



The Seder ILLUMINATED

FIFTH EDITION ♦ NEWLY REVISED & EXPANDED

Seder & Haggadah Guide
- with Divrei Torah & Practical Halachos -

Rabbi Ari Levitan

Including an Excerpt of "Eliyahu HaNavi"
by R' Avraham Yom Tov Rotenberg



DESIGNED + PRINTED BY RAMAPOST.COM

RAMAPOST
MARKETING | DESIGN | PRINT | MAIL

FIRST EDITION PRINTED NISSAN 5780 / APRIL 2020
SECOND EDITION PRINTED NISSAN 5781 / MARCH 2021
THIRD EDITION PRINTED NISSAN 5782 / APRIL 2022
FOURTH EDITION PRINTED NISSAN 5783 / APRIL 2023
FIFTH EDITION PRINTED NISSAN 5786 / MARCH 2026

DESIGN AND PRINT BY RAMAPOST.COM

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EXCERPT OF "ELIYAHU HANAVI" BY R' AVRAHAM YOM TOV ROTENBERG INCLUDED

ואמונתך בלילות

The Seder Illuminated

Preface

This small booklet was originally published for Pesach 5780 (2020). At that time, the world was in lockdown and nearly everyone's Pesach plans were disrupted. Families were separated, and many people were forced to conduct their own Seder for the first time. In my community, especially among young families, many had never previously led a Seder and were concerned that they would not be able to conduct a meaningful one. I was therefore asked to compile a short, practical guide that would help navigate the many halachos and customs of the night. Baruch Hashem, the booklet was received warmly and, based on the positive feedback, proved to be helpful to many.

Since then, I have made minor corrections, added several additions, and gradually expanded the content. What I now present before you is a collection of sources, insights, and practical guidance relating to this important night. It is my hope that this small booklet will have a large impact on your Seder.

I am grateful to my dear friend, Hagaon Rav Yitzchak Miller Shlit"a, Rav of the Prospect Vines community in Lakewood, for sharing his precious time, reviewing this work, and offering his wealth of knowledge.

Additionally, many of the thoughts and ideas contained in these pages were developed and refined together with my chavrusa, Rabbi Menachem Katz, Rav of the Pitney community in Jackson, New Jersey. Your insight and your friendship are truly invaluable.

A special thank you to my Eishes Chayil for allowing me to dedicate time to this project — time that came at the expense of her own, and the help she would have otherwise had. To my children and grandchildren, for their love, constant encouragement, and support.

I would also like to thank my parents, in-laws, siblings, and siblings-in-law, who have all served as shining lights, illuminating my life in countless ways.

A special thank you to Shragie Lieber and the entire Ramapost team, for always being available and for allowing deadlines to be overlooked in order to bring this publication to fruition.

A heartfelt thank you as well to Glade Renovations for their generous sponsorship of this project. Their philanthropy extends far beyond this endeavor, as they have made a meaningful impact on many Torah and

cheded initiatives.

And lastly, but most importantly, I offer my feeble attempt to express my deepest hakaras hatov to the Borei Olam — the Master of even my gratitude, the source of all light, who has illuminated my life with countless lights.

May these words illuminate the night of Pesach, shine a powerful light upon the darkness of our Galus, and may we be zocheh to the day when the entire world will be filled with the light of Torah and the knowledge of Hashem.

Ari Levitan

Pesach 5786/2026

חודש ניסן

Chodesh Nissan

החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים/This month shall be for you the beginning of the months.

Extra Kedusha in Nissan

The Mitzvos of Pesach possess a unique severity. The punishment for eating chametz or for failing to offer the Korban Pesach is Kares—a penalty rarely associated with transgressions of this nature. This can be understood with the novel explanation offered by the Kli Chemda (beginning of Parshas Bo) regarding a Midrash. The Midrash (Bo 15:20) relates that when Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon concerning Kiddush HaChodesh, He told them that since sanctifying the new month requires a panel of three, He Himself would join them in sanctifying the month of Nissan. The Kli Chemda wonders why this was necessary. If three were required, why could Hashem not simply instruct Moshe and Aharon to include one of the elders? Why did the Divine Presence need to join them personally? He explains that Hashem Himself wished to participate in the sanctification of Nissan in order

to infuse the month with an added dimension of holiness. By doing so, the mitzvos associated with this month would carry an elevated level of sanctity—and consequently, their violation would bear a more severe consequence.

The Entire Month of Nissan is Rosh Chodesh

Perhaps this idea sheds light on the teaching of the Shelah HaKadosh, who writes that the entire month of Nissan possesses the status of Rosh Chodesh. In other words, the whole month is imbued with the heightened kedushah normally reserved for the beginning of a month—an elevated sanctity rooted in the unique Divine involvement in its original sanctification. This idea may in fact be hinted to in the very wording of the Pasuk itself. When introducing the month of Nissan, the Torah employs a seemingly redundant formulation: “החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים, ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה” (Exodus 12:2). The Pasuk appears to describe Nissan in two distinct ways. First, “החודש הזה לכם ראש חדשים”—this month stands apart as the head or source of the months. But then the Torah adds a second description: “ראשון הוא לכם לחדשי השנה”—it is the first of the months of the year. Perhaps these two phrases reflect two separate dimensions of Nissan. On one level, it is simply the first month in the chronological order of the year. On a deeper level, however, it is “ראש חדשים”—a month that serves as the root and source of sanctity for the entire cycle of months.

