

כל המרבה לספר הרי זה משובח

פסח תשע"א - נערך ע"י הרב דניאל אליעזר רוזלאר

Insights for the Seder Table - Pesach 5771



ליל הסדר

Seder Night.

Q: Why are the rituals of Pesach night known as the “Seder”?

A: The term Seder, which means “order”, is highly significant. One who is oblivious to miraculous events will simply regard history as a series of haphazard occurrences. But a person who recognises God’s hand directing the course of history and the occurrence of miracles will see that often there is a clear pattern and **order** governing what has happened. The events that accompanied the Exodus were not merely a random series of events that happened to result in the Israelites leaving Egypt. Consequently, the Seder Night is all about recognising a sense of order, a “*seder*” in the context of the Exodus from Egypt.

[Chiddushei HaRim]

ברכת ההגדה

The brachah for the Haggadah

Many commentators note that it is a Biblical mitzvah to recount the story of the Exodus on Pesach night, and thus it is strange that the reading of the Haggadah is not preceded by a brachah to this effect. Numerous answers have been advanced, including the following:

- The mitzvah has already been fulfilled with the recitation of Kiddush which mentions **זכר ליציאת מצרים** / a memorial to the Exodus. [Rabbenu Peretz]
- A slave who is released from servitude naturally wants to give praise to the Almighty for enabling his release. Since a key component of the Haggadah is praising God for taking our ancestors out of Egypt, and since this is something that we are naturally inclined to do, there is no requirement for us to recite a brachah. [Sfat Emet]
- The **ברוך המקום** passage that precedes the Four Sons is actually a form of brachah over the Maggid section of the Haggadah. [Rav Soloveitchik]

קידוש

Kiddush

Q: What role does Kiddush play in the structure of the Seder rituals?

A: The four cups of wine that we drink at the Pesach Seder commemorate the four expressions of redemption that God used when He promised to take the Israelites out of Egypt (Shemot 6: 6-7). The first cup with which we celebrate our freedom is used for the Kiddush ceremony which declares the sanctity of the Jewish people and proclaims our uniqueness. This is a fitting use for the first of the cups because our freedom would be meaningless if we did not use it to enhance these aspects of our existence as Jews. Jewish sanctity and uniqueness is characterised by mitzvah observance and indeed, the Sages in Massechet Avot (6:2) said that the only person who is truly considered free and at liberty is one who fulfills the words of the Torah and observes its mitzvot - **אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתורה**. Therefore, on this night of joy when we celebrate the fact that our ancestors were released from slavery,

we preface the proceedings with a testimony to our holiness and uniqueness amongst all the nations, as if to declare that were it not for Kiddush and the ideas that it embodies, the rest of the Seder ritual and our celebration of freedom, would be devoid of meaning.

כָּל דֹּכֵפִין יִיתִי וְיִכּוֹל, כָּל דֹּצְרִיךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח.

Whoever is hungry should come and eat; whoever needs should come and eat the *Pesach*.

Q: What is the difference between these seemingly synonymous invitations?

A: The Egyptians afflicted the Israelites in two ways: physically and spiritually, and when the Israelites were redeemed they were saved from both these forms of oppression. The phrase **כָּל דֹּכֵפִין יִיתִי וְיִכּוֹל** / *whoever is hungry should come and eat*, reflects the *physical* redemption, in that we are now able to invite guests to our tables. The second phrase, **כָּל דֹּצְרִיךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח** / *whoever needs should come and eat the Pesach*, reflects the *spiritual* redemption, in that we can now celebrate our religious rites without let or hindrance.

[Cheshev Sofer]

מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

Why is this night different from all other nights?

Q: Pesach night is not the only occasion during the year when we do things differently. Each of the festivals has unusual motifs and practices, so why is this the only time when we ask why this night is different from all other nights?

A: Most of the changes that we make during the year do not contrast sharply with our normal behavior, but are merely additions to our daily practices. Even on the festival of Succot, when we adjourn from our houses and spend the week in temporary shelters, the practices reflect our lives in exile from the Holy Land. But Pesach is unique because our behavior on this occasion is so completely at odds with what we normally do. It is the only occasion in the year when we behave like royalty and truly free people and when we appear to forget that we are a downtrodden people exiled from our land. Therefore it is particularly appropriate on Pesach night to ask: Why is this night so different?

