



HAGADDAH INSIGHTS FOR YOUR SEDER

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מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה הלילה הזה בלומצה.

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין שאר ירקות הלילה הזה מרור.

שבכל הלילות אין אנו מטבילין אפילו פעם אחת הלילה הזה שתי פעמים.

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בין יושבין ובין מסבין הלילה הזה בלנו מסבין:

1. *Ha'Lekach V'Halibuv*
R" Avraham Schorr



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מה נשתנה הלילה הזה, שמעתי מאחד לפרש שהאדם צריך לשאול את עצמו מה נשתנה על ידי הלילה הזה, הלילה המיוחד הזה שיורדים בו אורות נפלאות, כמה זה פעל אצלו שנוי, ובמה הוא נשתנה על ידי קדושת הלילה. בלילה הזה נעשה נס לילה כיום תאיר, וזה הוא השנוי שאנו אומרים כאן מה נשתנה הלילה הזה, כמו שפי' השפ"א, וְכִמוֹ כֵן הָאָדָם צָרִיךְ לֵהִשְׁתַּנּוּת שְׁנוֹי כֹּזֶה מִלֵּילָה לְיוֹם, וְהֵבֵן.

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2. Rav Schachter on the Hagaddah



עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים – WE WERE SLAVES TO PARAOH IN EGYPT. The *passuk* that describes Moshe's first *nevuah* states: וירא מלאך ד' אליו בלבת אש מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה בוער באש והסנה אינו מדוע לא יבער הסנה – "An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush. He saw and, behold, the bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed ... Why will the bush not be burned?" (*Shemos* 3:2-3). Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the fire was located only in the midst of the bush; on the outside, the bush appeared the same as any other bush. Thus, Moshe wondered why the fire did not spread outward from the middle of the bush.

The vision of the burning bush was symbolic of the state of the Jewish

People in Mitzrayim. *Midrashim* explain that Moshe doubted that the Jewish People had earned Hashem's miraculous intervention (see *Rashi*, *Shemos* 2:14, s.v. *achein*; 3:11, s.v. *v'chi*). The Rav explained that because Moshe viewed the Jewish People superficially, he did not see them as worthy of being taken out of Mitzrayim.

Therefore, Hashem responded to Moshe, ראה ראיתי את עני עמי אשר במצרים – "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Mitzrayim" (*Shemos* 3:7), and showed him the vision of the burning bush. The *Midrash* (*Shemos Rabbah* 3:3) explains that Hashem perceived His people with a deeper, twofold form of vision, ראה ראיתי. Hashem saw *Bnei Yisrael* for what they were destined to become.

This perspective signifies the notion that within the soul of every Jew there burns the fire of an *אהבה המסתרת*, a hidden love for Hashem, despite what may be a cold, outward appearance. This concept is elaborated on in the *Tanya* (*Likutei Amarim*, *perakim* 15, 19, 45; *Iggeres HaKodesh* 18), who explains that each Jew possesses a natural longing for Hashem and a desire to submit to His will.

The Rav commented that we allude to this principle in the *Haggadah* when we state, עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים, and not עבדי פרעה היינו, a term found in reference to Pharaoh's advisors (*Shemos* 10:7). The term עבדים לפרעה means that the Jewish People were slaves to Pharaoh only outwardly, in a socio-political sense; in their essential, inner nature, they were *benei chorin*. We distinguish similarly in *Hallel*, when we declare, הללו עבדי ד', not הללו עבדים לד', since innate to every Jew's personality is a natural inclination to

be a servant of Hashem (*Nora'os HaRav*, vol. 8, pp. 72-74).

The *passuk*, כאיל תערוג על אפיקי מים בן, נפשי תערוג אליך אלקים – "As the deer longs for brooks of water, so too my soul longs for You, O G-d" (*Tehillim* 42:2), implies that just as a deer is instinctively drawn towards water, without comprehending where he is going, a person yearns to be close to Hashem, without necessarily understanding what he is searching for. Even the most secular Jews, who despise *kedushah*, long for closeness to Hashem in the depths of their hearts. Although they do not wish to admit it, even to themselves, they do recognize this "deficiency". That is why they react with such anger to all matters of religion.

