Dedicated by Neil and Lissette Reines in memory of
Moshe ben Shlomo Reines z”l
מşehir בן שלמה ז”ל

Dedicated in honour of our grandchildren ר”ן
Ella Breindel, Shimon Aryeh, Sarah Leah, Avi and Binyamin Shimon
Robin and Shaya Berglas

In loving memory of our dear wife and mother,
Maxine Bessin ר”ל

By Berl Bessin, Kobi & Shelby, Robert & Aliza

Dedicated with appreciation for all the wonderful learning opportunities
the YU Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov provide for our community
Susan & Fred Birnbaum & Family

With gratitude to the Beit Midrash for all of the learning opportunities
Golda Brown and Harry Krakowsky

In memory of our dear uncle Bill Rubinstein z”l, and in honour of our cousins
Eli and Renee Rubinstein, you are an inspiration to us all.
May Hashem give you the strength to continue your tireless efforts for our community.
Sincerely, Yaakov and Aviva Eisenberger

Dedicated by Mervyn and Joyce Fried in honour of the wedding anniversary of
Choni and Aliza Fried and in memory of Joyce’s mother, Rochel Breindel bat Yosef HaKohen z”l
לעילוי נשמת ר”ט יעקב באב ובן מראיה וא𝗟ון חוכרים ז”ל
Jeffrey Goldman by his family

Dedicated by Esther and Craig Guttmann and Family in loving memory of Katie Fishel z”l
 máiיה בת מחמוד יהודה ספד ז”ל

Dedicated by Nathan Kirsh in memory of his beloved parents Lou and Ruth Kirsh z”l
ז PropTypes בת ומאלי חוכרים ז”ל

Dedicated by Nathan Kirsh in memory of his beloved brother Jerry Kirsh z”l
בי-ようで בת ומאלי חוכרים ז”ל

Dedicated by Alan and Resa Litwack in memory of Moe and Rose Litwack z”l
משה בן אלקיסו וה’dת בית מאלי ז”ל

Dedicated by Allan and Malka Rutman in memory of their parents,
אלון חוכר בת מראיה ז”ל

Dedicated by Robbie and Brian Schwartz in memory of their dear parents
Sara and Hy Hertz z”l (Sara Batia bat Shalom Yitzchak ha-Lavi, Chaim Zalman ben Moshe)
Frank Schwartz z”l (Ephraim ben Noach)

Dedicated by Mimi and Byron Shore in memory of our parents
Naftali Blumenback z”l and Chaya Dabrusa bat Shneur Zalman z”l

In memory of our dear parents and grandparents, Alfred and Erika Zauderer z”l

Ricky and Dianna Zauderer and family
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Save the Date!

Our Annual Dinner celebrates our 10th anniversary by thanking the members of our original Board

June 25, 2019

Details to follow...
This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, let them come and eat. All who need, let them come participate in the Pesach. This year we are here; next year in the Land of Israel. This year we are slaves; next year, free people.”

This section is most meaningful at our Seder, opening the ‘main course’ of the evening: Maggid. But this paragraph raises questions, including:

1. Why do we say that matzah is “the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt”? The Torah never says the Jews ate matzah during their slavery in Egypt. They ate the matzah when they left Egypt!

2. Why is matzah described as “bread of affliction”? It is bread of liberation and joy! Indeed, further along in the Haggadah we will say, “What is this matzah for? For our ancestors’ dough did not have sufficient time to become leaven before the King of Kings of Kings, G-d, was revealed to them and redeemed them.” So why is it called “bread of affliction”?

The Torah commands us, “Guard the month of Spring and perform a Pesach for Hashem, your G-d, for in the month of Spring Hashem your G-d took you out of Egypt, at night… You shall not eat leaven upon it; for seven days you shall eat matzah, bread of affliction, upon it, for you left the land of Egypt in haste, so that you will remember the day you left the land of Egypt, all the days of your life.” (Devarim 16) Here we already see that matzah is called “bread of affliction” – even as it is associated with redemption.

Ramban (Devarim 16:2), sensitive to our questions, sought to explain the link between matzah and “bread of affliction”: “The Torah commanded us to remember that we left in haste, and it is [also] ‘affliction’ as it recalls that in Egypt we had scarce bread and water. It hints at two things.” The haste demonstrates redemption and Exodus from Egypt, and alongside it we remember the terrible exile and suffering faced by Bnei Yisrael in Egypt.

It appears that these two dimensions of matzah also teach us about two dimensions of our experience in Egypt. On one hand, there is the Exodus to freedom and its joy, and on the other hand, there is the understanding that the slavery itself served as a melting pot in which we became a nation and progressed toward our destiny of receiving the Torah and becoming a holy nation.

We may see a similar idea in the words of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook in his Olat Ra’ayah: “There are two paths to the elevation of each of one’s practical forces in life. One way is expansion and freedom… so that it will grow and broaden its influence… The second engine [of elevation], even though it is the opposite, is the power of halting, which represses and prevents, pressing against the force which is ready to emerge, break out and expand, keeping it from emerging, so that it is imprisoned and dammed up. When its time comes, that preliminary pressure adds… freedom and strength to increase its flight and the strength of the elevation of its activity.” Meaning: Growth requires freedom on one hand, and boundaries and pressure on the other.

Many of this world’s forces function like springs; in order to reach peak strength, the spring must be pressed down at first, and only afterward can it be freed, to bring its force to bear. Pressure and freedom are both vital in order to realize the potential in any desire or individual.

Rabbi Kook continues to say, “This suffocating and pressing force was the great and powerful Egyptian empire.” Slavery created the force which enabled Am Yisrael to gather the necessary energy for its conversion into a nation.

Matzah represents two elements which only appear to be opposite. Matzah recalls slavery in Egypt, but this slavery is also part of redemption, by functioning as pressure. And matzah also recalls redemption and the Exodus from Egypt.

With Rabbi Kook’s idea, we can also explain why the Haggadah says that our ancestors “ate matzah” in Egypt. “Eating matzah” is term expressing the idea that the power to leave Egypt and become a nation developed via the slavery of Am Yisrael in Egypt.

Perhaps this is why the Haggadah begins with this paragraph. On every Seder night, we merit to see ourselves as though we had left Egypt. Now, too, and in every generation, we face difficulties and challenges. We feel the affliction and pressure, and we fear that we will not be able to endure it. The Haggadah tells us that this “bread of affliction” is what enables redemption itself.

This paragraph of Ha lachma anya begins by describing the past, the matzah our ancestors ate in Egypt. It continues to the present, the year we are experiencing now. And it concludes with a powerful turn to the future, the next year. Thus the introduction to the Haggadah conveys a sense that the entire future is already before our eyes, and we declare with certainty, “Next year in the Land of Israel, as free people.” This sense of the future is what enables us to stand up to the pressure and affliction, and to know that today’s difficulty is the key to a sense of future success, when we will be in a rebuilt Jerusalem.
The mandate to inquire about features that make the Seder night different from all others can be found as early as the Mishnah. A mishnah instructs, “[After] the second cup is poured, the son asks his father. And if the son does not have the understanding [to ask], his father teaches him [to ask].” (Pesachim 10:4) The Talmud notes that if the Seder leader does not have a child with the ability to ask, his spouse should ask; if he does not have a spouse, he should ask himself. Likewise, even if two Torah scholars, who are both well-versed in all of the laws of Pesach, are sitting alone, they must still ask one another. (Pesachim 116a)

We take steps to induce these questions. The Talmud instructs us to “remove the table” after the second cup of wine is poured to arouse the children’s curiosity. We are told that when the talmudic sage Abbaye was a child, his elders removed the table, inciting him to ask, “We have not yet eaten, and you are taking the table away from us?” (Pesachim 115b)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin (The Passover Haggadah with a Traditional and Contemporary Commentary, pp. 46-47) quotes a Chasidic Rebbe as asking, “Why do we not ask four questions on Sukkot, including one such as, ‘On all other nights of the year, we sit and eat in our home, but on this night, we eat outside in a little hut?’” He also noted that at the Seder, we seek to address a number of internal paradoxes:

- Matzah is the bread of affliction, yet it is also a symbol of freedom.
- Maror is a symbol of servitude, but is also served as hors d’oeuvres, and dipped into another food as a sign of opulence.
- Karpas is dipped into salt water, which reminds us of oppression and tears, yet we recline during much of the Seder as a display of redemption. (ibid)

But even more perplexing than the questions and paradoxes is the Haggadah’s answer. Saying, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,” does not directly provide a resolution to these questions. Why, then, must these questions be asked year after year, especially by those who already know the Haggadah’s response?

