

Yavneh Special Collections: The Seder Companion

Pesach 5784



DEAR YAVNEH

בס"ד

Long ago, we set out on an important journey. On a night such as this, we left our homes in Egypt, leaving behind a life of slavery and degradation to embark on a quest for freedom and dignity. Sharing food is the first act through which slaves become free. A person who fears tomorrow does not share with others, but someone who shares his food with a stranger has already shown himself capable of fellowship and faith - the two things from which hope is born. That is why we begin the Seder by inviting others to join us to share in our meal. By reaching out to others, by giving help to the needy and companionship to those who are alone, we bring freedom into the world. As we gather once again to celebrate and are reminded of the timeless journey embarked upon by our people, we share both food and knowledge.

In the spirit of our collective responsibility to uphold the values of our people and our community, we are delighted to present to you the 2024 edition of "Yavneh Special Collections: The Seder Companion." This compilation of divrei torah reflects the wisdom and insights of our community, offering guidance and inspiration for your Seder experiences, encouraging all of us to join as a community of individuals, each sharing wisdom and insights with one another so that we enhance our sense of dignity and our enjoyment of our freedoms.

Chag kasher v'sameach,

THE YAVNEH BOARD 2024-25





KADESH

BY JAKE WOLF



In Kiddush, we say “mekadesh yisrael v’hazmanim,” that Hashem sanctified yisrael and the zman. We know the power of sanctifying time is in the hands of the Sanhedrin, as they establish the calendar. However, Rav Pam writes that not only does the Sanhedrin have the power to make time holy, but each one of us do. We have the opportunity to approach every moment, every hour in our lives with an attitude of either holy or mundane. What will we choose to do with our time? Will we devote it to something holy or not? I think this is the reason for why we start the seder off with kadesh. One explanation could be that, because the first hallmark of freedom is sovereignty over your time, and the point of the seder is to relive the exodus from Egypt, and the first mitzvah Jews received was sanctifying time, we start with kadesh. Another explanation could be that the seder is a structured meal, with many details, yet we are tasked every year with completing it the best way we can. Hashem is putting it in our hands. Hashem has given us the rough outline, now it’s time for us to carry it out ourselves. Along the lines of making every moment holy, I wanted to take the time to thank everyone in this community who has contributed to making Torah a part of our daily lives. Looking back on this year, if you told me I would be Torah chair and coming to Mishmars once a week by Spring, I would’ve laughed in your face. From the moment I stepped on campus I was drawn in by the warmth of the Yavneh community, and pleasantly surprised by the ease of which I could balance a secular college life with my Jewish values. Going from a gap year in Israel to a secular college in America, I feared it would be hard for me to hold onto my Jewish identity. Being a good yid in Jerusalem is much easier than doing the same on campus. However, my fears were not realized. Members of Yavneh past have implemented measures such as the eiruv, and shabbos meals, to make everyone in this community feel at home. I want to take a moment to thank them. Today, even after the year we’ve had, and oh it’s been a year, I look back and I feel content. All the horrors of the war, and everything that has been happening on college campuses have somehow been counterbalanced by becoming a member of such a welcoming and thriving community. I want to thank everyone who makes that possible. Everyone who comes to minyan, cooks for shabbos, drives to the north side, writes divrei torah, gives mishmar, comes to Hillel on shabbos, davens or leins, cleans after shabbos, or does anything as a member of the community, you may not think about it everyday but you are a vital component of this community, and I appreciate you. Here’s to another year, lachayim.



U'RECHATZ

BY NOAH BIRNBAUM

The Rav brings the following question: What does the order of Kadeish first than Urchatz mean? The normal and natural way that we usually do things when we try to get close to Hashem is to first “wash off” or distance ourselves from the bad and then we can receive kedusha following the tahara. So why during the seder do we do the exact opposite?

The answer is found in the Pesach story. When they left Mitzrayim, Bnei Yisroel were still engrossed within the 49th level of tumah. Hashem made it so that they were made holy before even cleansing off that tumah. Hashem brought them straight up to the highest level of kedusha in order to leave Mitzrayim.

This is the very essence of Pesach. Hashem gives every one of us the ability to pass over all of the lengthy processes of coming out of the tumah to see where we can be. This insight gives us the koach to then work through that tumah already knowing what it's like on the other side of the rough spiritual battle. We need to show Hashem these days how much we long for a life of kedusha so that Hashem helps us fight off all of those impurities that come forth. Our connection to kedusha is eternal and on these days we must tap into that wellspring and bring it out. Every Jew yearns for a deep connection with Hashem and this longing is what will bring us to be able to battle our yetzer hara.

Therefore, on Pesach, we reverse the order: Kedusha (Kadeish) then Tahara (Urchatz). We connect with our essence of kedusha and Hashem then gives us the koach to take on the great act of cleansing ourselves and removing any blocks between us and our Father in Heaven. It is through this that we are able to prepare ourselves to become a vessel for Hashem's shechina in this world.

