



A Beit Midrash Zichron Dov Publication

Be'Chol Dor Va'Dor

Our Journey to Freedom



Pesach Seder Companion

5786 | Volume 12



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in honour of Rabbi Mann and the entire chevra, whose Torah
thoughts enrich our community and grace our table every Shabbat.

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war and sacrifice, and continue to protect Jews and other
oppressed peoples worldwide.

Dedicated by Kevin and Amanda Wassermuhl
in loving memory of Chana Raisa bat Tzvi ז"ל

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Introduction

After two and a half years marked by war, loss, and profound challenge, the State of Israel and the Jewish people have also borne witness to something remarkable: resilience, rebuilding, and renewal. In moments of darkness, the strength of our people has shone brightly. The noble qualities we see today - in courage, unity, faith, and determination - did not arise suddenly. They are the continuation of a calling that stretches back through the generations: our enduring purpose and mission as a nation.

בכל דור ודור - In every generation, we are reminded anew who we are. Time and again, the Jewish people rise together, strengthened by our shared past and united in our eternal striving toward freedom, redemption, and light.

In that spirit, we have gathered together *divrei Torah* from voices across generations of Torah leadership connected to the Toronto community: Rabbinic leaders of Toronto, past and present shlichim, and distinguished Israeli Rabbis who have recently inspired our communities through their visits, who all embody the living spirit of *Torat Eretz Yisrael*.

Through this collection, we hope to serve as one link in the unbroken chain of Jewish learning and tradition. May these words strengthen our connection to Torah, deepen our love for the Land of Israel, and reinforce the unity and destiny of the Jewish people.

As we sit around the Seder table and recount the story of our *geula*, may we merit to see the continued renewal of our people and the fulfillment of our eternal hope for freedom, peace, and light.

Wishing you and yours a Pesach Kasher ve'Sameach,
Beit Midrash Zichron Dov and Mizrachi Canada

The Itinerary of Liberty



Rabbi Yehuda Mann
Rosh Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Last year, on my way from Toronto to Eretz Yisrael for my sister-in-law's wedding, I had a stopover in Athens. At the airport, a small but classic disagreement developed between me and my father.

My father wanted to see the city properly. He had a full itinerary ready: first the Acropolis, then the museum, then a long list of historic landmarks. Thoughtful. Organized. Ambitious.

I said, "Abba, I'm on vacation! On vacation I don't go to museums. I look for the kosher restaurant. I don't want a schedule. I want beten-gav (a phrase Israelis use to refer to lying by the pool and rolling from one's stomach to their back). That's freedom!"

For one day in Athens, that works.

But here's the irony: On the very night we celebrate freedom - the night of the Seder - we follow the most detailed itinerary of the year. The author of the Haggadah clearly sided with my father.

Kadesh. Urchatz. Karpas. Yachatz.

Every step deliberate. Every stage defined. The most structured night on the Jewish calendar.

If this is the night of freedom, why is it so carefully choreographed? Shouldn't freedom mean no itinerary, no structure, just spiritual beten-gav?

I once heard a powerful insight from Rabbi Efreim Goldberg. We tend to think happiness comes from unlimited freedom and unlimited choices. The whole world is open. Conquer it, taste it, experience it!

But that's not how life actually works.

Psychologist Barry Schwartz, in *The Paradox of Choice*, describes a famous study. In a gourmet market, one display offered 24 varieties of jam. Another offered just six. The larger display attracted more attention but far fewer purchases. When faced with 24 options, people hesitated, second-guessed, and walked away. With six options, they chose and were satisfied.

Choice is good. But too much choice creates anxiety, regret, and paralysis. When everything is possible, nothing feels secure. Unlimited freedom can actually leave us feeling trapped.

You can't live a life of *beten-gav* forever. It works for a day in Athens, maybe a week in Miami. But long-term joy comes from purpose. From direction. From living for something bigger than yourself.

And that is exactly what Pesach teaches.

The Torah does not restrict us to confine us. It guides us to free us: from emptiness, from confusion, from the exhausting pressure of endless options. The structure of the Seder is not the opposite of freedom. It is the definition of freedom.

There is a beautiful story about the Imrei Emes, who quoted his father, the Sfas Emes. The Sfas Emes once said that during Hallel, at the words "Ana Hashem," one can merit extraordinary blessing. The chassidim debated: Which "Ana Hashem"?

"Ana Hashem hoshia na" - please save us?

"Ana Hashem hatzlicha na" - please grant us success?

The Imrei Emes explained: My father meant a different phrase. "Ana Hashem ki ani avdecha." Please, Hashem, or as some explain, thank You, Hashem, for I am Your servant.

Salvation is beautiful. Success is wonderful.

But the greatest gift of all is to be an *eved Hashem*.

The Torah and mitzvos are not 613 restrictions. They are 613 connections. Not 613 burdens, but 613 pathways to closeness with the Ribbono Shel Olam.

That is real freedom.

This Pesach, as we sit at our beautifully ordered Seder, may we discover that true liberty is not the absence of structure, but the embrace of a sacred mission.

And may we all merit to say, with joy and gratitude:
Ribono Shel Olam, thank You that I am Your servant.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

When you have too many choices, such as several snacks, games, or things to watch on television, does it make you happier? Or can it sometimes make it harder to choose? Why?

The Seder has a clear order with 15 steps. Why do you think Hashem gave us a “schedule” for the night of freedom? How can rules sometimes make things more meaningful or engaging?

What is something in your life that feels like a rule or responsibility, but actually helps you grow and become better? Perhaps sports practice, learning Torah, helping at home?

Turning Ritual Into Our Story



Rabbi AZ (Avraham Zvi) Thau
Past Shaliach

Leil Haseder is a unique evening with the utmost significance. Throughout the year we try to instill within ourselves and our children a sense of purpose and mission. We attempt to connect them with the understanding of what it means to be part of Am Yisrael. Once a year we have the rare mitzvah of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Rav Soloveitchik writes at length about the contrast between our yearly obligation to remember that we left Mitzrayim versus at Leil Haseder when we have the mitzvah to tell over the story and to relive those events. The question then arises: What is the best way to accomplish this? What is the best way to transmit our story? In our attempt to answer these intricate questions, we must look practically at what we do and whether it aligns with our mission.

In this Dvar Torah we will focus on the section of *Urchatz*. What is *Urchatz*? The Mishna Brachot 1:6 says before eating any food that will be dipped we need to wash our hands. The Shulachan Aruch O"C 158:4 codifies that if we are going to dip our food in one of the seven liquids (י"ד שח"ט ד"מ - יין דבש שמן חלב טל דם מים) we need to wash our hands but we do not make a bracha, like we do before eating bread. While this sounds like an important Halacha, how is this relevant for Pesach or *Leil Haseder*? The Gemara (Pesachim 115A) says that any time we dip our food we need to wash beforehand. Tosfot explains that due to the fact that we aren't careful for ritual purity nowadays, we are therefore not required to wash our hands in general. So why are we washing in general and why on this night? The Gr"a (S.A. O"C 158:4) quotes Tosfot and then continues to explain that the majority of Poskim and the Geonim believe that we should say a bracha like we do before eating bread. However, the Magen

Avraham defends our practice. The Taz (S.A. O”C 158:4) writes that not only should we be washing at *Leil Haseder*, but we should be doing this all year round!

If we should do this not only during *Leil Haseder* then why do we specifically do it on this night? The Imrei Shefer (HaNatziv) says: *“On the seder night we attempt to act as if the Temple still stood, and to imitate the Pesach seder as it was at the time that the Pesach sacrifice was being offered. This principle has many ramifications, one of them being the washing of the hands here... Therefore, even those who are not stringent about washing their hands the whole year are stringent about this on the seder night.”* Another potential reason presented by the Aruch Hashulchan O”C 473:18 fits excellently with a theme we see in many other areas of the seder. He says the reason that we wash our hands even before having the matzah, isn’t to remind ourselves of what it was like in the times of the Beit Hamikdash or for us to be careful one night a year for *tumah* and *tahara*, rather we do this to get the children to ask questions.

We have an obligation to transmit our history and our story via the mechanism of asking questions. We want our children to not be spectators on this night, rather we want them to facilitate it and be active participants. *Urchatz* is yet another link in the chain to the incredible event of the seder and to our larger Jewish Story.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

What questions can we encourage our children to ask at the Seder so they feel like active participants in the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*?

How can small actions at the Seder, like *Urchatz*, help us and our families truly relive the story rather than just remember it?

In what ways can we strengthen our role in passing the story and mission of Am Yisrael to the next generation?