Furthermore, it seems that this is the reason that there are, in our times, so many problems relating to mental health. The love for Hashem concealed within the heart of every Jew draws him towards a life of Torah and *mitzvos*. If he does not act according to these inner feelings, he remains troubled. He is plagued by a lack of tranquility and peace of mind, as one who is prevented from satisfying his desires. More than *avodas Hashem* being an obligation that has been placed on a person, it is really a necessity for him.

Rav Soloveitchik explained further that this fundamental principle of *Yahadus* forms the basis of the statement of the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:5) that there exists a *havtachah* (promise) that in the end of time, *Bnei Yisrael* will certainly do *teshuvah*. How can there be such a promise if we have a principle of faith that guarantees *Man bechirah chafshis*? Are the Jewish People not free to choose evil rather than good? The answer must be that innately, the Jew does not want to sin. Any *aveirah* committed runs contrary to his true nature; sin is an aberration. Therefore, the natural course of events is such that the

Jew, even though he has the full ability to exercise his free will, will eventually return to his root nature. [See *MiPinei HaRav*, 2001 ed., pp. 281-282; *Nefesh HaRav*, 1994 ed., pp. 72-74; *Rav Schachter on the Parsha*, *Parshas Metzora*.]



מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר
 בֶּן עֶזְרִיָּה וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן
 שֶׁהָיוּ מְסַבִּין בְּבֵנֵי בְּרַק, וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת
 מִצְרַיִם כָּל אוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה. עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ תַלְמִידֵיהֶם
 וְאָמְרוּ לָהֶם, רַבּוֹתֵינוּ הֵגִיעַ זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע
 שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית.

3. Rav Schachter on the Haggadah



AN INCIDENT OCCURRED WITH REBBI ELIEZER. The Haggadah enumerates two halachos with regard to the mitzvah of sippur yetzi'as Mitzrayim: First, even great talmidei chachamim are obligated in the mitzvah, and second, whoever speaks about yetzi'as Mitzrayim at length is praiseworthy. The Haggadah then brings this anecdote in order to prove these halachic points.

The Tanna'im in this story gathered together and discussed yetzi'as Mitzrayim all night long. These great talmidei chachamim would not have wasted their time, talking about yetzi'as Mitzrayim all night, if a mere passing mention of yetzi'as Mitzrayim suffices to fulfill the mitzvah. Obviously, it is praiseworthy to tell about yetzi'as Mitzrayim with as much elaboration as possible, and even if one is a Torah scholar.

In this context, Rav Soloveitchik pointed out the difference that exists between ge'onei Yisrael and men of renown of the nations of the world. We cannot necessarily learn a proper way of life from the actions of judges or professors, Presidents or congressmen. There are no grounds to assume that they definitely abide by the law. Their high positions do not always reflect refinement of character or correct practice in their private lives.

For us, in contrast, a ga'on must be a tzaddik as well. That is why we can learn halachos from stories about talmidei chachamim – because their limud haTorah brings them to zehirus (heedfulness), then to zerizus (diligence), and then to yiras cheit and kedushah (Avodah Zarah 20b).

Our ability to study the practices

of talmidei chachamim is based on the assumption that they are not only great scholars, but also tzaddikim who are punctilious in mitzvah observance. Therefore, all of their actions are relevant halachah lema'aseh. Indeed, if a rav is known to violate mitzvos of the Torah, he forfeits his status as one of the chachmei haMasorah. The Gemara says that even if a rav violates a din derabbanan such as pas akum (bread baked by non-Jews), one is not allowed to repeat halachos in his name (Avodah Zarah 35b).

Because we assume that our scholars also act in a manner worth emulating, the Gemara advances the principle of מעשה רב – “Practice is greater [proof than a formal ruling]” (Shabbos 21a). In order to prove what the din is, the Gemara may cite that a certain Tanna or Amora paskened accordingly, but it is even more compelling if it can be demonstrated that the talmid chacham himself acted that way. מעשה רב – what a talmid chacham does in practice – is the best proof.

In our context, we tell the story about the Tanna'im who discussed yetzi'as Mitzrayim the entire night in order to infer the halachah of כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובה [See MiPineei HaRav, 2001 ed., Hakdamah, p. 9.]