KARPAS

BY OLIVER BASS

To lean, or not to lean? Looking around at a seder, it seems most people do not recline during karpas. Many haggadot do not even give explicit instructions one way or another. It is true that the poskim all agree reclining is not an obligation, but there is a disagreement regarding best practice. The Kitzur (119:3) says explicitly that one should eat the karpas reclining to the left – as does the Abudarham –while the Shibbolei Haleket (§218), a 13th century Rishon, says one should not recline. The Shulchan Arukh does not present an opinion at all, while the Rambam implies one should recline but does not say so explicitly (see 8:2 “הַמְסֹבִין” as well as 7:8). Apparently, Rav Elyashiv would lean some years and not others! Perhaps the most commonly heard argument against reclining is that the salt water in which the karpas is dipped is said to symbolize our tears during slavery, and while we are remembering our suffering it is not appropriate to recline (for reclining is an expression of freedom and luxury). Despite its popularity, the idea that salt water represents our tears in Egypt is actually incredibly recent. In a fascinating paper about the origin of this interpretation, Rabbi Dr. Zvi Ron shows the earliest known source that connects the salt water of karpas to our tears in Egypt is younger than two hundred years old. The Gemara is not clear about what the karpas is to be dipped in; it certainly does not mention salt water. The Rambam understood the sugya to imply the karpas was dipped in charoset just like the maror. However, the Tosfos quotes the Rashbam who understands the wording of the Gemara (Pesachim 114) to imply that the charoset was not yet at the table during karpas; therefore, the karpas had to have been dipped in something else. For the Rashbam’s younger brother, Rabbeinu Tam, ‘something else’ was either vinegar or salt water. The Rema concurs that vinegar is a viable option, and the Mishnah Berurah says one may even use wine if one desires (473:54). Rabbi Dr. Zvi Ron argues salt water and vinegar were popular choices among the Rishonim for a beautifully straightforward reason: it was simply normal to dip vegetables into salt water and vinegar at that time. This explains why no symbolic explanation arose for the salt water for several hundred years – there was no need to provide a symbolic meaning as long as salt water was recognized as a standard dip.





KARPAS

CONTINUED

The fact that the symbolic connection between salt water and tears is recent does not mean it ought to hold little weight. But if that were the only argument against leaning, it should be noted that the Mishnah Berurah (475:14) rules one who wishes to lean during maror may do so, and since maror is an explicit reference to our suffering in Egypt, a fortiori we should be allowed to recline during karpas (at least according to the Mishnah Berurah). So what is the Shibbolei Haleket's reason for not reclining? He explains the sages did not institute karpas for itself but only to exempt the maror from a bracha (due to uncertainty whether or not it will be covered by hamotzi). He explains that because the karpas is not an intrinsic part of the seder, one should not recline. On the other hand, the Rambam requires that a kezayit of karpas be eaten. Eating a whole kezayit is not necessary to exempt the maror, which implies that the Rambam believes the sages instituted karpas for itself. This could explain why the Rambam implies one should recline.

The most commonly given reason for karpas's inclusion in the seder is to arouse the children's interest with novel behavior (see Rashi, Rashbam, Rambam on the last Mishnah on Pesachim 114a, for example). But as we have explained above, dipping vegetables in salt water would not have been seen as strange. What is odd – or at least what the children were supposed to find odd – is that we eat the vegetables before we have broken bread (Bartenura, Tur), and that we do not continue to eat after karpas. The Abudarham held that leaning during karpas is yet another way to arouse the curiosity of the children.

There is no “right” answer to the question of whether or not to lean. To honor both opinions, the 19th century Turkish Rabbi Haim Palachi suggests eating some karpas reclining and some sitting upright. In light of this view, and in light of Rabbi Elyashiv's practice, one should feel free to try something new this year. However you decide, just remember to have in mind that the bracha on karpas should also exempt the maror.

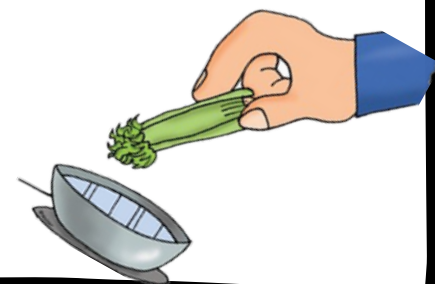
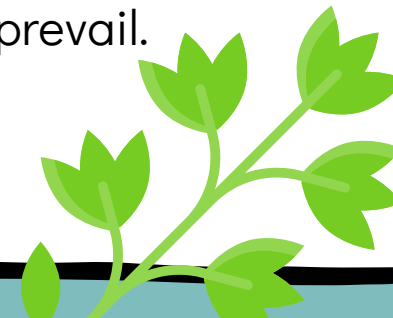
MORE KARPAS!