Karpas and the Meaning of Cheirut



Rabbi Ami Yunger
COO, Mizrachi Canada

At the beginning of the Seder, before we tell the story, before we eat matzah and maror, before the meal has even begun, we take a small piece of vegetable, dip it, and eat it. It seems like a minor detail. Yet Chazal built it into the structure of the night and even highlighted it in the *Mah Nishtanah*: *"On all other nights we do not dip even once; on this night, twice."*

Why does this act matter? What does karpas add to the experience of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*?

Many explain that the dipping is simply there to spark the curiosity of the children. Something unusual happens, and they ask. The Bach, however, offers a different explanation. He writes that karpas functions as an appetizer, something that awakens the appetite before the meal, reflecting the conduct of free and refined people.

That explanation is surprising. In Torah life, eating is never the goal. It is a tool. The Tur in Orach Chaim קנ"ה explains that a person eats in order to be strong enough to serve Hashem. The Mishnah Berurah (קנ"ה ס"ק יא) rules:

"ומצוה להנהיג עצמו במידה טובה והנהגה טובה לשמור בריאותו, כדי שיהיה בריא וחזק לעבודת הבורא יתעלה."

We take care of our bodies so that we can serve the Creator.

If so, why would the Seder begin by deliberately increasing our appetite? Is that what freedom looks like? Is a ben chorin someone who focuses more carefully on physical enjoyment?

Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimmon explains that the answer lies in what happens next. Although we eat the karpas and it awakens our

appetite, the meal does not follow. Instead we enter Maggid, tell the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, explain *pesukim*, thank Hashem, and relive the journey from slavery to redemption. We only return much later to the physical act of eating.

That long stretch between the appetizer and the meal is the message.

A slave responds immediately to physical need. When he is hungry, he eats as soon as food is available. His body pulls him, and he follows. A *ben chorin* can feel hunger and still wait. He can turn his attention to Torah and gratitude even while his appetite has been stirred. He shows that the soul leads and the body follows.

Karpas, which some link by allusion to *ס' ריבוא עבדו בפרך*, the six hundred thousand who were enslaved with crushing labor, now becomes the food of free people. We taste it, sense the hunger it creates, and then choose to continue speaking about *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. We declare that we are no longer controlled by instinct. We are *avdei Hashem*.

Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi expressed this sharply:

"עבדי הזמן – עבדי עבדים הם, עבד ה' – הוא לבדו חופשי."

One who serves time and impulse is still a slave. Only one who serves Hashem is truly free.

This understanding of freedom has taken on new depth in our generation.

Agam Berger described that even in captivity, she had the freedom to choose her response. In the terrifying moments of her kidnapping, she repeated "*Shema Yisrael*," the same words Jews have said for centuries at the edge of life. No captor could take that choice from her.

During Pesach, she and Liri Albag marked the chag in a dark room without windows. They cleaned their small space, made decorations from scraps of paper, and used a makeshift Haggadah

that had been written there. They heard about the Seder table set for them in Tel Aviv and listened to the voices of their loved ones. They cried, and then they ate their own “bread of affliction.”

Their bodies were confined. Their spirits were not.

They could not decide where they would sleep or when they would be freed. But they decided who they would be. They held on to *kashrut*. They observed fasts. They celebrated Pesach. They chose *emunah*.

That is the deeper meaning of karpas as Rav Rimon presents it. Freedom is not about having every desire satisfied. It is about not being ruled by desire at all. It is about the ability to pause, to wait, and to place Torah before appetite.

A *ben chorin* is not someone without limits.

A *ben chorin* is someone whose soul remains in charge.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

Think about a time this week when you wanted something right away. What would it have looked like to pause first and choose based on values instead of impulse?

At the Seder table, what is one small way each person can show that they are in control of themselves and not controlled by comfort, hunger, or distraction?

If cheirut means the soul leads and the body follows, what is one family practice we can strengthen this year that helps put Hashem first in our home?

A Night of Questions: The Power of Inquiry in Torah and Life



Rabbi Eddie Shostak
Menahel, Yeshivat Or Chaim
Rabbi Or Chaim Minyan

Jewish life is defined by questions. From our earliest traditions, asking questions has been the gateway to learning, growth, and connection. Nowhere is this more evident than on the night of the Seder. As we settle around the table, a child is placed in the spotlight to ask, *Mah Nishtana?* - “Why is this night different from all other nights?” And as the evening draws to a close, we join together in unison to ask, *Echad Mi Yodea?* - “Who knows one?” This ritual highlights a fundamental truth: Judaism thrives on inquiry.

Yet not all questions are equal. Some foster connection, understanding, and spiritual growth, while others can create distance, doubt, or even disintegration. In Torah study, the questions we ask shape how we relate to the text, to each other, and to Hashem. Consider questions like, “Why does the Torah emphasize loving your neighbor as yourself?” or “What can we learn from Yosef’s resilience in Egypt?” These inquiries invite reflection, moral insight, and practical application, allowing the Torah to resonate deeply in our daily lives. By contrast, questions asked with cynicism or resentment - “Why should we follow these outdated laws?” or “Is Torah really relevant today?” - can foster alienation and spiritual disengagement. The challenge lies in cultivating the art of asking questions that illuminate, inspire, and connect us to the eternal wisdom of Torah.

Rav Hutner teaches that just as the Wicked Son uses the word *lachem* - “to you” - in his question for which he is criticized, the Wise Son uses similar language *Etchem* - “you”. The distinction lies not in the words themselves but in the tone, intention, and

openness behind the question. Only a question genuinely asked as a question contributes to the fulfillment of the commandment to discuss the Exodus on seder night.

A genuine question presupposes a relationship; it implies a desire to understand and engage. The Wicked Son weaponizes his question, seeking confrontation rather than connection. In contrast, the Wise Son's inquiry builds bridges, deepens understanding, and fulfills the mitzvah of the night.

Modern research confirms the value of questioning in human development. In *A More Beautiful Question*, Warren Berger notes that children naturally ask thousands of questions, but social pressures often suppress this curiosity in adolescence. Those who retain the ability to ask thoughtful, probing questions become innovators, problem-solvers, and learners for life.

At the Seder, questions serve a similar purpose: to cultivate curiosity, to invite learning, and to awaken the freedom to explore, probe, and grow.

Chazal teach, "*Who is wise? He who learns from all people*" (Avot 4:1). The Talmud praises the student willing to humble himself, to ask "stupid" questions, knowing that such humility leads to elevated understanding (Brachot 63b). Rav Yehuda HaLevi likens the Jewish people to a symphony: every instrument, every voice, every perspective is essential. The Kabbalists teach that each Jew represents a single letter of Torah; missing a letter invalidates the whole. Each question, each voice, is critical and contributes to the richness of the collective wisdom of Israel.

In Jewish life and at the Seder table, we are all hungry for answers. But the first step toward understanding is the courage to ask good questions - questions that open our hearts, connect us to each other, and bring us closer to Hashem. True freedom and nation building, as the Seder demonstrates, is not only the capacity to answer but the capacity to inquire, reflect, and grow.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

How do we tell the difference between questions that connect and those that create distance?

How can we cultivate humility and curiosity in Torah study and daily life?

How can we make sure all voices are heard in our communities today?

The Birthday of Am Israel



Esther Shor
Past Shlichah, BAS

"עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים, ויציאנו ה' אלקינו משם ביד חזקה
ובזרע נטויה."

"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord our God brought us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm."



That's it!

Mazal tov! Happy Birthday! In this part of the Haggadah, we mark that very moment: Am Israel was born!

Looking at the story from a broader perspective, we learn from Netanel Elinson, an Israeli educator, author and activist, that the Exodus narrative is shaped in the Tanach as a birth story - the birth of a nation. The opening chapters of Chumash Shemot place us directly in the delivery room. First we encounter the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who ensure the survival of Israelite babies. Then we read a detailed account of Moshe's birth. These are not incidental details. They foreshadow the larger theme of the book: not just the birth of a leader, but the birth of a people.

The prophet Yechezkel explicitly refers to the Exodus as *"the day you were born"* (Yechezkel 16). The imagery of birth runs throughout the story. The emerging nation develops within the "Egyptian womb," sustained yet confined. The Ten Plagues resemble labor contractions - intense, escalating stages that gradually separate the child from the womb. Throughout the plague narratives, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes distinction and separation between Egypt and Israel, hinting at the coming rupture.

The final plague, the Plague of the Firstborn, functions as the last

and most painful contraction. “*There was a great cry in Egypt,*” the Torah tells us, echoing the cry of labor. As Egypt cries out, Israel emerges. Marked by the blood on their doorposts, the Israelites step out from their homes into a new reality. On the morning of the fifteenth of Nisan, a nation is born.

The birth imagery continues beyond the Exodus itself. Eight days after leaving Egypt, the people cross the Red Sea. This event can be seen as a form of national circumcision - a decisive, irreversible separation between Israel and Egypt, much like how a *brit milah* marks covenant and identity. Immediately afterward, we hear the newborn nation’s voice for the first time in song, the Song at the Sea, like the cry of a newborn announcing its presence in the world.