In truth, there are some questions, both legal and philosophical, that we may never truly be able to answer - at least in this world. The Talmud, after an involved debate, based on sound logic and proofs, will often conclude with the word “teiku,” leaving the question unresolved for the time being. Nevertheless, students of Talmud carefully study these sections, since probing and discussing provides increased understanding, even if it does not provide a conclusive answer. The Mishnah’s requirement for even the greatest scholars to ask the Four Questions indicates that our objective is not always to achieve complete clarity, but to gain increased insight from the questioning process. Indeed, our Sages comment that we elicit the child’s curiosity so that he will begin to ask, because through asking very simple questions, he will come to ask more questions. (Tosafot to Pesachim 115b)

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein also saw the theme of questions as central to the Seder, identifying a contrast not only within the Seder itself, but between the theme of the Seder and current reality. He noted that for most of history, a celebration of freedom was inconsistent with the reality with which Jews were living. This was certainly the case for those in Rabbi Feinstein’s community in Luban, Communist Russia (now Poland), who suffered physical and religious persecution. In a 1934 address, he explained that at the Seder, we are asking, “Why should we rejoice over the Exodus from Egypt? What difference is there between the exile under Pharaoh and the one in which we are now?” (Haggadah shel Pesach Vayaggad Moshe, p. 22)

The questions are also found on a philosophical level. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Alter of Gur, based on the Zohar, explained that Pesach is characterized by G-d’s attribute of strict justice. The blood that the Jews were required to put on their doorposts, and the slaughtering of the Korban Pesach, symbolized G-d’s wrath towards evildoers. Yet, these very acts caused G-d to display His kindness and mercy towards the Jewish people! Therefore, how can G-d’s attribute of mercy be manifested at a time when His attribute of strict justice is dominant? (The Pesach Haggadah with Ideas and Insights of the Sfas Emes, pp. 52-53)

May we continue to discuss and analyze these questions, on every level, and so come to greater insight and understanding, year after year.
The Haggadah’s opening account of the Exodus makes a curious point: Had the Holy One, blessed is He, not taken our forefathers out of Egypt, we, our children, and our children’s children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.

This statement seems to be conjecture. With all that has happened in world history, how are we expected to believe that we would still be slaves in Egypt today? Had the Exodus not occurred when and how it did, we can be certain that our trajectory as a people would have been different, and, given the impact that our nation has had in history, major ripple effects would have extended to the world at large. But to state that we would still be slaves seems a bit of a stretch. Surely, al derekh hateva, by the natural process of world events, something would have occurred that would have changed our status. Are we simply beginning this evening with a hyperbolic statement for dramatic effect?

An answer may lie not in boldly committing to this statement, but by refining our understanding of it. Imagine an alternate reality in which the Exodus, as we know it, had not occurred, with some other event bringing about our freedom – perhaps an inner moral stirring within the Egyptians, regime change, revolt – what would such a freedom have looked like? Would it have come with the same dynamic of a nation experiencing G-d’s direct and miraculous intervention, leaving Egypt en masse towards Israel with great wealth? Certainly not.

No neat comparison to our own experiences could be made, and to be sure, we gain no pleasure from difficult transitions that others have gone through. Nevertheless, others’ experiences of being granted freedom from slavery show us just how different our story is. Here is one account of black slaves in the aftermath of the American Civil War, courtesy of the University of Richmond (http://historyengine.richmond.edu/episodes/view/5032):

James Johnson, a 79 year old ex-slave from Columbia, South Carolina, stated... that he “[felt] and [knew] dat de years after de war was worser than befo.” The Emancipation Proclamation and the Union’s victory in the war secured the freedom of slaves, but with a society plagued by Jim Crow Laws and segregation, ex-slaves were far from liberated. Slaves paid the price for their freedom as emancipation introduced new hardships, insecurities, and humiliation.

During the post Civil War and Reconstruction Era, a slave’s fight for freedom turned into a mere fight for survival. The majority of slaves were released from their previous plantations penniless. Wages for African Americans also fluctuated in response to the perceived worth of that person and manual labor was considered easily replaceable during the post Civil War time period. With income being an issue, few ex-slaves had the ability to own land... Johnson declared that, “Befo’ de war, n----- did have a place to lie down at night and somewhere to eat, when they got hungry in slavery time.”

Death as a result of poverty was not the only thing that affected a slave’s life in the tough times of the post Civil War era. Ex-slaves were weakened by a severe sense of isolation brought on by separation from their families. Sales of slaves, the death of owners, and the presentation of slaves as gifts during the pre-Civil War era were only some of the reasons for this division. Alienation and loneliness dampened the spirit of these slaves’ new found freedom and made the fight to survive that much harder...

Whereas other peoples and their redemption stories were (and to varying degrees still are) incomplete, our nation was so incredibly fortunate to be given a ‘clean break’ from our torturous experience. We watched as plagues clearly demonstrated the immorality of Egypt’s choices. We enjoyed a complete physical departure from Egypt’s land and culture. We left with wealth that would aid in building up our people. We experienced the revelation at Sinai and were given a new system of values to live by. And, of course, we eventually returned to our own land. Other events could perhaps have delivered us from Egypt over time, but it is hard to imagine any other scenario in which we would come out as well as we did – al derekh hateva, our lives would likely have been closer to that of James Johnson.

Returning to the Haggadah text, we should note that in the alternate universe of bondage it presents, we aren’t necessarily speaking of continued slavery, at least not in the sense of how it was experienced in Egypt. Instead, we are told that we would still be meshubadim, a term used more broadly to indicate those who are beholden to something or someone. In some way or form, Egypt would still hold sway over us. We wouldn’t be slaves today, but we would still be feeling the far-reaching effects of a more difficult transition to true freedom.

The Exodus as we know it resulted in so much more than an end to our slavery. It gave us a fresh start that we were no longer meshubad, beholden to Egypt in any way whatsoever. We were given the reset that an enslaved people so desperately needs to reverse its fortune.

If we look carefully in our prayers, we may be able to see this emphasized in other places as well. In birkat hamazon, at the end of our meal tonight and throughout the year, we thank G-d, “For Your taking us out of the land of Egypt, Hashem, our G-d, and for redeeming us from the house of bondage.” Also this evening and many times throughout the year, our Nishmat prayer has us declare, “You, Hashem of our G-d, redeemed us from Egypt and redeemed us from the house of bondage.” This doubled phrase may mean to communicate that we were given two freedoms – the most basic freedom from slavery, but also something far more, a complete experience that brought about our transformation into G-d’s chosen people.
Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: I am like a man of seventy years old, yet I did not succeed in proving [to the Sages] that the Exodus from Egypt must be mentioned at night until Ben Zoma explained it: “It is said, ‘That you may remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life.’” (Devarim 16:3) “The days of your life” refers to the days, [and the additional word] “all” indicates the inclusion of the nights!”

The Sages, however, said: “The days of your life” refers to the present-day world; and “all” indicates the inclusion of the days of Mashiach.” (Translation from chabad.org)

The Talmud notes that while the Jews prepared to leave Egypt at night, their actual departure took place in the morning. (Berachot 4b) Therefore, the rabbis took for granted that the obligation of remembering the Exodus applies during the daytime. We are told that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah was eventually successful in proving to his colleagues that there is also an obligation to remember the Exodus at night.

Did the Sages actually maintain that there is no obligation to remember the Exodus at night?

1. In his commentary on the Hagaddah, Don Isaac Abarbanel maintains that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah’s colleagues actually agree that the obligation to remember the Exodus applies at night, explaining the phrase “the days of your life” to include a full twenty-four hour day. According to this approach, the additional word, “all the days of your life” is not necessary to teach about the nighttime obligation. Rather, the Sages use the word “all” to teach that the obligation to mention the Exodus will remain in the Messianic era. Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz similarly posits that the Sages learn that one is obligated to remember the Exodus every moment of his life in this world, from “the days of your life,” and that “all the days of your life” teaches that the obligation will remain the Messianic era. (Shelah: Pesachim, Matzah Shemurah 166).

2. Rabbi David Karliner maintains that they disagree only regarding Pesach itself. According to his understanding, even Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah accepts that there is no independent biblical obligation to actively remember the Exodus at all times throughout the year. Rather, only at the time when one performs mitzvot that the Torah connects with the Exodus from Egypt, including tefillin and tzitzit, must he consciously remember the Exodus. On Pesach, however, when there is a biblical obligation to mention the Exodus out loud, the Sages maintained that the obligation applies only during the day, and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah convinced them that the Exodus must also be mentioned out loud at night. (Teshuot She’elat David, Orach Chaim 1)

Does Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah actually maintain that the commandment to remember the Exodus will not apply in the Messianic era?

The Talmud (Berachot 12b) notes that the question of whether or not there will be an obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt in the Messianic era is based on Jeremiah’s prophecy, “Behold, days are coming, says G-d, when he will bring back the exiles from all the lands to which I banished them; and they will come back to the place from which I sent them out, because of My name, which I placed among them; they will remain there.” (Jeremiah 31:24)” Ben Zoma suggests that the prophet is saying that there will no longer be an obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt once the final redemption has occurred. The Sages reject Ben Zoma’s interpretation, maintaining that there will always be a mitzvah to remember the Exodus from Egypt, but that in the Messianic era, the miraculous redemption from slavery in Egypt will be eclipsed by the even more miraculous salvation from subjugation by the nations of the world.

1. Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet understands that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah actually rules that there will be no obligation to remember the Exodus from Egypt in the Messianic era. (Rashba, Commentary on the Hagaddah).

2. Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz maintains that Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah takes for granted that the commandment to remember the Exodus will remain in place during the Messianic era, as will all mitzvot. No special verse is needed to teach this. Thus, “all the days of your life,” only teaches that there is an obligation at night. (Ya’arot D’vash, Volume II, Derashah 18)

The Dubno Maggid, Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, asks what purpose would be served by speaking of the Exodus in the Messianic era, when its significance will be eclipsed by that of the final redemption. He notes that Moshe pleaded with G-d, “Please, G-d, send the one whom You are going to send.” (Shemot 4:13) Rashi explains that Moshe argued, “To what purpose do You wish to send me, since I will not bring Bnei Yisrael into the promised land; there will be other exiles and You will eventually send other redeemers.” The Dubno Maggid explains that when G-d said to Moshe, “Come, and I will send you to Pharaoh and you will take My people, Bnei Yisrael, out of Egypt” (Shemot 3:10), He implied, “If you do not take them out now, no one will in the future.” (Emet l’Yaakov on the Hagaddah, page 70) Therefore, had we not experienced the Exodus as we did, the final redemption would not be possible. So even in the Messianic era, the original Exodus will play a vital role.
We offer daily chaburot and special classes for students at Bnei Akiva Schools.
Did you know?

The One Who Guards Our Promise

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Currently: Ministry of Education, Israel

We have held 24 Medical Ethics/Halachah programs, nearly all CME approved, since 2016!

### 10

‘Baruch Shem Tov’

Barukh Shem Kedlach

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Completing the Incomplete

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When teaching his son about the Exodus, he begins with the Jewish people’s disgrace and concludes with their glory. And he expounds from the passage: ‘An Aramean tried to destroy my father’ (Devarim 26:5), the declaration one recites when presenting his first fruits at the Temple, until he concludes explaining the entire section. (Mishnah Pesachim 10:4 (cited on Pesachim 116a), Davidson Ed. translation)

The above passage is considered the source for the section of the Haggadah we are about to begin. We have already presented some of the disgraceful history of our people in the previous section (“Originally, our forefathers were idol worshippers”). Now we begin expounding upon a section from Devarim, which provides a brief history of the Jewish people. It opens with Lavan’s attempt to wipe out the Jews, continues with the Egyptian enslavement and our salvation from Egypt, and concludes with thanks to G-d for bringing us to Israel.

There is one (big) problem: This mishnah clearly states that we finish the entire section that we are beginning, yet in our Haggadah, we stop one verse short of the end of the section. We describe our national history, through the Exodus, but we don’t recite the final verse, “And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Devarim 26:9) Why is that?

1: Don’t follow this mishnah
The simplest answer would be to suggest that we do not follow this mishnah’s ruling. However, this approach is hard to accept, since it is a plain mishnah with no disagreement, and the Rambam (Hilchet Chametz UMatzah 7:4) codifies it as well. Also, we seem to follow all of the other rulings outlined in this mishnah.

2: Complete the midrash, not the biblical text
Citing support from the wording of the Me’iri (Pesachim ibid.), Rabbi Menasheh Klein (Mishneh Halachot 6:92) suggests that this mishnah requires us to read not the passage found in the Torah, but rather, a selection from the Sifri, a midrash that expounds upon those words of the Torah, even if the Torah section is not recited fully. He also notes that our mishnah does not instruct us to “read” this section, but rather to “expound” this section, which fits nicely with his suggestion that we read a midrashic expansion. Therefore, according to him, we do finish the mishnah’s required unit of text in our Haggadah.

3: Our Haggadah is incomplete
In his treatment of this issue, Rabbi Dovid Zvi Hoffman (Melamed Leho’il 3:56) poses another question, based on the ensuing passage in the Talmud (Pesachim, ibid., Davidson Ed. translation):

It was taught in the mishnah that the father begins his answer with disgrace and concludes with glory. The Gemara asks: What is the meaning of the term: With disgrace? Rav said that one should begin by saying: At first our forefathers were idol worshippers, before concluding with words of glory. And Shemuel said: The disgrace with which one should begin his answer is: We were slaves.

This talmudic question is very puzzling, as the mishnah seen above already gave us a set text to recite, beginning with disgrace and concluding with glory – the passage from Devarim! Those verses begin with Lavan attempting to wipe us out, and conclude with G-d taking us out of Egypt with great wonders and bringing us to Israel, which certainly fulfills the mandate of starting with disgrace and ending with glory. So why do Rav and Shemuel feel the need to provide alternatives?

Rabbi Hoffman explains that the true ‘glory’ that we received was not our amazing exit from Egypt, despite our focus on it on Seder night. The ultimate goal was the arrival in our land, and the building of the Beit HaMikdash. Our mishnah, as well as an earlier version of the Haggadah, was written at a time when the Jewish people were living in Israel, with a Beit HaMikdash. However, after their exile from the land, people had to move away from their Israel and Beit HaMikdash-oriented Seder, and toward one that centred on their Exodus from Egypt. At that point, the final verse of that section of Devarim, “And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey,” could no longer be recited in the Haggadah, as we had lost that special land.

Without our glory, our original “beginning with disgrace and ending with glory” was no longer relevant. Our Haggadah needed alternate forms of “beginning with disgrace and ending with glory.” So Rav suggested that we focus on being close to G-d (“...and now the omnipresent has brought us close to his service”), and Shemuel suggested that we add Devarim 6:21: “...it moves our focus towards celebrating the Exodus. We accepted those ideas, while retaining the still-relevant parts of the original text as part of our Haggadah as a remembrance.

We should not look at this simply as a historical curiosity, but rather, take a lesson from it. Part of the true Haggadah is missing, and we are no longer able to read the complete Haggadah, as prescribed by the mishnah! Yes, we are celebrating our Exodus from Egypt right now, but we look forward to next year, by which point we hope that we will be able to return to the reality of “and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey,” and to conclude that section, once and for all.

Did you know?
We engage in internal learning until 12:30 PM daily; this year, we are studying Kiddushin.
The heart of the Maggid section is the retelling of the events of Bnei Yisrael’s slavery in and redemption from Egypt. The Haggadah recalls these events by citing the paragraph of “Arami Ovedi Avi” which appears in Devarim 26:5-8 and expounds upon each phrase to provide insight into the story.

The last of these verses states: “And G-d took us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with great awesomeness, signs and wonders” (Devarim 26:8)

The Haggadah explains yad chazakah, a mighty hand, as follows: “With a mighty hand,” this refers to the pestilence as it is says: “Behold, the hand of G-d will be upon your livestock in the field... a very severe pestilence.” The Haggadah states that yad chazakah refers to dever, pestilence, citing the verse that appears in relation to the fifth plague.

Several explanations of the connection between yad chazakah and dever are offered. Rabbi Tzidkiyah ben Avraham Anav (Shibbolei HaLeket) and Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv), for example, provide two differing interpretations of which dever this verse refers to:

- **Shibbolei HaLeket** (commentary on the Haggadah) offers a different perspective. He doesn’t believe that yad chazakah refers to G-d’s strength in redeeming the Jewish people from Egypt at all! Rather, he maintains that yad chazakah means coercion; that G-d forced the Jewish people to leave Egypt. Shemot Rabbah 14:3 explains that there were many Jews who were comfortable in Egypt and had no intention to leave. As a result, G-d sent dever to kill those Jews during the plague of darkness. In this manner, G-d coerced the remaining Jewish people to leave Egypt, as they feared that if they remained, they would suffer the same fate as the others. Netziv believes that this is the dever that is alluded to in the Haggadah.

However, the simplest explanation is that the dever referred to in the Haggadah is the pestilence of the fifth plague, as the Haggadah explicitly cites a verse from the passage of the fifth plague when explaining yad chazakah. In line with this reading of the Haggadah, what is so significant about the fifth plague that it is uniquely labeled yad chazakah? Three possible explanations follow:

**1: Power shift**

The fifth plague marks a significant shift in the dynamic and balance of power between the Egyptians and the Jewish people. On three occasions in the seven verses describing the plague of dever, the Torah mentions that the plague will affect the Egyptian cattle, but the Jewish cattle will remain unharmed: when G-d tells Moshe about the plague, when the plague occurs and when Pharaoh sends messengers to verify that no Jewish cattle died during the plague. This differentiation between the Egyptian animals and Jewish animals signifies a change in the economic balance between the Jewish people and the Egyptian people. By destroying the Egyptian animals and thereby a significant portion of their wealth, G-d was shifting the balance so that Bnei Yisrael would no longer feel like slaves.