4. *Sridei Eish Hagaddah*

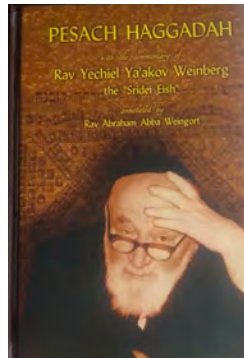
Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov
Weinberg
1884-1966

Sridei Eish

The wise one, the wicked one, the simple one, and the one who doesn't know to ask – אחד חכם ואחד רשע ואחד – הם ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול

Thus, we are to internalize the basis of the unity among all parts of the nation, between the learned sons and the ones who have doubts. At the same time, we are to impart to each of the sons the type of attention that is specific to his needs, in the sense implied by the verse, "Teach the child according to his way" (Mishlei 22:6). In addition, it us upon us, as fathers, to follow in the path of our forefather Avraham when he went to bind Yitzchak: "And the two of them walked together" (Bereishis 22:8) – this one to bind and that one to be bound; this one to be slaughtered and that one to be slaughtered (Bereishis Raba 56:3). Is there a picture more stirring than this, father and son going side by side? In this way, similarly, each person goes his own way, and yet are equal in mindset, together in thought, to do the will of their Maker. There is nothing that attests more clearly to the greatness of Avraham, and that reveals the light of Avraham's faith more – than the actions of his son, because only a son of Avraham could have been capable of such discipline and greatness of spirit as this.

And if nowadays we can no longer employ the verse, "And the two of them walked together" about many houses of Israel – it is because there



develops, it is no longer possible to place the responsibility on the parents,

is no longer shared will and aspiration between parents and children. It is impossible to demand sacrifices from our youth, we cannot expect of them to give up many social and financial advantages in order to hold onto their faith and serve their Maker, if they do not have a living model before their eyes, if they do not see parents who are also prepared to make sacrifices. Avraham "rejoiced to do the will of his Maker." Yet, at the same time, "there were tears falling from Avraham's eyes into the eyes of Yitzchak" (Bereishis Raba 56:8). The readiness to sacrifice went hand in hand with tremendous love that flowed from father to son. When a child sees and feels with all two hundred and forty-eight limbs both these things together, he "contracts" that same readiness... What is said in the recitation of Shema may be understood in light of this: "You shall drill into your children." How so? "You shall speak about them while sitting in your house and while walking on the way, and while lying down and while getting up." When the child sees how his father's entire life revolves around Torah, it will be the same for him.

When it is no longer possible to place the responsibility on the parents

If despite all this, a wicked son develops, it is no longer possible to place the responsibility on the parents,

for this is the outcome of the basic freedom of choice granted to each and every person. In the very same house, with the same educational background, both a Ya'akov and an Esav can emerge.

The unique contribution of each son

Each of the sons, who represent the wide range of Jewish children, contribute uniquely to the nation's make-up. This contribution receives

its full expression after clarifying the characteristics of each son, which at first glance seem to contradict each other, yet which, at the end of the day, supplement one another. At the extremes, the wise son comes to connect the pieces and the wicked son to take them apart.

יכול מראש חֶדֶשׁ, תִּלְמוּד לומר בְּיוֹם הַהוּא.
 אִי בְּיוֹם הַהוּא, יְכוּל מִבְּעוֹד יוֹם. תִּלְמוּד לומר, בְּעֵבֶר זֶה.
 בְּעֵבֶר זֶה לֹא אֲמַרְתִּי, אֶלָּא בְּשָׁעָה שְׁשִׁישׁ מִצָּה וּמְרוֹר מְנַחִים לְפָנֶיהָ.

One might think that [the discussion of the Exodus] must begin from the first of the month. The Torah therefore states, "On that day."⁵⁶ "On that day," however, could mean while it is yet daytime; the Torah therefore states, "It is because of this."⁵⁷ The expression "because of this" can only be said when matza and *maror* are placed before you.

5. *Unlocking the Hagaddah*
 R' Shmuel Goldin



Food for Thought

A. Understanding the *hava amina* (original assumption) in any Talmudic discussion is critical to the course of Talmud study. The logic behind the rabbis' initial positions, even if those positions are ultimately disproven, provides valuable insights into the nature of rabbinic thought and methodology.

Later scholars, therefore, question the Midrashic suggestion that the mitzva of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* should be launched yearly on the first day of Nisan. Why would we even assume, these authorities ask, that

the mitzva of retelling the Exodus story would begin fifteen days before the date the Exodus actually occurred?

