A PASSOVER READER

The Festival of Our Freedom

Vol. III

Original Essays by the Staff of the Cincinnati Community Kollel

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To enrich and grow the Cincinnati Jewish community by creating an environment of Torah study and providing access to our spiritual heritage.

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Cincinnati Community Kollel

2241 Losantiville Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237-4222

513 631-1118 • kollel@shul.net

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ON THE COVER:

Photo montage by Alter Raubvogel.

The Israelites crossed the Red Sea on the seventh day of Passover, 21 Nissan. They arrived at Mount Sinai 39 days later, on the first of Sivan (see Exodus 19:1).

Preface

For better or for worse, the Jews are always in the news.

This is not merely a phenomenon of the 24-hour news cycle. It has always been that way, ever since Abraham challenged the "Establishment" of antiquity. However, as a nation, the Jews' first and most newsworthy event was the Exodus from Egypt and the formation of what would forever be G-d's people. No group on Earth has, with such consistency, celebrated and attempted to relive their birth as a nation, on an annual basis.

At the Cincinnati Community Kollel, it is our mission to help connect Jews to our spiritual heritage. In the pages that follow, members of the Kollel's staff offer you a chance to more deeply connect to the depth of the upcoming holiday. These essays are designed to educate, inspire, and enhance your Passover holiday.

Enjoy!

Rabbi Meir Minster

Rabbi David Spetner

Rabbi Meir Minster

We, the Connected Son

THE FAMILIAR "FOUR SONS" MENTIONED IN THE HAGADDAH WOULD SEEM to be a clear study of contrasts. The "wise" son, the "wicked" son, the "simple" son and the son who "does not know how to ask" each appear to represent a very distinct attitude towards the unfolding discussion that sets the tone of the Seder.

First impressions, however, are often mistaken. Listening to their words, as the first three of these sons ask their questions, and contemplating the Hagaddah's responses to all of them, yields surprising similarities and even some seeming redundancy. To really know them, and to understand what makes them different, requires a more thoughtful and thorough look at these conversations.

The effort is worthy of our time and interest. The commentators explain that these four sons are not meant to be understood as the nucleus of some imaginary, dysfunctional family, rather they represent different elements of our own psyche. We are each of these sons at some point in our lives and experiences. When we understand them, we better understand ourselves and we set the stage for our own growth and development.

Let us examine one overlapping element found in the responses to both the wicked son and to the son who does not know to ask. The Kli Yakar (Shemos 12:26) writes that he is not the first to ask that the verse cited in the answer to the wicked son, "It is because of this that G-d acted on my behalf when I left Egypt," (Exodus 13:8) is the very same verse that is cited to the son who does not know to ask. Why would the Haggadah use the same verse to convey the different messages to these sons?

Rabbi Meir Minster is Roah Kollel and Director of Torah Studies; he oversees the academic excellence of the Kollel's staff scholars.

And different they are. To the wicked son we stress the verse's dark implication: "'G-d acted on *my* behalf'—had he been there he would not have been redeemed." To the non-questioning son we use the same words as a conversation starter: "You should open [the discussion] for him …" We then cite the start of the verse, "and you should tell your son on that day, saying …"

Among the explanations offered by the Kli Yakar is the idea that the one who does not ask may be abstaining because of total disinterest, from a complete dismissal of what is going on at the Seder. This would, indeed, be worse than the wicked son's confrontational question. Of course, his lack of questioning may merely be the result of not having the tools or the focus to delve into what he really would like to be connected to. We need to know where he is coming from, and to do so we start the conversation and test his reaction. Does he understand that his disinterest may exclude him? Does he want to connect?

The words of this verse serve, then, as a diagnostic. They will draw out those that seem disinterested and hopefully serve as the start of an engaging and connecting conversation. If not, they will confirm that we are dealing with someone much like the wicked son.

These two separate messages are beautifully hinted to in the words of the verse "You should tell your son." The word "tell" *(vehigad'tah)* is the same word that the title of the Haggadah is derived from. It can imply words that draw the listener in, like the words of Aggadah (the homiletic lessons of the Talmud). The same word can also have a connotation of harsh words, like a *gid* (sinew). Thus, these words can take two different directions, and serve as the perfect response to the son who does not ask.

To the wicked son, however, these words are meant to be harsh; we give him the full force of the verse's rejection. We omit the verse's opening words about starting a discussion, because he has made his choice clear and he does not want to be a part of any of this.

There is, however, even more here in this response. The Haggadah, in fact, uses this same verse a third time, in the very next section.

> One might think that [the requirement to talk about the Exodus] already applies from the first of the month. The Torah therefore says, "on that day." If [the story] can be told on that day, you might think you can tell it while it is still daylight. The Torah therefore says "Because of this…" *Because of this* can only be said when the matzah and marror are lying before you.

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his work *Meshech Chochmah* on Exodus 13:8, notes that the above verse, as interpreted by the Haggadah, does not mention the Passover offering together with the matzah and marror. From this he deduces that the verse is speaking specifically of a Seder being held in the Diaspora, where there would be no Passover offering—like our Seder today. Understood this way, the response is saying that G-d acted on our behalf because of our observance of the Seder during the hard times of exile, when G-d's presence in the world is not so obvious and our special connection to Him is subject to doubt.

As Rabbi Meir Simcha explains, to observe the Seder immediately after the Exodus, when times are good and we clearly are the beneficiaries of G-d's favor, does not show a real and enduring commitment to His service. Our continued observance of the Seder, in the difficult and trying times that we face today, is what demonstrates our bond.

It is precisely these trying times which often distract us and leave us seemingly disinterested and lacking proper focus in our approach to serving G-d. We may appear to be that disconnected son who does not have anything to ask, who does not possess the ability or drive to find the meaning in the message of the Seder.

If that is the case, then far from being removed from the themes of the Seder, we are, in fact, the focus. The Haggadah is really speaking to us more than anyone else, engaging us, and opening the discussion. The Haggadah is probing us, to see if we can become interested, if we want to be connected. It is our own personal observance of the Seder that is really why G-d acted on behalf of our ancestors when they left Egypt.

The Haggadah offers us so much in our quest to become more connected to its message. When we realize that it is speaking especially to us, it should help us to shake off our distractions and begin to ask the questions that will yield its insights. The more we demonstrate our interest, the more connected we will be.

Rabbi Dovid Spetner

Human Calculus

Rabbi Berel Wein tells a story of one person's view of the Jewish population. While on vacation he got into a conversation with an intelligent, upper middle-class American gentile. Rabbi Wein asked him how many Jews he thought there were in the United States. The man said he would assume about 50 million, almost ten times the actual amount!

The truth is that such a mistake should be of no surprise. Jews truly seem to be everywhere in the eyes of the average American. Whether in government, the media, business, academia, medicine, or entertainment, Jews play a role well in excess of their percentage of the population.

If the Jews stand out even when we are relatively few, just imagine the impact on a society where we grow rapidly. This occurred first in Egypt, and the reaction of the indigenous population was not friendly. The Torah at the beginning of the book of Exodus tells us (1:7) that the Children of Israel increased dramatically and the land was full of them. This caused Pharaoh and his people to plan for the enslavement of the Jews. Despite their best efforts, the Jews only increased—to such an extent that the Torah testifies (Exodus 1:12) that "they (the Egyptians) were disgusted by the Children of Israel."

Let us look more carefully at the beginning of that verse. "But as much as they afflicted it (the nation of Israel), so it would increase and so it would spread out." This seems counterintuitive. Normally, affliction of a people would cause a decrease in population, but here it caused an increase!