BY ISAIAH MILBAUER

FROM SALT WATER TO TAHANUN: FINDING A WAY FROM BROKENNESS

Since I was a child, I have looked forward to dipping karpas. I would impatiently wait at my seat for the parsley and the saltwater to reach me. This behavior was perhaps strange because saltwater is meant to represent our tears. At the same time, salt and water are substances of life. The covenant of salt speaks to our bond with God that gives life, is eternal, and will never be broken. To this end, Leviticus 2:13 reads: “You shall season your every offering of meal with salt.” Water is often likened to Torah and both are seen as sources of life. When we taste the karpas that we have dipped, we can taste the bitterness and sadness of our servitude, but maybe we can also taste the covenant and Torah. Moreover, without a love of life, and one another, there would be no reason to shed tears when we've suffered.

In the past few months, I've become more acquainted with Tahanun. We recite Tahanun after the weekday Amidah. The prayer speaks to our brokenness and the suffering that life can bring; but that even when we are weak, God is with us. We recite, “I soak my couch with my tears. My eye grows dim from grief.” When we taste our tears on Pesach, there is sadness but also redemption. The redemption arc is part of our daily prayers. Tahanun reads, “the Lord will accept my prayer,” a use of the future tense. We must believe in deliverance. We are still finding a way from brokenness and suffering. But, on Pesach we are imbued with hope, surrounded by one another and the knowledge that alongside mourning is the belief that life can prevail.






HA LACHMA ANYA

BY JAKE SPITZER

Maggid begins with Ha Lachma Anya, an introduction to the story of Pesach which seemingly has a bizarre composition. It begins with the declaration that the Matzah on the table is a poor man's bread, which our ancestors ate when they were enslaved in Egypt. This is followed immediately by inviting poor people to join the meal. And it then concludes with a hopeful yearning for redemption and a return to Israel. How do these three, seemingly independent parts make sense in unison and serve as an appropriate introduction to the Pesach story? To answer that question, I will start by asking a couple others. As we all know, the Pesach story is meant to be a retelling of our escape from Egypt, and a celebration of our freedom. Why, then, is the Matzah described as what our ancestors ate when they were enslaved, rather than Matzah's more well known characteristic of being the bread we took with us when we were set free? Also, offering to share what was just described as "poor man's bread" with poor people does not seem very gracious or hospitable, so what purpose does this serve? One answer to the first question is that Ha Lachma Anya serves as a reminder that our exodus from Egypt does not make us a 'redeemed' nation. It rebukes the idea that merely being set free from Egypt is the same as freedom for Am Yisroel. There is suffering in the world, Jews remain in exile, and Jerusalem is not yet rebuilt. Therefore, it is a powerful message: just as our ancestors were forced to eat poor man's bread, so too are we. Matzah cannot symbolize a redeemed man's bread when we still await the ultimate redemption. Connecting this with the second part of Ha Lachma Anya, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Saks z"l once wrote that sharing food marks the initial step in the transformation from slavery to freedom. A slave hoards food out of fear, but offering food to others signifies hope, a precursor to freedom. By opening the Seder by offering food to the less fortunate, we actively take steps to bring about the redemption of Am Yisroel. Only by sharing our Lachma Anya with others can we change it from poor man's bread to the emancipated man's bread - from bread of affliction to bread of freedom. Ha Lachma Anya serves as an inspirational message underscoring not just our present exile and lack of freedom, but the steps we take to remedy it, to bring ourselves out of exile, and to ultimately celebrate Pesach in a rebuilt Jerusalem. Ha Lachma Anya therefore demonstrates the liveliness of the Pesach story: not a stale narrative to remember, but an ongoing story of redemption in which we are active participants.





MA NISHTANA

BY AKIVA HABERMAN

We youngest children are often characterized as carefree and lacking any responsibility. However, twice a year, we alone bear the responsibility of singing **מה נשתנה**. Though I've been leading it at my סדר since I was able to, the whole concept puzzles me. We ask supposedly innocuous questions to learn about the seder, but in response are given answers that further confuse us. For example, when we ask about leaning at the seder: What does it mean that this night is different from the other nights—on which we eat while leaning and sitting up—because on this night, we only lean? I lean when obligated to (e.g. the four cups), but the rest of the time I sit upright, like all other nights. This question, like the others, leaves us with more questions than we started. So what is **מה נשתנה** asking and attempting to answer? Why does it seem counterproductive, and what function does it play in our seder? Much of our confusion about **מה נשתנה**'s function likely comes from a lack of context, so to better understand its function let us briefly discuss its origins. The tradition of reciting these four questions originates from Mishna 10:4 in Pesachim, which dictates that after the second glass of wine is poured, the son asks his father, “Why is this night different from the others?” Rabbi Dr. Richard Hidary draws a parallel between **מה נשתנה** and the first step of a Greco-Roman symposium: Exordium. The Exordium served as an introduction to the symposium's topic of discussion and as a way to engage the guests. So beyond our custom of reciting it, Rabbi Hidary writes, **מה נשתנה** serves a functional purpose similar to an Exordium's: introducing the topic of our seder, namely, Yetziat Mitzrayim, and engaging our seder guests. Today, however, **מה נשתנה** does not serve as a familiarizing introduction as it did in Mishnaic or Talmudic times because it confounds rather than clarifies. To start, depending on which version of the haggadah you read, there are different understandings for not only how many questions are being asked, but what is being asked, and if they are questions at all. A 1609 haggadah from Venice prints **מה נשתנה** with translations into three languages: Judeo-Italian, Judeo-German, and Judeo-Spanish. All three translations give distinct interpretations to the questions of **מה נשתנה** (Steiner). Additionally, because we engage with different secular and Jewish cultures, compared to 500 to 2000 years ago, our understanding of a typical night has changed. For instance, the second question of the Mishnah is today anachronistic: On all other nights we dip once, tonight we dip twice. **שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ מִטְּבִילִין פְּעַם אַחַת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְּעָמִים.**



