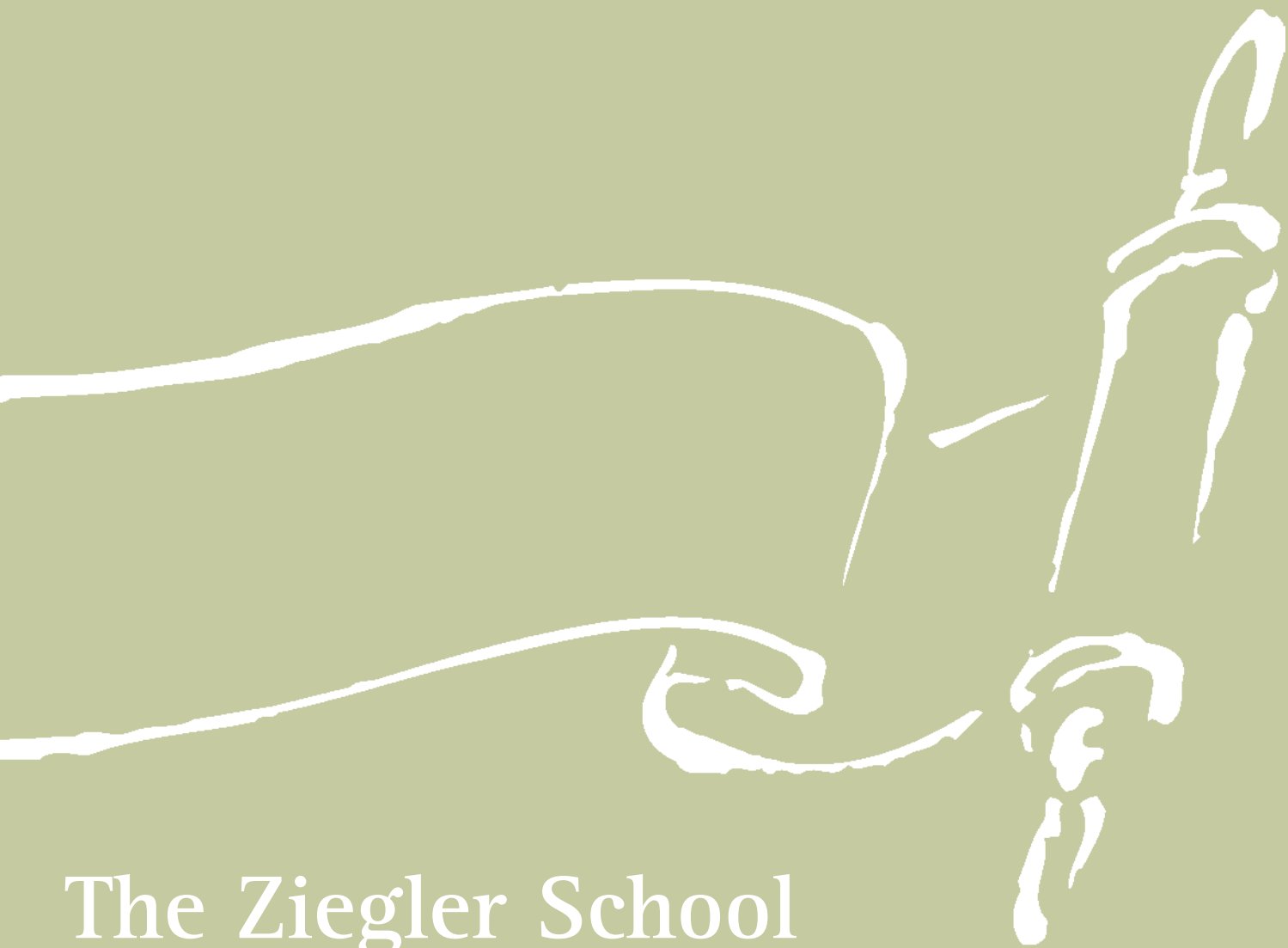




The Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

Walking with the Jewish Calendar

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דרכיה דרכי נעם

WHO KNOWS FOUR? THE DEEPER MEANING OF PESACH

RABBI DEBORAH SILVER

INTRODUCTION

Ah, the Pesach *seder*! Tablecloths stained with spilled wine, Haggadot brought down from distant closets, the *seder* plate polished up once again. Aren't we glad to be here?