My esteemed brother in law, Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, dean of Manhattan's Yad Avraham Institute, developed an answer by examining the language of one paragraph of the Haggadah:

> Blessed is He who keeps His pledge to Israel; Blessed is He! For G-d calculated the end of the Bondage in order to fulfill what He pledged

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Rabbi David Spetner is Rosh Kollel and Director of Operations; he oversees the overall functioning of the Kollel and its staff.

> to our father Abraham at the "Covenant Between the Parts," as is stated: "He said to Abram, 'Know with certainty that your offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, they will serve them and they will oppress them for 400 years; but also against the nation that they will serve I will execute judgment, and afterwards they will leave with great wealth.'"

In what way did G-d need to calculate the end of the slavery? When the 400 years were over, it was time for them to go. However, many of us are familiar with the fact that the Jews did not actually spend 400 years in Egypt. From the time Jacob and his family joined Joseph in Egypt until Moses led them out, only 210 years elapsed. Our Sages therefore famously explain that the 400 years began with the birth of Isaac. This requires us to explain that the "400 years" of the verse are not qualifying the words "they will serve them and they will oppress them," but rather that Abraham's "offspring will be strangers in a land that is not theirs," for 400 years. This was true in that the Patriarchs did not live in Canaan as permanent settlers, as if it were their own land.

However, the Vilna Gaon and others want to explain that there was an element of "400 years" to the actual slavery itself. Slavery and its accompanying suffering come in various degrees of oppression. As such, it is possible to experience 400 years worth of suffering in a much shorter period of time. Thus, in a matter of 116 very difficult years (the length of the actual enslavement), the Jewish people had endured 400 years of moderate suffering.

There was yet another element necessary for the Jews to leave Egypt. When G-d first appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3), Moses asked G-d why the Jews deserved to be taken miraculously out of Egypt (Rashi on Exodus 3:11). G-d responded that they deserved to be redeemed because they would come to Sinai and accept the Torah (Exodus 3:12 and Rashi *ad loc*).

Many commentaries (Nachmanides, Rabbeinu Bachaya, Maharal) explain that the Jews' numbering 600,000 at the time of the giving of the Torah was a necessary component of that event. They write that 600,000 represents the totality of perspectives in the Torah, each one represented by a different person and the family he leads. Even the name *Yisrael* (Israel) is an acronym for this idea: The letter "yud" for *yesh* (there are), "sin" for *shishim* (sixty), "reish" for *reebo* (myriads), "alef" for *osios* (letters), and finally "lamed" for *laTorah* (to the Torah).

(However, there are actually approximately half that—see *Pnei Yehoshua* to Kiddushin 30a for an explanation). Thus it was necessary for the Jewish people to have achieved the critical mass of 600,000 in order to receive the Torah.

If the goal of the redemption from Egypt was to receive the Torah at Sinai, then the population at the time of the Exodus needed to reach critical mass by that time. If the slavery had lasted 400 years, there would have been plenty of time to reach 600,000. But Providence required that they leave earlier, and so it forced 400 years worth of servitude to be concentrated in a mere 116 years. Under this smaller time frame, the Jewish nation needed to increase at a more rapid pace.

This, suggests Rabbi Kalatsky, is the meaning of the Haggadah's words, "G-d calculated the end of the bondage," for it indeed was a complex calibration of two disparate issues. The rate of growth in population had to align perfectly with the harshness of the slavery. This also is the meaning of the verse, "But as much as they afflicted it (the Jews), so it would increase and so it would spread out." Rather than being counterintuitive, it now makes perfect sense. It is precisely because the Egyptians were making it harsher, that the Exodus would happen sooner and the Jews would need to reach critical mass sooner, all in order to reach the goal of receiving the Torah. 

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis

What About Moses?

Imagine you are at your first Seder.

You have never really been told the story before, never studied the book of Exodus, never went to Hebrew school or heard Torah stories—not even the (highly corrupted!) movie versions. All you know is that someone named Moses had something to do with getting the Jews out of slavery in Egypt.

You pay close attention to every detail of the very intricate and thorough Haggadah, and learn all about the slavery and suffering, retribution, and redemption. By the time you get through the Ten Plagues, you feel that you have developed a pretty good appreciation of the story of the Exodus from Egypt. But you're a little surprised that one name hasn't been mentioned yet—there's been no reference to someone named Moses having anything to do with this story!

The Haggadah, in fact, relays nothing to us about Moses' involvement in the Exodus. Nothing is mentioned about his messages to the Children of Israel, his dramatic showdowns with Pharaoh, his initiation of most of the plagues, or even his leading the actual exit from Egypt.

Eventually, in the paragraph following the plagues, you do come across Moses' name—finally! "…And they believed in G-d and in Moses, His servant." But the mystery is now even greater. This lone reference sheds no light on his role in the story!

We will get back to this quote; but first, a little more analysis, to prove that the masking of Moses' involvement is no oversight.

Toward the beginning of the Maggid section of the Haggadah, a verse is quoted from the Book of Joshua (chapter 24): "…And Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt." A quick look at that chapter of Joshua would have us expect the Haggadah to continue with the

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Rabbi Yitzchok Preis oversees the Kollel's outreach activities and heads Kollel Dirshu, an early-morning Kollel for lay people.

following several verses, which elaborate on the plagues, the Exodus, and miracles at the sea. But the Haggadah stops with just that short quote. In his work, *Sifsei Chaim*, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander notes that the Haggadah shifts our attention just before we get to the verse that would have introduced us to… Moses!

Similarly, much of the Maggid section utilizes verses from Deutoronomy 26, with the exegesis of the Midrashic work, Sifrei. It would have been much simpler to utilize the numerous passages in Exodus that share the story in a much simpler manner. Again, as noted in *Sifsei Chaim*, the verses from Exodus would have introduced us to Moses while the verses in Deuteronomy make no such reference. Even the Sifrei selected by the Haggadah avoids mention of Moses by managing to select a variety of proof-texts, all free of Moses' name.

We can conclude that Moses' role being ignored at the Seder is quite intentional—but why?

Some explain that the Haggadah's author is drawing our attention to the fact that it is ultimately G-d, not Moses, who orchestrated the Exodus. But given the value Jewish tradition places on gratitude, acknowledging all who are sources of benefit to us, isn't it peculiar that Moses has been written out of the story?

A better understanding of the purpose, and message, of the Exodus can help us understand. And a look at the lone mention of Moses in the Haggadah, to which we alluded earlier, is the perfect place to start.

"…And they believed in G-d and in Moses, His servant."

This verse, taken from Exodus 14, sheds no light on the role that Moses played in the story—but it does highlight the role Moses felt he had in life, as well as the goal of the Exodus: "They believed in G-d."

This was a unique moment in history. G-d was laying the foundation of our relationship—manipulating every "law" of nature to secure our recognition that all aspects of Creation are in His hands, and that He has the capacity to alter them for those about whom He cares. "Who has brought you out of the land of Egypt" is, in fact, G-d's "self-description" in the first of the Ten Commandments.

"…And in Moses, His servant."

It is no coincidence that G-d selected Moses to be the agent through whom He introduced Himself to us. While freeing the Jewish people from servitude to a mortal tyrant, Moses was teaching the value and virtue of absolute subjugation to the Divine. Moses, the

humblest of all men, was singularly capable of leading the showdown while remaining nothing more or less than "His servant."

The staff utilized by Moses was meant to be seen as G-d's "scepter."[1] A king extends his scepter as a symbol of the broad reach of his arm; it is the mechanism by which he "projects" his decrees onto his subjects. When G-d told Moses to stretch forth this staff, He was reminding us Who really performed the miracles. Moses may have been the one standing in front of Pharaoh, but the outcomes were the product of the infinite reach of G-d. The entire experience was meant to lead to "…they believed in G-d and in Moses, his servant."