MA NISHTANA

BY AKIVA HABERMAN

Although I am not intimately familiar with all dining etiquette (and some would say not familiar at all), I don't know anyone who dips all other nights. Rabbi Hidary links this detail with a Roman custom to dip all vegetables before the meal, so by the time we get to dipping the Maror it would be its second dipping. The change to dipping “no times” in our haggadot, as brought down by the Gemara (Pesachim 116a), reflects a different cultural norm, where it is not common to dip all the vegetables before the meal. However, the modification only further obfuscates the original meaning of the maror being dipped. To specifically reference Maror, the rabbis added a fourth question to the **מה נשתנה**: On all other nights we eat various vegetables, on this night [we eat] bitter herbs. **שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלים שאר ירקות הלילה הזה מרור**. Once more this answer leaves us a bit confused. Tonight we do not only eat maror, but we even have a tradition to eat other vegetables, namely **כִּרְפָּס**. Even the opening answer of **מה נשתנה** isn't straightforward, we say “This night is different because on all other nights we eat leavened bread and unleavened bread...” Nowadays, we don't normally eat matzah on other nights and we certainly have no obligations to do so. Between the ancient ambiguities of **מה נשתנה** and our modern lens, what should serve as an introduction to the seder ends up prompting more questions than it has answers. Though **מה נשתנה** creates many loose threads, we can actually benefit from our state of confusion. In Plato's Meno, when Socrates teaches an attendant a fact of math by first putting him in a state of numbness, he says, “Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know?” (Meno). Socrates demonstrates that becoming numb and confused is really the first step to learning and engaging; and, further, that we don't strive to understand more without an initial stage of confusion. At the Pesach Seder, we are not simply retelling the story of the exodus—we must see ourselves as having personally left Egypt (Pesachim 10). Yet we cannot do that without engaging with the texts of the haggadah. Although today **מה נשתנה** may not provide obvious answers to its questions, it puts us in a state of confusion that pushes us to engage and have a more meaningful seder.



AVADIM HAYINU

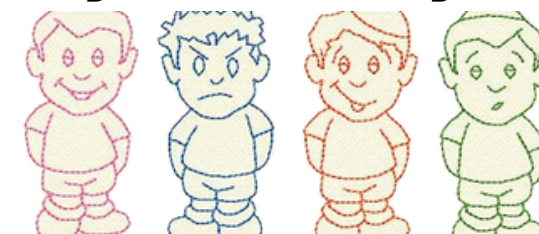
BY FINLEY HOROWITZ



Every year through the seder, we tell the story of our journey from slaves to free people. When we read the paragraph that begins with **עבדים היינו** - we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, now we are free people. This is a nice idea, but it's simply not true! Later in the Haggadah, during Hallel, we refer to ourselves as enslaved again, but only this time to a different master. We please Hashem because I am your slave. - **אני עבדך**. We still don't view ourselves as free people, but instead, we are enslaved to a different master - Hashem. So what do we mean when we talk about being free people? In mishnah Pirkei Avot, there is an interesting reading of the giving of the tablets that can offer us some insight **והלחת מעשה א-לקים המה והמכתב מכתב א-לקים הוא חרות על הלחת**, אל תקרא חרות אלא חרות. And it says, "And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets" (Exodus 32:16). Read not harut (engraved) but herut (freedom). This is what freedom really means. We had the freedom to choose to accept the tablets and be God's slaves. We will always be enslaved to something, but freedom is the ability to choose what we are enslaved to. As Jewish people leaving Egypt, we used our new freedom to choose Hashem as our master. So as we tell the story of our freedom through the seder, it doesn't mean a freedom with no commitment to anyone or anything. Rather, it means the freedom to choose Hashem as our master and be a part of His people.