The years in the wilderness represent the nation’s childhood and adolescence. The prophets later describe this period as a time of youthful dependence and growth. Like a child longing for the security of the womb, the Israelites repeatedly express nostalgia for Egypt, even after suffering there. Their yearning reflects the difficulty of independence and the fear that often accompanies freedom.

If the Exodus marks the birth of the Jewish people, then the stories of Bereshit, the *Avot* and *Ima’hot*, form its prehistory. They describe the family roots, the spiritual “genetics” from which the nation emerged. The Sages captured this idea in the phrase, “*The deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children.*” Yet history, in the national sense, begins at birth - with redemption and emergence.

Each year at the Seder, we do more than recall an ancient event. We celebrate a birthday - the birth of a people and the beginning of its journey toward its destiny. The Exodus is not only a story of liberation; it is a story of becoming. Mazal Tov!



Reflective Questions for Discussion

If the Exodus marks our birth as a nation, what do you think our “purpose” was at that moment?

What separates true freedom from simply escaping something difficult?

How does remembering our “birth story” shape who we are today?

מעשה ברבי אליעזר

Akiva Nichamtanu: Finding Hope in the Darkness



Rabbi Shmuel Leshner
Assistant Rabbi, BAYT

מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא ורבי טרפון שהיו מסבין בבני־ברק, והיו מספרים ביציאת מצרים כל־ אותו הלילה, עד שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו להם: רבותינו, הגיע זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית.

Once, Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining [at the Seder] in Bnei Brak. They spoke of the Exodus from Egypt throughout the entire night, until their students came and said to them, “Our teachers, the time for reciting the morning Shema has arrived.”



Everything in the Haggadah is placed with precision, as the very phrase *Pesach Seder* suggests - an ordered night, carefully structured.

At first glance, this passage seems intended to serve as a precedent for an earlier statement in Maggid: “Even if we were all wise, discerning, and knowledgeable, we would still be obligated to retell the story of the Exodus.” Although certainly knowledgeable, all of these rabbis still spent the entire night engaged in retelling the Exodus story. But questions about this story still remain. Why were these five sages together on Seder night, seemingly away from their families? Why specifically in Bnei Brak? Why did the rabbis discuss the Exodus all night long? Why did they need their students to remind them to recite *kriat shema*? Why did they not remember themselves?

R. Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, known as the Steipler, (*Kehillos Yaakov Berachot* 4:1) explains that this Seder took place in Bnei Brak because it was in R. Akiva’s city, where he was the *moreh de’atra*, the Rav of the city.

But this only deepens the questions: why did these great rabbis leave their own homes to spend the Seder with R. Akiva?

To answer this, we need to understand who R. Akiva was.

R. Akiva had very humble beginnings. *Avot Direbbi Natan* (6) relates that after a profound personal awakening, he committed himself to Torah study despite knowing almost nothing at all. He began by learning the *aleph-bet* alongside his young son, slowly progressing through *Tanakh* and Mishnah, until he eventually surpassed the leading scholars of his generation.

Chagigah (12a) records that R. Akiva studied for twenty-two years under Nachum Ish Gam Zu who taught him not only Torah, but a worldview of radical optimism. Nachum Ish Gam Zu, who endured blindness, amputations, boils, and poverty, was known for his constant refrain: “*Gam zu litovah* - this too is for the good.” R. Akiva internalized this teaching, later formulating it as a principle: “One must accustom oneself to say: Everything that God does is for the best” (*Berachot* 60b).

R. Akiva was once denied lodging in a city and forced to sleep in a field. His candle went out, his rooster was eaten, and his donkey was devoured. Yet each time he repeated, “Everything God does is for the best.” That very night, enemy soldiers overran the city; Rabbi Akiva alone was spared - protected by the very losses that had seemed so devastating.

R. Akiva’s optimism also appears at the end of *Makkot* (24b). After the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the sages saw a fox emerge from the Holy of Holies and wept. Rabbi Akiva laughed. The destruction, he explained, fulfilled the prophecy of Uriyah, which in turn guaranteed the prophecy of Zechariah foretelling Jerusalem’s restoration. Moved, the sages declared: “*Akiva nichamtanu, Akiva nichamtanu* - Akiva, you have comforted us.” R. Akiva was able to find hope even in a moment when all of the other sages had lost it. Even the death of every single one of his

own students did not break him. *Yevamot* (62b) relates that twelve thousand pairs of R. Akiva's students died because they failed to show respect for one another. Rather than despair, R. Akiva began again. He found R. Meir, R. Yehudah, R. Yosei, R. Shimon, and R. Elazar ben Shamua - through whom Torah continued to flourish. R. Chezekiah da Silva, in his *Pri Chadash*, explains that this is what we celebrate on Lag BaOmer. It was not merely the end of a tragedy, but R. Akiva's refusal to give up. Even after losing 24,000 students, on Lag Baomer, R. Akiva got up and found more students and taught them Torah. It was this resilience to which all of today's Torah can be attributed.

In light of this, we can now understand why the sages traveled to Bnei Brak for Seder night.

R. Yechiel Michel Epstein, the *Aruch Hashulchan*, in his commentary on the *Haggadah Leil Shimurim*, reminds us of the historical context. R. Akiva lived after the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash, during the harsh Hadrianic persecutions following the failed Bar Kochba rebellion - one of the darkest periods in Jewish history. What would a Pesach Seder look like without a Beit Hamikdash, without a Korban Pesach, and amid such suffering? How could one celebrate freedom in a moment of national despair?

The sages realized that there was only one place where they could learn how to conduct such a Seder: with R. Akiva in Bnei Brak. Perhaps this is why they left their families - to absorb from him the resilience and hope they would need to bring back to their communities.

Now we understand why they discussed the Pesach story all night. Night is symbolic of the darkness of exile. Then, as dawn approaches, the students announce: "The time for Keriat Shema of the morning has arrived." R. Shalom Rosner (*Shalom Rav Haggada*) suggests that this symbolizes the light at the end of the tunnel -

the certainty that morning follows even the darkest night. On that fateful night in Bnei Brak, at Rabbi Akiva's Seder, we can almost hear the words "*Akiva nichamtanu* - Akiva, you have comforted us" echoing once again.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

What gives you hope during challenging times?

Is there a person you turn to for courage and reassurance?

How do they help you find resilience?

Rediscovering the Tam: The Beauty of Intentional Simplicity



Rabbi Ori and Aviya Ezra
Shlichim | BAS, BMZD,
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The Four Sons are among the most iconic and enduring symbols of the Haggadah. Around countless Seder tables children negotiate, sometimes passionately, over who will read which son. The Wise Son is coveted; the Wicked Son is dramatic; and the indifference of the One Who Does Not Know How to Ask evokes sympathy. Yet there is one son whose depth is often overlooked, or even misunderstood: the Tam.

In modern terms, simplicity often implies naïveté or intellectual deficiency. But the Hebrew word *tam* carries a rich meaning, as one that speaks not of lack, but of wholeness, integrity, and inner clarity.

In the story “The Wise and Simple” (*Ma’aseh beChacham veTam*), Rabbi Nachman of Breslov reframes the Tam as perhaps the most spiritually successful of the four sons. The Tam asks simply not because he lacks depth, but because he is unburdened by cynicism. His questions flow from a place of trust, curiosity, and presence. Unlike the Wise Son, whose sophistication can distance him from lived experience, or the Wicked Son, whose sharpness becomes alienation, the Tam remains whole. His simplicity is not emptiness; rather, it is spaciousness. He meets the world without defensive, self-imposed barriers, allowing truth to enter from a place of love and connection.

This understanding of *temimut*, wholeness, finds a powerful echo in Chassidic commentary on the Torah. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudylkov, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov and author of *Degel Machaneh Efraim*, reflects on the verse describing the plague of darkness in Egypt (Shemot 10:23):

"ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבותם."

"For all the Children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings."

The English translation of this *pasuk* tells us where the light was. The Hebrew hints at why.

He writes:

"וזהו ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבותם, היינו במושב תם, ומושב הוא לשון עכבה שמעכב ומבלה ימיו בטוב. תם היינו אמת מידת יעקב שנקרא איש תם. אזי ולכל בני ישראל היה אור, מחמת שהיו הולכים בתמימות ובאמת, היה הקב"ה מאיר להם גם כן נהירו דאנפין."

"This is the meaning of 'For all the Children of Israel there was light in their dwellings,' that is, in the dwelling of tam, moshvotam. 'Dwelling' (moshav) implies a settling, a lingering: one who remains and spends his days in goodness. Tam refers to truth, the attribute of Yaakov, who is called an 'ish tam'. Thus, for all the Children of Israel there was light, because they walked in simplicity and truth, the Holy One illuminated them as well with radiant divine light."