Similarly, as per the understanding of the ancient work, *D'rashos haRan*, it is not a coincidence that G-d did not cure Moses of his speech impediment (at least during the Egypt experience). One could expect Moses to have had a uniquely good grasp of the language that could help win over the king. After all, he was raised in the palace, and he knew the "inside" jargon. Yet G-d did not provide Moses with the capacity to articulate his requests. He had to rely on his brother Aaron to serve as an interpreter. (One could even theorize that Aaron, of the tribe of Levi—the tribe that was least immersed into Egyptian culture—may have been a most unlikely candidate to win the heart of Pharaoh.) But the Exodus was not meant to be the product of Moses' talent or tact. The entire experience had to lead us toward "…they believed in G-d and in Moses, His servant."

Back to our "first-ever" Seder—or, for that matter, our "been-there-many-times-before" Seder. The Haggadah leads us through a night in which there is no dilution of G-d's total, direct involvement; when we do encounter His messenger, it is purely as such—His humble servant. Apparently the goal of "…they believed" was not a one-time goal, for one lofty generation. It is within our grasp, if we use the Seder night properly.

If we haven't achieved this level of appreciation before, let's imagine this really is our first Seder, and pay proper attention to what is said and what is not said. Through an appreciation of Moses' absence, he will have accomplished bringing yet one more generation to the state of "…they believed in G-d and in Moses, His servant."

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1 See "Magic Wands: Lessons From a Showdown in Egypt," in the Kollel's first Passover Reader (available at http://kollel.shul.net).

Rabbi Aharon Daniel

Provisional Redemption

> This month shall be for you the beginning of the months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year.[1]

NACHMANIDES EXPLAINS THAT WE SHOULD ASSIGN THE MONTHS NUMBERS starting with Nissan, in order to recall the great miracle of our redemption from Egypt every time we mention a month. Nachmanides wonders why this practice is, apparently, no longer followed. He cites the Jerusalem Talmud,[2] which says that the names we currently use for the months were retained from their Babylonian origins. He explains that, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah that people would no longer swear by "G-d, who brought us out of Egypt," but by "G-d, who brought us up from the land of the north (Babylonia)," we changed over to calling the months by their Persian names. This was to remind us that we had been in exile and that G-d had brought us back to Israel, thereby recalling this more recent redemption, much as we had done until that point for the Exodus.

This seems puzzling. Why would the Sages have sanctioned replacing numbering the months, which the Torah preferred, with a Persian counterpart? Furthermore, we know that the lingua franca of the Jews during the Second Temple was Aramaic; only religious material was transcribed in Hebrew. But every schoolchild knows that one of the things the Jews were praised for preserving while in Egypt was their language!

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky cited the Talmud[3] which tells us that the Second Temple lacked five things. First on the list was the Ark,

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Rabbi Aharon Daniel is a Kollel Staff Scholar.

1 Exodus 12:2

2 Rosh Hashanah, 1:2

3 Yoma 21b

which had been hidden by King Josiah. This is commonly understood to mean that from then on, no one knew its whereabouts. However, the Mishnah[4] tells the story of a priest in the Temple who accidentally noticed that a tile on the floor of a side room was out of place. Realizing that this must lead to the place where the Ark was hidden, he excitedly ran to tell another priest of his monumental discovery. But before he could get the words out, he dropped dead. The Mishnah concludes that they then knew absolutely that the way to the Ark was through that office. (Apparently, no one told Vendyl Jones.) Why, then, did the Sages not restore the Ark to its rightful place in the Holy of Holies?

Rabbi Kaminetsky suggests that the leaders of Israel knew that the Second Temple was not destined to stand forever. They understood that their return to Israel was not to be permanent. In truth, the Jews had deserved to remain in Babylonia for far longer than seventy years. However, Providence saw that by that time the Jewish nation was sliding ever deeper towards assimilation into the surrounding culture. Had they languished there much longer, they would not have succeeded in retaining their unique identity. Much like the situation in Egypt, where had G-d waited any longer to redeem us, there would have been no vestige of Jewishness left in us to redeem, so it was in Babylonia. So G-d had mercy on His people and returned them to their land, and rebuilt the fallen Temple—but only for the time being. The leaders of that generation realized that G-d's purpose in doing so was to enable them to strengthen themselves with enough Torah and faith to fortify the people for a prospective, longer exile to come. To demonstrate to all that they were not yet redeemed to the fullest, they kept the Ark in its place of concealment. Similarly, we find that after the Tabernacle was destroyed at Shiloh, the Ark was not restored to the new Tabernacle in Nob and then Gibeah; it was kept in Abinadav's house until King David decided to build the Temple—because the reconstruction of the Tabernacle represented only a limited redemption.

A strong proof to this theory may be brought from the wording of the daily Amidah prayer. Its composer, the Sage Shimon HaPekuli, lived during the era of the Second Temple. Yet one of its blessings begins "*V'LiYrushalayim ir'cho b'rachamim tashuv*, may You return, G-d, to Jerusalem." Where were the Jews at that time, if not in Jerusalem?

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4 Shekalim 6:2

Was G-d not with them there? It must be that the Sages knew that their time in Israel was limited, for the eternal redemption was not yet at hand. Thus they instituted the prayer for the final return even then.

Because the Sages recognized the transitory nature of the return from Babylonia, they maintained various practices that had been kept in exile. Had they not done so, the destruction of the Second Temple would have magnified, incalculably, the disappointment and disillusion they felt upon realizing, only then, that the complete redemption was not at hand. When Nachmanides says that the Sages substituted the Persian names of the months for the original, generic names in order to remind us that we had once been in Babylon and that G-d had taken us out, he means that the Sages wanted them to remember that that redemption had not in fact been complete. Towards this end, they encouraged the speaking of Aramaic, the language of the exile—for had they reverted to Hebrew, it might have appeared to be an indication that exile was no more. This is why the Jerusalem Talmud, despite the fact that it was redacted in Israel, was written in Palestinian Aramaic. This is also why we find so many Amoraim,[5] and even some Tannaim,[6] possessing names of clearly non-Jewish origin, despite the Jews' tenacious preservation of their names while in Egypt.

Nachmanides writes[7] that the Hasmonean kings were punished to the point of being wiped out because they violated the verse in Jacob's blessings that "The staff shall not depart from Judah," meaning that the Jewish monarchy must remain within the tribe of Judah. (The Hasmoneans were priests.) If the Hasmonean kings erred by installing themselves as kings, why, then, did the Sages not attempt to stop them, and instead re-establish the rightful dynasty of David? For that matter, why did the Men of the Great Assembly,[8] with its remaining prophets, not coronate a king as soon as the return to Israel was under way? The answer is that to do so would have been interpreted as a pronouncement that the final redemption had arrived. In fact, however, the Sages knew that G-d's real purpose in facilitating the

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5 Sages quoted in the Talmud, who lived in the years 10–220 CE.

6 Sages quoted in the Mishnah, who lived in the years 200–500 CE.

7 Commentary to Genesis 49:10

8 The governing body of Sages during and immediately after the Babylonian exile; Mordechai, of the Purim story, was a member.

rebuilding of the Temple and the return from Babylonia was to allow us to ready ourselves—by compiling the Oral Torah, and by instituting many standards and decrees—to withstand the eventual resumption of the exile. This is why they did not protest when the Hasmoneans took the reins of power.

Rabbi Kaminetsky drew on this idea to address a mystifying question. The Book of Haggai is primarily concerned with G-d's command to the leaders of Judah to hasten to rebuild the Temple. Chronologically, however, the prophesy of Ezekiel, containing the blueprint for the Third Temple, predated that of Haggai. Why would G-d command Ezekiel regarding the ultimate, final Temple, before instructing Haggai to lead the building of the Second Temple? In light of the above, we can understand: Since the destruction of the First Temple, the Jews had been anticipating instructions as to how to build the Temple that would symbolize the final redemption. This was the prophecy that Ezekiel did receive. But Haggai's prophecy augured the provisional Temple, for an era of more limited redemption, and better reflected the existing circumstances under which G-d chose to redeem His people. Ultimately, Ezekiel's Temple would supersede Haggai's. But for that time, Haggai's was more appropriate.