THE 4 SONS BY KOBY ROSEN

Esteemed treasurer Alex Weiss recently challenged me to contemplate the following related to the 4 sons. Rasha asks, "What is this service for you?"; by separating himself from the other Jews, he effectively karets himself, the apt punishment for mocking a mitzvah where he is liable to karet. The Haggadah instructs us to respond to Rasha by saying that "It is because of this [service] that Hashem did for me when I left Egypt". This quotation seems to be a reference to Shemot 12:26... the only problem, as Alex suggests, is that this is not what the pasuk says. In fact, the pasuk does not say "li" (for me) at all but really says exactly what Rasha says, "What is this service for you", not for us. So, Alex asks, what gives?! One answer might be that those kids in Shemot are just rashas... not likely, as those kids seem to avoid rebuke. Here's what I suggest. In Shemot 12:27, the answer given to the children is that "This service is the Passover sacrifice to Hashem who passed over the houses of B'nei Yisrael in Egypt while smiting the Egyptians but saved our houses; the people bowed low". The parents here change the pronouns from you to we. This linguistic change imparts a lesson: service to Hashem is not just for the parents' generation but for all. By learning this lesson, the children come to intellectually join the nation. Rasha, on the other hand, is not naive. He has already been taught the lesson but insists on taunting. He reads the text for the sake of refuting it and not learning it (which, if this resonates today for some Haggadah-makers, great). Rasha comes from a place of arrogance; the kids in Shemot come from a place of curiosity, humility. At the end of Shemot 12:27, the pasuk says the people, the nation, bowed low which on the pshat does not seem to fit the flow of the perek. But, if we instead see this conflation of ideas as commenting on each other, we can come to understand that the kids are embodying this same humility before their parents and Hashem that this nation has before Hashem just after leaving Egypt. For purposely, arrogantly using his knowledge to divide, to generate chaos, Rasha requires rebuke.





PESACH. MATZAH. & MAROR



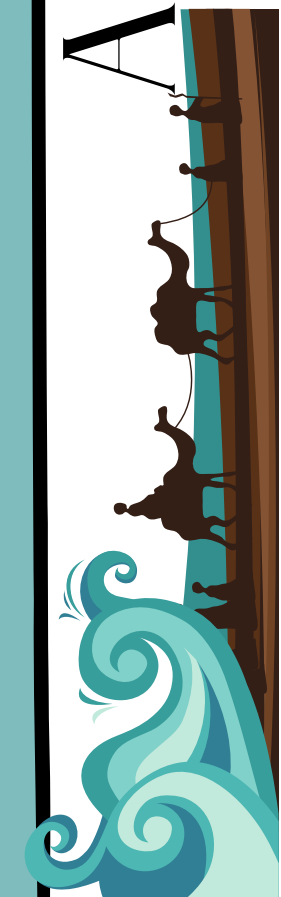
BY JOSH MILSTEIN

The unique nature of Pesach is often framed in temporal terms: *מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?* However, through an analysis of the centrality of Pesach, Matzah, and Maror to the seder, we will see an analogous, if not superior, locational distinctiveness to the seder night. Our first point of departure comes from a specific law only found in relation to the Korban Pesach. The Torah, when describing the obligation of the Korban Pesach, commands that once the Korban Pesach is slaughtered, it *cannot* be removed from one's house (*שמות יב: מו*). The only other place in Tanach or Halacha that we see such a specific spatial limitation on a Korban that is brought (aside from the general requirement to eat Korbanot within Jerusalem) is with the broad category of Korbanot designated as Kodshei Kodashim, the holiest Korbanot. Korbanot of such designation, for example the Korban Chatat, may only be eaten by Kohanim and *must* be eaten within the Mishkan or Beit HaMikdash (*ויקרא ו: יח-ט*). The only two places which act as physical constraints on the eating of a Korban are the Beit HaMikdash and the home on Pesach. Further, the strange phenomenon of painting the blood of the Korban on the doorposts of the house, a process only found by the Korban Pesach, can be likened to yet another temple ritual: the 7 sprinklings of the blood which accompanied each Korban. This practice, yet again, is even more spatially confined: not only must it occur in the Temple, but the blood itself must be sprinkled onto the Mizbeach, the temple altar. However, such connections are not just limited to the Pesach portion of the 3 staples of the Seder. Unlike most holiday obligations where there is either a requirement or a prohibition with regards to you as individual to (for example to sit in a Sukkah, not do work, or eat Matzah) the prohibition of Chametz is not merely that you as an individual do not eat Chametz, but additionally that, on a spatial level, Chametz cannot be found in your house (*שמות יב: יט-כ*). Rather, the Passuk emphasizes that “*כל מחמץ לא תאכלו בכל מושבותיכם תאכלו מצות*”. Not just that in the place of all of this Chametz, you should eat Matzah, but that you *מושבות*, your settlements, the physical space that you inhabit, should become a place where the typical presence of Chametz is usurped exclusively by Matzah. We see a precisely analogous formulation of such a phenomenon with the requirements of the *קרבן מנחה*, the flour offering, the only category of offering that involves bread ingredients. We see explicitly that “*כל המנחה אשר תקריבו לה' לא תעשו חמץ*”, No meal offering that you offer to Hashem should be made with Chametz (*ויקרא ב: יא*). This is the only other context in the whole of Tanach where we see the concept of Chametz appear. The only flour offerings that existed in the Beit HaMikdash were not allowed to be Chametz. Chametz was not to be offered on the Mizbeach. The Mizbeach in the Beit HaMikdash is a place where the ubiquity of Chametz is replaced by the sanctity of Matzah. The indispensable component of the Pesach Seder, epitomized by the Korban Pesach and the Matzah, all point to Pesach being not just about creating a palace in time, but about creating a physical palace in space as well. By taking the aspects of this palace we create, from the presence of Matzah over Chametz to the restriction on removing the Korban, implore us to recreate the Beit HaMikdash within our own homes. On Pesach, the family unit, the Chaburah, becomes the priestly class of divine worship and the home turns to the sacred temple where that worship is manifest. On the holiday focused on the building of our nation, the center of our focus turns towards the building blocks that make nationhood possible: the family.