We can envision that the light surrounding the Hebrews in Egypt emerged from their temimut. This trait flows from a place of inner acceptance, from the spiritual source of our forefathers, such as Yaakov, and from the courage to dwell and linger in truth.

We encounter praise of wholeness in our first patriarch as well, Avraham:

"התהלך לפני והיה תמים" - *"Walk before Me and be tamim"* (Bereishit 17:1).

Hashem calls upon Avraham to act with initiative and responsibility, to lead the way, and to do so guided by the beauty of *temimut*, allowing it to shape his *emunah* and his path.

The Tam of the Seder, the *tam* within the Israelites' dwellings, and the *temimut* of our forefathers teach us that we should envelop and enrich our beings in full honesty and loving, powerful presence within our surroundings. We are invited to create space

within our reality, within our relationships, and within our own minds, to be calm, loyal, and clear. This is our luminous strength.

We see these ideas in the words of David HaMelech:

“יְהִי לִיבִי תָמִים בְּחוֹקְךָ” - “Let my heart be sincere in Your statutes” (Psalms 119:80).

The Israeli singer Akiva echoes the same message in our generation, in a complex reality that often praises the impulse to armor ourselves with counterproductive sophistication:

“תִּשְׁמֹר עֲלֵינוּ פְּשׁוּטִים” - “Keep us simple.”

May we have the courage to cultivate within ourselves the quiet, enduring light of the Tam: an intellectual simplicity rooted in depth, and a humble elegance grounded in truth.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

Do you find yourself leaning more toward intellectual sophistication or simplicity?

In what moments of your daily life could embracing temimut change the way you approach challenges or relationships?

Considering the Four Sons, which one's approach or perspective resonates with you most, and what qualities from that son would you like to cultivate in your own spiritual or personal journey?

The Promise That Stands With Us



Rabbi Sam Taylor
Senior Rabbi, Shaarei Shomayim

Every year at the Seder table, families around the world rise to sing one of the most stirring passages in the Haggadah, *Vehi She'amda*. “*And this is what has stood by our ancestors and us,*” we declare. But if we pause and read the words carefully, something curious appears. The text never actually explains what “*this*” is. Instead, it continues with a statement that sounds almost unsettling: “*For not just one enemy has stood against us to destroy us, but in every generation they stand against us to destroy us, and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hands.*” At first glance, it raises an uncomfortable question. Is this really meant to encourage us? Are we celebrating the fact that in every generation someone rises up against the Jewish people?

The Yismach Moshe addresses this exact question and the answer offers a striking way to understand the passage. The promise that has “*stood by us,*” he explains, is not merely that our enemies ultimately fail. Rather, the very fact that threats arise in every generation creates the conditions for divine intervention. When danger confronts the Jewish people, Hashem must step in to save them. And when He intervenes in history, He is not necessarily bound by a predetermined timetable. Redemption can come earlier than expected, precisely because it is needed in that moment.

Seen in this light, *Vehi She'amda* takes on a deeper meaning. The promise that has sustained the Jewish people through the centuries is not simply that we will survive history’s storms. It is that Hashem has tied His own name to our survival in every generation. Each time enemies arise, the covenant calls forth a response. Each rescue becomes another moment of divine

involvement in human history. This perspective transforms how we understand the long and often painful story of the Jewish people. We are not merely a nation that has somehow managed to endure repeated threats. Rather, we are part of an ongoing relationship in which God continues to act in the world.

That message is not only about the past. *Vehi She'amda* speaks to the present as well. When we face difficulties, whether as a people or in our own personal lives, it can feel as though redemption is distant, something that will arrive only at the proper time. The teaching of the Yismach Moshe suggests otherwise. Sometimes the very moment of crisis becomes the opening for salvation. Hashem does not always wait for the “scheduled time” to help His children. When the need is real and immediate, the response can be immediate as well. And that, perhaps, is the promise that has truly stood by us in every generation.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

If challenges and threats can become the very moments that invite divine intervention, how might that idea change the way we view the difficulties we experience in our own lives?

Vehi She'amda suggests that Hashem's involvement in history is ongoing and responsive. In what ways can we train ourselves to notice and appreciate those moments of divine help in our own generation?

צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו

Why is Lavan in the Haggadah?



Rabbi Shaanan Scherer
Maggid Shiur

What is Lavan doing in our Haggadah? The short answer is that the animosity within the Patriarchal family that led to slavery in Egypt begins with Lavan's trickery.

However, we can elaborate on an alternative answers to what the Haggadah says. Rivka (Lavan's sister) sends Yaakov to Padan Aram to find refuge from Esav who seeks his death. Yaakov instantly falls in love with Rachel, the second daughter of Lavan. Lavan tricks Yaakov by disguising his older daughter Leah as Rachel. Yaakov ends up marrying Leah instead and only after seven more years of labour for Lavan does he marry his true love; Rachel.

It is clear that the family dynamics of one man marrying two sisters is far from ideal. There are two negative emotions mentioned in the Torah that Rachel and Leah experience are שנאה and קנאה, jealousy and hatred (see Bereisheet 29:31-33, 30:1). Leah is "hated" (or loved less compared to her sister) by Yaakov since they were only married by Lavan's trickery and Rachel is jealous of Leah for having children when she is still barren.

The Torah does not tell us about how Rachel and Leah educated their own children. We do not know what each mother told their sons about their half brothers and their husband's other spouse. However, the Torah tells us what Leah's sons felt towards Joseph: Bereisheet 37:3-5: *"Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him. Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; and they*

hated him even more." Leah's sons hated Joseph as a result of Yaakov's special love for Rachel's oldest child.

Later on in the chapter, we read (Bereisheet 37:9-11): *"He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers, saying, 'Look, I have had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. 'What,' he said to him, 'is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?'" So his brothers were jealous of him, and his father kept the matter in mind."*

Joseph, like his father, had prophetic dreams. This led to Leah's sons being jealous of him. The hatred and jealousy felt among the two sisters who shared one husband was carried on to the next generation and was felt among their children towards each other. It makes one wonder what kind of messages these two sisters told their sons about their half brothers. Ultimately, the jealousy and hatred towards Joseph led to his sale as a slave which then led to B'nei Yisrael living as slaves in Egypt until our Redemption which is told in Pesach Haggadah. We learn about how one's actions to others can even have multigenerational impact. How did this cycle of animosity begin?

"צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו"



Reflective Questions for Discussion

What two emotions does the Torah record existed among Leah and Rachel?

What reasons are given in the Torah for the brothers negative feelings towards Yosef?

Do you connect to the alternate reason explained here how Lavan connects to slavery in Egypt?

Yetziat Mitzrayim: From Escape to Belonging



Rabbi Ari Faust
Rosh KTM & Mizrachi Montreal

מִתְחִיל בְּגִנוּת וּמִסִּיִּים בְּשִׁבְחָה. וְדֹרֵשׁ מִ"אַרְמִי אוֹבֵד אָבִי", עַד שְׁיָגְמוֹר
כָּל הַפֶּרֶשָׁה כֻּלָּה.

We start by telling of the disgrace, and concludes with the glory. And expounds the passage of "Arami Oved Avi" in its entirety.



This teaching from the Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) – which delineates the structure of **סִיפּוּר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם** – is amorphic: What is the “disgrace” and “glory” that frame the story? How does *Arami Oved Avi* fit-in to the structure? What function does it serve? It’s not even clear who the Aramean in the *pasuk* is (some say Lavan – which is the Haggadah’s understanding – some say Avraham, some say Yaakov and some say all the Avot), or what *Oved* means (“wandering” or “sought to destroy”). The passage isn’t even directly connected to *yetziat mitzrayim* – the Torah teaches we must tell-over this story when we bring the *bikkurim* (First Fruits) to the Beit HaMikdash (Devarim 26).

The question of “disgrace” and “glory” is already debated in the Gemara: Rav holds that we tell a spiritual narrative – “*at first our ancestors worshipped idols ... and now we have been brought close to Hashem*” – whereas Shmuel holds it is one of emancipation – “*we were slaves ... and Hashem brought us out.*” Shmuel seems more intuitive – he focuses on the theme of the night, *yetziat mitzrayim*. But what is Rav’s rationale?

I believe that Rav is the key to unlocking the secret message of *Arami Oved Avi* and the underlying narrative of the Seder.

Redemption is not complete when the chains fall away - it is only beginning. German-Jewish social psychologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm once observed that freedom alone does not satisfy

the human soul. A person, he wrote, needs “a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.” Without belonging, freedom becomes disorientation; liberation becomes loneliness. A person may escape oppression and still feel exiled within.

