God first tells Moshe to return to Egypt and free the children of Israel, Moshe's response is that they (Bnai Yisrael) don't even know Your name (Ex. 3:13) and they won't believe that You sent me to rescue them (Ex. 4:1).

When Moshe and Aharon first appear in front of Pharaoh and demand the freedom of the people in the name of God, the monarch asks (Ex. 5:2):

מי ה' אשר אשמע בקולו.

Who is God that I should listen to His voice?

The people of Egypt will, over time,

learn about the God of Israel; the enslaved Jews will also learn bit by bit about the power of God. The first few makkot reveal God as the Creator of the World (the plagues of Blood, Frogs and Lice); those that follow show that God is involved in what happens in this world (the plagues of Wild Animals,⁴ Pestilence, and Boils); the next three show Him as having the ultimate power (the plagues of Hail, Locust and Darkness).

The educational journey of Pharaoh involves him repeatedly taking one step forward and a step or two backwards. We see him bend a bit but keep returning to his starting point that the people of Israel must remain his slaves. It is only after the tenth plague in which his citizens are being struck down that Pharaoh orders that Bnai Yisrael leave immediately (Ex. 13: 31), possibly rushed into the decision by his understandably panicked advisors. He allows them to worship their God as they requested and asks to be blessed as well. But even at this point, we do not see clear proof that Pharaoh (or the Egyptians) have fully learned who God is. Just a few days later, when he thinks that the Israelites are lost in the desert, (a sure sign in his mind that their God is fallible), Pharaoh wastes no time in chasing after them to bring them back to servitude. The ultimate lesson is yet to be learned by Pharaoh and his army.

The educational journey of Bnai Yisrael is not so clearly outlined.

Bnai Yisrael were certainly aware that as the makkot progressed, the Egyptians were being targeted while they were being spared. That could well have been a powerful lesson of God's justice and mercy. As the makkot reached their apex, Bnai Yisrael show a willingness to bravely tie a lamb to their doorposts, slaughter the animal, and paint the lintels of their house with blood as the cries of their Egyptian neighbors are

heard. They pack their bags and, in the light of day, march across the land and out of the country as Pharaoh's soldiers stand down.

Their commitment — or at least their confidence — does not last long. With their backs to the sea, Bnai Yisrael are terrified as the chariots of Pharaoh roar toward them. Not for the last time, they insist to Moshe that this has all been a serious mistake and demand to be taken back into enslavement.

This is apparently the point that the tannaim in the *Mekhilta* were focused on, and the reason that their teaching was incorporated into the Haggadah. Clearly, the education of both the Egyptians and the Israelites was not complete and needed a final demonstration to seal the lesson. That is why the miracles — and the makkot — of *kriyat Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea) were needed and why the rabbis stressed the ongoing connection between the plagues in Egypt and the battle at sea. But just what did the two peoples learn?

Pharaoh sees how God saved his former slaves, and, at this juncture, finally *acknowledges mi khamokha ba-eilim Hashem*, who is like You, Hashem (Exodus 15:11)? The Israelites perceive the *yad ha-gedolah*, the mighty hand of God, and finally reach the point where it can be said that they believe in Hashem, *va-ya-aminu ba-Shem*, and also in Moshe, His servant (Exodus 14:31).

That phrase becomes the textual justification for the tannaim who compare the events on the sea to the plagues.

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה.

And Bnai Yisrael saw the great hand.

During the makkot, Hashem used his "finger" as the Egyptian magicians comment (Ex. 8:15). The "hand" of God, understand the tannaim in the *Mekhilta* passage, is five times as potent.

And even though the word *yad* appears *yad Hashem hoya be-miknecha*, Hashem's hand is on your cattle (Ex. 9:3) it is not *yado ha-gedolah*, His great hand, and doesn't achieve the same results.

From an educational perspective, *kriyat Yam Suf* also provides the next step for Bnai Yisrael's educational journey, what in education is called the "Gradual Release of Responsibility."⁵ The goal is for students to move from observing the direct instruction of the teacher, to guided practice with the teacher, to independent work and application. In a classroom setting, a teacher will demonstrate a new skill or technique, model and outline the various steps, and then give students opportunities to practice, first with the teacher's help and then on their own. They have seen, they have listened, and then they have practiced. The students become active participants in the learning process rather than passive observers.

In Egypt, God did everything for Bnai Yisrael and they watched and learned about His Power and how He cared for them. Bnai Yisrael were, in fact, passive observers. At the Yam Suf, God is still doing most of the work, but Bnai Yisrael now must do something — they have to enter into the water. This was not an easy feat since they had no knowledge of when the water would return to its former strength and possibly drown them. According to the midrash, some of them had to enter the water before the water began to split.⁶ The process underway proceeds slowly but inexorably. As they continue in the journey in the desert, they will gain more independence. When Amalek comes to attack, the Israelites fight a battle and win, assisted by the uplifted hands of Moshe in prayer. When they fight against Og and Sichon at the end of the 40 years, more of the responsibility has been shifted over to the people.

The redemption of the Bnai Yisrael from slavery was intended to have a broader significance — not merely freedom "from" (from the inhuman conditions imposed upon them by their slave-masters) but freedom "to" (to become the people of God with a mission to become a holy nation, a nation of priests). Leaving the land of Egypt was the fulfillment of "freedom from." Crossing the Yam Suf a week later with the Egyptian army drowned before their eyes opened the possibility of a new reality for the people, a freedom to do what they want, to believe in what they want to believe.