AND WITH SIGNS

BY JOE KAPLAN

“And with signs” - this [refers to] the staff, as it is stated (Exodus 4:17); “And this staff you shall take in your hand, that with it you will preform signs.” Why does the Haggadah interpret “and with sings” as referring to Moshe’s staff? This seems more than a bit contrived, and for something that seems relatively unimportant to the overall exodus story. It is especially strange given that all of the other terms in the pasuk at issue, are interpreted in a manner that emphasizes Hashem’s direct role in the exodus story. Specifically, the Haggadah uses the pasuk to emphasize that Hashem Himself took the people out of Egypt and not an angel or a messenger, and otherwise to highlight elements of the story that were undeniably divine in nature. A shepherd’s staff seems like the polar opposite – an insignificant, utilitarian, essentially human object. Why is it important to recall such an object at this point in the seder? Perhaps one answer to this question is that the Haggadah is going out of it’s way to teach us –at the very moment we are focused on the centrality of the Divine role in the seminal story of our people– some important lessons about human leadership and the need for such leadership. First is that each and every one of us has the capacity to lead and inspire others regardless of our place in society. In this sense, Moshe’s staff symbolizes the achievement of greatness by a man of modest origins and limited resources. Second is that we should and can achieve human progress using whatever tools available to us. Just as Moshe uses his staff at various points in the torah to command respect, rally the troops, and invoke divine will, so too must we use the objects, tools and resources at our disposal in service of human advancement and in the pursuit of the divine command. Third is that human leadership is a critical and necessary component to the fulfillment of the divine plan. In other words, God demands each and everyone of us to step up. On Purim we read about Esther doing just that when the moment demanded it, putting her life at risk to save the Jewish people. Moshe had done the same thing earlier in our history, appearing uninviting before pharaoh to demand that he let the Jewish people go free. The fact that the Haggadah it self lists the staff–emblematic as it is of Moshe and the human element– on equal footing with the plagues, divine spirit and raw power that God brings to bear on, the Egyptians, drives home the message that we all have an imperative, to take hold of our own destiny, and to shape the realities of those around us.



MAROR

BY AKIVA DAVIS



The mitzvah of eating Maror at the seder comes from Shemot 12:8, which says “And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it.” This pasuk discusses the eating of the korban Pesach that Bnei Yisrael – אָמַר רַבָּא: בְּלַע מַצָּה – יֵצֵא, בְּלַע מָרוֹר – לֹא יֵצֵא. The gemara says One who swallows Matza [without tasting it] satisfies his obligation. One who swallows Maror [without tasting it] does not). It is made clear here that the mitzvah of eating the maror is not simply the process of eating it, unlike the (satisfy his obligation matzah, which does not have to be tasted. The actual mitzvah comes from tasting and truly experiencing the bitterness and pain associated with it. The reasons behind this pain are more complex than simply remembering the suffering we experienced in Egypt. Rabbi Zvi Hirschfeld brings a perspective on how eating the maror should bring about two types of sadness. One is a closed off and depressed sadness, which blocks out joy and holds us back, and the other is a sadness that comes from a sense of longing and idealism, where we are disappointed with how things are but are determined to change them. The purpose of the seder is to move from a sadness that holds us back to a sadness that propels us forward. Interestingly, the consumption of Maror mentioned in the Torah does not include eating it by itself, and is only talked about in regards to being eaten with the Korban Pesach. The wording used is “matzah al maror,” instead of “im,” the more standard word for “with.” This indicates that the Korban and the maror need not be physically combined when eaten, and they should only be eaten with each other. Thus according to the Ramban, there is no actual mitzvah to eat the maror by itself, which could be a potential reason for why we eat it with charoset. Another potential reason for why we dip the maror in charoset is to symbolize that the bitterness we experience has an aspect of sweetness as well. As mentioned before, we experience not just the sweetness that we are free now, but the fact that the bitterness of our current state is not an .endless or closed off sadness, but a sadness that can be acted on for the better