B. Numerous authorities explain that the *hava amina* of the Midrash is based on the conviction that the Israelites' path toward freedom begins in earnest not on the date of the actual Exodus, but earlier, on the first day of Nisan. We have previously reviewed the foundations of this belief (see p. 40), but will again summarize them here.

1. On Rosh Chodesh Nisan, the Israelites receive their first mitzvot as a nation:

the mitzva of Kiddush Hachodesh (sanctification of the new moon) and the commandments associated with the Korban Pesach. God's transmission of these edicts constitutes a critical first step in the redemptive process, marking the moment when the nation's allegiance to divine law begins. Freedom from servitude to man must be immediately accompanied by a new sense of service to the Divine, if the nascent Jewish nation is to succeed across time.

2. The content of these first mitzvot also shapes the nation's first real steps toward independence. By commanding the Israelites concerning the sanctification of time, God underscores the dividing line between slavery and freedom. A slave's time is controlled by others, while a free man is in control of his time. *By granting you dominion over your calendar, God essentially declares to the Israelites, I grant you control over time itself. Use your moments wisely; fill them with significance and meaning, and you will truly learn to be free.*

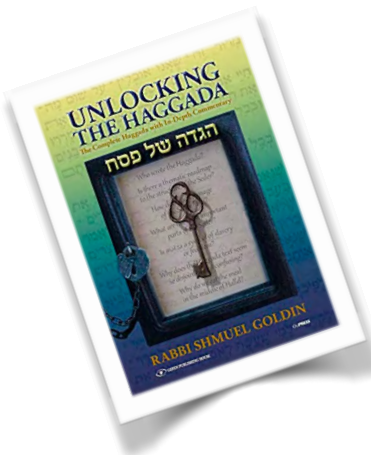
3. Many scholars maintain that the instructions concerning the Korban Pesach also constitute a declaration of freedom from Egyptian mastery. God directs the nation to publicly set aside a lamb, a god of Egypt, on the tenth day of Nisan, to slaughter that lamb as an offering on the fourteenth of the month, and to consume

that lamb in its entirety on the eve of the fifteenth. The very awareness of these looming events, granted to the Israelites on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, increases their growing spiritual severance from the powerful culture around them.

4. Because these events occurred on the first day of Nisan, a case can be made that the mitzva of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* should be yearly launched on that date.

C. In spite of these and other possible arguments, however, the Midrash rejects Rosh Chodesh Nisan as the starting point for the performance of the mitzva of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Rejected, as well, is the possibility that this mitzva should be fulfilled during the daylight hours of the fourteenth or the fifteenth of the month. Based on the biblical phrase "*ba'avur zeh*" (because of this),⁵⁸ the rabbis conclude that the mitzva must be performed in the presence of the physical symbols of the Seder night, "when the matza and the *maror* are lying before us."⁵⁹

The full significance of the role played by physical symbols in the mitzva of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* has been discussed in our introductory essay "More Than a Mitzva: *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*" and will be further clarified when we reach the final section of Maggid (pp. 133–38).



יכול מראש חודש – ONE MIGHT THINK THAT IT APPLIES FROM ROSH CHODESH. Rav Soloveitchik (*Shiurim L'Zecher Abba Mari Z"l II*, 5745 ed., pp. 153-154) explained why Chazal entertained the possibility that the *mitzvah* of *sippur yetzi'as Mitzrayim* commences with the beginning of the month of Nissan.

As we discussed earlier (see p. 87), the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah* 7:1) compares the word זכור written in connection with *yetzi'as Mitzrayim*, זכור, to the word אשר יצאתם ממצרים found in the context of Shabbos, זכור את יום השבת. Regarding Shabbos, זכור entails focusing one's thoughts on Shabbos. *Rashi* (*Shemos* 20:8) writes, "Pay attention to always remember the day of Shabbos, so that if you will come upon an attractive object [during the week], designate it for Shabbos." The *Ramban* (*Shemos* 20:8) describes that we constantly remember the Shabbos by referring to the days of the week according to Shabbos. The days are not given their own names, but are known simply as "the first day of the Shabbos," "the second day of the Shabbos," and so on. In this way, one looks forward to Shabbos during the entire week and is never distracted from it.