**2: A precursor to makkat bechorot**

Riv”a, in his commentary on the Haggadah, connects dever and makkat bechorot, saying that dever was the precursor to makkat bechorot. First G-d killed the animals, and only later did He kill the people. Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman (commentary on Shemot 9:1-5) also notes that there is a similarity between dever and makkat bechorot in that both involve death, and both make reference to the hand of G-d. Connecting the two events highlights the severity of dever, while all the plagues were a serious blow to the Egyptians, this was the first encounter the Egyptians had with death, and as a result, it warrants a description of yad chazakah.

**3: Directly from G-d**

Building upon this connection between dever and makkat bechorot, Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon (Haggadah Shirat Miriam) explains that these plagues are also the two plagues Moshe mentions to Pharaoh the first time they speak, when he tells him that G-d will smite the Egyptians with dever or cherev (the sword, referring to the death). Dever and makkat bechorot instilled the most fear, as they were the ones that came directly from G-d. Moshe and Aharon are not involved in starting the plague, as they are for many of the others, and Moshe tells Pharaoh directly that “the hand of G-d” will bring dever to the Egyptian animals. Thus, the description of yad chazakah is fitting.

These insights shed light on an often-overlooked passage of the Haggadah, and the multiple interpretations and expressions of G-d’s might reinforce the notion that it was truly G-d behind all the miraculous events leading to the Jewish people’s redemption from Egypt.
The reasons the Torah devotes so many pesukim to the details of each of the Ten Plagues is not because the Torah is meant to be a historical record of the Israelites leaving Egypt. Rather, the Torah is a book of eternal Jewish values and beliefs. Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky in Sefer Netivot Shalom ("Inyanam hanitzchi shel aseret hamakkot") notes that this is hinted to in the couching of the biblical phrase "G-d who is taking them out of Egypt" (Numbers 23:22) in the present tense, and not "who took them out of Egypt", in the past tense. The message of G-d taking us out of Egypt is continuous, not just a story of the past.

This idea is supported by the division of the Ten Plagues listed as mnemonics by Rabbi Yehudah in the Haggadah. The Maharal notes that this division of the Plagues neatly separates them into three groupings that reflect the three spheres of existence. The first three plagues — dam, tzefarde'a, and kinim (referred to by Rabbi Yehudah as D' tzach) refer to effects of the plagues on items that exist in the sphere below the ground. The next three – arov, dever, and sh'chin (Adash) refer to plagues on items in the sphere of our own existence – the same plane as man, and the final three (really four) of barad, arbeh, choshech, and makkat bechorot (B'achav) identify plagues brought on items in the sky and heavens – the highest of the three spheres. By bringing the Ten Plagues, Hashem showed Pharaoh clearly that He controls the totality of existence – one G-d controlling everything in the world. Pharaoh, who had emphatically denied the existence and power of Hashem by saying "Who is Hashem?" and "I do not know Hashem", (Shemot 5:2) was proven completely wrong as G-d demonstrated that He controls all.

This is why each triad of plagues begins with Moshe making it clear how erroneous Pharaoh’s denial was. Triad one – D’tzach - starts with Moshe saying to Pharaoh “through this, you will know that I am Hashem”. (Shemot 7:17) Triad two - Adash - has Moshe declaring “in order that you should know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land”. (Shemot 8:18) Finally, triad three - B’achav - has Moshe stating emphatically “in order that you should know that there is none like Me in all the land”!

Midrash Rabbah (Shemot Rabbah 12:4) similarly notes a slightly different triad pattern in the presentation of the plagues. The plagues of dam, tzefarde'a and kinim were brought by Aaron on the earth, the plagues of barad, arbeh and choshech, which targeted the skies, were performed by Moshe, and arov, dever and makkat bechorot were brought by Hashem. The plague of sh'chin appears to have been performed by Moshe, Aaron and Hashem together.

Netivot Shalom (vol. Sh'mot pp. 58-59) adds that the Ten Plagues were meant to be basic foundational statements and beliefs being demonstrated by Hashem. The plagues were to teach Pharaoh the three foundational beliefs:

• emunat hamo‘ach, intellectual belief;
• emunat halev, intuitive emotional belief;
• emunat ha’evarim, when the body believes in Hashem so clearly that the limbs robotically act to follow Hashem without cognitively or even emotionally being aware of this.

Through these three lessons, the plagues make it clear that there is nothing else other than Hashem. Netivot Shalom views these three types of emunah as progressing from the lowest to the highest forms of belief in Hashem. Therefore, according to the Netivot Shalom, the triads of the Ten Plagues were to help instill in Pharaoh and the Egyptians a total emunah in Hashem. These three levels of emunah become further clarified in the three statements stated in the Torah to teach Pharaoh – “through this, you will know that I am Hashem”, “in order that you should know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land”, and “in order that you should know that there is none like Me in all the land”. As Kli Yakar (quoted by Netivot Shalom, ibid.) points out, each of these three statements is found at the beginning of one of Rabbi Yehudah’s triads. They are associated with three progressive levels in the emunah values – in metzi’ut Hashem (belief in the existence of G-d), hashgachah prattit (belief in Divine providence to each Jew), and koach Hashem leshonot et hateva (belief in Hashem’s ability to control and change nature). At the completion of the Ten Plagues, Pharaoh was convinced of all three levels of belief in Hashem.

Sefer Degel Machaneh Efroyim (quoted by Netivot Shalom, ibid.) interprets this as not only a lesson for Pharaoh, but, as noted at the opening, a lesson for every Jew, as the plagues are meant to have significance for every generation of the Jewish people. Thus, studying and retelling the Ten Plagues helps each of us to identify and neutralize the “Pharaoh” in each of us, in order to further enhance our emunah in Hashem.

Netivot Shalom extends this idea and notes that while Pesach only occurs once a year, the Almighty gave us a weekly opportunity to allow us to rediscover and strengthen these three progressive levels of belief in Hashem - we do this by carrying out the order of the holy day of Shabbat. As we enter Shabbat on Friday evening and settle into the spirituality of the day, we begin to probe the emunah of G-d’s existence in our minds. Shabbat day then allows us further to rediscover our emunah in Hashem’s Divine providence in our lives. At the end of Shabbat’s day, at the time of se’udah sh’lishit, we are able to reach to the highest level of emunah – of a total and supernal existence of G-d, as we rediscover He who is the ultimate controller of the world. A Jew therefore need not wait for Pesach to arrive once a year in order to find an opportunity to regain these values of emunah in Hashem; G-d grants us this ability every Shabbat! Through the light of Shabbat every Jew can reach the totality of belief in Hashem as the Torah tells us “for [Shabbat] is a sign...to know that I am Hashem who sanctifies you”. (Shemot 31:13)
An Inspiration to Serve Hashem

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“When Hashem gave us the Ten Commandments and began, ‘I am Hashem, your G-d…you shall not have any gods other than me’ (Shemot 20:2-3), the nations of the world exclaimed, ‘He is [merely] demanding His own honour.’ Once they heard, ‘You shall honour your father and mother’ (Shemot 20:12), they went back and acknowledged the earlier commandments.” (Kiddushin 31a)

Rashi explains why the nations retracted their earlier exclamation when they heard the commandment to honour parents: They said to themselves, “[if one is obligated to honour his parents], one is certainly obligated to honour Hashem, who is also a partner in His creation, in addition to his father and mother. [Furthermore], one’s life and death are in Hashem’s hands.” (Rashi to Kiddushin 31a) Why does Rashi, in explaining the nation’s thought process, mention the fact that both our life and our death are in Hashem’s hands? Why is that a reason to honour Him?

Perhaps, Rashi intends this comment not as a reason to honour Hashem, but rather as a motivator. Hashem is due honour for the favour He granted us by creating us. Lest we default on our obligation to honour Him, Rashi warns us that Hashem has the ability to reward or punish us. This interpretation of Rashi, however, is difficult. The Talmud is filled with many obligations of Jewish law, and Rashi does not always remind us to take our obligations seriously because our life and death are in His hands!

It seems that Rashi intends to teach us that there are three reasons why we are obligated to show Hashem honour:
1. He created us.
2. Our life is in His hands (everything that we have in life is a gift from Hashem).
3. Our death is in His hands (He gives us life itself and does not take our life from us).

The blessing of life itself is not something that we can take for granted. The Talmud comments, based on a verse in Eichah (3:39), “Why should a person complain about their portion in life? Have they never sinned? It should be sufficient for them that I granted them life itself.” (Kiddushin 80b) Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato encapsulates these ideas in the following paragraph: “What can increase our feeling of inspiration is looking at the multitude of favours that Hashem grants us at every moment, and the wondrous miracles that He has done for us from the time of our birth until our last days. The more that a person contemplates this, the more he will recognize his great obligation to the G-d who bestows these favours upon him. (Mesilat Yesharim, chapter 8)

Both life itself, and everything that we have in life, are gifts from Hashem that obligate us to reciprocate. The Mesilat Yesharim elaborates on this point, using the Talmud’s comparison to a parent: “The love of Hashem must be embedded in a person’s heart to the point where he is inspired to do what is pleasing to Him, just as one feels inspired to do for one’s parents what will give them pleasure.” (Ibid. Introduction)

The classic mussar [ethical] work, Chovot HaLevavot, is structured in the following way:
• The first chapter speaks about the existence of G-d.
• The second chapter speaks about the wisdom and kindness of G-d that is evident from His creation. It describes how everything that Hashem created was designed specifically to provide us with the greatest benefit.
• The third chapter speaks about our obligation to serve Hashem as a way to “repay” Him for his kindness.