The story of *yetziat mitzrayim*, when told through the narrow lens of Shmuel, is incomplete. Exile is not just where we live, it's how we understand ourselves. Exile is confusion, doubt, and the uneasy feeling of being an impostor in someone else's story. The true “glory” of *yetziat mitzrayim* becomes shaped through shared struggle, loss, and responsibility – becoming part of a people, a history, a destiny.

Arami Oved Avi is the meta-narrative: It encompasses our roots as wanderers with no place, includes the spiritual homelessness, external threats and enslavement. It then crescendos to a tale of emancipation, chosenness, spiritual belonging and ultimately our stronghold in Eretz Yisrael.

Freedom without identity is only escape; true *geulah* – and the arc and purpose of *yetziat mitzrayim* – is the transformation into a covenantal nation anchored in faith and in Eretz Yisrael.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

Why does the Seder frame *Yetziat Mitzrayim* through the broader narrative of *Arami Oved Avi* - a story of wandering, vulnerability, and identity - rather than focusing only on the dramatic moment of emancipation from Egypt?

How does Rav's understanding of “disgrace and glory” challenge our modern assumptions about what it means to be free?

In 1948 we merited to re-establish our liberty and independence in Israel. In the context of our modern state, what could it mean to move from liberation to covenantal belonging?

At the Seder, Even the Mnemonic Asks a Question



Rabbi Benji and Nechama Berger
Shlichim, Bnei Akiva Toronto

There are a lot of mnemonics in our lives. We use them to help us remember different things in our day-to-day routines. We learn them throughout our educational journeys.

In Israel, here are just a few:

- בג"ד כפ"ת, the rule we learn in school about the Beged Kefet letters receiving a dagesh in certain grammatical contexts.
- קב"ר רח"ל תחת אש, anyone who has learned first aid in the army or MADA knows this combination of letters telling us when to apply a tourniquet.
- מג"ע א"ש, the order of brachot and their hierarchy, from *Mezonot* to *Shehakol*.

We see these mnemonics providing structure, clusters of letters that allow us to retrieve complex information at the right moment. Memory is the basis of our cognitive existence. Our memories define our knowledge and shape our identities. They allow us to retrieve information for decision making, whether in the short term or the long term.

The phrase we use, "*let me sleep on it*," is not just poetic. It is scientifically sound. Sleeping allows our minds to consolidate and retrieve long term memory, combining stored knowledge with present dilemmas. Mnemonics are tools that support that retrieval process. They help us access information when we need it, whether we are writing a composition, making a bracha, or, ל"ו ע"ל, applying a life-saving tourniquet.

Yet there is one *siman* that Rabbi Yehuda gives us in the Haggadah that does not form a word, or even resemble one:

דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב

The abbreviation of the *makkot*.

Why does Rabbi Yehuda provide this mnemonic? Why in this form? What is it helping us remember?

Several explanations are offered.

One possibility highlights the roles of Aharon and Moshe. The first three plagues were performed by Aharon with his staff. The next three were performed by Moshe without his staff. The final three were performed by Moshe with his staff. The *siman* reflects transitions in agency.

The Maharal, in *Gevurot Hashem* (Chapter 57), discusses a broader progression within the *makkot*. He explains that they move through different layers of existence, from disruptions in the lower physical realm, to afflictions affecting living beings, and finally to phenomena in the heavens themselves. The plagues escalate in scope and intensity, culminating in death itself with *Makkat Bechorot*.

Others note that the ten plagues naturally divide into three groups of three, with *Makkat Bechorot* standing apart. The words in the *siman* themselves do not carry inherent meaning. The Midrash even records that this *siman* was engraved on Moshe Rabbeinu's staff, as if the structure of the plagues was embedded in the instrument of redemption itself.

So why, Rabbi Yehuda? Why this combination of letters?

Maybe that is precisely the point.

We sit in a classroom, and the teacher begins speaking about something like “Gene Expression Regulation in Eukaryotic Cells.” Say what? The terminology feels overwhelming. Yet, in many cases, we hesitate to ask. We are afraid to appear vulnerable. Even more so today, when we struggle with concentration and focus, terrified that perhaps this was already explained and we somehow missed it. This is definitely relevant also with simpler phrases we have been introduced to in our day to day lives. We. Just. Don't. Remember.

Perhaps עד"ש בא"ח ב invites us into that space.

Not every structure is immediately clear. Not every *siman* forms a neat, satisfying word. Sometimes we are meant to sit with the question.

Let us all, including us adults, come to this Seder asking questions. Even the ones we feel should have obvious answers. Let us explore them together with our children.

One of the greatest fears we have as parents is the moment our children discover that we are not perfect, that we do not have all the answers. But והגדת לבנך is not about presenting perfection. It is about analyzing our history together. Yes, there will be things we pass on. And yes, there will be things our children teach us in return, giving us the *nachat* of seeing them take one step further, broadening their minds beyond where we reached.

Isn't that the goal?



Reflective Questions for Discussion

Is there something in the Haggadah that looks so simple on the surface yet to you seems so complex or challenging? If so, what is it?

What other reasons do you think Rabbi Yehuda made this mnemonic and in this grouping?

Would you rearrange the mnemonic in a different way? Why?

The End of the Haggadah or the Climax?



Rabbi Duvid Fendel
Rosh Yeshiva, Sderot Hesder
Former Guest Speaker, Jan 2026

The ten plagues were a world-shaking event that enabled the Exodus, *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Rabbi Yosei HaGlili suggests that at sea there were five times (!) as many plagues, meaning ten plagues in Mitzrayim and fifty plagues at sea. Why so?

Before we dive into the explanation, it is interesting to note that the Rambam does not include Rabbi Yosei in his Haggadah. Evidently he feels *Kriyat Yam Suf* is a different theme and revelation! The *halacha* teaches that if one mentions every night *Yetziat Mitzraim* without discussing *Kriyat Yam Suf*, he has fulfilled his command, but not *vica versa*.

From Rabbi Yosei, we can learn that the plagues were an attempt to remove evil. The most basic step to break away from evil is to disassociate, to disconnect, to detach entirely!

However this is all preliminary; after the ten plagues and subsequently *Yetziat Mitzraim*, evil continued to exist and even thrive. *Yetziat Mitzraim* was an escape from wickedness, as the ten plagues were reversible and not a total victory.

On *Yam Suf*, however, the experience was totally different: it was a revelation that comes when evil is eradicated, erased and totally destroyed. Only then can we genuinely sing *Az Yashir-zeh kali vanvehu!* The fifty plagues mentioned at sea are in fact a full, irreversible elimination and defeat of evil. Only then could we see and feel Divine clarity of G-dliness. Even those who were very far spiritually during *Kriyat Yam Suf* are said to have experienced prophecy greater than Yeshayahu and Yechezkel, with the evil fully destroyed.

On a deeper level, at *Yam Suf* we were also proactive in making the miracle happen, and therefore the G-dly response was five times as powerful and impressive.

Instead of seeing Rabbi Yosei HaGlili as an appendage, it's actually more of a climax. After the ten plagues, we escaped evil, though it still existed. In this part of the Hagaddah we learn that the concept of living alongside terror and accepting the fate that evil is here to stay, now changes into *Tikkun Olam* by eradicating evil completely!

As a citizen of Sderot and having experienced Simchat Torah in Sderot, where the evil was present and felt, Rabbi Yosei HaGlili's message is very important and perhaps the climax of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*.

Chag Kasher V'sameach and looking forward to greeting you in Sderot,
Duv Fendel



Reflective Questions for Discussion

How does seeing the crossing of the sea as the climax of redemption change the way we understand freedom and spiritual transformation?

What does the idea of eradicating evil rather than merely escaping it mean in our personal or communal lives today?

How might experiences of suffering or threat, whether historical or contemporary, shape our capacity to envision and work toward true *tikkun*?

The Selection & Leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Rosh Beit Midrash, Machon Lev
Community Rabbi, Nofei HaShemesh
Former Guest Speaker, Feb 2026

At the end of the paragraph discussing Rabbi Yosei HaGili, we witness the only time Moshe Rabbeinu is mentioned in the Haggadah: *“And they believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe.”* What is so special about Moshe Rabbeinu that he was selected to be the leader of Am Yisrael? The Torah does not explicitly specify anything about Moshe’s leadership qualities. In fact, quite the contrary. We are told that Moshe had a speech impediment, something that may be considered a handicap for an orator. Perhaps the text *alludes* to Moshe’s unique qualities which made him the appropriate choice as a leader.

Rabbi Lau in his Haggadah points out that the first three interactions that Moshe has with others portray Moshe's true personality. Moshe is present at three disputes, and rather than act as a passive bystander he leaps into action to protect the underdog. First, we are told that Moshe left the palace in Egypt to assist his brothers that were being oppressed by the Egyptians. When he witnessed an Egyptian whipping a Jew, Moshe defended the Jew. He could not bear to see the suffering of his people.