MAROR + KARPAS

BY JOEY ROSENFELD

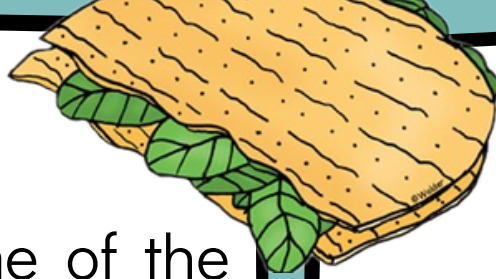
When thinking about when we dip something at the seder, one typically thinks about karpas. There, we dip a vegetable in saltwater and then proceed shortly after with the telling of the story. Yet there is another time that we dip a vegetable at the seder- marror. In the eighth step of the seder, we dip the marror into the sweet charoset. In a sense, these two acts of dipping serve as a bookend to the main obligation of the night: telling the story of Bnei Yisrael's exodus from Egypt. However, dipping didn't just serve as a bookend on leil haseder itself. Numerous rabbinical figures note that the Torah bookends the story of Bnei Yisrael's enslavement and redemption with dipping: the brothers dipped Yoseph's multicolored coat in blood, and Bnei Yisrael dipped the "agudos eizov" in blood to smear along their doorpost. Seemingly, the haggadah is trying to highlight a larger theme by structuring the seder the way it does. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks beautifully writes the following idea. The two dippings serve as an inverse of the other. In Karpas, we take something generally sweet (or at least pareve in that regard), and dip it into saltwater. Even something nice and sweet like freedom can evaporate if we turn against each other and have "sinas chinam". That can turn a relatively nice situation south in a hurry. On the other hand, we later take a bitter item called marror and dip it in something sweet - charoset. This comes to teach us the inverse lesson: if we can take something good like freedom and ruin it with sinas chinam, the opposite is also true.

Even if there are external threats from society around us, if we bond together and have a sense of "achdus" and share each other's pain, we can turn the most bitter items sweet. Yaakov's family at the time of Parshas Vayeshev had everything going for them from a socioeconomic perspective - and sinas chiman ruined it. In Egypt, despite the low physical conditions of the Jews, they were there for each other. Rabbi Dovid Gottleib, rabbi of Kehillat Haela in Ramat Beit Shemesh, notes that the Chofetz Chaim would quote midrashim emphasizing the extraordinary levels of chesed that Jews did for each other in Egypt. Perhaps the most famous Midrash on this theme was the fact that Bnei Yisrael set up the first gamach while the nation was enslaved. Even though they were all slaves, they realized that someone else had it worse, and they took it upon themselves to help others. When you are struggling, feel a natural reaction to look inward and act more selfish yet still help others, that is worthy of ushering in redemption. Perhaps no person in the world had a better excuse to not be so into the spirit of the night. Jennifer Ariely was the mother of Biyamin Ariely hyd, who was killed serving in Gaza in the early weeks of the war. A month later she was invited to a close friend's wedding and she was unsure if she would attend. She ultimately decided to go but thought she would leave early and not be able to fully experience such a high level of simcha. Yet during the chuppah itself, she thought to herself: no one here has a better excuse to not be so engaged at this simcha than me. Everyone will understand if I don't dance too much. Yet if I dance, everyone else will elevate the simcha in the room to such a high level specifically because I am investing in this simcha. Therefore, even though it won't be easy or natural for me, I will try to dance and increase the simcha in the room for the chosson and kallah. She did so - and the effects were tangible through the wedding hall and reverberated to all those around her. May we all merit to feel a sense of achdus will all of acheinu kol beis yisrael and be zoche to see the final redemption speedily in our days.



KORECH BY ZEV WOLDENBERG

We learn from the Gemara that Hillel, during the time of the second beit hamikdash, made a matza sandwich with Maror and the Korban pesach. Now today, because we don't have the Korban pesach, what do we use? Charoset. Interestingly, we replace the savory Korban pesach that balanced the bitter flavor of the maror with something sweet, Charoset (Unless one were to suggest that the kohanim were cheffin up a bbq brisket Korban pesach. But we are not so chutzpadik as to seriously suggest this.) So why this discrepancy in flavor? I would like to suggest that it is because during the time of the beis hamikdash we could truly, in our state of closeness to Hashem, tolerate the maror, the memory of slavery, unadulterated and unopposed in its bitterness. You can think of Hillel as getting a needle at the doctor's office, but while holding Hashem's hand. In being able to offer Hashem the Korban pesach, and not only that, but also sharing the korban pesach with Hashem, we might also feel that He shares in our bitterness, like a caring mother at the doctor's office. But today, without the beis hamikdash, we need an extra dose of sweetness to soften the bitterness of our memories of mitzrayim. And for this I think Hashem gives us Charoset.