At the Yam Suf, Bnai Yisrael learned many things. They learned God was there for the long haul and would continue to support them even as they learned to be more independent. They were to use this new independence and maturity to deepen their connection to God.

They learned to acknowledge what had been done for them and began to sing the praises of Hashem (*Az Yashir*, Ex. 15:1-22). And even as they sang, they learned about nuance. They recognized the miracle and appreciated that it came with a cost, the loss of life. And to this day, the death of the Egyptians at the sea is marked in our prayers; full celebration of our freedom is not possible in light of the massive destruction inflicted on the Egyptian, and so only "half" Hallel is recited on the Seventh day of Pesah (and on the days of Hol Hamoed as well).

The tannaim in the *Mekhilta* therefore felt it important to see the events at sea as a series of makkot — unique and terrible — overwhelmingly more deadly than the plagues in Egypt itself. And, significantly, they saw a direct connection between the events in Egypt culminating in Makkat Bekhorot (the killing of the first born) and the makkot at sea.

The latter makkot in Egypt were quite severe and unusual. But even they paled when compared to the enormity of what took place at the makkot at the sea. While all the plagues propelled the Jews to a new level, a level of trust and faith, the makkot at the sea constituted a culmination of all of the events that took place in Egypt. The exponential intensification of the battle at sea which involved the beginning of initiative by the Jews themselves reflected a new beginning. A nation was created, forged out of the crucible of slavery. The process is not uncomplicated and there were defeats and setbacks along the way. But by stepping into the sea, the Jews displayed the fortitude needed to justify God's faith in them. Just a few short weeks later, God will concretize His promises to the Avot by giving them the Aseret HaDibrot and making them His nation.

Thus, the enigmatic tannaitic discussion of makkot at the sea show us how much our forefathers learned from the experience at the Yam Suf, lessons of gratitude and nuance, lessons of fortitude and independence, and lessons of bravery and belief — lessons that we still learn from today.

Endnotes

1. The competing views of Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva are set out in the midrashim: *Mekhilta* (Horovitz-Rabin) Va-Yehi parasha 6, p. 114, and *Mekhilta de-Rashbi* (Epstein-Melamed) Beshalah 14:31, p. 69. The Haggadah skips the citation from Ex. 14:31 and the opening comment: "And Israel saw the great hand": severe beatings and beatings one more unusual than the next, and unusual deaths and deaths one more severe than the next." Interestingly, a parallel source in *Shemot Rabbah* substitutes Rabbi Yehoshua, a contemporary of Rabbi Eliezer's, for Rabbi Yossi, who was a student of Rabbi Akiva.

2. S. and Z. Safrai, *Haggadat Haza"l* (Jerusalem: 1998), p. 148.

3. See *Tanchuma Va'erah* 14; *Shemot Rabbah* 9, 10; and *Eliyahu Rabbah* 8.

4. Makkat Arov can be translated as a plague of wild animals (the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda in the *Tanchuma*) or a swarm of insects (Rabbi Nechemiah in the *Tanchuma*) or swarms of birds (Resh Lakish in *Bereishit Rabbah*).

5. A phrase coined by Pearson & Gallagher (October 1983), "The Instruction of Reading Comprehension" in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for the Study of Reading.

6. *Sotah* 37a. Rabbi Yehuda discusses how while the different tribes were refusing to enter the water, insisting that one of the other tribes go first, Nachshon ben Aminadav, the prince of Shevet Yehuda jumped into the waters and the water split.

Where is Moshe Rabbeinu in the Haggadah?

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ועל הים מה הוא אומר וירא ישראל את ה' הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים ויראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו.

And at the sea, what does it say? "And the Jewish people saw what the great hand of Hashem did to the Egyptians and the nation feared Hashem and they trusted in Hashem and Moshe His servant.

Pesach Haggadah

Incredibly, throughout virtually the entire Haggadah, which recounts the Exodus from Egypt that took place under the dedicated leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, Moshe's name is not mentioned. There is a famous explanation from the Vilna Gaon that one of the major themes of the Haggadah is that Hashem took us out of Egypt by Himself, as we express in the words "*Ani Hashem — Ani v'lo malach ... Ani Hu v'lo acher*" (I am

Hashem — I and not an angel ... It was me and not anyone else) — so that we should not delude ourselves into thinking that salvation will come from the hands of mortals. Rather, we are reminded that we have nobody to turn to other than Hashem himself (see *Sotah* 49a). Accordingly, it is important that Moshe's name not become the focus of the Haggadah, or even a distraction from the divine source of our deliverance.

And yet, at the same time, there is one parenthetical allusion to Moshe's name in the concluding section of the Maggid section of the Haggadah, dealing with the reckoning of the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians. As the Tanna Rabbi Yosi Haglili tabulates the total number of adversities suffered by the Egyptians, he notes for each plague in Egypt there were five corresponding plagues (like the number of fingers in a hand) during the splitting of the sea. The full verse printed in the Haggadah that speaks of the "hand of Hashem" ends with the words, "they trusted in Hashem, and in Moshe his servant."

According to the Vilna Gaon's explanation, this is the exception that proves the rule. Since Moshe's name is only mentioned once, and even during this occasion in a supporting role as the "servant" of Hashem, we are thus sensitized to the realization that Moshe's name indeed does not appear elsewhere in the Haggadah, and are forced to understand that this is because his role in the redemption was not as our true savior, but as the servant of Hashem who is the true source of the redemption of our people.