Yaakov Avinu describes the intense effort that he invested in caring for Lavan’s sheep. “This is how I was: By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes.” (Bereishit 31:40, Artscroll translation) Nevertheless, the Torah tells us that the seven years that Yaakov spent working for Rachel “seemed to him a few days because of his love for her.” (Ibid. 29:20, Artscroll translation) When doing something for someone we love (whether it is something done for them in order to make them happy, or it is something done to facilitate a relationship with them, as was the case with Yaakov Avinu), even tasks that involve a lot of effort can become pleasurable opportunities. Similarly, serving Hashem is not a chore. Rather, it is an expression of emotion and love.

In his commentary on the Haggadah, Rabbi Matityahu Salomon, the mashgiach ruchani of the Lakewood Yeshiva, explains in the name of the Malbim that Dayyanu is an introduction to Hallel. We list the favours that Hashem did for us to inspire us to praise Him with Hallel.

Why, then, were the legalistic paragraphs of Rabban Gamliel placed between Dayyanu and Hallel? Surely, it would make sense to recite Rabban Gamliel’s halachic teachings first and then to inspire ourselves with Dayyanu immediately prior to Hallel!

Perhaps, the answer is that we want to emphasize that gratitude towards Hashem does not end there. It is not sufficient to merely recognize His favours, or even to sing His praise. We must also be inspired to do what is pleasing to Him and to fulfill all of his mitzvot with the utmost precision and the deepest understanding. The inspiration of Dayyanu must guide us to the fulfillment and deeper understanding of all of the mitzvot of the Seder night.
The Pesach our ancestors ate when the Temple stood: what was it for? Because G-d passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt, as Shemot 12:27 says, ‘And you shall say: It is a Pesach sacrifice for G-d, who passed over the houses of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt when He struck Egypt, and He saved our houses. And the nation kneeled and bowed.’

Saving Our Houses?

Our Maggid builds to an emotional crescendo, starting from suffering, then describing the Divine decision to redeem us, then recounting miracles, and finally triggering the Dayyenu song celebrating G-d’s many kindnesses. We are now positioned to launch into Hallel – but we pause for a halachic note: Rabban Gamliel reminds us to mention Pesach, Matzah and Marror. This paragraph could disrupt our religious epiphany – but if we read it carefully, the Pesach passage (cited above) might actually elevate our intensity, investing new meaning in our contemporary celebration.

The biblical praise, He saved our houses, should catch our ear. Surely, G-d saved our families; why would we care about the houses, which we were set to abandon in a matter of hours? Indeed, a midrash (Pesikta Zutrita) suggests that we read “houses” allegorically, referring to future generations. But perhaps we could read it literally, a statement that the mitzvah of the Korban Pesach saved those houses, as well as the future houses of Bnei Yisrael.

Placing the Blood

The ritual of the Korban Pesach included an odd instruction to place blood from the Korban Pesach upon the doorposts and lintel of our houses. (Shemot 12:7, 12:13, 12:22-23) The requirement is perplexing, because we are taught to treat blood with the greatest respect. We take great steps in kashering meat to avoid consuming blood, and when performing shechitah of beasts and birds we are commanded to cover the blood, preserving its dignity. (Sefer haChinuch 187) Multiple explanations of this unusual display of blood have been offered, including:

• To identify Jewish houses – This is the simple implication of Shemot 12:13, “The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are. I will see the blood and pass over you, and the plague will not come upon you to destroy, when I strike the land of Egypt.” However, this literalist read of Shemot 12:13 presents numerous problems, starting with the self-evident fact that G-d knows which houses are occupied by Jews.

• To inspire – This inspiration is generated in two opposite directions, depending on where the blood was placed:

 ◊ Within the view that the blood was on the exterior of the house, a midrash (Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael Bo, Pischa 6) suggests that it was meant to intimidate the Egyptians.

 ◊ Ibn Ezra (extended commentary to Shemot 12) contends that the blood was on the interior, and was meant to bolster our own spirits.

• To demonstrate allegiance – A midrash states, “How does the blood benefit the angel, or Israel? But as long as Israel do this, placing the blood on their entrances, G-d will have mercy upon them, as it says, ‘And G-d will pass over the entrance.’” (Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael, Beshalach, Amalek 1)

We may suggest one more approach, though: By placing the blood on our doorposts and lintel, we converted each house into a mizbeiach [altar]. Indeed, a midrash says this explicitly: “Our ancestors had three altars in Egypt – the lintel and the two doorposts.” (Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael, Bo, Pischa 6) With the korban pesach, we made our houses into Sanctuaries for G-d, and our entrances joined other sacred entrances from our past, including the entrance to the tent of Avraham and Sarah, and the entrance of Moshe’s tent, where human beings communicated with G-d.

Perhaps this is how G-d “saved our houses” in Egypt. In addition to saving our lives on the fourteenth of Nisan, G-d saved our houses by making each one a protected Sanctuary. And far from disrupting our Seder’s emotional flow, this actually extends the emotional high of our Maggid-Dayyenu-Hallel elevation, expressing the personal connection to G-d realized for each Jew.

Saving Today’s Houses

Indeed, our houses have retained this sacred status ever since. Our tables bear salt like a mizbeiach (Rama Orach Chaim 167:5), we cover knives on the table during birkat hamazon because iron should not be wielded upon a mizbeiach (Beit Yosef Orach Chaim 180:5), and we may not kill bugs or perform any repellent act on a table because it is a mizbeiach (Magen Avraham 167:13, Aruch haShulchan Orach Chaim 167:12). The table where we eat even provides atonement like a mizbeiach, when we share food with the needy. (Berachot 55a) Because of this mizbeiach status, Jews have traditionally created memorials for the Beit haMikdash at the entrances of our houses and at our tables. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 560:1-2)

Finally, a midrash identifies an ongoing, visible version of the blood which saved our houses: the mezuzah. (Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael, Bo, Pischa 11) The inspiration we feel at our Seder, when we describe the blood which marked our houses as altars for G-d, is renewed each time we pass through the doors of our houses. May we recognize, at the Seder and beyond, the remarkable consecration which marked our houses, then and now, as sacred space.

Did you know?
We teach in the broader Jewish community, including Adath Israel, Beth Emeth and Beth Tikvah!
The Haggadah tells us, based on a mishnah, that in each generation, a person should feel as if he or she left Egypt. (Pesachim 10:5) The Haggadah and Mishnah cite a verse to support this obligation: “And you should tell your son on this day that it is on account of this that G-d did for me when I left Egypt.” (Shemot 13:8) The Talmudic sage Rava adds that we must also say, “And He took us out from there, in order to bring us and give us the land which was promised to our forefathers” (Devarim 6:23). (Pesachim 116b)

The Haggadah, however, does not explain why it is so important for each person to feel as if he or she personally left Egypt. Is it not enough to study history, to understand that our forefathers left Egypt? What is added by the feeling that we ourselves left Egypt?

Don Isaac Abarbanel suggests one answer to this question: Through the Exodus from Egypt, the Jewish people internalized certain fundamental Jewish beliefs: G-d created the world; G-d watches over the Jewish people; G-d can change the natural order of the world, and does so at His will; G-d is concerned for each individual person; reward and punishment; and prophecy. In fact, because G-d does not perform open miracles in every generation, the Torah commands us to perform many mitzvot to remember the Exodus from Egypt, in order to inculcate within ourselves, and to teach others, the fundamental beliefs of Judaism.

Thus, if a person feels as if he or she left Egypt, that person has already acquired a strong belief in G-d, akin to the level of belief of those who actually left Egypt. The Abarbanel then explains how to feel as if each person left Egypt: By thinking about the miracles that G-d performed in Egypt, and by understanding how the miracles establish the foundational Jewish beliefs, one can ultimately come to feel as if oneself was present at the Exodus from Egypt. In other words, the goal of each person feeling as if he or she left Egypt is to have a strong sense of emunah (faith), and the path to do so is to strengthen one’s emunah.