[Rav Ovadiah Yosef]

וַיּוֹצִיאֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם, בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה.

And Hashem our God took us out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Q: What is the significance of the two terms - **יד חזקה** and **זרוע נטויה**?

A: The expressions *mighty hand* and *outstretched arm* seem to be synonymous. But in fact they have entirely different meanings and there is a significant difference between the two terms: The *mighty hand* refers to the force that God used to destroy the Egyptians and make them release the Israelites. The *outstretched arm* refers to the manifestation of the Divine Presence that occurred when the Egyptians were defeated and the Israelites left Egypt - God made certain that there was no doubt about his direct involvement in the series of events that preceded the Exodus.

[Malbim]

חכם מה הוא אומר? מה העדות והחקים והמשפטים וגו'. רשע מה הוא אומר? מה העבדה הזאת לכם?

What does the wise son say? What are these testimonies and statutes and rules etc.? What does the wicked son say? What is the purpose of this service for you?

Q: On the face of it, both the wise son and the wicked son appear to be asking similar questions - what is the significance of all these mitzvot? What is the difference between their questions?

A: On close inspection one can detect a subtle and significant difference between the questions, and this difference reflects the distinction between a **חכם** and a **רשע**. The wicked son refers to "*this service*," indicating that he poses his question on the Seder night. The implication of his query is that he will only fulfill the mitzvot of the evening if he feels that he has been given a satisfactory answer - he is not absolutely committed to the requirements of his religion and will observe them only if he feels they are appropriate. But the wise son asks a more general question in a theoretical context. Whilst he is keen to understand the rationale of the mitzvot and delve into their meanings, he demonstrates that this is not a pre-requisite for his observance and he will fulfill the mitzvot irrespective of the answers that he receives. Thus, whilst there is a similarity in the formulation of the questions, the purpose of the questions is vastly different.

[Chatam Sofer]

ואף אתה אמר לו כהלכות הפסח: אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן.

And you shall say to him in accordance with the laws of the Pesach: One may not eat dessert after eating the Pesach offering.

Q: The wise son has asked all about the various different mitzvot that are observed on Seder night. Why are we instructed to answer him by telling him cryptically that it is prohibited to eat anything else after the Pesach sacrifice has been consumed?

A: The passage need not be understood as telling us exactly *what* we should tell the wise child. Rather, we may understand the Haggadah as telling us *how* we should answer him. The wise child has demonstrated an interest in the halachic, ritualistic, and technical aspects of the festival of Pesach. These can be somewhat finite subjects and lend themselves to approached in a cut and dried manner. Consequently, we are told that we must answer his questions in accordance with the laws of the Pesach offering. One of these laws was that following the eating of the *Korban Pesach* at the end of the Seder meal, nothing further was permitted to be eaten. The reason for this law was in order that the taste of the sacrifice should remain in the person's mouth for the remainder of the evening. We need to remember that a clever child can easily turn his attention to other disciplines if the answers that he is given do not stimulate him and whet his appetite for further inquiry. So just as the taste of the Pesach sacrifice must remain in a person's mouth even after the conclusion of the Seder, the answer given to the wise son must be stimulating enough to interest him for the remainder of the evening and beyond.

וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרָיִמָּה, אֲנוֹס עַל פִּי הַדְּבָר.

And [Jacob] went down to Egypt, compelled by a Divine decree.

Q: The biblical narrative indicates quite clearly that Yaakov *chose* to go to Egypt once he discovered that Yosef was still alive, and though the Almighty endorsed his decision, the basic text does not suggest that he was forced to there. Why does the Haggadah tell us that his descent was **הדיבור** אנוס ע"פ?

A: Yaakov's intention was to go to Egypt just for a brief period of time - to *visit* his son. But when he stopped at Be'er Sheva God told him to remain there. Thus Yaakov's actual journey to Egypt was undertaken of his own free will, but the fact that he settled there was a result of a Divine decree.

[Rav J B Soloveitchik]

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וּגו'.

And the Children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed etc.

Q: How did Bnei Yisrael *swarm* in Egypt?