Nonetheless, if this is the purpose of the parenthetical mention of his name, the point of Moshe's subordinate role would seem to be best expressed by eliminating his name altogether. Indeed, in the Rambam's version of the Haggadah, the entire section describing

the multitude of plagues during the splitting of the sea is omitted entirely, resulting in no mention at all of Moshe's name.

Some explain that the name of Moshe would have been eliminated altogether, except that Moshe's name needed to be mentioned in this specific verse, since it is forbidden to quote only half of a verse (see *Ta'anis* 27b). However, there are other verses in the Haggadah that are only quoted in part, including the immediately preceding verse cited in the Haggadah that refers to the "finger" of Hashem. Indeed, Rav Yitzchak Yosef shlit"a, quoting his father Rav Ovadia Yosef zt"l, writes in the *Yalkut Yosef* (Tefillah 2:131, n.17) that the incomplete verses in the Haggadah prove that one is permitted to quote a fragment from a verse for the purpose of amplifying a homiletic message. Thus, we still need to understand more fully why Moshe's name is mentioned even in passing.

Perhaps we can explain that it was in fact necessary to include Moshe's name in the Haggadah as an expression of *hakaras hatov* (gratitude) to Moshe for his supporting role, even if Moshe was not the ultimate force for our salvation. The Gemora in *Bava Kamma* (92b) notes that as a matter of proper etiquette, one should thank the royal waiter who brings the wine to the table, even though the king of the palace was truly responsible for providing the wine (see Rashi's explanation ad locum). Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l (as elucidated by Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a in *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 112) understood that this Gemora is teaching an important principle about serving Hashem properly. If we do not show proper appreciation toward human beings, we will not learn to express the requisite amount of recognition and gratitude to Hashem. Thus, it could be that our version of the Haggadah similarly includes a solitary acknowledgment of

Moshe Rabbeinu, to inspire us towards the appropriate level of gratitude that we need to have towards Hashem for all the goodness that He has bestowed upon us (see *Pesachim* 116a in which Rav Nachman underscores the centrality of the theme of gratitude to Hashem in the Haggadah).

Rav Soloveitchik himself cited from his father a different explanation regarding the general omission of Moshe's name (*Shiurim l'zecher Aba Mori*, volume 2, pp. 158-160). Rav Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l noted that, although the Rambam omitted any mention of Moshe's name in his version of the Haggadah, he does write (*Chametz u'Matzah* 7:2) that a parent is obligated to tell a wise son during the course of the recitation of the Haggadah about "what transpired to us in Egypt, including the miracles that were brought about by Moshe Rabbeinu." However, we need to understand why there is no such requirement for a son of lesser erudition.

The midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 3:1) expounds upon the verses in Shir Hashirim (3:1-4):

על משכבי בלילות, זה לילה של מצרים,
בקשתי את שאהבה נפשי, זה משה ... עד
שהביאתיו אל בית אמי, זה סיני.

"Upon my couch at night" — this is the night of Egypt, "I sought the one I love" — this is Moshe ... "until I brought him to my mother's house" — this is Sinai.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik understood that this Midrash refers to Pesach night. The Jewish people "sought" to include their beloved leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, in the Haggadah, but, as the opening verse continues, *"I sought but found him not,"* because Pesach night belongs solely to Hashem, who redeemed us without an intermediary. However, when Moshe was brought "to my mother's house," representing the giving of the Torah at Sinai, he played a prominent role as the Torah teacher to

the Jewish people, and therefore merits having the Torah called in his name, as recorded in the verse, "the Torah of Moshe my servant" (Malachi 3:22).

Accordingly, Rav Soloveitchik suggested, based on his father's interpretation of the Midrash, that the obligation recorded by the Rambam to mention Moshe Rabbeinu's name in the retelling of the Exodus from Egypt to the wise son, relates exclusively to the Sinaitic experience of receiving the Torah, the climactic moment of the redemptive experience that only the wise son can truly comprehend. However, when telling the story of the Exodus to a child of lesser erudition, the focus is solely upon our emancipation from slavery in Egypt, regarding which any mention of Moshe Rabbeinu's name would be inappropriate since the redemption came from Hashem alone.

Thus, we can derive from the general omission of Moshe's name in the Haggadah that salvation comes from Hashem alone. From the single mention of his name in our version of the Haggadah, we are reminded to show gratitude towards the servants of Hashem as well. Finally, the Rambam teaches us that while deliverance comes from Hashem, there was a crucial role played by Moshe in delivering the fruits of such deliverance through the transmission of the Torah, which represents the ultimate fulfillment of our redemption.

Partnering in the Process of Redemption

Rabbi Shay Schachter

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"I am most proud to be a direct descendent of the Baal Shem Tov," said

the highly accomplished Professor Gheona M. Altarescu, M.D.

Dr. Altarescu is the director of the awe inspiring PGD laboratory at Shaare Zedek Hospital in Yerushalayim and is directly responsible for the birth of over 1,000 healthy children over the past 15 years. Dr. Altarescu is board certified in Internal Medicine and Clinical Genetics and took a leadership role in the breakthrough scientific research of the BRCA gene. A humble and unassuming Polish Jewish woman, Dr. Altarescu agreed to open her lab to a small group of young American rabbanim and give them a glimpse of the exceptional work that she does.

Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) is a miraculous reality that I knew very little about before my visit to Shaare Zedek. Many couples are carriers of genetic disorders and are at high risk for transmitting them to their children. Until recently, the only way to detect whether an unborn child has inherited these genetic disorders was either through an amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling. However, the couple can then be faced with the extremely delicate question of pregnancy termination. Now, through the modern advances in the science of IVF and PGD, doctors can microscopically determine the condition of an embryo, and implant only unaffected embryos back into their mother.

Adorned in our scrubs, we entered the lab and were completely overwhelmed by this unfamiliar new world. Seeing embryos develop under a microscope and watching the technicians carefully separate the healthy genes was truly fascinating and humbling to all of us. But then came the penetrating question from one of the female technicians. "I come to work every day, but rarely do I have the opportunity to speak openly with a rabbi. My days are spent editing genes, but I sometimes feel as if I am

playing God! Is this even considered appropriate work for a Jew to be involved with?"

What right do doctors ever have to treat a sick patient, after all, they too are playing God!? If one was destined to be sick, then who are we to change that painful reality? It took me some time to clearly formulate a perspective, but with Pesach approaching perhaps my thoughts are worth sharing.

When reading the Hagadah, one can mistakenly think that the Esser Makkos took place in a short span of time. But in truth, this was a lengthy process that developed over the course of at least a year. Klal Yisrael experienced the most dramatic scenes, culminating in the phenomenal experience of Kriyas Yam Suf.

One Leil HaSeder, my father told us a fascinating insight in the name of Rav Soloveitchik. Have you ever noticed that not once in the course of that year is there any mention of Klal Yisrael thanking Hashem or singing *shirah*?! How shocking that Az Yashir was only sung on the occasion of Kriyas Yam Suf! Were there no feelings of gratitude until that very last moment? One would at least expect a minimal level of recognition, a word of thanks, or a brief expression of song after experiencing the power of Makkas Bechoros! Perhaps the feeling of freedom had not yet been a reality to them, but there was still an entire week that followed their departure from Mitzrayim until the miracle of Kriyas Yam Suf unfolded. Why did nobody thank Hashem in that interim period either? And what was unique about Kriyas Yam Suf that warranted an entirely new response on the part of the Jewish people?

Rav Soloveitchik explained, based on a passage in the Hagadah:

לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שליח אלא
הקדוש ברוך הוא בכבודו ובעצמו.

Not through an angel and not through a messenger, but rather the Holy One Blessed Be He personally [carried out the killing of the first born].

Until this point, the Ribono Shel Olam did everything for us. We watched as the incredible story of our geula unfolded. Naturally, this is what we all expected to happen at the Yam Suf as well. Moshe Rabbeinu began to daven as the Jewish people were terrified of their impossible predicament. It was at that moment that Moshe Rabeinu was told, "*Mah titzak elay? Daber el Bnei Yisrael v'yisau*"! — Don't call out to Me. Tell the Jewish people to go! Hashem was informing Moshe Rabbeinu that things were now going to change. From here on in, human beings are going to be granted the opportunity and given the privilege to partner with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and create the next chapters of their own redemption. Until Nachshon Ben Aminadav initiated this miracle, nothing at all would have happened!

There are special times in history when we, as human beings, are invited to participate and collaborate with the Ribono Shel Olam in the process of our own redemption. It is those moments that are the most fulfilling and gratifying ones of our lives. When we recognize that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has entrusted us to further enhance His world and take part in creating a miraculous outcome. It is precisely at those moments, when we are personally engaged in the process, that we feel a most overwhelming sense of gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and indeed it was on that occasion that Klal Yisrael began to sing *Az Yashir Moshe U'vnei Yisrael*.

What greater privilege and honor can we be given than to know that the Ribono Shel Olam has placed His trust in us, and that He holds a firm belief in our ability to make a major difference in the unfolding of events that happen in our world.

I was awed when visiting the IVF-PGD lab because it is one of the rare opportunities where human beings are entrusted to partake, facilitate and collaborate with the Ribono Shel Olam in the process of personal geulah. It was an overwhelming feeling to be in the presence of such brilliant, selfless and righteous *shluchim* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

As we celebrate our national redemption on Leil HaSeder, we can all take a moment to identify an unredeemed aspect of our society, and pledge to do what we can to partner with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in bringing that situation one step closer to a more positive and enriched existence.

Strategies for Engagement at the Seder

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Our job at the Seder is to keep everyone engaged, intrigued, and inspired. Although this is especially true for any children present, it applies as well to adults of any age, including ourselves. This is a difficult task that we should approach intentionally and thoughtfully. Thankfully, the compilers of the Haggadah structured the text and rituals in such a way to afford us many opportunities for retention of attention.¹ What follows are three different components of the Seder that provide opportunities for increased engagement, with supplemental insights from the psychological and educational literature.