A second answer is based on the comments of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Lubavitcher Rebbe addresses a contemporary issue: how can a person maintain his or her commitment to Torah, while trying to earn a livelihood? In the professional world, there are times of competition, when a person may be tempted to cut corners, engage in borderline-ethical activities, etc., in order to try to get ahead. How can a person avoid this?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe answers that a person must maintain his or her bitachon (trust) in G-d. Having left Egypt and gone into the Wilderness, a land without food and water, the Jews who left Egypt displayed a tremendous amount of bitachon in G-d. They trusted that G-d would provide for them. Ultimately, their trust was rewarded with the entry into Israel. This may be why Rava stated that we must say, “And He took us out from there, in order to bring us and give us the land which was promised to our forefathers” (Devarim 6:23). (Pesachim 116b)

For the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the goal of each person feeling as if he or she left Egypt is to have a strong sense of bitachon, and the path to do so is to strengthen one’s bitachon. By focusing on our bitachon, we seek to rise to the level of the bitachon of those who left Egypt. Once we reach their level of bitachon, we feel as if we ourselves left Egypt.

To summarize, according to the Abarbanel, the way to feel as if a person left Egypt is to focus on emunah (belief) in G-d, while according to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the way to feel as if a person left Egypt is to focus on bitachon (trust) in G-d. As well, according to the Abarbanel, the goal of feeling as if each person left Egypt is to arrive at the high level of emunah that was felt by those who left Egypt. According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the goal of feeling as if each person left Egypt is to arrive at the high level of bitachon that was felt by those who left Egypt.

A difference between the Abarbanel and the Lubavitcher Rebbe may manifest itself in the content one should focus on, in order to feel as if one personally left Egypt. According to the Abarbanel, the way to feel emunah in G-d is by focusing on the miracles that were performed by G-d during the Exodus. In other words, one should focus on the acts of G-d, in order to instill the fundamental Jewish beliefs that were mentioned above.

According to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, it may be suggested that the focus should not only be on the miracles, but should also include the Jews’ reaction to the miracles. Specifically, the focus should include the fact that Jews followed G-d to a place without food or water, because of their complete trust in G-d. If the goal is to arrive at the high level of bitachon that was felt by those who left Egypt, then the focus must include the Jews’ reactions to G-d’s miracles.

Thus, the Abarbanel and the Lubavitcher Rebbe provide us with different frameworks to understand why one must feel as if he or she left Egypt, and what our goal is, in instilling those feelings. With either greater emunah (Abarbanel), or greater bitachon (Lubavitcher Rebbe), we can thank G-d for “taking us from slavery to freedom, from sadness to happiness, from mourning to holiday, from darkness to great light, and from subjugation to redemption.” (Haggadah)
The Talmud (Berachot 39b) records a debate about making berachot on bread in a case where both pieces of bread and whole loaves are served. Rav Huna says one may make the berachah on either bread. Rabbi Yochanan, however, holds that it is preferable to make the berachah on the whole loaf. This allows for the mitzvah to be performed in a more respectful way. After developing the argument further, the Talmud records two exceptions to this debate:

1. Rav Pappa says: On Pesach (i.e. the Seder night) we place the piece into the whole matzah and break it (i.e. make the berachah and break off a piece to eat). [The matzah referred to in Talmud was not the brittle version popularly used today. It was likely more akin to a laffa, which enabled literally wrapping up the smaller piece and hiding it inside the whole matzah.] This is because the Torah calls matzah “the bread of poverty” (lechem oni).
   (Devarim 16:3)
2. Rabbi Abba says: On Shabbat a person must make the berachah over two full loaves. This is because the Torah (Shemot 16:22) recounts that Bnei Yisrael collected a double portion (lechem mishneh) of manna in the desert on Fridays, in preparation for Shabbat. This second exception is understood to apply to Yom Tov as well.

On a regular Yom Tov or Shabbat we can readily apply the second exception. In that case the requirement for lechem mishneh means that even Rav Huna will agree that making a berachah on pieces of bread is inappropriate. The question is what to do on the Seder night, which is directly referenced by exception 1, but is also a Yom Tov meal and therefore presumably falls under exception 2 as well. This question engendered a debate among the talmudic commentators, which produced three main views:

1. Tosafot (Pesachim 116a s.v. mah darko): The Seder is a Yom Tov meal and therefore exception 2 certainly applies. With exception 1, the Talmud is telling us that in addition to the normal Yom Tov bread, the Seder night requires a separate piece of bread which is indicative of matzah’s status as “the bread of poverty”.
2. Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi (Pesachim 25b): The two exceptions are describing two different possibilities for Yom Tov meals. Usually, the concept of lechem mishneh requires us to make a berachah on two full loaves (exception 2). However, on the Seder night, in order to accommodate the requirement of lechem oni we break off a piece of one of the two loaves. Thus, exception 1 is actually describing a way of fulfilling both lechem mishneh and lechem oni simultaneously.
3. Rambam (Hilchot Chametz Umatzah 8:1): The two exceptions cannot be satisfied simultaneously. Exception 1 is therefore telling us that as opposed to other Yom Tov meals, on Seder night there is no requirement for lechem mishneh, in deference to the requirement for lechem oni. [This reading of Rambam’s view is presented by Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik; see Harerei Kedem II pp. 144-145.]

At this point we have laid out a classic talmudic debate. This is valuable in its own right. However, carefully considering this debate can lead us to an important understanding of the moment of motzi matzah at the Seder.

On one level, what underpins the different views is the question of how the requirements of lechem oni and lechem mishneh interact. At first blush, the two contradict. Lechem mishneh is a reminder of the bountiful double portion which G-d provided, and still provides, to Bnei Yisrael before every Shabbat and Yom Tov. But on the contrary, lechem oni, as the Talmud tells us elsewhere (Pesachim 114b), is a reminder of the impoverished state of the Jews in Egypt - “just as the way of a pauper (aron) is only [to eat] a piece [of his bread], so too here (i.e. when eating matzah), [only] a piece [is used].” The incommensurability of lechem oni and lechem mishneh seems to undergird Rambam’s, and, to a lesser extent, Rabbi Alfasi’s views. This is expressed most sharply by Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer (the Gaon of Vilna) (Beur HaGra, Orach Chaim 473:11) who critiques the opinion of Tosafot by asking how one could possibly fulfill lechem oni by adding on to the number of breads usually eaten during other meals. To explain the position of Tosafot we need to go one layer of analysis deeper and ask what the goal of lechem oni really is.

According to Rambam, lechem oni adds an experiential element to the mitzvah of eating matzah. The Seder night is about recreating the experience of slavery. The free Jews in the desert may have enjoyed double portions, but the enslaved Jews in Egypt dared not eat all of their food at once, and therefore only ever ate a piece of their bread. At the Seder we mimic this practice. As such, there is no room for lechem mishneh.

According to Tosafot, however, the purpose of lechem oni is not to recreate an experience. Fundamentally, the Seder is a Yom Tov meal, eaten by Jews who have been freed from slavery. Therefore, lechem oni must serve a symbolic purpose. Like a prop, the piece of matzah enables an intellectual discussion about the slavery that was. Because of this, there is no issue with using two whole matzot in addition to the piece.

This portrayal of the debate provides some depth to the specific act of breaking bread at the Seder, but this debate itself does not reflect divergent philosophies about the Seder overall. Both sides must agree that the shift from slavery and the straits of Egyptian life, to the expansive freedoms of life together with G-d, must be manifest in both our emotional-experiential and our intellectual activities at the Seder. What this particular detail about motzi matzah highlights is the importance of considering where these experiential and intellectual components appear in the Seder. This way we can be ready to maximize the potential of the evening.
Maror in its Right Place

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While it may be one of the most striking moments of the Seder night, the mitzvah of eating maror has a certain degree of mystery about it. One of the core questions asked regarding the eating of maror is about its location in the Seder.

Rabban Gamliel teaches us that there are three things that a person must state in order to minimally fulfill the requirement of telling the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim (Exodus from Egypt) - Pesach, matzah, and maror. Unfortunately, at our Sedarim, we are missing the presence of the Korban Pesach (G-d willing, it should return soon!). As such, we begin with matzah and then proceed to maror.

Rabban Gamliel teaches that matzah is a symbol of our redemption and the thrilling speed at which it occurred. Maror, on the other hand, is intended to fling us back to the pain of enslavement and its bitter burden. The symbolism of each leads us to question the order in which they are eaten. Shouldn’t we experience the bitterness of slavery and only afterward the exhilaration of redemption? Instead, we eat them out of order, tasting redemption only to immediately return to the bitterness of slavery! Also, a midrash describes Bnei Yisrael taking leftover matzah and maror with them as they left Egypt. (Mechilta Bo 13) While this would appear to be a pragmatic move, this midrash teaches that it was done out of a love for the mitzvot that had been fulfilled with these food items. What exactly was so beloved about the mitzvah of maror?