Yet Pesach runs the risk of being rather like Ebenezer Scrooge's Christmas Past - hung about with pleasant memories that distance rather than include us. In the same way, the *seder* runs the risk of being on the wrong side of predictable - boring rather than reassuring, sentimental rather than genuinely feeling, complacent rather than inspiring. Perhaps part of the reason for this is that the *seder* is one of the most consistently observed Jewish practices. Most of us can probably remember *seders* from our childhood, and there are those of us who might even have the occasion commemorated in photographs or on film.

But this is a festival which bears a closer examination. The story of the birth of the Jewish people is permeated with rich layers of meaning. In this essay we will shake out the crumbs, as it were, and see what we can make of the pattern on the tablecloth.

To begin with, let's look at the number of times that we mention the number four at the *seder*: We drink four cups of wine. There are four questions, traditionally asked by the youngest at the table, which trigger the ceremony. Soon afterwards we find four sons - archetypes of children, framing our telling of the Pesach story. Within that story, we explore four expressions of redemption.

What does 'four' connote? We think, of course, of the four seasons, the four elements, the four directions. Four is the number of stability, of completion, of basis (think of the stable structure of the pyramids, for example). In our own tradition we have our four *tzitzit*, the fringes that we gather together to show how we will be gathered from the four (again!) corners of the earth. And if we follow the theme, we notice that the early Rabbis identified four ways of understanding Torah (for which we may read, "the world"): *peshat* (the direct meaning), *drash* (the interpreted meaning), *remez* (the clues to the deeper meaning) and *sod* (the deepest, most secret meaning). Clearly Judaism has its own love affair with the number four.

In an article entitled "The Four-fold Structure of the Passover *Haggadah*"¹ Dr Jeremy Schonfield explores the thread of 'four' as it runs through the first half of the Pesach *seder*. What looks on the surface like a somewhat incoherent, repetitive text is actually, he argues, a series of four different *haggadot* which we read in sequence. The Pesach story is told four times, each from a different aspect and each aimed at a different audience. Indeed, each version is aimed at one of the four children whose story precedes them.

The *haggadah* of the "wise child," he argues, is the one attributed to the teacher Shmuel. It begins, "*Avadim hayyinu le'faroh bemitzrayim*," which is the answer given in the Tanakh to the wise son's question there. The *haggadah* of the "wicked child" is the one attributed to the teacher Rav, beginning, "*Mithila ovdei avodah zarah hayu avoteinu*," picking up the child's own language in her/his question, "*Ma ha'avodah hazot lachem?*" The *haggadah* of the "simple child" is the one which follows, beginning "*Tzei u'lemad*" ("go out and learn"). And the final *haggadah*, appropriately enough for a child who does not know how to question, is that of Rabban Gamliel - a "show and tell" of the shankbone, the matzah and the bitter herbs. Thus, before the meal reaches the table, each of the four types of children has had the story told in the way he or she personally needs to hear it.

Implicit in Dr Schonfield's analysis is the idea that the Pesach ceremony needs a degree of flexibility. The fixed order of the *seder* (indeed, the word means, *order*), might not need to be quite as fixed as we tend to make it. There is room to adapt it so that it changes as we change. Since Pesach is a festival which retells a quantum developmental shift in our history, we do it an injustice if we do not approach it in a way that will open up its newness to us, year after year.

¹ Dr Jeremy Schonfield, "The Four-fold Structure of the Passover Haggadah, published under the title, *One Haggadah, or Four?*" In Robert Hayward and Brad Embry (eds) *Studies in Jewish Prayer. Journal of Semitic Studies, Supplement 17* (2005): 185-205.



PESACH

Provided we manage to incorporate the list of items with which the service traditionally begins (*kadesh, urchatz, karpas, yachatz, etc.*), there is room to improvise. Yet somehow, we avoid doing this. It is tempting, instead, to pull out the old *Maxwell House Haggadah* and smile wryly as we tramp our tedious way towards the meal, which then, understandably, becomes the real focus of the evening.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with eating together. But are we to allow this to become the primary focus of our holiday experience? 'Four' also symbolizes a crossroads, a choice of directions. This constitutes an invitation to us to explore. I want to suggest four ways – or, perhaps, four trajectories – to refresh our understanding of the festival, and help to turn “Pesach past” into “Pesach present,” lest we inadvertently fall in the position of the so-called “wicked child,” asking “What is this service to you?”