BARECH BY KIRA POLLARD

There is a discussion in the book over whether one counts children in a Zimun. The answer depends on if they understand to whom we are blessing in the Birkat Hamazon. Rabba asks the young Rava and Abaya the question. They respond "Hashem." Rabba asks "where is Hashem?" Rava points to the ceiling "Hashem is in the house." Abaya goes outside and points to the sky. "Hashem is infinite." Rabba declares that they both will be great rabbis. Emphasis on the word both. And, in the Gemara they are always paired together. After Birkat שפור חמתך Hamazon and before Hallel, we open the door and say The custom is to remind us of pesach when the Beit Hamikdash stood. At that time, each family unit had to eat the Korban pesach by themselves. In fact, barriers were set up to delineate those private spaces (kol ditzreich was written while in exile). But after benching when the actual Seder part was completed, all of Jerusalem would go up to the rooftops and say Hallel together. We open the door at this point in our seder to remember how it was then and to perhaps demonstrate the lesson learned from Rava and Abaya. These two young boys had captured an important lesson that is vividly demonstrated at the Seder. Judaism family centered, concretizing the learning of the Torah. It is also expansive, reaching back to generations past as we learn from Rashi and others, and reaching forward to future generations as we teach them about our values. We start as a family unit then open our doors to the infinite majesty of being a part of the chain that connects us from generation to .generation

NIRTZAH

BY URIEL BAUER

After a long night of retelling Yetziat Mitzrayim as if it were happening to ourselves, we finally reach the last part of the Seder. The word Nirtzah can be translated in different ways, including pleasing/desired or accepted – the only time the word Nirtzah is used in the Chumash is in Vayikra when discussing how placing a hand on the head of a burnt offering makes the sacrifice “acceptable.” But as we get to this last part of the Seder, say “L’Shana Haba B’Yerushalayim,” and sing a few songs, what does it mean to engage in acceptance? The Seder is both spiritually and metaphysically an island in time, in which we bridge past and present and barely notice as conversation drags on until way past midnight. Eventually, though, we have to leave this island and return to the present reality. We are not in a rebuilt Jerusalem... and leaving the Seder to realize you’re in Hyde Park after feeling liberated during Maggid reminds us that Jews are still suffering today as they did in Mitzrayim prior to being redeemed. Acceptance, in Nirtzah, is gently grounding us back in a difficult reality after feeling elevated by the Seder, but allowing us to take the joy of the Seder back to 2024 by trying to lengthen the Seder with just a few more songs and a few more arguments about which tunes are better. Finally, while much of the Seder is about teaching the next generation about Yetziat Mitzrayim, such as the singing of Ma Nishtana, I was always motivated to stay awake until Nirtzah when younger – even if it ended up being far past my usual bedtime – because of the enjoyment from singing Echad Mi Yodea and accomplishing the feat of making it to the end of the Seder. However, as an adult, I see Nirtzah as an opportunity for those adults responsible for teaching the children during Maggid to end the Seder with a youthful enjoyment of their own. The pure singing, laughing, and that last cup of wine adds even more joyfulness to the Seder after following every step of the Haggadah in accordance with its rules and laws. We accept that we have ended the Seder – technically – but try to cover up the sorrow with an attempt at lengthening the Seder with a bit more delight in feeling freed.



NIRTZAH

BY EITAN FISCHER

Nirtzah, the conclusion of the Passover seder, is often overlooked. And, as a result of people around the table being exhausted, the importance is often forgotten. To me, however, the reflection on the night, and looking toward future Passover seders, is just as – if not more – crucial than the rest of the night.

To end Nirtzah, we sing “Leshanah haba’a biYerushalayim habenuya” – “Next year in Jerusalem rebuilt.” After all of the reflection during the Passover seder, this is the conclusion. This is what the writers of the Haggadah want you to remember. This comprehension of the importance of returning to Jerusalem is not unique to the Passover seder, however. We pray every day toward Jerusalem; at weddings, we break a glass in memory of the destruction of the temple; we sing about Jerusalem at the end of Neila. This recollection of the importance of Jerusalem is everywhere, and without such recollection, our purpose and our identity, as Jews, is faltered. “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy” (Tehilim 137:1–6).

The Passover seder, as emphasized in the final section ‘Nirtzah’, is not just one of the biggest and longest celebrated Jewish holidays. It is the ultimate form and the origin of Zionism. The seder provides us with two nights for us to remember the thousands of years that our Zionism has thrived, and how we have always chased Jerusalem, Israel, and Zion, our eternal homeland. This recollection is especially important in times like today, where our soldiers are fighting for our safety, and for our ability to be in Jerusalem. So, on this seder, when you are tired, maybe drunk, and just want to go to bed, put in the last stretch and remember Jerusalem, as we have for thousands of years.