Order

The Haggadah is a highly structured text. There is a specific order for when

and where we are supposed to recite and perform the different rituals. We emphasize this structure by chanting the order of the Haggadah even before we officially commence the first rung of “Kadesh.” The commentators offer several explanations for this tradition, including: that the recitation of the order serves as a memory device to help prevent mistakes (*Machzor Vitri*); it serves as a preparatory function to put one in the right mindset (*hazmanah*) for the upcoming spiritual undertaking (*Va-Yaged Moshe*); and that it functions as a way to create a sense of permanence (*keviut*) that is required (*Yismach Av*). Perhaps reciting the order in the beginning serves a pedagogic function as well. Teachers are encouraged to set an agenda and review it at the beginning of a class. The structure and clear expectations frame the upcoming learning, provide a sense of comfort and security for the learner, and help build motivation.² The same is true in the therapeutic context, and is why setting the agenda at the beginning of a psychotherapy session is a key component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).³ Likewise, chanting the order of the Seder before officially beginning helps set the agenda and provide a clear framework for what is to come, serving as one strategy to help participants effectively engage in the learning experience.

Curiosity

While order is essential, too much order can become predictable and boring. To maintain interest, we highlight the change from the ordinary in order to spark curiosity. The Talmud in *Pesachim* relates several practices that were done just to pique the interest of the children and encourage questions. These practices include giving out nuts to the children (109a, according to Rambam), lifting the matzot (109a, according to Rashi), dipping the vegetables twice (114b),

removing the food earlier than expected (115b), and pouring the second cup of wine (115b, according to Rashi).⁴

Psychological research on curiosity indicates that greater curiosity leads to higher life satisfaction and an increased sense of meaning in life.⁵ In addition, curiosity is associated with enhanced memory,⁶ and better job⁷ and academic performance.⁸ In the classroom, it is important for teachers to promote curiosity by fostering an environment where questions are encouraged and students feel safe taking risks, making mistakes and not knowing.⁹ This should ideally be embedded into the family culture as well, particularly at the Seder. The traditional question prompts from the Talmud that promote curiosity can also become predictable and routine, such that other opportunities for questions and exploration should be provided. While fostering a sense of psychological safety — where everyone feels comfortable being vulnerable displaying lack of knowledge — is not always easy; it should be an area of focus on the Seder night.

Additionally, questions are not only a reflection of the learner’s curiosity but can be used strategically by educators to further promote curiosity. While this isn’t a natural skill for all, thinking through critical points in the Seder to ask pointed and poignant questions to promote exploration and discussion can enhance inquisitiveness and interest at the seder.¹⁰

Experiential

Instead of a more traditional lecture-based learning style, the Seder provides an educational framework that is vibrant and multifaceted. While we are presented with a mix of stories and classic text-based learning and analysis, we are also told that these must be done in the presence of live props. We need the Pesach, matzah, and marror to be

present and seen as we discuss the ideas. Eating also forms an essential part of the learning experience. The symbolism and tastes of the food influence what we are supposed to be learning. Even our body posture is regulated to try and instill a sense of freedom. The Seder is not just a cognitive endeavor, but a fully experiential and embodied learning experience.¹¹ As is famously indicated in the Rambam’s formulation of “*chayav adam le-harot et etzmo*,” we are obligated to act in a way that reflects as if we ourselves are leaving Egypt. There are various added customs that expressly relate to this idea including walking around with matzah on our backs, as if we were leaving Egypt. Also fundamental to the Seder are the songs and traditional tunes that help express the more creative and artistic elements of our personalities. While not as common, many Haggadot depict beautiful imagery to help inspire the more aesthetic aspects. In all, these characteristics of the Seder also function to make the learning experience dynamic and stimulating.

In all, it is clear from these multidimensional aspects that the Seder offers many opportunities for inspiration and engagement. This is evident starting with the opening framing and agenda setting, continuing with the intermittent changes to capture the curiosity of the children, and concluding with the embodied and experiential aspects of the learning process. These multifaceted experiences are important for two reasons. First, they provide numerous hooks and a plethora of options for different learners and diverse personalities so that everyone will hopefully be captivated by some aspect of the Seder. Second, the Seder serves as a paradigm for an ideal educational experience, where everyone, despite how they usually like to learn, is exposed to, and encouraged to engage with, a fully immersive and multimodal learning environment.

Endnotes

1. For a fascinating analysis of how the different sections of the Haggadah address the needs of different learners, see the introduction of Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimón's *Shirat Miriam: Haggadah MiMekorah*.
2. See Diep, A. N., Zhu, C., Cocquyt, C., de Greef, M., Vo, M. H., & Vanwing, T. (2019). Adult Learners' Needs in Online and Blended Learning. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 59(2), 223–253; Lewis, N. (2015). Daily agendas: The key to organizing the classroom. *Journal on Best Teaching Practices*, 2(1), 7-9, and sources cited within.
3. See Beck, J. S. (2020). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond*. Guilford Publications.
4. For an extensive analysis, see *Haggadah Shel Pesach: Metivta*, pp. 371-379
5. Kashdan, T. B., & Steger, M. F. (2007). Curiosity and pathways to well-being and meaning in life: Traits, states, and everyday behaviors. *Motivation and Emotion*, 31(3), 159–173.
6. Gruber, M. J., Gelman, B. D., & Ranganath, C. (2014). States of curiosity modulate hippocampus-dependent learning via the dopaminergic circuit. *Neuron*, 84(2), 486–496.
7. Kashdan, T. B., Goodman, F. R., Disabato, D. J., McKnight, P. E., Kelso, K., & Naughton, C. (2020). Curiosity has comprehensive benefits in the workplace: Developing and validating a multidimensional workplace curiosity scale in United States and German employees. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 155, 109717.
8. Von Stumm, S., Hell, B., & Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2011). The hungry mind: Intellectual curiosity is the third pillar of academic performance. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(6), 574–588.
9. Jirout, J., Vitiello, V., and Zumbro, S. (2018). "Curiosity in Schools," in *The New Science of Curiosity*. ed. G. Gordon (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers)
10. To this end, Dr. Erica Brown's *Seder Talk* is an invaluable tool to helping us towards this goal.
11. For more on experiential learning, see Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and*

development. FT press. For more on embodied cognition and learning, see Macedonia, M. (2019). Embodied learning: Why at school the mind needs the body. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 2098; Shapiro, L., & Stolz, S. A. (2019). Embodied cognition and its significance for education. *Theory and Research in Education*, 17(1), 19-39.