"*Ha lachma anya*, this is the bread of affliction…" The Haggadah opens with its first paragraph in Aramaic. Even at the Seder, the Sages employed the language of exile. "*Hashata hacha*—" at present, we are all too aware of the long exile, constrained still by languages foreign to our origins. But—and here the Haggadah reverts to Hebrew—"*L'shanah haba'ah bnai chorin*, next year, may we be free!"

Next year may we no longer need reminders of the exile. Let us witness the lasting, complete redemption!

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann

Who Knows Eleven?

At its end, the Haggadah includes a song that highlights the numbers one to thirteen and the fundamentals they imply for the Jewish People. The lyrics explain that the number one is for G-d; the number two reminds us of the Torah, which was given on two tablets; three is for the Fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob); and so on. There is one number, however, that doesn't seems to fit into the scheme. That is the number eleven, representing eleven stars. The commentators agree that this refers to the eleven stars in Joseph's dream.

Now, one may ask, what is the significance of this for the Jewish People to remember? When a person hears "one," he remembers G-d, "two," the Torah, and so on. But what is so important about the stars in the dream of Joseph that one should remember when he says the number "eleven?"

Furthermore, the eleven stars never existed! They were part of a dream! Why is it important to mention or remember something from a dream? All the other items in the song are fundamental things for a Jew to remember, but this one does not seem to fit in. Why mention the eleven stars?

An additional question comes up when we realize that the eleven stars are actually referring to Joseph's brothers, the Tribes of Israel. But the Tribes are clearly mentioned in the next number, twelve: "*Sh'naim asar shivtaya* (Twelve Tribes)." So why would there be a need to mention it again?

I once heard that the answer may be that this dream is telling us much more than it seems on the surface. The Talmud (Berachos 55b) says that a person dreams at night about things that he thought in his heart during the day.

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann is a Kollel Staff Scholar.

Let us take a moment to see the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. The Torah says (Genesis 37:4) "*Vayis'n'u oso, v'lo yoch'lu dab'ro l'shalom,* [the brothers] hated him, and weren't able to talk to [Joseph] peaceably." The brothers hated Joseph to the point that they plotted to kill him. They felt that Jacob treated Joseph better than the other brothers—he learned with him and gave him the special coat.

But what were Joseph's feelings towards his brothers, who hated him? Did he hate them in return, or did Joseph only see the good in his brothers? How can we know Joseph's real feelings?

The answer is in the dream that Joseph had about his brothers. The dream reveals to us what Joseph actually thought of his brothers during the day. Had he thought of them as evil people out to kill him, he would have envisioned them in his dream as eleven lions or tigers or violent murderers. Instead he viewed them as special people, as symbolized by stars. Precisely because it was a dream, we learn Joseph's true feelings towards his brothers.

Here we learn the important, fundamental lesson of *ahavas Yisroel*, loving Israel. A Jew must always see the good in his brothers, his fellow Jews.

The Sages say that the generation of the Second Temple learned a lot of Torah and did a lot of mitzvos, but the Temple was destroyed due to the sin of baseless hatred and slander. What caused the Temple to be destroyed will, of course, stop the Temple from being rebuilt. G-d wants all His children to get along nicely with each other.

Now we see the great significance of the eleven stars in Joseph's dream. They teach the fundamental axiom of our expected role in our relationship to fellow Jews. The eleven stars are indicators of the tremendous love Joseph had towards his brothers, as he saw only the good and didn't see any bad. This is an important lesson for us to learn and impart on the night of Passover. It teaches us a lesson completely independent of twelve for the Tribes, which is the next number in the list.

Let us take the lessons of the "eleven stars" and learn how to love all Jewish People unconditionally. Through this we will undo the cause of our current exile and enable the long-awaited Messiah to come and rebuild the Temple.

Rabbi Dovid Heinemann

Living the Story

> In every generation a person is obligated to look at himself as though he personally left Egypt, for it is written: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of this that G-d acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.'"[1]

THIS MITZVAH THAT THE TALMUD ASKS OF US, TO SEE OURSELVES AS THOUGH we personally left Egypt, is noteworthy. We do not find in regard to the holiday of Purim that we must look at ourselves as though we personally were saved in Persia. On Sukkos we do not have to see ourselves as though we personally slept and ate in huts in the desert. Why, then, is the mitzvah of repeating the story of the Exodus from Egypt different? What is so unusual about it that one must actually look at himself as though he left Egypt?

A possible explanation is that if one sees himself as such, he will be more animated in retelling the story of our Exodus. However, that, itself, begs for an explanation. What is so important about this story?

The *Sefer Hachinuch*[2] explains that the more times something is mentioned in the Torah, the more critical it is. As proof, he offers the examples of the prohibition against idolatry, which is mentioned forty-four times, and the mitzvah of Shabbos, which is mentioned twelve times. The mitzvah of remembering the Exodus is mentioned *fifty times!* The Torah is clearly informing us that telling the story of the Exodus is an extremely important mitzvah. Why is that so?

Nachmanides[3] has a lengthy explanation as to the unique importance of the story of the Exodus. He explains that from early history, when people started serving idols, the views of faith in one G-d quickly became engulfed in confusion. Some said there was no original Creator at all, while others maintained that there was, indeed, an original

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Rabbi Dovid Heinemann is a Kollel Staff Scholar.

1 Talmud, Pesachim 116b

2 Mitzvah 331

3 commentary to Exodus 13:16

Creator, but that He was no longer aware of what was going on in the world. There were still others who said this Creator knew what was going on but was not involved in the day-to-day running of the world. Therefore, life for these people was just a bunch of random occurrences, and they were like leaves being blown around by different winds. In such a mindset, miracles have no place. Were miracles to be done for a specific group of people, such miracles would be a powerful refutation to the idea that there is no G-d or that He has no involvement with the world. And if these miracles were predicted in advance by a prophet, the truth of the existence of G-d would be that much more powerful.

When G-d sent Moses to Pharaoh to tell him that G-d was going to bring plagues (ten of them!), He was, in essence, telling Pharaoh that all these idols are useless. For example, the plague of blood would destroy the god of the Nile river. The plagues on the animals would demolish the concept that some of the animals were gods. Each of the ten plagues took out another Egyptian god, and served to testify that G-d, who created the world, knows what is going on in the world and is involved in every aspect of every plague, from the tiniest insect to the large, wild beasts, from the locusts to the slaying of the firstborn.

G-d will not perform miracles to punish every evil person in every generation. Therefore He commanded us to make a constant reminder, for ourselves, our children, and all our descendants, of what transpired to our ancestors in Egypt. When commanding us in the performance of many mitzvos, e.g., the Sabbath and the redemption of the firstborn, He informs us that those commandments are our remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. We must constantly remind ourselves that G-d performed these miracles openly so that any lingering questions about His involvement in the world would be eradicated. For all generations we must remember the story of the miracles of the Ten Plagues and our leaving Egypt. This is the very foundation of the Jewish faith in G-d.

With this explanation we can understand so many different ideas that take place on Pesach and, indeed, all year round. The Torah mentions the Exodus frequently, because it is the basis of our faith. In order for us to do any of the other mitzvos, we must first be faithful to the idea that there is only one G-d, and that He is involved with and cares about each and every one of us.

On Passover we want the children to get involved as much as possible. We want them to ask the Four Questions and any other questions

that are puzzling them about the evening. One of the reasons for the question-answer system is that the Torah wants us to repeat this story with enthusiasm. The more "give and take" there is, the easier that task becomes. Questions arouse interest and enthusiasm in a topic, and we need the children to listen and be interested.