Second, we are informed that Moshe witnessed two Jews quarreling and interceded by asking, how can you raise your hand to hit your fellow Jew? Third, when Moshe arrived in Midian, when we might have expected that he would behave as a fugitive and maintain a low profile, Moshe defends Yitro's daughters from the other shepherds and assists with feeding their cattle.

What do we learn about Moshe's personality from these scenarios?

He could not stand idly by while injustice was being committed. Moshe showed compassion to the oppressed. He did not distinguish between a dispute between a Jew and a non-Jew, a dispute between Jews, or a dispute between non-Jews.

Rav Meir Yechiel, known as the Ostrovtzer Rav, and Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, known as the Ahi'ezer, were once traveling together and each asked the other to share a *dvar Torah*. The Ahi'ezer asked the Ostrovtzer to go first, since he was a *gavra raba*, a great individual. The Ostrovtzer responded: A *gavra raba* is demonstrated not by one who interprets Torah in a powerful manner, but rather by one who relieves the suffering of another. This is clearly depicted in the Talmud.

The *gemara* in Makot 22b states in the name of Rava, "*How foolish people are who stand out of respect for a sefer Torah, but do not stand out of respect for a gavra raba.*" Rava goes on to prove that Rabbis should be respected, since the Torah dictates that a person may be judged to receive forty lashes, while the Rabbis limited the number of lashes to thirty-nine. This shows their power of interpretation.

We may ask why Rava did not offer as proof an earlier *pasuk* where we see a parallel of the strength of the rabbinic interpretation. The Torah dictates that one should count fifty days between Pesach and Shavuot and the Rabbis determined to count only forty-nine days. This, too, would be illustrative of how the Rabbis were able to reduce by one number a biblical directive. Why quote from *Sefer Devarim* when you can quote from an earlier appearance in *Sefer Vayikra*?

The Ostrovtzer Rav offered the following explanation. To be considered a *gavra raba*, a great individual, it is not just about the power of interpretation. Rather, one has to be concerned with minimizing the pain of another individual. This is exemplified by the idea of reducing the lashes, but not by reducing the counting of the *omer*.

What made Moshe Rabbenu a gavra raba? Moshe witnessed another's suffering and he had to get involved. He felt the pain of others even without having a personal relationship with them. A Jewish leader is someone who gets involved, who tries to alleviate the suffering of others no matter who they might be. He seeks to make the world around him a better place. He does the right thing even when it is not in accordance with the popular opinion.

We should emulate Moshe Rabbenu, to see the pain of suffering of others and to do everything we can to improve their predicament. We cannot remain as mere bystanders, but rather take responsibility and action in order to achieve justice and a better world.

Moshe had many names, but he is best known by the name Moshe, which he was called for the simple reason that he was lifted out of the water as a child, *min hamayim mishituhu*. Water represents conformity. It takes the shape of the container into which it is poured. Moshe was pulled out from the water. That's Moshe. Someone who was not afraid to swim against the current, so that justice can prevail.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

When I witness injustice or suffering, do I instinctively step forward like Moshe, or do I remain a bystander?

Is my definition of greatness centered on knowledge and achievement, or on relieving the pain of another?

Where in my life am I being called to “leave the water” and swim against the current in order to uphold what is right?

The Freedom to Notice



Rabbi Avishai and Aleeza Kharilkar
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We are a people of miracles.

There's a well-known joke about Jewish holidays:

"They tried to kill us, Hashem saved us, now let's eat."

Behind the humor lies something very real. Every holiday carries layers of gratitude. We have survived, been protected, and been carried through history in ways that defy explanation. There is always so much to thank Hashem for.

But on Pesach, ל"ח chose a unique way to express that gratitude. Instead of one overarching song of praise, they gave us a long list of stages. After each one we say: *That alone would have been enough* - *Dayenu*.

Why structure our thanks this way?

Perhaps because *Dayenu* can only be said from a place of freedom.

When a person is enslaved, they are focused only on survival. When you are controlled by something, whether it be fear, pressure, pain, you can't see beyond it. You see only the immediate struggle. Everything becomes about getting through the next moment, but the moment we stepped out of slavery and into freedom, something shifted. We could lift our heads. We could look around. We could finally see.

And after that moment, suddenly, every detail mattered.

Through the lens of redemption, each stage of *Dayenu* stands as a complete miracle on its own:

Leaving Egypt.

Walking through the Sea.

Being sustained in the desert for forty years.

Ultimately, we needed the entire journey. But each step alone was a *complete* miracle.

We have seen this perspective even in our own generation. Those who have returned from captivity and survived unimaginable darkness often speak about how, once free, they feel gratitude for the smallest things - sunlight, fresh air, a simple meal, the presence of family. Freedom sharpens appreciation.

In the rush of daily life, we rarely pause to notice how thankful we are. But when we step back and see the full picture, we are often overwhelmed by how much goodness quietly surrounds us.

It is not obvious that we can see, hear, taste, speak, move, think, learn, walk, and run. That we have a roof over our heads, a warm meal, a bed to sleep in, people who love us.

That is the message of *Dayenu*. Only when we pause at each stage, reflect on it, and give it space, And only then can we say, honestly and fully: how much more so we are appreciative of all of the goodness we've received from Hashem, multiplied again, and again.

Rav Kook deepens this idea. In *Ein Ayah* (Shabbat 5:12), he writes that the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, is revealed not only in grand and dramatic events, but just as much in the small, individual details. Just as we say, "*How great are Your works, Hashem,*" we must also learn to say, "*How small - and precise - are Your works, Hashem,*" about each and every detail that ultimately joins together to form one greater good.

True freedom, then, is not just leaving Egypt. It is not focusing only on the black dot on a white page, but noticing how much white surrounds that dot.

In a world where so many are enslaved to chasing what they do not have, real freedom is the ability to live with, and appreciate, what we already do have.

Every single detail.

Dayenu.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

What is one thing I can do this week to “lift my head” and look at my reality with a fresh perspective?

Where do I tend to focus on the “black dot,” and what surrounding goodness might I be overlooking?

If I paused for three uninterrupted minutes to list what I am grateful for, what might emerge?

The Good, The Bad and The Oneness of Hashem



Rabbi Elan Mazer
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Rabban Gamliel claims that whoever does not say these three words on Seder night has not fulfilled the obligation properly: *Pesach, Matzah, and Maror* (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5). We spend the entire night telling the story, asking questions, answering, singing, explaining. If the goal is *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*, why hinge the mitzvah on these three symbols?

Let's start with Pesach. The Maharal explains that many *halachot* of the *korban Pesach* emphasize oneness and wholeness, a kind of *achdut*. It is eaten in one *chaburah*, in one place, as a unified act. It is roasted whole, and its bones may not be broken (Shemot 12:46, see Maharal, *Gevurot Hashem* 36). This is not only technical law. It trains the soul to perceive that the redemption came from One, and is defined by God's Oneness.

Furthermore, this *korban* must be eaten together with the two foods that most contradict each other. Matzah which is the bread of freedom, eaten in haste as we left Mitzrayim. Maror is the taste of bitterness, the embodied memory of slavery, "*they embittered their lives.*" (Shemot 1:14.). The Maharal explains that this is the theological revolution of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Judaism is not only the claim that there is one God instead of many gods. It is the claim that reality is not run by competing forces, some "good," some "bad," battling for control. If Hashem is *Echad*, then everything sits within that oneness, the salvation and the suffering, the open miracles and the dark stretches that make us wonder. Yeshayahu says it with breathtaking clarity: "*Yotzer or u'vorei choshech, oseh shalom u'vorei ra, ani Hashem oseh kol eileh*" - *Hashem forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates evil* (Yeshayahu 45:7). That *pasuk* does not minimize pain. It frames history. It insists that nothing is outside Him, and therefore nothing is meaningless.

That is why the Mishnah says that when telling the story of *Yitziyat Mitzrayim* we begin with *gnut* (the bad) and only then reach *shevach* (the good) (Pesachim 10:4). We do not tell the story by skipping to the happy ending. We tell it as a unified arc. We were slaves, and we were redeemed, and both belong to the same Divine plan. Maror is not a footnote we mention politely before dessert. It is part of the faith itself. When we place maror next to matzah under the banner of Pesach, we are declaring that Hashem was present in the degradation and in the deliverance, and that the Jewish heart learns to serve Him in both.

Shlomo Hamelech in Shir HaShirim describes the long road of Jewish history. “*Iti milvanon kallah, iti milvanon tavo’i*” (Shir HaShirim 4:8). Rashi reads these words as Hashem speaking to *Knesset Yisrael* in exile, assuring us that even as we are driven from the *Beit HaMikdash*, He remains with us. The verse continues, “*tashuri mei rosh amanah*,” which can be heard as an invitation to look from a higher place, *rosh emunah*, the summit of faith. There will come a time when we look back and realize that the *emunah* we carried in the bitter places was not a detour from redemption. It was the beginning of redemption.