RIGOR

“*Ha lachma anya*,” we say, holding up the matzah at the beginning of the *seder* - ‘This is the bread of affliction.’ The matzah is the poor bread - *lechem oni*.² But the theme of rigor and want is evident elsewhere in Pesach as well.

Consider, for example, the strictness of the rules about food at this time. Even the slightest trace of *chametz* (leaven) in a food product means that the item in question cannot be allowed in our homes. (This rule has particular relevance for people with pets - dogs eat a great deal of fish at Pesach!)

We are particularly strict, also, about which foods must be excluded. The standard Rabbinical rule is that anything made from rye, oats, wheat, spelt or barley is forbidden (with the exception of *matzah*). In Ashkenazi communities this rule is also extended to *kitniyot* or “little things” – grains other than those specified and pulses such as lentils, which historically were often mixed or contaminated with flour. (For Sephardim, *kitniyot* are permitted, which is why an Ashkenazic Jew invited to his or her Sephardic neighbor’s *seder* may be surprised to find rice on the table!)

Pesach conveniently coincides with spring cleaning, and historically this obligation was taken very seriously. In times past, the house-cleaning enterprise began almost as soon as Purim was over, purging the home from top to bottom, a task entailing hours of human labor.³ Although the time requirements have been reduced significantly through the mechanization of certain household tasks, any home owner who personally undertakes a “Pesach cleaning” will still attest to the irony of Pesach being referred to as a “festival of freedom”.

The fact that we are rigorous at this time of year is not accidental. Slavery was marked by excruciating labor - *avodah be-farekh* - and impoverishment - *oni*. Our Pesach preparation and the restrictions of the festival provide us with an embodied way to re-experience this poverty and want. Half the world lives on less than \$2.50 a day.⁴ One in eight Americans is currently going hungry. Rather than complain about how indigestible the *matzah* is, suppose we were to embrace the holiday’s theme of rigor and simplify our diet for eight days? If all of us were to go vegetarian for all, or some, of Pesach, for example, what might we learn from the experience?

LUXURY

Running alongside the theme of rigor, and in stark contradiction to it, is a theme of luxury. We lean to our left at the Seder, remembering how it felt to lie on couches and be served our meal. We buy new clothes; we set the table with our best. This idea has its roots in the earliest tradition, where we learn that even the poorest Jew must be supplied with four cups of wine with which to make the seder.⁵ The rabbis of the Talmud ruled that both women and children must also drink them (though Rabbi Yehudah asks, of the children, ‘What use is it to them?!’)⁶ In modern times, many people opt to drink four cups of the very best wine they can afford as a testament to the deep enjoyment implicit in this *mitzvah*.

² Deuteronomy 16:3.

³ See, for example, Chaim Raphael, *A Feast of History*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London 1972, p. 150. This book is an excellent resource for all manner of things connected to Pesach.

⁴ <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/2/causes-of-poverty>.

⁵ Mishnah, *Pesachim*, 10:1.

⁶ Babylonian Talmud, *Pesachim*, 108a.



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Rabbi Chaim Weiner has written that there is also a “luxury” inherent in the *matzah*.⁷ He points out that Lot offers *matzah* to the two angels who came to visit him⁸ and that many of the Temple sacrifices were made with *matzah*. If you lived in the desert, *matzah* - freshly made, unleavened bread - was a delicacy. Whereas bread baked from an old batch of dough might have flies and insects in it, bread baked shortly after the dough had been prepared was untainted and showed that a guest warranted only the best. Viewed in this light, Rabbi Weiner observed, *matzah* is the bread of kings, a fitting symbol for celebrating our freedom.

Consider also the richness and sweetness of the *charoset*. Indeed, there are some who make it from all of the fruits mentioned in the Song of Songs, which we read at this time of year.⁹

The theme of luxury is an invitation to us to reconsider the richness of our lives. We all know that material richness quickly becomes superficial. Pesach, by contrast, invites us to ask what people, what qualities, what hopes and aspirations truly enrich our lives, and marks a time to re-commit to “living richly” and “living freely” in the most meaningful way.