We can now understand why the Talmud has instructed us to look at ourselves as if we, personally, left Egypt. If we want to transmit this story to the next generation properly, and keep the impression and faith strong, it must conveyed as though it happened to us personally. There is no comparison between someone telling a story that happened to him and someone who tells a story that he heard from others. A story that our entire faith is based on is not one that can just be left to average storytelling. Although Purim, Sukkos, and other holidays are extremely important, the very foundation of our faith is not built on them. Thus, if one did not view himself as part of those stories, but rather told them over blandly, that would be enough. However, when it comes to retelling the story of the Exodus, we must relive it and actually transmit it as though we were there.

Rabbi Isaac Kahn

A Lesson in Faith

In Genesis,[1] G-d tells Abraham that he will have children and that they will ultimately inherit the land of Israel. Abraham questions G-d, "Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?" G-d answers, "Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own and they will serve them, and they will oppress them four hundred years. But also the nation that they will serve I shall judge, and afterwards they will leave with great wealth… and the fourth generation shall return here."

The Talmud[2] explains that the reason Abraham was punished through the exile of his children in Egypt was *because* he asked this question. This was *quid pro quo*—the reason they went down to Egypt was because he didn't believe fully enough that everything G-d says will be fulfilled. Therefore his offspring, through their experiences in Egypt and the Exodus, would achieve a level of complete belief.

Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon further elaborates on this idea. He explains that faith is the absolute trust in the absolute truth and trustworthiness of G-d's every word. It is the confident knowledge that G-d is "the faithful L-rd, Who does as He says; Who speaks and fulfills His word; Whose every word is truth and righteousness."[3] This level of faith is the foundation of the Jewish people and it is the core of the covenant between G-d and Israel. This level was reached by the Jewish nation at the Splitting of the Sea, as the Torah says, "… And they believed in G-d."[4]

With this introduction, it is clear why the Exodus is our primer in faith. Let's delve deeper into this faith and how it affects our daily lives.

Rabbi Isaac Kahn is a Kollel Staff Scholar.

1 Chapter 15

2 Nedarim 32a

3 Excerpt, blessings after the Haftarah

4 Exodus 14:31

The Splitting of the Sea was not simply a miracle. When G-d split the sea, the Jews clearly saw G-d's presence and involvement in nature. It is said, "A maidservant saw at the sea that which Ezekiel… did not see."[5] In other words, there was an incredible Revelation of G-d.

This being true, how did the Jews sin with the Golden Calf so shortly afterwards? How did they have such a great fall in such short a time?

Before answering this question, let's ask another one. The Talmud[6] explains that the verse from the Shema, "You will not stray after your hearts," is referring to heresy. Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman asked, why is heresy called straying after the *heart?* It should be called straying after the *mind*—after all, heresy is a corruption of the mind, not the heart! He answered that the foundations of faith themselves are clear and undeniable to anyone's mind. However, there is one problem: The naturally clear-thinking mind is influenced by the desires of the heart. This being said, it is obvious that heresy must come from the heart, which is where man's desires lie, and it is those desires that cause him to stray.

Rabbi Yaakov Moses Kulefsky used this idea to explain an apparent contradiction. One Midrash says that Abraham died five years before his otherwise-appointed time, so that he would not have to see his grandson Esau become evil. However, there is another Midrash that says that Esau turned evil because he saw that Abraham died five years early. Answers Rabbi Kulefsky: The truth was that G-d took five years from Abraham's life, as the first Midrash says. Esau, however, wanted an excuse to follow his negative desires, so he blamed it on his grandfather's death.

This idea is found in Isaiah: "This people is fattening its heart, hardening its ears, and sealing its eyes, lest it see with its eyes, hear with its ears, and understand with its heart, so that it will repent and be healed."[7] Everything starts with the fattening of the heart, and this is also the hardest to remove.

One final point that can be understood with this idea is what we say about the wicked son in the Passover Haggadah: "Since he

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5 Mechilta, Beshallach 2

6 Berachos 12b

7 Isaiah 6:10

excludes himself from the Jewish community, he denies Judaism." In truth, his real desire is to follow his own whims, and that is why he excludes himself. Since he needs an excuse, he blames everything on G-d and denies Judaism.

Now let us return to our earlier question: How did the Jews fall from such a high level? The answer is that they strayed after their hearts. When our belief is based on feelings, all too often we allow those personal feelings to push away what we have learned about G-d. We are constantly fighting this battle, of not allowing our hearts' desires to cause us to stray from the proper path.

This also answers a commonly asked question: Why is it that many times we are inspired and this causes us to grow in spirituality, yet this growth does not last? Why can't we maintain our levels of growth? The reason is that our growth came about from an inspirational feeling; once this feeling dissipates, down comes the growth that accompanied it.

Another downside of faith based on feelings is that it cannot protect us from separation and strife. These caused the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and have brought much hardship to our nation throughout our history. Strife also comes when people think only about themselves and don't take G-d into account. As stated above, this happens when people allow their personal feelings to overpower all other feelings.

So with this new perspective, let us explore a Midrash:[8] Rabbi Yosi, the son of Rabbi Chanina, says all the kingdoms are called in the name of Egypt because they have oppressed us. The commentaries explain that this is based on a verse in Isaiah that talks about the ultimate gathering in of the exiles: "...And the lost ones will come from the land of Ashur, and those pushed aside from the land of Egypt, and they will bow to G-d on the holy mountain in Jerusalem."[9] Of course, there are no longer any literal exiles in the land of Egypt. Rather, all of us are still partially in the Egyptian exile, still unable to fully practice our religion.

Although we are free and we have the Torah, there are still elements missing. We have no Temple, G-d's Presence is not openly revealed, and we are influenced by the surrounding culture. Only

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8 Bereishis Rabbah 16

9 Isaiah 27:13

after the ultimate redemption, which will be a continuation of the redemption from Egypt, will we truly be free, as the verse says: "Like the days that I took you from Egypt, I will show you miracles."[10]

At that point there will be one major difference: Our faith will no longer be based on feelings. It will be seen by all that G-d is the Creator of the world, as Elijah said, "and let this people know that you, G-d, are the G-d."[11]

Faith through seeing is complete faith. It leaves no room for argument, since everything is right there in front of you. The same is true of one's desires, as Rabbi Wasserman explained above—once shown openly the truth, all other desires fall away. Nothing is as powerful as the truth, because "The L-rd, G-d is true."[12]

Let us therefore enter the Seder night with a new conviction—to make every effort to recognize and believe what true faith is. By doing this, may we merit to see the ultimate redemption and the return to the Temple in Jerusalem, speedily, in our days.

10 Micha 7:15

11 I KIngs 18:37

12 Jeremiah 10:10

Rabbi Eli Polsky

The Plague of the Firstborn

in Three Acts

Act I

Scene I

LET US TRY TO DIG AROUND A BIT THROUGH ONE OF THE FINAL CONVERSATIONS that Moses had with Pharaoh.

To set up the scene: Moses and Pharaoh are having a heated argument over whether the Jews will be allowed to bring their livestock to the desert when they go to worship G-d. In the heat of the moment, Pharaoh blows up at Moses and screeches, "Go away from me! Beware! If you dare look upon my face again, I will kill you!"

Moses is certainly justified to become upset at this affront. Indeed, the Torah relates to us: "And Moses left from before Pharaoh in a state of burning anger."[1]

However, before Moses walks away, he has one final prophecy for Pharaoh: The Plague of the Firstborn.

And herein lies the intriguing lesson.[2]

The *Shechinah* (G-d's Divine Presence) does not rest upon one who is in a state of anger.[3] In other words, in order to receive prophesy, one cannot be in a state of anger!