Returning to the question of the order of matzah and maror: The connection between Pesach, matzah, and maror is mentioned twice in the Torah. The Torah writes regarding the Korban Pesach, “Roasted over a fire, with matzot, on maror it shall be eaten.” (Shemot 12:8) Later, in presenting the mitzvah of Pesach Sheni, the Torah states, “On matzot and maror you shall eat it.” (Bamidbar 9:11) Both follow the same order: Pesach, matzah, and then maror. In fact, the Tosafist Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir makes this exact point: Rabban Gamliel is merely following the precedent established by the Torah itself. (Rashbam to Pesachim 114a, ad) But while following the order of the biblical text might seem sensible, the Talmud seems to be saying that eating maror before matzah would not fulfill the mitzvah to eat maror, at all. The actual formulation used by the Talmud is that such a person has consumed maror, “not at the requisite time of maror.” (Pesachim 114b) This is, in fact, the view of Tosafot (Pesachim 114b, zo). But should we really disqualify one’s mitzvah of Maror on the basis of the order in a biblical sentence? And why does the Torah itself place maror after matzah, given that slavery preceded redemption?

In the year 1900, Rabbi Avraham Bornstein, commonly known as the Avnei Nezer, sent a letter to Rabbi Shlomo of Erzakov. Rabbi Shlomo had asked the Avnei Nezer about the logic behind an opinion regarding whether eating matzah and maror simultaneously can fulfill the mitzvot of the Seder. In the course of answering this question, the Avnei Nezer writes the following: “The reason [matzah and maror must be eaten separately] is that the matzot [consumed] on the night of Pesach are meant to give thanks for the miracles. Therefore, we eat matzah to give thanks for redemption. Maror is eaten to also give thanks for the bitterness with which they embittered [our lives]. Through this, we rose to great heights during the Exodus from Egypt. However, the benefit of the maror isn’t revealed until the redemption. As such, the [ordained] time for maror is after the matzah, and when they are [eaten] together, this is fine, as [one still attains] knowing the taste of bitterness at the time of redemption. No more should be written about this.” (Shu”t Avnei Nezer OC 379)

The Avnei Nezer’s response provides a solution to the question of why maror follows matzah. According to the Avnei Nezer, the Seder isn’t purely a reflection on redemption and its power. Rather, we are also meant to reflect upon what we have gained from the hardships that we have lived through. This moment of reflection is provided specifically by eating maror after matzah. A comment from Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, the Sefat Emet, can perhaps shed additional light on the Avnei Nezer’s brief statement. The Sefat Emet (Pesach 5647) explains that the pain experienced during the course of the enslavement in Egypt was “preparation, salvation, and sustenance,” for future exiles that would befall the Jewish people. Paradoxically, we praise G-d, not just for having been brought out of slavery, but also for having the legacy of withstanding that slavery to provide fortitude during the struggles we face generations later.

Maror is a guide to processing the pain of the past. We cannot ignore what has happened and close ourselves off from it. At the same time, we strive to not be totally consumed by it either. Instead, it becomes incorporated into who we are and serves as a point of strength. This is the power of experiencing the bitter taste of maror only after having felt the redemptive message of matzah.
At first glance, the reason for Birkat HaMazon on Seder night appears to not be due to its importance to the Seder themes, but as a simple consequence of the meal. Contributing to this impression is the fact that no special additions are said in this Birkat HaMazon, other than those added for the entirety of Pesach.

Contrary to this first impression, though, we do find a special instruction regarding Birkat HaMazon on Seder night. The Tur (Orach Chaim 479) writes: “It is a mitzvah to search for a zimmun [the invitation to join in Birkat HaMazon, recited only if there were three participants in the meal].” This statement is endorsed by the Rama (Darchei Moshe ad loc), who states: “The custom nowadays is to search for a zimmun.”

The commentators debate the source and the rationale of this statement. According to some, it has nothing to do with Birkat HaMazon per se, but rather stems from our preference to have three people present for Hallel, which immediately follows. (Taz 479:3) Others saw the mitzvah to look for a zimmun as connected to the cup of wine we drink over Birkat HaMazon, as according to some opinions, the cup was originally enacted where there was a zimmun; thus, it is preferable to have a zimmun at the Seder so as to enhance the meaning of the third cup (Perishah 479:2).

It may be argued, however, that the mitzvah to look for three participants has to do with the special status of this night’s Birkat HaMazon, which sets it apart from its recitation during the rest of the year. Moreover, rather than seeing the mitzvah to join others for Birkat HaMazon as a result of Chazal’s ordinance to drink four cups, we should look for a reason that would explain both the decision to designate a cup of wine for Birkat HaMazon and the recommendation to have a zimmun.

A mishnah states that even a poor Jew must drink four cups on Seder night, even if this means taking public charity. (Pesachim 10:1) This assertion is explained in the Talmud (Pesachim 112a) as a consequence of the four cups being pirsumei nisa – publicity for the miracle. A similar reasoning seems to underlie the Talmud’s remark that “women are also commanded to drink the four cups, as they too were part of the miracle” (ibid. 108a). This view of the four cups is understood when they are seen as one entity, emphasizing the liberty and happiness of Seder night (see Pesachim 108b). However, when we analyze each cup separately, one cup stands out as seemingly having nothing to do with the miracle of the Exodus – the cup of Birkat HaMazon. Unlike the cup of Kiddush, where we explicitly mention Yetziat Mitzrayim, and the cups of the Haggadah and the Hallel, whose whole existence is due to the miracle, the cup of Birkat HaMazon appears – superficially – to relate only to our gratitude for the food given to us by G-d.

However, when we look carefully at Birkat HaMazon, we immediately recognize that the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt is not absent. In the second blessing, on the land and the food, we distinctly thank G-d “for taking us out of Egypt, the house of bondage”. This is not an accidental remark; it follows the Torah itself, as it instructed us to bless Hashem after eating:

“And you will eat and be sated, and you shall bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land He has given you. Beware that you do not forget Hashem, your G-d... Who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Devarim 8:10-11, 14).

If this assumption is correct, we can offer another explanation for the Tur’s instruction to look for a zimmun for Birkat HaMazon, especially on this night. If the blessing we recite is truly part and parcel of the night, another way to tell the story of our redemption, and not merely there to fulfill an unrelated halachic requirement, then it should be subjected to the same rules governing the retelling of the Exodus throughout the whole Seder night.

As is well known, one of the hallmarks of the commandment to tell the story of our salvation from Egypt on Seder night (setting it apart from the everyday mitzvah to remember the same event) is that it is preferred to tell the story in a conversational manner (see Chiddushei Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik [Stencil], Pesachim 116a). Thus, having a zimmun in Birkat HaMazon on this night makes it more of a dialogue, and as such, it can be considered another piece of the retelling of Yetziat Mitzrayim.

Birkat HaMazon offers a unique angle on the Exodus, seeing it not as a historical fact standing by itself, but as the first act in the greater play of coming to the Promised Land. In other words, Birkat HaMazon contains the same viewpoint which is expressed in the fifth expression of redemption – “I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and I will give it to you for a possession, I am Hashem”. (Shemot 6:8)
Hallel, and the Sounds of the Exodus

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Throughout the Seder, we tell the story not only through words, but through a multiplicity of senses and experiences. We sing, point, and eat. It is that immersive environment that creates the lasting memories of the Seder.

The first Seder in Egypt itself, however, was accompanied by a sinister sound that punctured the religious ceremony taking place in the Jewish homes. Moshe warns Pharaoh that on that fateful night, G-d will force Pharaoh’s hand by killing every Egyptian firstborn. The result would be an earth-shattering cry:

Moses said, “Thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Thus says the Lord: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians, and every first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle. And there shall be a loud cry in all the land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again; but not a dog shall snarl at any of the Israelites, at man or beast— in order that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.” (Shemot 11:5-7, JPS translation)

Moshe warns Pharaoh that Egypt will be filled with the sounds of mourning. In distinction, in order to show that G-d had chosen the Jewish people, the Jews would be spared even from the sounds of barking dogs. (Shemot 11:7)

However, while they may have avoided vicious sounds directed at them by the dogs, the Jews had to experience that first Seder with the wails of the Egyptians filling their ears. How did that chilling background music shape their memory? Were they meant to derive that the defining moment of becoming Jewish should be that of keeping G-d’s command while their enemies suffer?

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 5:5) provides what seems to be an answer to this, by offering several other voices that filled the country that night:

Rabbi Yaakov bar Acha said in the name of Rabbi Yosi: Power was given to Moshe’s voice and it went out throughout all of Egypt, for a distance of a forty day walk. What did he say? From this place to this place, that is one group [to sacrifice the Pesach], and from that place to that place, that is another group [to sacrifice the Pesach].

…

Rabbi Levi said: Just as Moshe’s voice was given that power, so was that power given to Pharaoh’s voice. His voice went throughout all of Egypt, for a distance of a forty day walk. And what did it say? “Get up and leave from among my people.” (Shemot 12:31) In the past you were the slaves of Pharaoh, and from now on you are the slaves of G-d. At that moment, they said “Hallelukah— praise, O slaves of G-d” – and not the slaves of Pharaoh.

It seems that the Yerushalmi is trying to fill out the picture, and theologically explain the cries of the Egyptians. The Yerushalmi does not want us to think that the suffering of the Egyptians was an end in and of itself. Rather, the pain they suffered was an unfortunate consequence of Pharaoh and Egypt’s obstinance. However, had the other voices filled Egypt earlier and been heeded, they would have been able to help the Egyptians avoid such punishment. The ability to prevent those screams was in the hands of Pharaoh – announce that the Jews are free, and there would have been no need for more plagues.