A: This verse should be understood in the context of the previous verse in the Torah: *And Yosef and his brothers died, and all that generation* (Shemot 1:6). Once the righteous people from the first generation had passed on and were no longer able to protect the Israelites with their merit, the Egyptians began to treat them as if they were merely swarming insects.

[Kli Yakar]

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ, וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ, בְּמֵאדָּ מְאֹד, וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאֶרֶץ אֹתָם.

And the Children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became strong, exceedingly so, and the land was filled by them.

Q: Why does the verse use the term **בְּמֵאדָּ מְאֹד** instead of the more usual **מְאֹד מְאֹד**?

A: The word **מְאֹד** can be understood as reference to possessions and monetary wealth. A precedent for this can be found in the final Mishnah in Massechet Brachot which interprets the words **וּבְכָל מֵאֲדָרְךָ** to mean "with all your money." Thus the phrase **וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאדָּ מְאֹד** can be reinterpreted to mean that the Israelites became very strong financially. Such an interpretation helps us understand why the officers appointed over the Israelites are called **שְׂרֵי מִסִּים**. This term does not necessarily mean taskmasters and an accurate translation would be "tax officers" whose job it was to do relieve the Israelites of their wealth.

[Kli Yakar]

וַיַּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים. כִּמָּה שְׁנֵאֲמַר: הִכָּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ. פֶּן־יִרְבֶּה וּגו'.

And the Egyptians dealt with us in an evil manner as it says: Let us deal wisely with them, lest they increase etc.

Q: The proof text does not appear to demonstrate how the Egyptians dealt with the Israelites in an evil manner - it merely states that they were concerned that the Israelites might overwhelm them. The subsequent verses quoted by the Haggadah that refer to the task-masters, the slavery and the oppression would have been better proof texts for this point.

A: An alternative way of translating **וַיַּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים** is that the *Egyptians regarded us as evil*. Accordingly the proof verse demonstrates how that perception manifested itself - that the Egyptians decided to deal wisely with them because they were afraid of being overwhelmed by the Israelites.

[Rav J B Soloveitchik]

וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרָךְ.

And the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites rigorously.

Q: In what sense were Bnei Yisrael forced to work rigorously?

A: The Torah demands that we do not force an employee to work *rigorously* (Vayikra 25:43). Chazal define this mitzvah as meaning that he should not be given pointless work, nor should he be forced to work without any indication of the duration of his labour.

The slavery that the Israelites were subjected to by the Egyptians was not rigorous only in the back-breaking sense of the word. It was also rigorous in the sense that much of what they were forced to do was pointless and futile (according to the Midrash, the store-cities of Pitom and Raamses were built on very soft and unfirm ground so that they frequently collapsed and needed to be rebuilt). They were also given no indication of how long they would have to work each day.

[Shevet Sofer]

וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרָךְ:

And the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites rigorously.

Q: What does the word בפרך mean?

A: It can be related to the word פרוכת which is a separating curtain. In this context it means that the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites by separating them from the rest of society and turned them into a rejected underclass. A form of apartheid was employed that denied the Israelites the rights that were enjoyed by the rest of society and they became despised by the Egyptian populace. Because they were shunned they had nowhere to turn to seek redress for the unjust suffering that was being imposed on them.

[Rav S R Hirsch]

וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא עַל־יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ, וְלֹא עַל־יְדֵי שָׂרָף. וְלֹא עַל־יְדֵי שְׁלִיחַ. אֲלֵא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכֹבוֹדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ. שְׁנֵאֲמַר: וְעַבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּלִילָה הַזֶּה וְגו'.

And God took us out of Egypt: Not with an angel, nor with a saraph, nor with a messenger, but the Holy One Blessed Be He in his glory and by himself, as it is written - *And I shall pass through the land of Egypt on this night etc.*

Q: This statement makes it very clear that it was God himself who passed through the land of Egypt on the night of the Exodus. But elsewhere the Torah tells us that God would not allow *the destructive force* to enter the Israelite houses (Shemot 12:23), which imply that indeed an agent was responsible for the final plague.