There is no fooling the *Shechinah*. Either you are angry or you aren't; even one who controls his anger, is still, in reality, angry deep down inside, and if one is angry, the *Shechinah* will not rest upon him.

However, in our story we are referring to someone who was in such control of his emotions that he did not allow himself to get angry!

Rabbi Eli Polsky is an alumnus of the Kollel's Torah L'netzach program.

1 Exodus 11:8

2 As pointed out by Rabbi Dovid Halevi Seigel, a.k.a the *Turei Zahav*, or Taz (1586–1667), in *Divrei Dovid*, referring to Rashi's commentary on Exodus 8:11.

3 Talmud. Shabbos 30b

Pharaoh said a terrible thing to Moses, but Moses did not need to control his anger at that moment, because he simply did not become angry. Not even a drop. Hence, he prophesied right after Pharaoh's sacrilege. After all, he had a job to do!

Then, as soon as his duty was done, the Torah testifies that he allowed his normal human emotions to wash over him. "Moses left from before Pharaoh in a state of burning anger."

But he succumbed not a moment before it was necessary.

Scene II

Let us zoom in, for a moment, on an expression used in this final prophesy. Moses said, "So said G-d: 'At about midnight, I shall go into Egypt, and every firstborn shall die.'"[4]

Since Moses knew exactly when midnight would be, why did he say "about" midnight?

Moses thought that the astrologers of Pharaoh might make a mistake, and they would miscalculate midnight by a few moments. When the plague would seem to strike a few moments away from midnight, they would then say that Moses was a liar. For it is said, "Teach yourself to constantly say, 'I don't know,' lest you be accused of lying."[5]

Let's sit back and appreciate the power of a scoffer.

What exactly happened in that one instant, when the clock struck "about" midnight? Total and utter destruction to anything that could remotely be connected to the concept of "first." Every first-born died—male and female, even unborn fetuses, from Pharaoh's noble sons down to the enslaved first-born of Egyptian prisoners. Both the firstborn of a father and the firstborn of a mother died in that moment.[6] Firstborn animals died.

The Egyptian firstborn who were hiding in their temples were smitten together with their gods. Wooden idols rotted, stone idols dissolved, gold and silver idols melted.

In households with no children, the oldest person in the house was slain. In households in which the firstborn had died before the commencement of the plague, the dogs dug up their corpses, chewed

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4 Exodus 11:4

5 Talmud, Berachos 4a

6 As an aside, this revealed to many households the unfaithfulness of a spouse, which caused further destruction!

them, and dragged them through the streets. And any statues erected in their honor were also destroyed.

All of this destruction happened at the exact same moment.

"Oh, but, according to our calculations, Moses is a few moments off! Moses is a liar!"

Imagine such blindness and depravity.

You can lead a horse to water…

Act II

How did the firstborn take Moses' prophecy when they heard it?

Let us look at the Haggadah for a clue. There we find the list of the ten plagues: Blood. Frogs. Lice. Wild Beasts. Epidemic. Boils. Hail. Locusts. Darkness. The Plague of the Firstborn.

Why does only the last plague get the extra description "The Plague of?" Either every plague should have this prefix, or none of them should. What is unique about the last plague that it deserves this prefix?[7]

Something else is unique to this plague's name. In general, the plagues are named for their agents. "Blood" was a punishment that came about through blood, "Frogs" came about through frogs, and so on. There is one exception to this rule: The Plague of the Firstborn is named after its *victims*.

Explaining these exceptions will be the key to answering our first question.

The firstborn were not simply victims of the plague. They *were* the plague! When they heard of Moses' prophecy, and of Pharaoh's indifference towards it (see Act III), they were livid. "Does our blood mean nothing to you?" they cried out. And then they rioted. Egypt burned. The powerless masses were slaughtered. Property was destroyed.[8]

This chaos, brought on by the firstborn, was (literally!) the original "Egyptian Spring." King David put it this way: "*L'makkei Mitzrayim bivchoreihem, ki l'olam chasdo*—to Him Who struck Egypt with its

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7 Also, why is it referred to in Hebrew as *Makkas Bechoros*, feminine, and not *Bechorim*, masculine (like the word *bechor*)? The use of the feminine *Bechoros* seems to attach that word to *Makkas*, which is also feminine, as if *Makkas* ("The Plage of") were the noun and *Bechoros* ("Firstborn") the modifier. But surely it is just the opposite?

8 As related by Midrash Shocher Tov 136:12, Zohar Vil. II No. 45, Tos. Shabbos 87b D.H. "V'oso Hayom"

firstborn, for His kindness is eternal!"[9]

Act III

Now let us visit Pharaoh, and see how he is coping with this revolting development. "Pharaoh woke up that night." Rashi adds: He woke up from his bed.[10]

Contrast Pharaoh's calmness—cool and collected—to that of Moses. While Moses' level-headedness in the face of Pharaoh's chutzpah is a commendable trait, and stems from his total control over his emotions, Pharaoh's comes off as being, well, pig-headed.

Imagine you are Pharaoh for a moment.

Moses is nine for nine! Whatever he has prophesied has come to fruition. Your most sophisticated necromancers have admitted that this is beyond witchcraft; rather, it is the finger of G-d, in all of His Glory. You, yourself, have admitted that "this time I have sinned; G-d is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones!"[11] Your own advisors are begging you to send out the Jews. Your entire country is on the verge of mutiny!

Finally, Moses comes and prophesies that tonight "every firstborn in Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sits on his throne to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the millstone, and all of the firstborn of the animals. And there will be a great outcry in the entire land of Egypt, such as has never been heard, nor shall there ever be heard like it again!"[12]

And one more thing: You, Pharaoh, are a firstborn.

What more logical place for Pharaoh to find himself that night, but snuggled comfortably in his bed?

Perhaps this unfathomable indifference in the face of the threat to his—and his empire's—total destruction is what Rashi highlights when he tells us that Pharaoh rose that night, confused and bleary-eyed, from his bed. Pharoah woke up from his deep slumber (literally and metaphorically), and encountered an Egypt which G-d Himself was using as His playground to turn Creation on its head.

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9 Psalms 136:12

10 Exodus 12:30, and Rashi's commentary

11 ibid., 9:27

12 ibid., 11:5-6

Alter B. Raubvogel

These Three Things

> Rabban Gamliel used to say, "Whoever doesn't say the following Three Things on Passover hasn't fulfilled his obligation: The Paschal lamb, matzoh, and marror (bitter herbs)—the Paschal lamb, because G-d skipped over the houses of our forefathers in Egypt… Matzoh, because our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt… Bitter herbs, because the Egyptians embittered our forefathers' lives in Egypt."[1]

THE HAGGADAH TAKES RABBAN GAMLIEL'S MANDATE SERIOUSLY; IT IS forever canonized in the Passover service. But Rabban Gamliel didn't say which Passover obligation he was referring to. Was it the retelling of the Exodus, was it one of the other mitzvos of Passover night—the eating of matzoh, bitter herbs, or the Paschal lamb—or was it a combination of these four mitzvos?

In our Haggadah and in the Mishnah, this passage appears near the end of Maggid, the retelling of the Exodus. At that point in the Seder, many a tired and hungry guest has drifted into oblivion—or is trying to quickly read through whatever pages remain between him and his dinner. If explaining these three concepts is critical to fulfilling our obligation on Passover night, why leave it for last?

We also need to understand why Rabban Gamliel requires us to repeat various elements of the Exodus story, which have already been described in the Haggadah, and associate them with these three symbols of Pesach night. And why these symbols in particular?

THE COMMENTARIES ARE DIVIDED OVER WHICH MITZVAH REQUIRES RECITING the "Three Things." Some maintain that Rabban Gamliel was talking about the retelling of the Exodus, and others hold that he referred to one or more of the mitzvos in his list.