The same applies to the זכור of *sippur yetzi'as Mitzrayim*. On *seider* night, one must not allow himself to be distracted from experiencing the *yetzi'ah*. The *mitzvah* is for one to be absorbed in the story of *yetzi'as Mitzrayim*, as if he is

living through the events he is telling about. He must feel the slavery and the freedom.

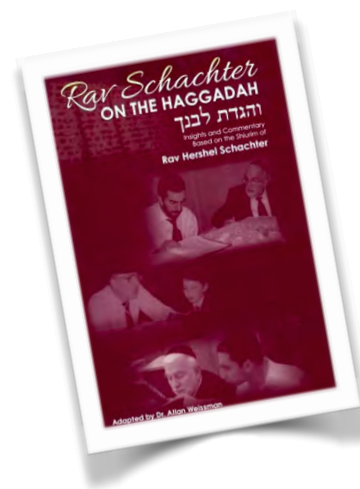
Since, in the context of the זכור of Shabbos, the *mitzvah* begins at the start of the week, one might have thought that the same is true for the זכור of *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* – that *sippur* begins on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. Indeed, it is only because of another consideration that the *mitzvah* does not begin on Rosh Chodesh. As the paragraph concludes, *sippur* may only be fulfilled in conjunction with the *Korban Pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror*, and these *mitzvos* only have relevance on *seider* night.

The *Nesivos* (*Ma'aseh Nissim*, s.v. *yachol*) cites the *passuk*, היום אתם יוצאים – בחודש האביב – "Today you are leaving, in the month of springtime" (*Shemos* 13:4), as indicating that the month of Nissan in particular was established as the *chodesh hageulah*. He writes that at the time of *yetzi'as Mitzrayim*, a *nes* occurred so that the *mazal* of *tleh* that typically rules this month was overpowered. That is why, *Hashem* singled out the month of Nissan when He gave the *mitzvah* of *kiddush hachodesh*: החדש הזה לכם – "This month [Nissan] shall be for you the beginning of the months" (*Shemos* 12:2). Indeed, the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (11a) famously records, בניסן נגאלו בניסן עתידין ליגאל – "In Nissan, they were redeemed; in Nissan, they are destined to be redeemed." For this reason, we have a *minhag* not to recite *Tachanun* and not to fast during the entire month of Nissan; we treat the whole month as if it is a semi-Yom Tov, a *zman hageulah*.

The *Netziv* (*Ha'amek Davar*, *Shemos* 12:2) expands upon this concept. The *Mishnah* in *Rosh Hashanah* (1:1) teaches that for the purpose of dating documents, Jewish kings count their years starting from the month of Nissan, while non-Jewish kings date their reign from Tishrei. The *Netziv* explains that for non-Jews, who follow the **natural**

rules of history, Tishrei is the appropriate month to use as their starting point, since all of Nature began in Tishrei, with the act of Creation. In contrast, the Jewish Nation follows a **supernatural** pattern, exemplified by the miraculous events surrounding *yetzi'as Mitzrayim* in Nissan. This month, therefore, is the appropriate first month of the year for *Klal Yisrael*. This explains why only Jewish kings mark the beginning of their reign from Nissan.

6. Rav Schachter on the Hagaddah



ניח הכוס מידו ויגלה המצות.

**צֵא וּלְמַד מֵה בְּקֶשׁ לֶבֶן הָאֶרְמִי לַעֲשׂוֹת לַיַּעֲקֹב
אָבִינוּ. שְׁפָרְעָה לֹא גָזַר אֱלֹא עַל הַזְּכָרִים
וּלְבֶן בְּקֶשׁ לַעֲקֹר אֶת הַכֹּל, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:**

**אֶרְמִי אֹבֵד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִמָּה וַיִּגַּר שָׁם
בְּמַתִּי מֵעֵט, וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָדוֹל, עֲצוּם
וְרָב**