What We Ought to Say at the Seder

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At the end of Parshat Bo, before the children of Israel exit Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, G-d commands the still-enslaved people to tell the story of their yet-to-be redemption to future generations.

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעַבְדִּי זֶה עָשָׂה
ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, "It is because of what the L-rd did for me when I went free from Egypt."

Shemot 13:8

In His Infinite Oneness, as Maimonides explains, G-d does not experience time.¹ Past, present, and future converge. Yet for the Jews still waiting to witness a promised deliverance and experience freedom first-hand, I imagine this anticipatory commandment must have felt both premature and reassuring.

Over the last few years, gathering families and making Passover plans has been especially challenging. None of us know the future. Many have felt the pain of empty seats at the Seder table, as well as the joy of newly assembled highchairs. From the very young to the hard-wisdom won, the participants at the Seder present a range of ages, abilities, and attention spans. And with great blessing comes the great responsibility of handling

the complexities of intergenerational communication with care.

One of the most devastating stories of a mismanaged parent-child relationship is captured in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The life of "[King Leir], ruler over the Britains in the year of the world 3105 at what time Ioas reigned in Iuda," was recorded in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and other sources Shakespeare frequently consulted throughout his career.² The play begins with the aged king's decision to resign the throne and divide his kingdom between his daughters while he lives so "that future strife may be prevented." Yet in forcing his daughters to compete for their portions—demanding each answer "Which of you doth love me most?"—he initiates a sibling rivalry that escalates to familial and political devastation. The youngest, Cordelia, refuses to flatter her father like her sisters, plainly stating, "I love your Majesty according to my bond, no more nor less." Her honesty is met with incredulity. Lear prompts her to mend her speech and she continues, "You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I return those duties back as are right fit: obey you, love you, honor you," adding she hopes never to be like her sisters who have husbands but claim to love their father "all." Cordelia's instant and severe banishment activates the question that powers the rest of the play: what *do* children owe parents and parents owe their children?

Though Shakespeare often sidestepped controversy by setting his plays in the pagan past, Cordelia's use of "bond," "obey," and "honor" would have had biblical resonance for his Protestant audience.³ In the religious discourse of the day, the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother was a basic tenant of faith. In the time of the Israelites' exodus, it was nothing short of revolutionary.

In ancient Egypt, the nuclear family

was the basic social unit. Monogamy was predominant, and census records show the average household included two adults and two children; sons grew up, married, and moved to start a new household, and the “mode of residence appears to have been of a neolocal type” in which new couples would live independently from their parents.⁴ As a result of this common practice, sons focused on the needs of their spouses and couples on their offspring, creating a child-centric society that puts the tenth plague into sharper focus. “If thou wouldest be wise,” the Egyptian vizier Ptah-Hotep advises his son, “provide for thine house, and love thy wife that is in thine arms.”⁵ In his account of Egypt, Herodotus notes that “to support their parents the sons are in no way compelled if they do not desire to do so, but the daughters are forced to do so.”⁶ All of this, including the fact that Egyptians lacked kinship terminology for relatives beyond the nuclear family, illustrates a culture that distanced adult children from their elderly parents, with each successive generation living in relative autonomy from the previous one.⁷

Prior to their descent into Egypt, Bnai Yisrael lived and camped as large multigenerational families, but centuries of slavery had altered their living arrangements and eroded their values. While Egyptians might have been able to assist parents in their old age through slaves and financial support, the Israelites didn’t have such luxuries, creating a situation in which the older generation might be abandoned. In this light, the fifth commandment (*Kibud Av V’Em*) given to the Jewish people in the desert is radically countercultural:

כְּבֹד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוֹן יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־הָ' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ:
Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land that your G-d giveth thee.

Shemot 20:12

In addition to establishing a form of social security for the newly fledged nation, as our Sages have taught, the placement of *Kibud Av V’em* among the first half of the Ten Commandments which focus on humankind’s obligations to their Creator implies one’s existence and assets, including parents, are all from Hashem, as is the obligation to honor them. In the words of Rabbi Sacks, “Honoring parents acknowledges our human createdness. It tells us that not everything that matters is the result of our choice, chief of which is the fact that we exist at all.”⁸ It also consecrates the multigenerational family as essential to Jewish life and *avodat Hashem*. For the Abarbanel, honoring parents is fundamental to Judaism since our ancestors are the bearers of our *mesora*.⁹ And perhaps contrary to popular belief and invocation, this *mitzvah* is not expressly for the young. Linking the verb *kabed* (honor) to wealth (as in Proverbs 3:9), Chizkuni implies that *Kibud Av V’em* is directed at adult children since fulfilling the *mitzvah* properly would require financial resources and a degree of autonomy, which is more befitting individuals in the stage of life when they are earning a living and having children of their own.