Alter Raubvogel is the Kollel's Administrator and graphic designer.

1 Talmud, Pesachim 116b

The Maharsha[2] contends that Rabban Gamliel meant the eating of the Paschal lamb, which is accompanied with matzoh and marror. That is, one had to describe the symbolism of all three foods in order to fulfill the obligation of eating the Paschal lamb in Temple times. But if so, he asks, why is this mitzvah different from all other mitzvos? One is *supposed* to concentrate on every mitzvah's meaning when he fulfills it, but that isn't usually an absolute requirement. Why isn't it good enough to just recite a blessing and eat the requisite amount of lamb?

The Maharsha explains that the Paschal lamb is one of only two sacrifices that are invalid when offered without intent. The other is a sin offering. The common denominator between these two is that they symbolize a process of coming close to G-d's holiness, after being far away from it. The requirement for intent is mandated to ensure that someone who brings one of these sacrifices grows from the experience.

In the case of the Paschal lamb, Rabban Gamliel taught that it must also be *eaten* with intent[3]—and that this intent must be verbalized. The Torah commands us[4] to "remember" the Exodus, as well as the symbolism of matzoh and marror, and Rabban Gamliel held that this remembrance is to be carried out the same way that we "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy,"[5] by verbalizing it (as we do when we say Kiddush on the Sabbath).

All three of these symbols represent pulling away from defilement, drawing near to G-d, and becoming holy. The original Paschal lamb, which was offered in Egypt, demonstrated that the Israelites were no longer going to worship Egyptian gods; in fact, they were going to slaughter and eat them! Bitter herbs, and romaine lettuce

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2 Acronym of Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Halevi Eidels (1555–1631); commentary to Pesachim, ibid., as explained by Rabbi Yitzchok Kleiman, former Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) of the St. Louis Rabbinical College. (Open question: Would Rabban Gamliel oblige us to speak of the Three Things today, when we have no Paschal lamb?) Rabbi Kleiman pointed out that the very sequence of the Three Things, with the Paschal lamb listed first, implies that they are associated with the eating of the sacrifice; if they were meant as part of the retelling of the Exodus, the Three should begin with marror, just as Maggid begins with "*Avadim hayinu*, we were slaves…"

3 Although the Maharsha doesn't say so, this writer assumes the requirement is irrelevant to a sin offering, which isn't eaten by the person who brings it.

4 Deuteronomy 24:18. The writer does not know why, but the Maharsha explicitly quotes this verse, even though it discusses the just treatment of proselytes—not the Paschal lamb.

5 Exodus 20:8

in particular,[6] symbolize the gradual, inexorable subjugation of the Israelites, from which G-d released them. And matzoh represents the abolishment of the Evil Inclination, which is symbolized by leavening.

The B'nei Yisas'char[7] argues that Rabban Gamliel referred to all three mitzvos—the Paschal lamb, eating matzoh, and eating marror. Indeed, he contends that the need to speak about the Paschal lamb is obvious from the words of the Torah, "You will say, 'This is the Passover offering…"[8] Rabban Gamliel meant to teach that this also applies to the other two mitzvos.

How did Rabban Gamliel arrive at this ruling? The B'nei Yisas'char explains that Rabban Gamliel was trying to answer a question.

There's a principal in the Torah that a prosecuting agent (*kateigor* in Hebrew) can't be employed in one's defense (*saneigor*). For example, the High Priest never wore gold when he entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur to atone for the Jewish People, because gold is emblematic of the Golden Calf. Rabban Gamliel asked, shouldn't this principal apply to the Paschal lamb, matzoh, and marror? The Israelites worshipped lambs (and other idols) while they were in Egypt. Matzoh recalls how the Israelites left Egypt in such a rush that their dough didn't have time to rise; G-d hurried them out because they had become so defiled with the influence of Egypt that, had they stayed any longer, they would have been unredeemable. And Kabbalists teach that the backbreaking labor with mortar and bricks was intended to make up for the sin, generations earlier, of building the Tower of Babel![9] If all these symbols are emblematic of the sad condition of Israel—of mankind—before the Exodus, how can we employ them in the service on Passover night?

The answer, B'nei Yisas'char says, is analogous to the Talmud's response to a similar question.[10] A man can betroth a woman by giving her either money (i.e., something of value) or a contract. However, a divorce can only be effected with a *get*, which is a contract; money won't do, because it can't function as both a creator (*saneigor*) and

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6 Romaine lettuce starts out tender but become tough over time—Pesachim 39a.

7 Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro (1783–1841); "*Ma'amarei Chodesh Nissan*," 5:18

8 Exodus 12:27

9 Rabbi Yitzchok Luria, in *Pri Eitz Chaim*

10 Talmud, Kiddushin 5a

a destroyer (*kateigor*) of marriage. The Talmud asks, then how can a contract serve both purposes? The answer is that one doesn't use the same generic contract for both marriage and divorce. Each contract is unique, and it's defined by the words written on it.

The Torah makes speaking about the Paschal lamb part of the mitzvah, explains the B'nei Yisas'char, because *the inherent symbolism of the lamb is determined by the words one uses to describe it.* That is how Rabban Gamliel answered his question, and that is why he also required a verbal explanation of matzoh and marror. Saying that each represents a different aspect of G-d's deliverance transforms them into symbols of that deliverance.

Both the Maharsha and the B'nei Yisas'char offer us ways to explain why the Haggadah quotes Rabban Gamliel at the end of Maggid, shortly before we drink the second of the Four Cups. It turns out that discussing the Three Things at the Seder is a preamble to fulfilling the series of mitzvos which follow Maggid—eating matzoh and marror (and, in the time of the Temple, the Paschal lamb).

However, many commentaries do interpret Rabban Gamliel's requirement as part of recounting the Exodus. Among them is Tiferes Yisroel,[11] who explains that each of the Three Things represents multiple aspects of the bondage in Egypt and G-d's salvation.

There were plenty of reasons, he writes, why the Exodus never should have happened. The Israelites were almost as sinful as the Egyptians, as symbolized by the lamb, which both Egyptians and Israelites worshipped; indeed, even as G-d took the Israelites out of Egypt, there were those among them who held on to idolatry (such as the Idol of Micah)![12] Also, G-d told Abraham[13] that his children would spend 400 years in Egypt; at the time of the Exodus, they had only been there 210 years,[14] as symbolized by unrisen dough. And, practically speaking, it should have been impossible for the Israelites to ever break free of the bitter herb of slavery, either literally or psychologically.

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11 Rabbi Israel Lipschitz (1782–1860); *Bo'az*, commentary to the Mishnah, Pesachim, chapter 10

12 See Talmud, Sanhedrin 103b

13 Genesis 15:13

14 Rashi's commentary, ibid.

Yet G-d reckoned each of these barriers to redemption as *a reason for and a means of salvation.* The spiritual decay in Egypt was so extensive that it had to be stopped immediately, before it could destroy the very soul of the Jewish nation. G-d allowed the Egyptians to exert supernatural, bitter pressure on the Israelites, so that their quota of 400 years of exile could be met in slightly more than half that time. When G-d did exact punishment on the Egyptians, He skipped over the Israelites—*pasach*, in Hebrew—and hurried them out of Egypt so fast that they had to bake their bread unleavened. In doing so, G-d prevented the decadence of Egypt—the Evil Inclination, symbolized by leaven—from destroying the Jewish spirit.

The Three Things also represent other aspects of the redemption. G-d spared the Israelites from the destruction of Egypt, in keeping with His word to Abraham; we recall this with the Paschal lamb. The Exodus took place just in time, leaving the Israelites unspoiled, like unleavened bread; they remained so spiritual that at the Splitting of the Sea, our Sages say, the Revelation of G-d to even a servant-girl was greater than the visions of Ezekiel.[15] And the bitter suffering in Egypt inspired the Israelites to cry out to G-d, Who then hastened their deliverance.