Consecutive Miraculous Months

The Gemara (Ta’anis 29a) teaches that just as when the month of Av begins one decreases rejoicing, so too when the month of Adar begins one increases rejoicing. Rashi explains that the reason for this increase in joy is that this month ushers in a season during which great miracles occurred for the Jewish people—namely the miracles of Purim, and those of Pesach in the following month of Nissan. Mefarshim question why Rashi includes Pesach when explaining the joy associated specifically with the month of Adar. The Purim miracle indeed took place in Adar, but Pesach belongs to Nissan. The Hagaos Yaavetz (see also Shu”t Yaavetz, vol. II, Siman 88) explains that Adar is significant because it inaugurates a period of consecutive months filled with redemption and miracles. Once this chain of salvation begins, the atmosphere of joy already emerges at its outset, in Adar. A similar idea appears in the Gemara (Megillah 6b), which rules that in a leap year the Megillah is read in the second Adar. The Gemara explains that it is preferable to juxtapose the celebration of one redemption, Purim, with the celebration of another redemption, Pesach (Rashi). This reinforces the notion that the redemptions of Adar and Nissan are not isolated events, but part of a continuous season of Geulah, beginning in Adar and culminating with

Yetziyas Mitzrayim.

Bridge Between Purim and Pesach

See also the Chasam Sofer (glosses to Shulchan Aruch O.C. 551:1), who offers an additional perspective. The Gemara states that just as rejoicing diminishes with the onset of Av, so too rejoicing increases with the arrival of Adar. The Chasam Sofer explains that the parallel between these two months is not exact. The decrease of joy in the month of Av reaches its climax and conclusion on Tisha B'Av. In contrast, the joy of Adar continues throughout the entire month.

In this regard he disagrees with the Magen Avraham (ibid. 1), who understands that the heightened joy of Adar effectively concludes with Purim. Rather, the Chasam Sofer explains that the joy extends further, because the fifteenth of Adar marks the thirtieth day before Pesach—the point at which the obligation of shoalin v'dorshin b'hilchos Pesach begins. From that moment, the anticipation and preparation for Pesach already take hold.

Thus, the celebration of Purim naturally flows into the preparation for Pesach, creating a bond between the two festivals and serving as a bridge between the redemptions of Adar and Nissan.

Custom of Women to Refrain from Work on Rosh Chodesh

Another practice that highlights the unique character of Rosh Chodesh is the well-known custom of women refraining from certain forms of work on that day. This custom is codified in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 417:1) נהגו הנשים שלא לעשות מלאכה בראש חודש “It is the custom for women not to perform work on Rosh Chodesh.” The source of this custom is explained in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 45). When the Jewish people were asked to contribute their jewelry for the Egel HaZahav, the women refused to participate in the sin. As a reward for their steadfastness, Hashem granted them Rosh Chodesh as a special day, somewhat akin to a personal Yom Tov.

The Shiblei HaLeket writes that this practice is not a later custom, but rather an ancient one that dates back to the days of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Daas Zekeinim and the Rosh (to Vayakhel 35:22) offer a fascinating perspective on its origin. They explain that the women were originally granted a special distinction specifically on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the month during which the Mishkan was erected and dedicated. In recognition of their refusal to participate in the sin of the Golden Calf, they were given a measure of celebration on that day.

Over time, however, the remaining Roshei Chodashim were “drawn

along” with it, and the special status extended to every Rosh Chodesh throughout the year.

Thus, what began as a distinction connected to Rosh Chodesh Nissan ultimately evolved into a broader custom applying to all months. Once again, we find that the unique sanctity of Nissan radiated outward, leaving its imprint on other times of the calendar as well.

The Bracelet

This thought reminds me of a remarkable story that one of my Talmidim and Mispalelim, Ushi Schwartz, told me about his grandmother, Mrs. Chaya Rochman a”h. When she became engaged in 1947, her Chassan gave her a beautiful gold bracelet. It appeared in the engagement photos—but after that, no one ever saw her wear it. The grandchildren would occasionally ask, “Bubby, why don’t you wear the bracelet Zaidy gave you?” She would simply shrug and remain silent. Naturally, the family assumed something must have happened to it. Perhaps it was lost, stolen, or sold during difficult times. The mystery remained unsolved. After she passed away, the family began cleaning out her home. While sorting through the closet, one of the granddaughters discovered a small embroidered bag hidden in the back. Inside was the bracelet, still shining, resting in its original box. Tucked inside was a handwritten note dated the week she had been diagnosed with her illness. The note read:

“I received this bracelet from my Chassan when we became engaged, and it means very much to me. Because it is so precious, I have decided to set it aside to donate to the Beis Hamikdash when it is rebuilt, may it be speedily in our days.” Her will repeated the same instruction: the bracelet was never to be worn. It had been designated for the Beis Hamikdash. So powerful was the yearning of these extraordinary women throughout the generations to contribute and play a role in the building of the Mishkan and the Beis HaMikdash.