THE STORY

Rabbi Menahem Creditor, in writing about the ways we tell the Pesach story, quotes from Michael Ende’s classic ‘children’s’ book, *The NeverEnding Story*:

“Why is it so dark?”

“In the beginning, it is always dark.”¹⁰

This reflects another long-established dynamic of Pesach: in telling the story, we “begin with ignominy and end in praise.”¹¹ This trajectory, taken in conjunction with the rabbinic injunction that “in every generation a person must regard themselves as if they, personally, were one of those released from Egypt,”¹² is an invitation to spin a narrative at the seder that speaks to each of us individually. Indeed, our “four Haggadot” do exactly that, addressing the personal needs of each of the four different types of individuals as that person hears the story.

Less is often more, and perhaps we do not need four Haggadot every time. Instead, consider what it might be like to devote a seder to a single aspect of the story of the Exodus. What might a seder be like if we followed just the theme of water? Or we could focus just on the stories of the male characters? Or of the female characters? If we wanted a different challenge we could trace the experience of Pharaoh as the story unfolds? Or if we had the time and energy we might even design our own Haggadot, and invite others to design them with us. Imagine, for example, a *Haggadah* with no text but only pictures...¹³

The Rabbis say that anyone who enlarges upon the story of the Exodus is to be praised.¹⁴ To do so is to write ourselves personally into an ongoing narrative – a NeverEnding story, indeed.

LOVE

Finally, let us consider the emotional tone of the festival. Pesach is, above all, a celebration of love. It is not an accident that the reading chosen for the intermediate Shabbat of Pesach is the Song of Songs, the “holy of holies” narrative describing the ecstasy of relationship.

⁷ Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg (ed.), *A Pesach Companion*, Masorti Publications, London 1997, p. 33.

⁸ Genesis 19:3.

⁹ My beloved teacher, Professor Raphael Loewe of London, sacrifices at least one electric blender per year in pursuit of this enterprise.

¹⁰ Michael Ende, *The NeverEnding Story*, cited in www.shefanetwork.org/RabbiCreditor/TorahfromtheTisch/Pesach5767.doc.

¹¹ Mishnah Pesachim 10:4.

¹² Exodus 13:8.

¹³ Or the Haggadah audaciously compiled by an atheist friend, containing not a single reference to God!



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Yet the theme of love is also implicit in the story of the Exodus, if we read it with close attention. The Hebrew verb which drives the narrative in the Torah is based on the root *y-d-a*. Although typically translated as “to know,” this root also carries connotations of far deeper physical and emotional intimacy. Consider how it is used in the paragraph below:

After many more days went by, the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel groaned from their labor and screamed, and their cry went up to the Lord from their labor. And the Lord heard their anguished groaning, and remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And the Lord saw the Children of Israel: and the Lord **knew**.¹⁵

This paragraph sets the whole narrative of the Exodus in motion. The cry of the Children of Israel is what motivates God to act. The text could have placed the initiative for the redemption squarely with God. For example, the story could have begun, “God decided to vanquish Pharaoh of Egypt...,” but instead God’s actions are anthropomorphized. God hears and sees and, finally, *knows*. The whole story of the Exodus can be traced to this place of empathy. Underneath all the miracles, all the signs and wonders, is the heartbeat of love.

In a similar way, our *sedarim* (“*seder*” in the plural) can be opportunities to celebrate relationship and connection. In the same way that the Exodus story can be made personal, the *seder* (and the time before nightfall leading up to it) can be an opportunity for memory-sharing and memory-making. At a family *seder*, grandparents and guests from the older generation can be questioned – and even recorded — talking about the *sedarim* they remember from their youth. At a community *seder*, guests from different backgrounds and cultures can relate their memories of how the Pesach story was first told to them. At any *seder*, the participants can take time to remember those who came before, who are no longer at the table. The open-handed hospitality implicit in the paragraph “*ha lahma anya*” (“Let all who are hungry come and eat!”) is an invitation both to share and to build collective memories.

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have only dealt with the Passover *seder*. But a *seder*, meaningfully conducted, can also provide a springboard into the remaining seven days of the festival. If our *seder* has begun a new process inside us, then these seven days are, as it were, a new seven days of Creation. At the end of Pesach, looking back, we might be able to see how we have been changed and renewed through our holiday experience.