Rabban Gamliel’s three words are therefore not a ritual checklist. They are a lens. Pesach teaches *achdut Hashem*, that there is One. Matzah and maror teach what that oneness means in real life, that Hashem is with us in the sweet and in the bitter, in the sunrise and in the shadow. On Seder night we do not only remember that we left Egypt. We learn how to see God in the full texture of existence, and how to keep walking with Him until the story reaches its final geulah.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

How can evil be from Hashem if we know that Hashem is the purest form of Good?

Can you recall a time when something bad happened to you but resulted in a better outcome?

מרור זה שאנו אוכלים, על שום מה?

The Meaning of Maror



Rabbi Michael Edrei
Rosh Yeshiva, Sdot Negev Hesder
Former Guest Speaker, Dec 2025

We say in the Haggadah, *“This maror that we eat, for what reason? Because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt.”*

The Seder night is a time of freedom, a time of redemption. So what is maror doing at the Seder?

One might have expected us to say that we eat maror because we were redeemed from bitterness. But that is not what we say. We do not mention redemption from bitterness. On the Seder night we recall the bitterness itself, *“because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt.”* When a person eats maror, he must experience the bitterness itself, not the exit from it.

There are overall three mitzvot of eating on the Seder night: Pesach, matzah, and maror. Corresponding to them are three redeemers: Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. We may debate which mitzvah corresponds to Moshe and which to Aharon, but there is no debate about Miriam. Maror clearly corresponds to Miriam. Even in her name, Miriam, we have the letters of mar, merirut, as the Torah shares, *“They could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter, therefore it was called Marah.”* Can we find traces of redemption amongst the bitterness within Miriam?

To approach this, let us turn to a passage in the Tanya, chapter 31. The Baal HaTanya explains that true brokenheartedness, bitterness of the soul over its distance from the light of God’s presence, is not called sadness. Sadness is something negative. It seals the heart and makes it closed like stone, without vitality. Bitterness, however, contains life. There is energy in it, a stirring of strength. Sadness crushes a person and removes vitality. Bitterness is an energy that generates movement.

The Mitteler Rebbe writes that the intensity of one’s divine service

corresponds to the intensity of one's bitterness. It is like a spring. The more it is stretched, the more powerfully it is released. Bitterness is the stretching of the spring.

On the Seder night, bitterness is the feeling of not belonging. The first step toward freedom is knowing that I am not meant for this place, and that I could be elsewhere. In the book Uncle Tom's Cabin, when the master finally grants his slaves bills of freedom, they protest and ask what they did wrong. They may have suffered and they may have been sad, but they were not bitter. They had internalized their slavery.

In Egypt we were not sad. We were bitter. That means that in our essence we are free people, and slavery was something imposed upon us. Bitterness, therefore, is the first step toward redemption. The Sages tell us that after the decree of Pharaoh, in which *"every son that is born you shall cast into the Nile,"* Amram divorced his wife. Miriam persuaded him to take back Yocheved and to father Moshe, when she said to him: *"Your decree is harsher than theirs, for Pharaoh decreed only against the males, but you have decreed against the females as well."* The first movement of redemption, the birth of Moshe, came from Miriam; she was the driving force of redemption. Miriam, through her protest to Amram, made possible the birth of Moshe, the redeemer. Bitterness gives birth to redemption.

Today maror is *De'Rabanan*, while in Temple times it was *De'Orayta*, *"with matzot and maror they shall eat it."* When there is a Pesach offering, there is maror. When there is no Pesach, maror stands alone only *De'Rabanan*. Maror by itself is not the goal. It enables the Pesach.

May we merit to taste the sweetness that emerges from bitterness, for there is no true sweetness except that which grows out of the bitter. *Pesach kasher v'sameach.*



Reflective Questions for Discussion

Where in my life do I feel discomfort that might actually be a signal that I do not belong in this place?

Is my struggle leading me toward sadness that closes me, or toward bitterness that awakens me?

What inner slavery have I accepted as normal, and what would it mean to rediscover my essential freedom?

Korech: The Perfectly Imperfect Sandwich



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The “Hillel sandwich” - the combination of matzah and maror - is the final ritual that stands between us and our meal on seder night. We have already eaten both matzah and maror separately, so why does Hillel insist that we eat them together as well? And why did this custom persist, becoming an essential component of the seder? Perhaps in the *Beit Hamikdash* it made sense to eat the *korban Pesach* together with matzah and maror, but today, when we no longer have the *korban Pesach*, what is the value of a meat sandwich without the meal?

To understand the value of the combination, we must first explore the individual components and the way that combining elements can create something new, greater than the sum of its parts. Along the way, we will also come to understand why Hillel was the Sage who championed eating all the components together, and why the sandwich retains its meaning even without its middle.

Matzah represents the sweetness of redemption and the way it arrives unexpectedly, fully formed, before we have time to prepare. Maror embodies the bitterness of slavery, which feels endless and immutable. Alternatively, matzah symbolizes humility: made from the simplest ingredients through the most basic process. Maror, by contrast, represents the eventual consequence of excess and lack of restraint, a bitterness that dulls our ability to enjoy what we have.

Learning to hold sweetness and bitterness together is an essential Jewish life skill. Throughout history, we have been embraced and exiled, celebrated and reviled, sometimes at the very same moment. Jews developed the capacity to digest opposing experiences simultaneously and allow them to enrich one

another. That capacity has enabled us to navigate the stormy seas of our history with self-possession and resilience.

A parallel lesson about the unification of opposites appears in Midrashic interpretations of a verse describing the Exodus. Rashi explains the verse “מוציא אסירים בכושרות” (“[God] sets free the imprisoned, safe and sound”) (Psalms 68:7) according to its plain meaning: praise to Hashem for freeing the imprisoned at a temperate time of year, when conditions would be comfortable. In Bereishit Rabba (68:4), however, Rabbi Yose bar Chalafta offers a strikingly different interpretation. He understands the verse as praising Hashem for pairing up couples and sustaining their relationships, defying human nature, in a miracle as great as the splitting of the sea. Accepting one another and remaining connected despite deep differences is no small feat, and it is precisely this skill that Hillel embodied.

Hillel was renowned for his humility and love for all Jews. Numerous stories, such as those recorded in Shabbat 30b–31a, illustrate his patience, his refusal to be constrained by rigid hierarchies, and his ability to meet Jews and non-Jews alike where they were without compromising his values. It is therefore fitting that Hillel insisted on combining both the sweet and the bitter, the humble and the sophisticated, in this seder ritual that commemorates the Temple. After all, the Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred between Jews - our inability to see past differences to the essential worth of every individual. By internalizing (quite literally) the need to integrate all types of people and experiences into our model of ideal *avodah* (Divine service), Hillel teaches us a lesson that extends far beyond the seder table.

Perhaps Hillel's capacity to love every Jew stemmed from a deeper belief: that we, and our religious practice, retain value even when incomplete, like a sandwich missing its central component. In our interactions with others, whether within our families, our communities, or the broader world, we must learn to focus on

what remains, the matzah and the maror, even when so much feels absent. Choosing to see what others contribute, rather than what they lack, is the key to cultivating the love and patience that Hillel exemplified, and that will ultimately unlock the redemption we yearn for.

On both the individual and national levels, it is the ability to step outside the “natural” instinct to maintain distance and instead see the “other” as a partner rather than a threat that lays the groundwork for miracles. This shift makes possible both redemption and the deep, enduring relationship between people, and between Hashem and the Jewish nation in the Temple - may it be rebuilt speedily in our days.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

In your opinion, which part of the Exodus had a longer-lasting impact on the Jewish nation: the slavery or the redemption?

When in your life have you experienced the mixture of bitter and sweet? How did that affect the experience? How has it affected your memory of the experience?

Think of someone in your family who is very different from you. What is one way you could be more like Hillel in your relationship with them?

Hallel: The Soundtrack of Jewish Joy



Rabbi Dr. Seth N. Grauer
Rosh Yeshiva, Head of School, BAS
Chairman, Mizrachi Canada

When the Jewish people cross the *Yam Suf*, they experience one of the most extraordinary moments in human history.

But then, just three days later, they arrive at Marah.

וַיָּבֹאוּ מִרְתָּה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתֶּת מַיִם מִמֶּרְה כִּי מָרִים הֵם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מֶרְה:

They came to Marah, but they could not drink water from the stream at Marah, for the water was bitter; that was why it was named Marah ["bitter"].