7. Minchas Chain

Hagaddah

R' Noach Isaac Oelbaum



לענ"ד נראה, דבהך פרשה ישנו ענין מיוחד להאריך בה ובסיפורה, דבפרשה זו מתבאר לנו גישה חדשה ויסודית בהכרת ענין גאולת מצרים, דבפשיטות אנו מבינים דעיקר השמחה דאנו משבחים ומפארים הוא על גאולתינו ועל פדות נפשינו, אולם באמת רואים אנו מהשתלשלות ביאת אבותינו למצרים, יסוד חדש, דמה שנדמה פעמים לעין האדם לצרה ולמכה, הוא באמת טובה ורפואה, וממה שהגויים חושבים לעשות לנו רעה מזה בעצמו נמשך לנו ישועה והצלה, וזה ראינו גם בירידת אבותינו למצרים, דאז ה' נראה שהוא צרה גדולה שהוכרחו לעזוב ארץ אבותם ולילך בגלות בארץ לא להם, ובאמת נשתלשלו מזה טובות גדולות לישראל, - ראשית ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול עצום ורב, דמה שהם נתחכמו לישראל למעטם ע"י עבודה קשה פן ירבה ופן יפרוץ, גרם שהקב"ה הרבה אותם כמש"כ "וכאשר יענו אותו כן ירבה וכן יפרוץ", וכאשר נאמר עוד בגזירת אם בן הוא והמיתן אותו, וירב העם ויעצמו מאד, כמו שהעיר הרמב"ן (במדבר ג' פ"ד) על הפלא ששבט לוי הוי הפחותים במספר מכל שבטי ישראל ולא הגיעו אף לחצי שבט מישראל הפחות מכולם, וכ' הרמב"ן, דזה ה', יען ששבטי של לוי ל"ה בשעבוד מלאכת מצרים, ודוקא שאר ישראל

ארמי אובד אבי: בהגש"פ "מועדים וזמנים" (עמוד ע"ו) כתב, דנפלאים הם דברי הרמב"ם בשעה שמפרש חובת אמירת הגדה (פ"ז חו"מ), דמסיק שם "וכן מתחיל ומודיע שעבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים וכל הרעה שגמלנו, ומסיים בנסים ונפלאות שנעשו לנו ובחרותינו, והוא שידרוש מארמי אובד אבי עד שיגמור כל הפרשה, וכל המוסיף ומאריך בדרש פרשה זו, הרי זה משובח". ולכאורה צע"ג, דלמה מפרש כל המרבה לספר ביצי"מ הרי"ז משובח כשמאריך בפרשה זו של ארמי אובד אבי דוקא, והא לכאורה כללא הוא בכל סיפור הלילה שנכון להאריך, יעו"ש, - אכן

שמררו המצריים את חייהם בעבודה קשה כדי למעטם, בזה ה' הקב"ה מרבה אותם כנגד גזירתם, דנראה דברי מי יקום, משא"כ שבט לוי של"ה בשעבוד עבודה, היו פרים ורבים רק כדרך כל הארץ, יעו"ש, - נמצא דמהגזירה עצמה נסתבב טובה גדולה לישראל שפרו ורבו וירבו ויעצמו במאד מאד, - וא"כ שפיר כ' הרמב"ם דהמאריך בפרשה זו הרי"ז משובח, דפרשה זו מיוחדת, דממנה אנו חזינן, דלא רק עצם הגאולה והישועה טובה לנו, רק אנו מבינים דגם הצרות והשעבוד שסבלנו, אף זה ה' ג"כ מגוף חלקי הגאולה והישועה, דמזה נסתבב טובה גדולה לישראל.



8. *Unlocking the Haggadah*
R' Shmuel Goldin



A. This segment of the Haggada has troubled me for years. Just a moment ago, we symbolized our sorrow over the suffering of the Egyptians by pouring a drop of wine from our cups with the mention of each of the ten plagues. Now, in contrast, the rabbis seem intent upon interpreting the events surrounding the Exodus in ways that magnify the pain experienced by the Egyptians. How are we to explain this sudden change in approach?

Given that midrashic literature is primarily used, according to many authorities, as a rabbinic vehicle for the transmission of spiritual, ethical and moral ideas, what messages are the rabbis conveying through the discussion before us?

B. Clearly bothered by this phenomenon, the scholars struggle to determine a positive message that might emerge from a multiplication of the afflictions affecting the Egyptians.