While it might seem that the divine injunction to honor one’s parents was a cultural necessity for the newly emancipated Israelites at Sinai, the second iteration of the commandment in Devarim underscores its timeless relevance.

כְּבֹד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכוֹן יְמֵיךָ וְלְמַעַן יִיטֵב לְךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־הָ' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ:

Honor your father and your mother, as your G-d has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with thee in the land that your G-d giveth thee.

Devarim 5:16

As society advances, the tendency for children to feel “ahead” of their parents advances too. And while we may tend to think a lack of respect toward adults is a 21st-century problem exacerbated by the digital age, the Torah shows this is hardly a contemporary phenomenon. After just forty years in the desert, even the Jewish people needed reminding, and our Sages suggest, the additional phrase “as your G-d has commanded you” inserted in the second iteration of the law of *Kibud Av V’em* underscores the ever-present potential for reverence recession.

The Talmud is not short on stories and discussions about the physical and emotional difficulties facing children of aging parents, including Rabbi Ismael’s mother who complains when he refuses to let her drink the water used to wash his feet.¹⁰ In *Kiddushin* 31a, the Sages teach:

כִּיבוֹד מֵאֲכִיל וּמִשָּׁקָה מִלְבִּישׁ וּמִכֶּסֶה מִכְּנִיָּס וּמִרְצִיָּא

What is considered honor? He gives his father food and drink, dresses and covers him, and brings him in and takes him out, for all his household needs.

Evidently, such acts cannot be performed unless the child cohabitates with his or her parent or is able provide a substitute caregiver. Of course, not all children are in such a position, and the *Shulchan Aruch* states that in fulfilling one’s obligation, the child need not incur personal financial loss but can draw on available resources from the parent; furthermore, if being physically present to serve as an aid prevents the child from meeting his professional responsibilities, he is not “obligated to miss work and end up a beggar’s son.”¹¹

This is the predicament Lear’s eldest daughter Goneril finds herself in when her father comes to live with her. The cost of hosting the king and his hundred knights and squires drains her domestic resources, and she asks her father to

reduce his entourage in an effort to restore economy and order to her household. When Lear refuses, both daughters demand he justifies his need for not only one hundred, fifty, or ten companions, but even one. Although Lear is stubborn, Shakespeare elicits the audience's sympathy by portraying the painful reduction of an elderly man's agency and dignity in real-time. Before Lear storms out, he slings bitter curses at his daughters and declares, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."

The Talmud also has harsh words for a child who fails to fuse the right actions with the right attitude toward a parent.

תְּנִי אֲבִימִי בְּרִיָּה דְרַבִּי אַבְהוּ יֵשׁ מֵאֲכִיל לְאָבִיו
פְּסִיגֵי וְטוֹרְדוּ מִן הָעוֹלָם.

Avimi, son of Rabbi Abbahu, taught: There is a type of son who feeds his father pheasant and yet this behavior causes him to be removed from the World, i.e., the World-to-Come.

Kiddushin 31a

For Rashi and Tosafot, meeting a parent's physical needs, even in excess, merits severe punishment if done with resentment and communicated with hostility.

The Haggadah famously records conversations between a father and four sons, identified not by names but by character traits. When introducing the questions of the three sons who speak, the Haggadah writes:

חָכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר... רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר...
תָּם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר

What does the wise son say?... What does the wicked son say?... What does the simple son say?...

In his commentary on the Haggadah, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shares that his father-in-law, the Friediker Rebbe, understood the words *mah hu omer* not as *what does he say* but as *mah hu (what he is), omer (he speaks)*, meaning that a person's true character can be discerned

from how he or she communicates."¹² For example, after observing the labor and expense that goes into the Seder, the Rasha asks:

מָה הָעֵבֶדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם

What is this worship to you?

Shemot 12:26

The Haggadah notes that his word choice of *lachem v'lo lo* ('To you' and not 'to him') is a verbal rejection of his father's values. In response, the Haggadah advises the father: "you will blunt his teeth and say to him, 'For the sake of this, did the L-rd do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8)." 'For me' and not 'for him.' If he had been *there*, he would not have been saved." While this response has been understood as a harsh yet deserved rebuke, what is gained here? Indeed, the son may still be in Mitzrayim mentally—enslaved to a cultural paradigm that distances fathers and sons—but how does further alienating an already alienated child help? For the Lubavitcher Rebbe, placing emphasis on the word "there" transforms the message from banishment to benevolence. Indeed, redemption during the Exodus was contingent on consent, and had this son been in Egypt at that time, he would not have been redeemed; however, the father implies, we are no longer *there* but in the present post-Sinai era, when every Jew is free to choose a relationship with Hashem at any moment.¹³

As the Haggadah implies, we can mitigate tensions between parents and children by being mindful of tense. In his book *Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About the Art of Persuasion*, Jay Heinrichs explains that the past tense (forensic rhetoric) is all about blame and punishment. "Look what you did!" "She started it!" The chief topics of past tense are guilt and innocence, and when people feel

judged, they get defensive. The present tense is demonstrative and is used for labeling and evaluation. "You never call." "You are a slob." The future tense is deliberative and deals with choices. Its chief topic, according to Aristotle, is the advantageous next thing. Admittedly, teaching my teen these tools has made arguing with her more difficult. Consider the following scenario.

Me: You were supposed to be asleep by now.

My daughter: What time is it?