Pesach is a true gift. It is inquiring, inclusive, engaging. It is also flexible and forgiving - we can adapt and add to its rituals in order to make them meaningful to us. If we can also be innovative, exploring its deeper themes, it offers us the opportunity to connect with our Jewishness at a personal, family and communal level. Whoever we are, at whatever stage of life we find ourselves, Pesach offers us the opportunity to reconnect and renew, through the telling of one of the greatest stories the world has ever known.

¹⁴ Haggadah of Rav Amram Gaon.



PESACH – TEXT 1

RIGOR

מאת הגדה של פסח:

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארע דמצרים...

PASSOVER HAGGADAH

This is the poor bread which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt...

הרטב"א, שם:

הא לחמא וכו' מה שאומרים כן בלשון תרגום יש אומרים שהוא כדי שלא יכנסו השדים אצלנו, לפי שאינם מכירים בלשון תרגום. והנכון, לפי שהוא אינו מסדר המשנה אלא מתיקון האמוראים תיקנוהו בלשון בבלי כדי שיבינו אותו הכל, כי בלשון זה היו רגילים לדבר בבבל. ולמה נקרא לחמא עניא, והלא אפילו במצתו של שלמה היה מותרת. פירש רש"י לפי שעיסת פסח היא כשיעור עיסת מדבר שהיא עסירית האיפה, והוא קרבן עני הבא בדלי דלות. וזה אינו נכון. חדא, דמה ענין השיעור הזה אצל מצת מצוה? ועוד, דאדרבה האוכל כשיעור הוא בריא ומבורך. אבל הנכון דנקראת "לחם עני" מפני שהמצה מתקבצת ומתחסרת ואינה מצלחת כמו החמץ, כי מעוגה אחת של עיסה רבוכה, תיאפה עוגת חמץ גדולה. ועוד, לפי שנאפה בחיפזון ואינו מספיק להחמיץ.

PASSOVER HAGGADAH

(ACCORDING TO THE TRADITION OF THE RITBA, RABBI YOM TOV BEN AVRAHAM OF SEVILLE, D. 1330)

This is the poor bread, etc: The fact that this is said in Aramaic is understood by some as being a precaution against demons coming into the home, since demons do not understand Aramaic. But the correct reason is that this passage is not from the Mishnah; the Amoraim included it in Aramaic so that every person would understand it, since that was the language that used to be spoken in Babylon.

Why is it called poor bread, since even “Solomon matzah” is permitted? Rashi understands this as being because the amount of dough made on Pesah was the same as the amount made in the desert – a tenth of an ephah – which is the equivalent to the sacrificial offering of a person who is destitute. This is incorrect, firstly, because this measure has nothing to do with the matzah we eat to perform the mitzvah; and secondly, because a person eating that amount of matzah is healthy and blessed. The correct understanding is that it is called poor bread because it is concentrated and shrunken, and not successful like bread (because one small piece of dough cooks into a large loaf of bread). And it is called poor bread, also, because it was baked in a hurry and not given time to rise.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- If we accept that at the time of the *Haggadah's* compilation Aramaic was more accessible to the average reader than Hebrew, why was this text (the “*Ha Lachma*”) said in Aramaic while other sections of the *Haggadah* are in Hebrew?
- Which of the offered interpretations of matzah as “poor bread” make sense to you and why? Can you offer others?
- Why on the joyous occasion of our liberation from bondage would we eat “poor bread”? What themes or images are being evoked by this liturgy and this rite?



PESACH – TEXT 2

ABUNDANCE

משנה פסחים י:א

עֲרֵבִי פֶסַחִים סְמוּךְ לַמִּנְחָה, לֹא יֵאָכַל אָדָם עַד שֶׁתִּחְשַׁךְ. וְאָפְלוּ עָנִי שְׂבִי שְׂרָאֵל לֹא יֵאָכַל עַד שֶׁיִּסָּב. וְלֹא יִפְתְּחוּ לוֹ מֵאֲרֻבָּעָה כּוֹסוֹת שֶׁל יַיִן, וְאָפְלוּ מִן הַתְּמָחוּי:

MISHNAH, PESAHIM 10:1

On the evening before Pesach close to the Minhah service, a person should not eat until it gets dark. Even a poor person of Israel should not eat until they have reclined. And they should not stint on giving them four cups of wine, even from the food kitchen.