A: It may be noted that the Israelite population was 600,000 males aged between 20 - 60, in addition to the proportional number of women, children and elderly. With a population of that size statistics demand that on any given night there will be a number of "natural" deaths. Had any Israelites died on the night of the death of the firstborn - and especially if any of the fatalities had been firstborns - the Egyptians may have believed that whilst they bore the brunt of the plague, the Israelites were not immune to it. Therefore, God assured the Israelites that on that night even the *normal* powers of destruction would not enter their houses and that not one of them would die.

[Rav Ovadiah Yosef]

רַבִּי יְהוּדָה הָיָה נוֹתֵן בָּהֶם סְמָנִים: דִּצְרָךְ עַד"ש בְּאַח"ב:
Rabbi Yehudah gave them *aides memoire*: *Detzach Adash B'Achav*.

Q: Why did R' Yehudah make a mnemonic out of the list of the plagues?

A: The Ten Plagues are mentioned in two different places in the Tenach: in *Sefer Shemot* (chaps. 7-12) and in *Sefer Tehillim* (chap. 78). R' Yehudah's intention was to indicate that the chronological order of the plagues is an accordance with the sequence that they appear in Shemot.

[R' Yehudah Hachassid]

אֱלֹהֵינוּ קָרַע לָנוּ אֶת-הַיָּם, וְלֹא הֶעֱבִירָנוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ בְּחֶרֶבָה, דִּינוּ.

Had God only split the sea for us, but not brought us through it on dry land, it would have been enough for us.

Q: What advantage would it have been to the Israelites if God had merely split the sea for them, but not led them through on dry land?

A: God could have split the sea, but allowed the Israelites to pass through a muddy quagmire. But instead He ensured that the sea-bed was entirely dry, allowing the Israelites a swift and easy passage. This demonstrates that God was not concerned only with the Israelites' survival, but also with their comfort and wellbeing.

[Netziv]

אֱלֹהֵינוּ קָרְבָנוּ לְפָנֵי הַר סִינַי, וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה, דִּינוּ.

Even if He had brought us to Mt Sinai, but not given us the Torah, it would have been enough for us.

Many commentators have wondered what the point would have been in bringing the Jewish people to Mt Sinai without giving them the Torah. One answer to the dilemma is to suggest that bringing the people to Mt Sinai includes giving them the Written Torah, whilst "giving us the Torah" refers to the Oral Tradition.

[Rav J B Soloveitchik]

בֶּן עָשָׂה הַלֵּל בְּזִמְנָן שְׁבִית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הָיָה קִים. הָיָה כּוֹרֵךְ פֶּסַח מַצָּה וּמָרֹר וְאוֹכֵל בִּיחָד.

This is what Hillel did when the Temple was in existence: He would combine the Pesach offering, the matzah, and the marror, and eat the all together.

Q: Why did Hillel maintain that the Pesach, matzah, and marror had to be eaten together?

A: The Pesach offering was a thanks-offering to God, the matzah symbolised freedom, whilst the marror symbolised affliction. Both the matzah and the marror had to be eaten together with the Korban Pesach in order to demonstrate that we thank God for both the good and the (seemingly) bad in our lives, in accordance with the Talmudic dictum that one must bless God for the bad in the same way that he blesses him for the good. We are certainly thankful to him for redeeming us from Egypt, but we must also be thankful to him for the slavery that we experienced there which gave us the necessary strength and stamina to become God's chosen people.

[Shevet Sofer]

חד גדיא

Just one kid.

Q: What is the message of חד גדיא?

A: Significantly, each verse of this song not only tells us the next stage in the saga, but it also reminds us about the kid. The ox didn't drink the water only because it quenched the fire. Ultimately, it drank the water because of the cat that ate the kid. The message of this tale is that events cannot be viewed in a vacuum, and should not be assessed only with regard to what immediately preceded them. We need to have a far-reaching historical perspective and we need to appreciate that the cause for any given thing may often lie a long way back. The cat that ate the kid would not have realised that that meal would precipitate such a long string of events, leading to the eventual appearance of the Almighty himself. Undoubtedly, we ought to learn from the song the far-reaching potential that our actions can have.

But such an explanation is mere imagination and speculation. In reality Chad Gadya is an extremely fitting finale for the Seder Service and its essential message is enchantingly simple: On the night when we retell the story of how we first became a free nation, we may be reassured that no matter whatever happens during the course of history, in the final analysis the Almighty will make His presence known.