Me: 12:05 am.

My daughter: You're right. I should have been watching the time more carefully.

Me: Yes, you should have. I tell you all the time.

My daughter: I must have been too focused on [writing this essay that I'm really proud of / driving slowly at night to be more cautious / listening to Sarah, who's been going through a lot lately...]. I'll set an alarm right now on my phone for 10:30 pm every night and make sure I'm more careful in the future.

Me: ...Um, okay. Thanks.

The reality is, of course, children are not perfect, and many parents are objectively problematic. Lear forces his daughters to compete for his love, and both the king and the Earl of Gloucester reject children who honor them justly in favor of flatterers who fan their egos. For their pride, greed, vanity, lust, duplicity, and ignorance, Shakespeare literalizes the curses G-d says will befall those who do not faithfully observe His commandments:

יִכְכֶּה ה' בְּשִׁנְאוֹ וּבְעוֹרוֹ וּבְתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב: וְהֵיטָה
מִמֶּשֶׁשׁ בַּצְּהָרִים כְּאֲשֶׁר יִמְשֵׁשׁ הָעוֹר בְּאַפְלָה
וְלֹא תִצְלִיחַ אֶת־דְּרָכֶיךָ וְהֵיטָה אֶף עֲשׂוֹק וְגוֹל
כָּל־הַיָּמִים וְאִין מוֹשִׁיעַ:

G-d will strike you with madness, blindness, and dismay. You shall grope at noon as the blind grope in the dark; you

shall not prosper in your ventures, but shall be constantly abused and robbed, with none to give help.

Devarim 28:28 -29

During the 17th century, audiences were so unsettled by the pathos of an enfeebled and mad Lear wandering through the wilderness with the blinded and abandoned Gloucester that Nahum Tate composed an alternative ending, and Tate's "happier" version supplanted the bard's on English stage for over a century.

Although Lear and Cordelia both die in Shakespeare's tragedy, he does include a poignant scene toward the end when the two are momentarily reunited. When Lear struggles to recognize his own daughter, Cordelia requests, "O, look upon me, sir, and hold your hands in benediction o'er me," which summons to mind images of the Avot who gathered their offspring as their own eyes dimmed to bestow blessings upon them. Although Lear asks Cordelia for forgiveness, he never truly intuits his mistake: believing that the parent-child bond is about reciprocity instead of perpetuity and futurity. Although many commentaries read the promise of *ya'arichun yamecha* (*lengthened days*) in Shemot 20:12 and Devarim 5:16 as a quid pro quo reward for *Kibud Av V'em*, longevity in itself isn't always a boon when we consider the effects of aging, even when adult children do everything in their power to maximize comfort and dignity. Yet living long enough to see the transmission of Torah and the continuity of the covenant from one generation to the next is a most precious gift, one which Moshe Rabbenu— who spent his whole life living apart from his own parents— desperately yearned for.

In the Folio version of Shakespeare's tragedy, Gloucester's surviving son urges the audience at the end of the play: "The weight of this sad time we

must obey; Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." However, after listening to Lear wish infertility on his own daughters at the height of his fury, we're left to wonder whether this is actually good advice. And if we do aim to speak only "what we ought to say," then "ought" according to whom or what?

G-d willing, our homes will host family and friends of varying degrees of cognation, habitation, and cerebration this Passover as each of us is bound to not only retell a story from our collective history but imagine ourselves personally experiencing the Exodus.

בְּכֹל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ
כְּאִילוּ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם

In each and every generation one is obligated to see ourselves as if they went out from Egypt

Pesachim 116b

Numerous laws and guidelines exist to help us navigate the Seder night for a multigenerational crowd. Laws pertaining to *what* we should say and *when* are extensive, including directives provided in the Haggadah itself.

וְכֹל הַמְרַבֵּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיציאת מצרים הרי זה
מְשַׁבֵּחַ

And anyone who adds [and spends extra time] in telling the story of the exodus from Egypt, behold he is praiseworthy.

Yet the Seder also teaches us that it's not just what we say but how we say it that matters, and obligates us to exercise the highest levels of care in our communication with young and old alike. By saying what we ought, and

untethering the bestowal of kindness from compliance, we become blessings to ourselves and others and can look toward the future with faith and gratitude.

Endnotes

1. See *Guide of the Perplexed* (especially 1:73)
2. Holinshed's Chronicles: England, Scotland, and Ireland. Volume 1. Project Gutenberg online.
3. See William J. Kennedy's "Shakespeare's King Lear and the Bible," *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible and Literature* (Cambridge, 2020).
4. J. Moreno Garcia, "Households," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (2012).
5. The Instruction of Ptah-Hotep and the Instruction of Ke'Gemni, Trans. Battiscombe G. Gunn, Project Gutenberg online.
6. Herodotus, *An Account of Egypt*, Trans. G. C. Macaulay. Project Gutenberg online.
7. M.P. Campagno, "Kinship and Family Relations," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (2009).
8. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Structure of the Good Society," Yitro. <https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/yitro/structure-good-society/>
9. Shemot 20:12.
10. Jerusalem Talmud, *Peah* 1:1:23-24.
11. *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 240:5.
12. *Likutei Ta'amim u'Minhagim*.
13. Based on the Rebbe's talks and writings, including a public letter dated Nissan 11, 5717 (April 12, 1957), https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/2853/jewish/There-Here-and-Nowhere.htm