הרב עובדיה מברטנורה, שם

וְלֹא יִפְתְּחוּ לוֹ: גִּבְאֵי צְדָקָה הַמְּפָרְנִסִּים אֶת הָעָנִיִּים. וְאָפְלוּ: הוּא מִתְּפָרְנִס מִן הַתְּמָחוּי. דִּהְיִינוּ עָנִי שְׂבִי עָנִיִּים דִּתְנִן בְּמִסְכָּת פָּאָה מִי שֵׁישׁ לוֹ מִזֶּה שְׁתֵּי סְעוּדוֹת לֹא יִטּוּל מִן הַתְּמָחוּי. אֲרֻבָּע כּוֹסוֹת: כְּנֶגֶד אֲרֻבָּע לְשׁוֹנוֹת שֶׁל גְּאוּלָּה שֵׁישׁ בְּפִרְשֵׁת נֶאֱרָא: וְהוֹצֵאתִי, וְהִצַּלְתִּי, וְגֵאלְתִּי, וְלִקַּחְתִּי.

EXPLANATION OF THIS TEXT BY RABBI OVADIAH OF BARTENURA:

They should not stint: the charity officials who sustain the poor. Even in the case of a poor person who is sustained by the food kitchen – this is the poorest of the poor, as it teaches in *Masechet Peah*: ‘A person who has enough for two meals must not take from the food kitchen.’ Four cups: in parallel to the four expressions of redemption in the Torah portion of *Va’era*: ‘I shall bring out’, ‘I shall save’, ‘I shall redeem’ and ‘I shall take.’

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What does the Mishnah give as an explanation for delaying the start of the seder until after dark? Does this connection still hold in a contemporary context?
- The “proof text” from *Masechet Peah* seems to be trying to limit who is able to make claims on public charity. Why are these restrictions waved in the case of Pesach? Why is the ability of a poor person to rejoice at the holiday seen as a communal obligation?
- How does Rabbi Ovadia explain the significance of the four cups of wine? Given this symbolism, what is the significance of consuming each of the four cups over the course of the *seder*?



PESACH – TEXT 3

THE STORY

שמות יג:ח

וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעָבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Exodus 13:8

And you shall tell your child on that day, “It is because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt.”

RABBI MENACHEM CREDITOR, *TELLING OUR STORY*

(www.shefanetwork.org/RabbiCreditor/TorahfromtheTisch/Pesach5767.doc)

How might we truly enter the story and not have our deeper vision disturbed by the physical turning of a page?... Perhaps feeling a bit less safe, a bit less secure, is the way into the story. Perhaps allowing ourselves to become vulnerable in the telling of our own story, intentionally forgetting the “good ending” so that we can experience the narrative tension, would provide an inescapable experience, and would result in a gratitude only possible for an “insider,” a character of a story. Hallel is a different experience when you've been personally released... To get there, I have to let my guard down. In order to be truly grateful for when and where I am, I must swim through time and encounter the moments – both frightening and elevating – that got me here.

(Reproduced with the permission of the author)

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What does the author see as the true intention of the seder? How does this compare with the seder experience to which he believes many of us have become accustomed?
- Do you see in the structure of the Haggadah (especially the Magid or relation of the Exodus story) an attempt to build the narrative tension which the author speaks of?
- Do you agree with the author's claim that we run the risk during the seder of simply “turning pages” without emotionally entering the narrative? What might be some ways to avoid this (apart from those he names)?



PESACH – TEXT 4

LOVE

שיר השרים ב:א

אֲנִי חִבְצֶלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים:

SONG OF SONGS 2:1

I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys.

שיר השרים רבה פרק ב

דבר אחר: אני חבצלת השרון - אני היא וחביבה אני. אני היא שהייתי חבויה בצלן של מצרים, ולשעה קלה כנסני הקדוש ברוך הוא לרעמסס, והרטבתי מעשים טובים כשושנה, ואמרתי לפניו את השירה. שנאמר: (ישעיה ל') השיר יהיה לכם, כליל התקדש חג.

דבר אחר: אני חבצלת השרון - אני היא וחביבה אני. אני היא שהייתי חבויה בצלן של ים, ולשעה קלה הרטבתי מעשים טובים כשושנה, והראיתיו באצבע מנון עבורי. שנאמר: (שמות ט"ו) זה אלי ואנוהו.