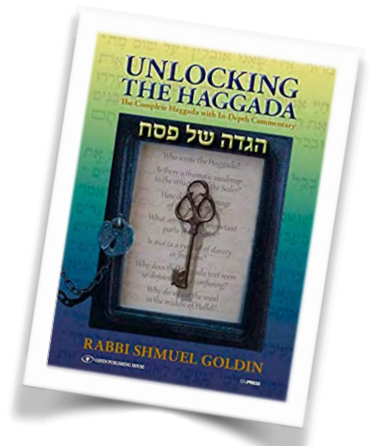
Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, the Vilna Gaon, for example, points to a divine promise delivered to the Israelites shortly after the parting of the Reed Sea: “If you hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord, your God, and do what is straight in his eyes, and pay attention to his commandments and observe all his decrees, then all of the diseases that I brought forth in Egypt, I will not bring upon you, for I am the Lord, your healer.”⁹⁶

The greater the number of afflictions that we can discern as having struck Egypt, the Gaon explains, the greater the number

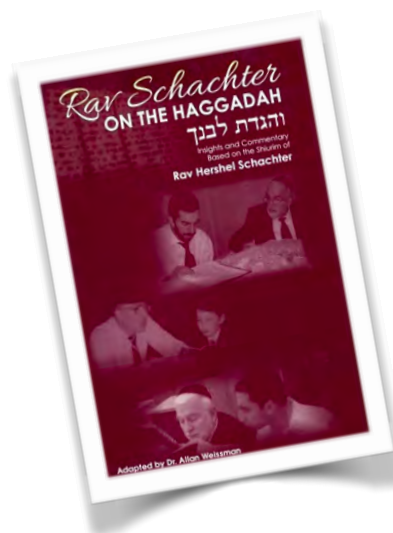
of afflictions from which God will protect the Jewish nation as a reward for their loyalty across time.⁹⁷

A fascinating midrashic observation in this vein is made by the nineteenth-century Hasidic sage Rabbi Aryeh Leib Alter, popularly known by the title of his most famous work, the *Sefat Emet*. Rabbi Alter notes that *the sum total of all the plagues presented in the Haggada* – the ten biblical plagues; the three phrases of the mnemonic presented by Rabbi Yehuda (*D'tzach Adash B'achav*); the sixty, two hundred forty, and three hundred plagues computed respectively by Rabbi Yossi Haglili, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva – *equals 613*. Subliminally, the Haggada reminds us that God's protection of His people is ultimately contingent upon their obedience to His law. Across time, observance of the 613 biblical mitzvot will protect the Jewish nation from numerous “afflictions of Egypt.”⁹⁸

Finally, the various interpretations we offered earlier concerning the purpose of the plagues as a whole can lend positive significance to their magnification, as well. Whether as vehicles for the revelation of God's existence, as teaching tools concerning the extent of God's involvement in human affairs, or as deserved punishment clearing the way for spiritual repentance on the part of the Egyptians, the plagues had a positive purpose. As painful as these afflictions were, they were ultimately designed to be of potential benefit to the Egyptians, the Israelites, and a watching world.



9. Rav Schachter on the
Hagaddah



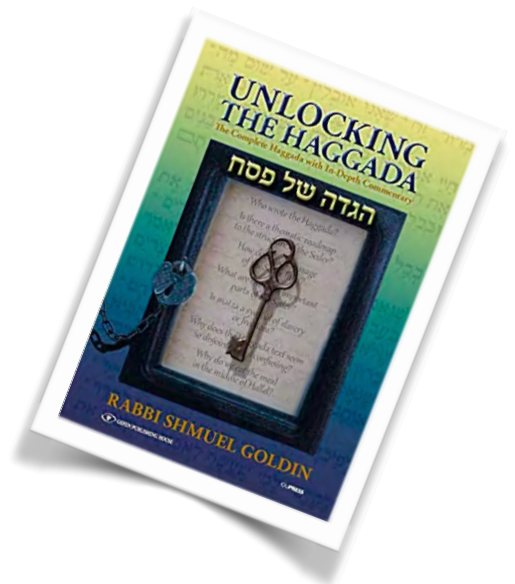
שולחן ערוך. The Mishnayos in *Pesachim* (5:7, 10:6-7) record that *Hallel* must be recited twice – first at the time of the offering of the *Korban Pesach* on *erev Pesach* and again in connection with the eating of the *Korban Pesach*. *Hallel* is not recited during the meal itself, as the *Gemara* in *Ta'anis* (5b) teaches that אין מסיחין בסעודה – “one should not talk during a meal,” since doing so could cause choking. Thus, reciting *Hallel* at the time of eating the *Korban Pesach* means that one recites part of *Hallel* before the meal and the rest of *Hallel* after the meal. In this way, we are *kovei'a* (establish) the meal as a *se'udas hoda'ah*, a meal of thanksgiving (*Netziv*, *Imrei Shefer*, *Pesichah* and s.v. *u'mafsikin b'emtza haHallel*).