But the Yerushalmi pushes further – why was it important for the Jews to be free? As the Yerushalmi imagines, it was so they could hear the call of G-d’s command, as they could hear Moshe commanding them to bring the Korban Pesach. However, as the Yerushalmi continues, that was not the final sound that needed to be heard. It was the sound of Hallel that was the telos of all that happened in Egypt. G-d wanted the Jews to understand that the ultimate purpose was that the Jews should recognize that freedom from Egypt was necessary so they could embrace servitude to G-d, something they did by breaking into song that celebrated their new status as avdel Hashem, Divine servants.

The Talmud Bavli notes that it was this message heard from another voice that captured the essence of all the Jews, that of G-d at Sinai. Commenting on why a Jewish slave who refuses to go free must have his ear pierced, the Talmud writes:

Rabban Yo‘ḥanan ben Zakka‘i would expound this verse as a type of decorative wreath [homer], i.e., as an allegory: Why is the ear different from all the other limbs in the body, as the ear alone is pierced? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: This ear heard My voice on Mount Sinai when I said: “For to Me the children of Israel are slaves” (Leviticus 25:55), which indicates: And they should not be slaves to slaves. And yet this man went and willingly acquired a master for himself. (Kiddushin 22b, Koren translation)

Again, the Talmud focuses on the importance of hearing the correct sounds and messages. The cry of the Egyptians was an unfortunate necessity to ensure that Pharaoh would say what he was required to – the Jews are free. That freedom was necessary so the Jews could hear the commands of the Torah. Ultimately that transformed them when they heard not just specific commands, but accepted G-d’s call to become his servants. And finally, the Jews needed to celebrate that new status with the song of Hallel. As we close the Seder, we sing those words that the Yerushalmi imagines capped off that night of cries, commands, and song – the words that indicate that the message sunk in.
While the abundance of divrei Torah tend to take place toward the beginning of the Seder, for many, the beloved memories and emotions associated with the first night of Pesach occur during the singing at the conclusion of the night. After putting away our binders of Torah thoughts, satiating ourselves with what seems like a whole box of matzah, a full dinner at midnight, and four cups of wine, we conclude the retelling of Yetziat Mitzrayim with joyous and beloved songs of praise. One especially cherished song is Adir Hu (“Mighty is He”). With its easy to sing and upbeat melody, it would likely earn a spot on Passover’s “Greatest Hits.” However, despite it being a highlight of the Seder, it often gets overlooked when it comes to exploring the text itself.

The hymn Adir Hu, whose author is unknown, was composed during the Middle Ages. According to the Jewish German scholar, Leopold Zunz, Adir Hu was composed in the 6th or 7th century, but did not appear in print until the 15th century. By the 18th century, the tune we use today was sung throughout Germany and other areas of Europe.

Why is Adir Hu part of the Pesach Seder? On Pesach, we celebrate the redemption of the Jews from their enemies. It is therefore appropriate that after the retelling and celebration of our freedom from Egypt, we convey our yearning for the ultimate redemption. The song of Adir Hu is therefore sung to express our desire for Hashem to speedily bring the coming of Mashiach and the third Beit HaMikdash.

Rabbi Naftali Hertz Ginsberg, in his commentary on the Haggadah explains that this song is especially fitting for Seder night, since the Talmud tells us that Mashiach will arrive on the first night of Pesach. (Rosh Hashanah 11b) However, if Mashiach would arrive on a holiday, how would we be able to build the third Beit HaMikdash, which would involve violating Yom Tov? Rashi answers that while it is prohibited for the Jewish people to engage in building the new Beit HaMikdash, Hashem Himself will construct it, and that would be permitted despite it being a Yom Tov (Shavuot 15b). We therefore sing the joyful refrain, “May He build His house soon. Quickly, quickly, in our days, soon. G-d build, G-d build, build Your house soon!” We implore Hashem to be the One to build the final Temple, and we ask for it to be done speedily, as the redemption could begin this very night.

The idea that G-d Himself will build the third and final Beit HaMikdash resolves another difficulty about the ultimate redemption. The Torah tells us that Hashem swore He would not let the Jewish nation return to His Temple. As the verse states, “For which reason I swore in My wrath, that they would not enter My resting place” (Psalms 95:11). If this is true, how then do we long and pray for the building of the third Beit HaMikdash? This can be compared to an angry king who exiled his children from his palace and swore to never let them reenter. However, as time went on, the king forgave his children, yet didn’t want to break his promise. He therefore tore down his palace and rebuilt it himself so that his children could return without the king reneging on his oath. As we see from the words of Adir Hu, if Hashem rebuilds the Temple Himself, then the problem of letting His nation return is resolved. (Naftali Seva Ratzon commentary on the Haggadah)

One notable element of Adir Hu is that it follows the pattern of the aleph bet to describe qualities of Hashem. As seen from the prayer Ashrei, an alphabetical pattern is a significant feature. The Talmud (Berachot 4b) states that anyone who recites Tehilah L’Dovid (Psalm 145, which is the core of the Ashrei prayer) three times a day merits the World to Come. One of the reasons for this prayer’s importance is that it is arranged as an alphabetic acrostic. What can we learn from this pattern, and why did the author or Adir Hu choose to compose this hymn alphabetically?

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (Pachad Yitzchak, Pesach 55) comments that the alphabetic structure of Ashrei represents Hashem’s trait of mishpat, judgment. Just like bet always follows aleph, Hashem controls the world through order and justice. However, Ashrei also contains the verse, “You open up Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing,” symbolizing Hashem’s compassion as well. Ashrei therefore alludes to the idea that Hashem rules the world with both justice and compassion.

Perhaps the same message can be seen in Adir Hu. The song is written in an alphabetic acrostic to praise Hashem, alluding to the organized justice in which G-d governs the world. Yet, at the same time, Hashem controls the world with chesed and compassion, which is why we plead for Him to rebuild the Temple even if we don’t deserve it. We ask Hashem to compassionately rebuild the Beit HaMikdash Himself so that it can be done as soon as possible, even if it’s on Yom Tov, and so that the Jewish people will be accepted back in G-d’s home.

This Pesach, as we all sing this beloved song together, may we merit the ultimate redemption that we yearn for in Adir Hu, “speedily in our days soon.”
The Talmud explains the reasoning behind dipping karpas in salt water at the beginning of the Seder night, as an action performed simply to raise the interest of the children sitting around the table. (Pesachim 114b)

The Talmud does not explain, however, why our Rabbis specifically chose this action in order to gain our children’s attention. Many other things could be done which would equally coerce the children’s attention. Furthermore, we are confused shortly after when we chant Ha Lachma Anya inviting strangers into our house to join us, culminating by maintaining that while we’re still in exile, next year we will be in Jerusalem. What is the relevance of this prayer and the custom of karpas at this stage of the evening?

Rabbeinu Manoch, a 13th century sage, explained that dipping karpas in salt water at the beginning of the Seder symbolizes Yosef’s brothers dipping his coat in blood immediately after selling him as a slave. This can be supported from a text, as Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, former Rabbi of London’s Finchley Synagogue, explains: The word “karpas” is found in Megilat Esther (1:6) and is used there in reference to a type of fabric. It is more than interesting to note that Rashi, when describing Yosef’s “coat of many colours” (Bereishit 37:3), explained that the coat was made from karpas.

Before discussing how G-d brought us out of slavery, which is the essence of Seder night, it is essential to understand how we got there in the first place. We arrived in Egypt because of internal strife; because one Jew sold another Jew. And according to our Sages, we are in our current galut (exile) because of sinat chinam – purposeless hatred. Therefore, immediately after having dipped the Karpas in salt water to remind us how we initially arrived in Egypt and why we are in exile now, we say the Ha Lachma Anya prayer, emphasizing our current diaspora situation.

Recently we, as a community, lost a talmid chacham and pillar of Yeshivat Chaim and Yeshiva Gedolah Zichron Shmayahu, Rabbi Moshe Goldberg zt”l. Something extremely powerful that I noticed in my short time learning with the YU Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash at Or Chaim was Rabbi Goldberg’s incredible ability to treat everyone, regardless of ‘frumkeit’ or knowledge, as an equal. He taught the importance of loving all of Klal Yisrael with a constant smile on his face and he lived a life emphasizing the essence of ‘frumkeit’ or knowledge, as an equal.

Don Isaac Abarbanel (cited in the Orchos Chaim and Arukh) explains that this part was written in Aramaic because when the Hebrew Haggadah was brought to an extended audience. Therefore, they worded the invitation in Aramaic, such that everyone would understand the importance of welcoming in others. Yes, this is “Family Time”, but every Jew should not only be theoretically considered a brother or sister, but should be worthy of inclusion - always.

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