WE SEE THAT MANY LAYERS OF MEANING ARE WOVEN INTO THE SYMBOLS OF the Seder and the mitzvos of Pesach night. This really is true of all of the Torah and G-d's commandments. May G-d help us to use the Seder as a springboard for a lifetime of growth in Torah and spirituality—of freedom!—just as the Exodus launched our people on their journey to Sinai so many years ago.

15 Rashi, commentary to Exodus 15:1, quoting *Mechilta*

Rabbi Dani Schon

Exodus Past, Exodus Future

I ONCE ATTENDED A LECTURE IN WHICH RABBI DOVID ORLOFSKY ASKED, "What is the purpose of the Pesach Seder?" Those in attendance suggested the standard answers, such as retelling the story of the Exodus to one's children. Rabbi Orlofsky smiled at these responses, but said he was seeking more.

He explained that the essence of the Passover Seder can be discovered by examining the very first thing that we do that night. Many have the custom to speak out or sing the entire order of the Seder, from *kadesh* until *nirtzah*, before actually starting. This seems a bit strange, since there doesn't seem to be any other Jewish ritual in which we map out the entire direction of the mitzvah before performing it. Rabbi Orlofsky explained that the purpose of the Seder is to traverse the fifteen steps of the Seder and ultimately reach the endpoint, *nirtzah*—literally, "we will find favor"—which, as the word implies, is when we become beloved by G-d. The main way we do this is through *shira*, singing the praises of G-d. The Talmud teaches, and Maimonides codifies, that on Passover night we all have to visualize that we ourselves were liberated from the bondage in Egypt. It is from this deep wellspring of gratitude that we sing *shira* to G-d for taking us out of Egypt, as well as praising Him for many of the other kindnesses that He has done for us.

The Levush writes[1] that the reason why our Sages split the recital of Hallel at the Seder in two, one half before the meal and the other half after, is that the first half of Hallel (Psalms 113 and 114) deals with the redemption from Egypt, and the second half (Psalms 115 through 118) deals with the future, ultimate redemption. We see this

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Rabbi Dani Schon is a Kollel Staff Scholar.

1 Commentary on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 480

in the Talmud's explanation[2] of the Hallel: The phrase "*B'tzeis Yisroel Mimitzrayim*, when Israel left Egypt,"[3] refers to the redemption from Egypt; "*Hayam ra'ah vayanos*, the sea saw and fled,"[4] refers to the Splitting of the Sea; "*Heharim rak'du ch'eylim*, the mountains skipped like rams,"[5] refers to the giving of the Torah; "*Es-haleich lifnei G-d*, I will walk before G-d,"[6] refers to the Resurrection of the dead; and "*Lo lanu*, not for our sake,"[7] refers to either the subjugation of the Jews before the final redemption or the war of Gog and Magog, the cataclysmic confrontation before the End of Days. The first three of these phrases, which deal with the redemption from Egypt, are recited in the first half of the Hallel, before the meal, while the last two phrases, which deal with the final redemption, are recited in the second half of the Hallel, after the meal.

(This idea is also the basis for the ruling of the Vilna Gaon, that the second half of the Hallel need not be recited before *chatzos* (halachic midnight). He explains that only those mitzvos that are connected to the redemption from Egypt must be performed before *chatzos*, while those mitzvos which are not directly related to the redemption from Egypt may be performed afterward.)

We also see this division in the rest of the Seder. The first portion of the Haggadah clearly discusses all the miracles that G-d performed for us when He took us out of Egypt. However, the second half of the Haggadah does not deal exclusively with the redemption from Egypt, although there are references to it. Immediately after the Grace After Meals, we say "*Sh'foch chamoscha*," in which we beg G-d to pour His wrath upon the nations that attempt to destroy the Jews. Then we recite the second half of the Hallel, which makes reference to the future redemption. When we start the final stage of the Haggadah, we say "Next year in Jerusalem!" We conclude the Haggadah with "*Chad Gadya*," a seemingly simple story which, the Vilna Gaon explains, actually refers to the entire history of the Jews, beginning with Jacob's receiving the blessings from Isaac, all the way until the end of days.

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2 Pesachim 118a

3 Psalms 114:1

4 ibid. 114:3

5 ibid. 114:4

6 ibid. 116:9

7 ibid. 115:1

We see from here that the function of the Seder is not merely to recount the redemption from Egypt, but to discuss the future redemption, as well. We are not merely required to review our glorious past; rather we also have to focus on the future redemption which will make our previous redemption pale in comparison. But why is this such an important part of the Seder night, and is there any connection to the general theme of *shira* (song) that is prevalent in the Haggadah?

The Talmud[8] describes how G-d wanted to make King Hezekiah the Moshiach (the Messiah), and allow Sennacherib to be the antagonist in what would now become the final, apocalyptic battle. However, the Divine attribute of justice objected, "How is that justice? King David, though he recited many songs and praises before You, was considered unworthy of being the Moshiach; yet You would anoint Hezekiah the Moshiach, even though You performed many miracles for him and he did not sing praises in front of You!" We see from the Talmud that the concept of *shira* is directly related to the Moshiach and the ultimate redemption. But why? What element of *shira* is unique such that it is a prerequisite for the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate redemption?

The Midrash[9] states that from the time of Adam on, no one said *shira* until the Jews sang "*Az Yashir*" (Exodus 15) after the Splitting of the Sea. This seems puzzling, since there are instances in Genesis[10] where the Patriarchs built altars and presumably expressed thanksgiving to G-d. There must have been something missing in those earlier expressions of thanksgiving. But what, precisely, was so special about the praise that the Jews offered to G-d at the Splitting of the Sea that raised it to the lofty level of *shira*?

The Jews looked, in hindsight, and realized that even the things they had thought were bad were part of a bigger plan that G-d had in store, to redeem His Chosen People from oppression. Therefore, after the Splitting of the Sea, the Jews lauded G-d for all of the events that had occurred in Egypt, including their slavery, because they realized that it was all part of His master plan. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander[11] points out that the beauty of *shira* is not the beauty of any one note; rather,

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8 Talmud, Sanhedrin 94a

9 Shemos Rabbah 23:1

10 e.g., Genesis 33:20

11 in *Sifsei Chaim*

it is the arrangement of all of the notes, which join together to form a harmonious unit. So, too, the Jews did not praise G-d for any one act of kindness; rather, they gave thanks to Him for all of the events that led up to their miraculous redemption, as they were finally fully aware that even the smallest thing that had happened to them was part of the redemption process.

Now we can understand the essence of *shira*. But still, why is it so integral to bringing Moshiach?

Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzato writes,[12] "In the future, the ways of G-d will be known to all of the Jews—how all of their sufferings and pains were only to prepare them for good." At the time of Moshiach, our understanding of G-d will be so great that we will understand exactly why G-d ran the world the way that He did. Rabbi Friedlander suggests that if we strive *now* to comprehend the hand of G-d behind all of life's events (which is the essence of *shira*), then G-d will bring us the Moshiach, who will fully reveal to us G-d's hand in the universe.

Through their redemption from Egypt, the Jews reached a high level of *shira*, recognizing G-d's guidance behind all events. Therefore we can suggest that our job, on the Seder night, is to tap into that power and clearly see the hand of G-d in our Exodus from Egypt, as well as in our personal lives. We hope this will be a merit to the coming of the Moshiach, who will fully reveal to us how G-d is behind everything in our world.

Thank you!

To Shmuel Plotsker, for your editorial assistance.

12 *Da'as Tevunos* 54, written in eighteenth-century Italy