The institution of *se'udas hoda'ah* is based on the *parsha* of *Korban Todah*, in which one who wishes to express his gratitude toward *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*

brings a specific type of *Korban Shelamim*. The *Netziv* (*Ha'amek Davar*, *Vayikra* 7:13) highlights the fact that a *Korban Shelamim* may ordinarily be eaten for two days – the day it is offered, the subsequent night, and the next day – whereas a *Korban Todah* may only be eaten on the day it was offered and on the subsequent night. The *Netziv* explains that the reason for this discrepancy is that the shorter time frame of the *Korban Todah* will compel the one offering the *korban* to invite many more people to eat the *korban*, with the result that he will praise *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* in the presence of a larger group of people. The *se'udah* in which the *Korban Todah* is consumed will thus be converted into a *se'udas hoda'ah*.

Similarly, the *se'udah* on *seder* night, through our surrounding it with *Hallel*, takes on the character of a *seudas Korban Todah*.

10. *Unlocking the
Haggadah*
R' Shmuel Goldin



A. The last *piyut* recited on the Seder night is the most well known of the Haggada's *piyutim*, yet also the most mysterious and obscure.

Chad Gadya is a poem of unknown authorship, but like Echad Mi Yode'a is reported to have been displayed in the study of Rabbi Elazar Rokeach in the early thirteenth century. This early sighting notwithstanding, Chad Gadya is the most recent of the Nirtza poems to be included at the Seder, making its first appearance in a printed Haggada in Prague in 1590.

B. After indicating that a solitary goat is bought by a father for two *zuzim* (a *zuz* being an ancient Judean coin), Chad Gadya outlines a series of nine violent attacks: by a cat upon the goat; by a dog upon the cat; by a stick upon the dog, and so forth, culminating in God's destruction of the Angel of Death. No reference is made to any subject associated with Pesach. In fact, no direct reference is made to any overriding religious theme at all.

The obvious question, therefore, must be raised: Why is Chad Gadya included in the Haggada, particularly as the culminating entry in the text?

C. A variety of answers have been suggested by the scholars.

Some scholars view Chad Gadya as an allegorical review of the turbulent historical passage of the Jewish people. The goat, these scholars maintain, symbolizes the Jewish nation, while the various "attackers" represent that nation's countless persecutors

across the ages. The *piyut* ends on a positive note, with the ultimate redemption symbolized by God's slaying of the Angel of Death.

Other authorities offer vastly different interpretations for this poem, suggesting themes ranging from the spiritual challenges confronting individuals over the course of their lives to the steps of the Pesach ritual performed in Temple times.

D. Perhaps, however, another global interpretation can be offered for the strange inclusion of Chad Gadya in the Seder service.

Throughout the evening that now draws to a close, we have celebrated the "Seder," the divinely driven historical "order" that shapes our nation's journey (see p. 14). We have shared in a world in which everything makes sense, all questions have answers and God's presence is clearly evident in our national history from its earliest footfalls.

We now, however, prepare to leave the rarefied atmosphere of the Seder and reenter a world in which God's presence can be difficult to discern – where cats eat goats, dogs bite cats, sticks beat dogs with impunity; where the natural order continues

around us, without apparent divine intervention. More significantly, we reemerge into a world that often does not make sense, in which questions don't always have answers and the righteous may well suffer while the wicked may well prosper.

As the Seder closes, Chad Gadya offers a nod to the world in which we daily live, yet simultaneously offers a significant qualification.

By weaving a tale in which seemingly random violence ultimately gives way to God's will, this *piyut* urges us not to be misled by "appearances" around us. God is present in our world, Chad Gadya declares, even when He is hidden; our lives are not governed by chance but by divine plans beyond our comprehension. We are traveling toward a day when all will become clear.

The Seder is designed to remain with us long after its conclusion; coloring our sometimes difficult days with a deep, abiding belief in God's guiding hand. Serving as the "airlock" through which we move from the Seder evening to the rest of our lives, Chad Gadya marks the first step in the application of the Seder's messages to a challenging, often bewildering world.