דבר אחר: אני חבצלת השרון - אני היא וחביבה אני. אני היא שהייתי חבויה בצלן של סיני, ולשעה קלה הרטבתי מעשים טובים כשושנה, בידי ולבי ואמרתי לפניו: (שם כ"ד) כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע.

דבר אחר: אני חבצלת השרון - אני היא וחביבה אני. אני היא שהייתי חבויה ורמוסה בצלן של מלכיות, למחר כשיגאלני הקדוש ברוך הוא מצלן של מלכיות, אני מרטבת כשושנה ואומרת לו שיר חדש. שנאמר: (תהילים צ"ח) שירו לה' שיר חדש כי נפלאות עשה, הושיעה לו ימינו וזרוע קדשו.

MIDRASH RABBAH SONG OF SONGS 2:1

Another explanation of I am...the lily of the valleys – I am she, and beloved am I. I am she who was hidden in the shadow of Egypt, and for a short while the Holy Blessing One made me live in Raameses, but I was watered with good deeds like a rose, and sang a song before him, as it says (Isaiah 30:29): You shall have song as in the night where a festival is sanctified.

Another explanation of I am...the lily of the valleys – I am she, and beloved am I. I am she who was hidden in the shadow of the sea, but in a short time I was watered with good deeds like a rose, and pointed to him beautifying himself for me, as it says (Exodus 15:2): This is my God and I shall beautify him.

Another explanation of I am...the lily of the valleys – I am she, and beloved am I. I am she who was hidden in the shadow of Sinai, but in a short time I was watered with good deeds like a rose, and with my hand and my heart I said before him (Exodus 24:7): All that the Holy One has said, we shall do and hear.

Another explanation of I am...the lily of the valleys – I am she, and beloved am I. I am she who was hidden and crushed in the shadow of the ruling powers, but tomorrow, when the Holy Blessing One rescues me from them, I shall be watered with good deeds like a rose and sing him a new song, as it says (Psalms 98:1): Sing to God a new song for he has done wonders: his right hand and his strong, holy arm have worked deliverance for him.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- How does this midrash link the Song of Songs text to the themes of Pesach? What are the images or allusions it uses?
- What aspects of Pesach make it appropriate to pair the festival with the reading of Song of Songs, an unabashedly romantic text?
- Like so many aspects of the Passover liturgy and rituals, this midrash develops its ideas in four parts? What are these? What is the progression among them?



PESACH – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

ABBA EBAN, “THE TRUMPETS OF THE EXODUS,” ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAM, 1955. QUOTED IN SIDNEY GREENBERG, *A MODERN TREASURE OF JEWISH THOUGHTS* (THOMAS YOSELOFF, 1960)

The redemption from Egyptian bondage must be regarded in any serious view of history as one of the authentic points of climax in the progress of mankind ... The flight across the Red Sea and Sinai preserved a revolutionary idea, which could never have evolved in the idolatrous despotism of the Pharaohs. The idea was the sovereignty of God, the Ruler of the universe. Omnipotent, one and indivisible, the embodiment of righteousness and the loving Father of all creation. From this idea there flowed acceptances and rejections which came to dominate life among the children of man. Recognizing this event as the beginning of our true destiny we, the descendants of those fleeing slaves have, in all succeeding generations, commemorated the ancient saga. Our tradition, to this day, exhorts every Jew to recite the story of the Exodus from Egypt at the appointed season as though he personally had experienced this redemption from servitude to freedom.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you see the Passover story as a point of climax in Jewish history? In human history? Do you see this acknowledged in secular aspects of Western society?
- The author claims that the “acceptances and rejections which came to dominate life among the children of man” flowed naturally from the acknowledgement of a single omnipotent Creator. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- In what ways do you see the destiny of the Jewish people unfolding from the events at the Red Sea and Sinai? Do you still see these as the pivotal events shaping Jewish life and thought?
- The author stresses the fact that during the seder the Exodus story is recounted as if from a first-hand perspective. What do we gain or lose by assuming this relationship to our history?





Published in partnership with the
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism,
the Rabbinical Assembly,
the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs
and the Women's League for Conservative Judaism.



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