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out something remarkable. The Torah does not say, “*because the water was bitter.*” It says, “*because they were bitter.*”

The bitterness may not have been primarily in the water. The bitterness may have been in the people.

The Rebbe explains that only when a person is internally sweet, when their inner world is healthy and positive, can the world around them begin to feel sweet as well. If a person carries bitterness inside, even blessings can taste bitter.

A revolutionary idea! We generally assume that circumstances determine mood. No, says the Rebbe. Mood determines circumstances. Our inner state shapes the experience we have. The people were bitter... so the water tasted bitter.

Martin Seligman, widely considered the founder of Positive Psychology, believed that optimism can be taught and trained. Seligman believed that people needed to work hard to avoid cynicism, skepticism, negativity, and that the more they focused on being positive, the happier they actually were.

Events themselves do not determine emotional experience. Our interpretation of and response to those events do.

How we celebrate Pesach and how we recite Hallel can be a blueprint for how we can live lives based in positive psychology.

My Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l, would often highlight the distinct two motifs in Hallel. One is a direct thank-you to God for a specific miracle and the other a song of praise recognizing God's absolute control over nature.

In other words, even if an experience or event appears negative, we can still see beyond it by recognizing that Hashem is pulling all the strings.

Similarly, Rabbi Sacks describes Hallel as the "*soundtrack of Jewish joy*," highlighting its role as a powerful expression of gratitude and praise. He distinguishes between expressive Hallel, recited at the time of a miracle (like by the Maccabees), and evocative Hallel, said as a remembrance on the anniversary of a miracle. The former voices an existing emotion, while the latter aims to create that emotion through memory.

In other words, our responsibility is twofold. On the one hand, we express our gratitude to Hashem for His kindness and miracles in our own lives and in Jewish history. On the other, we strengthen our faith by connecting to Him during the tough times as well.

Just as there can be no healing without pain, no spring without winter, and no *Geulat Mitzrayim* without *Galut Mitzrayim*, so it is with us.

As long as we cling to our spiritual roots and remind ourselves - optimistically - that Hashem is orchestrating everything - whether triumph or adversity - no temporary wind can uproot us.

On the contrary. With strong, faith-based optimism, any storm - personal or national - will only serve to awaken our power of renewal. Chag Sameach!



Reflective Questions for Discussion

Song plays a vital part in Judaism. At the end of his life, Moshe gave us the 613th mitzvah - that in every generation we should write a new Sefer Torah. On that occasion he used an unusual word. He called the Torah a “song” (Devarim 31:19). What is so special about music and song that it ‘trumps’ mere words? Do you find it more meaningful to contemplate the words rather than sing them?

Ask everyone around the table whether they can recall a challenging incident/time in their lives when they were comforted or strengthened by seeing the bigger picture/realizing that Hashem is in charge.

Can you think of practical ways to catch yourself slipping into negativity/reacting pessimistically and switch into an ‘optimistic,’ divine presence mode?

Bring Them Home - Now



Rabbi Leo Dee
Public Speaker, Author
Former Guest Speaker, Nov 2025

The year is 70 CE, the Temple has been destroyed, Pesach can no longer be celebrated as the Torah requires with a sacrificial lamb, and the Jewish people have been exiled across the Roman Empire. What do we do?

With Jewish reoccupation of our homeland forbidden, we need a ceremony and a text but what should be its message? How could we get it past the Roman censors?

What about a text, written as if it were referring to a long past redemption, with a message of freedom? And what if it were possible to encode into that text the real message about a future redemption, a return to Israel, that could be understood only by "those in the know"?

And so the Haggadah came to be.

The code word *Yetziah Mitzrayim* ("Leaving Egypt") was selected as the trigger term. It meant "future return" to everyone around the early Seder tables. This was clear. After all, why were there only four cups of wine when there were five expressions of redemption in the passage in Exodus ("*I will take out*," "*I will save*," "*I will redeem*," and "*I will take*," and the obvious missing one: "*heveiti*" - "*I will bring [you home to Israel]*").

Why was there a story about Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva meeting to discuss *Yetziah Mitzrayim* all night long and having to be told that it was time to say the morning *shema*, couldn't they see the sun rise? No! They were hiding in a cave, it was the time of the Bar Kochba revolt, and clearly they were not talking about history but about the reconquest of the Jewish state from their Roman oppressor! It was obvious because Rabbi Eliezer

held that one should spend the festivals with one's family, not at Uman and certainly not with one's colleagues in a dark cave in Bnei Brak. What should be the main text of the Haggadah? Verses from the book of Exodus that described the leaving of Egypt? No! It should be the declaration made when bringing the first fruits to Jerusalem, *Arami Oved Avi* which was commanded to be said on our original arrival in Israel as a people. As the true theme of the Seder became less obvious to generations born after the termination of the Roman empire, the Rabbis made it clear as crystal, adding the final wish, "*Next year in Jerusalem.*"

As with most Jewish ceremonies, however, engaging the intellect was not enough. The emotions had to be ignited as well. And how better than with food? What are the emotions of leaving exile and heading back home? Here the Torah gives us the answer. Imagine being told you can catch a plane home after weeks away in a temporary accommodation, evacuated for our safety to a foreign land. In the minutes before the taxi arrives there are three prominent emotions in the household: stress (*will we be ready?*), excitement (*we're going home!*) and tension (*change is always a challenge.*) And the Torah replicates these feelings with three symbols that have to appear on every Seder table: Matzah, Pesach and Maror. The matzah represents that feeling of time pressure, after all it is defined as bread made in 18 minutes. The burnt bone, representing the sacrificial lamb, is the symbol of hope and excitement, the rebuilding of the Third Temple. And the Maror represents the bittersweet feeling of change, of fear of past oppressions, of what awaits us. Taken together they are the perfect combination of emotions to get us into *Geulah* mode, for redemption, for a return home.

May this year be the year that we heed the message of the Haggadah. May we enact the slogan of recent years, "*Bring them home NOW!*" from Toronto, from New York, from London and from all over the world. Amen.



Reflective Questions for Discussion

When I say “Next year in Jerusalem,” do I experience it as memory, hope, or personal responsibility?

Which emotion of redemption lives most strongly in me right now: urgency, excitement, or tension?

If the Seder is a coded call to return home, what action in my own life would make that message real rather than symbolic?

Don't Forget Sefirat Ha'Omer!



Rabbi Ezer Diena
Maggid Shiur

Although not actually in the text of the Haggadah, on the second night of Pesach we begin to count the *Omer*. Often, those who attend Shul will have already counted it there, but those who remain at home need to be reminded to count after nightfall so as not to lose the count on the very first night. So, at the very least, this article will hopefully serve as a reminder in case anyone forgets, but beyond that, here is a short and unique idea from Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg connecting Pesach and *Sefirat Ha'Omer*.

When the Torah (Vayikra 23:15) describes the date that we begin counting, it uses a strange term, “ממחרת השבת”, usually translated as “*from the day after Shabbat*.” Chazal tell us that this refers to the day after the first day of Pesach, which the Torah refers to as Shabbat in this case. However, many commentaries are bothered as to why the Torah here refers to Pesach as Shabbat, which it does not do anywhere else? In fact, this language led to various other Jewish sects to incorrectly begin counting on other days, such as the Sunday of Pesach, or the end of Yom Tov altogether.

In his magnum opus *Haketav Vehakabbalah*, Rabbi Mecklenburg suggests that the term “Shabbat” here does not refer to the day that we rest, but rather, the day that we stopped eating *chametz*. Back when the Jewish People left Egypt, the Torah (Shemot 12:15) tells us “אך ביום הראשון תשביתו שאר מבתיכם”, that the first day of Pesach is considered the day on which we remove all leaven (at least it was in Egypt). Only once this is complete can we begin the process of *Sefirat Ha'Omer*, counting up to receiving the Torah.

So, after we have spent so much time preparing for this wonderful *Chag HaMatzot*, let us sit back in our chairs and recall the original *Mimochorat HaShabbat*, the day after removing all of our *chametz*. Now that we have removed all of our physical and spiritual *chametz*, we are ready to not only to celebrate Pesach, but also to proceed into the time of *Sefirat Ha'Omer*, which we hope to complete this year with a renewed *Kabbalat HaTorah* in the built third *Beit Hamikdash*!



Reflective Questions for Discussion

Which night of Pesach do we begin counting the *Omer*?

What might the Torah be teaching us by calling Pesach “Shabbat” specifically in the context of beginning *Sefirat Ha'Omer*?

Why might the process of removing *chametz* be an important spiritual preparation before beginning the journey toward receiving the Torah?

How can we personally use the transition from Pesach to *Sefirat Ha'Omer* as a time to grow after removing our own “spiritual *chametz*”?

שחר

YOM HAZIKARON | YOM HA'ATZMAUT 78

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**Tuesday,
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6:30^{PM}**



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