Reading of Parshas HaChodesh

The Levush (Orach Chaim 685) explains that Parshas HaChodesh is read on the Shabbos preceding the month of Nissan “כדי לקדש חודש ניסן” — in order to sanctify the month of Nissan. He immediately qualifies this statement, however, noting that this is not the ikkar kiddush of the month, for the primary sanctification was accomplished when Beis Din established the calendar. The reading of the parsha is therefore only a rabbinic enactment.

Rashi, however, offers a seemingly different explanation. On Megillah 29a, Rashi writes that the reason we read Parshas HaChodesh is because it contains the section discussing the laws of Pesach. According to Rashi, the reading serves primarily as preparation for the upcoming festival rather than as a means of sanctifying the month itself.

This raises several questions.

First, according to the Levush, why is there a need to “sanctify” the month of Nissan through the reading of this parsha more than any other Rosh Chodesh?

Second, what does the Levush mean when he says that this reading is not the ikkar kiddush? His wording implies that while the essential sanctification occurs through Beis Din, there still remains some element of sanctification that is achieved through the reading of the parsha.

Perhaps the explanation lies in the unique nature of the month of Nissan. Chazal note that Nissan possesses a heightened level of kedushah, as it is the month in which the Jewish people were redeemed and in which the foundational mitzvos of the nation were given. Moreover, according to the Midrash cited by the Kli Chemda, the sanctification of this first month was performed with a unique participation of the Divine Presence itself, imbuing Nissan with an elevated spiritual character.

In light of this, the reading of Parshas HaChodesh may serve not merely as a reminder of Pesach but as a rabbinic reenactment of that original sanctification. While the primary kiddush of the month was indeed accomplished through the authority of Beis Din, Chazal instituted the public reading of this parsha so that each year the community would reawaken and draw forth the special kedushah embedded within Nissan.

Thus, the Levush’s language becomes precise. The reading is not the essential sanctification, yet it nonetheless participates in the process of sanctifying the month, allowing the unique holiness of Nissan to be renewed and experienced by the Jewish people each year.

From Natural Order to Divine Providence

לכם החודש הזה “This month shall be the first for you - Israel. Although the world was created in Tishrei, and therefore Tishrei marks the beginning of the year, that beginning relates only to the natural order with which the world was initially created.

However, from Nissan began the ordering of creation through a distinct

Divine providence, guided by the Torah and the mitzvos.

For this reason, the reigns of the kings of Israel are counted from Nissan (Rosh Hashanah 2a), whereas the kings of the nations of the world are counted from Tishrei.

Thus it is written (Shemos 12:2): “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months.” For in it occurred the exaltation and emergence of the ‘head’ of Israel, together with the nullification of the power of the Satan, as it says: “He shall crush your head” (Bereishis 3:15).”

The Month of Shechina

The Chiddushei HaRim (Hilchos Pesach, siman 429) explains the reason why fasting is prohibited throughout the month of Nissan.

The Beis Yosef questioned this practice, since Megillas Taanis—which established certain days as festive days on which fasting is forbidden—was annulled after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. If so, why does Nissan still retain its festive status?

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that the festival-like status of Nissan does not derive from Megillas Taanis. The days mentioned in Megillas Taanis were considered festive only when the Beis HaMikdash stood, and once the Temple was destroyed, those commemorative days lost their force.

However, the sanctity of Nissan stems from a different source—the establishment of the Mishkan. It is well known that while the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the Mishkan was never destroyed, for it was the handiwork of Moshe Rabbeinu, and therefore the enemy never gained control over it; rather, it was hidden away.

The Mishkan was not a permanent structure like the Beis HaMikdash but rather a sanctuary that journeyed from place to place, as the verses describe. In essence, that aspect of the Mishkan has never departed from us, even in exile. As the Gemara states (Megillah 29a): “Wherever Israel was exiled, the Shechinah went with them.”

The day the Mishkan was erected marked the moment when the Shechinah descended to dwell among the Jewish people. That reality remains the very foundation of our existence in exile and the source of our hope for redemption.

The Beis HaMikdash, by contrast, represented a fixed dwelling place for the Divine Presence. When the Temple was built, the Mishkan was

hidden away, because the Divine presence had now found a permanent home. But once the Temple was destroyed, that fixed structure was lost, and the commemorative festivals of Megillas Taanis, which were connected to the Temple era, were annulled.

The sanctity associated with the Mishkan, however, returned to prominence, for the idea of the Shechinah accompanying us in exile once again became central to our existence. For this reason, the festive character of Nissan, connected to the erection of the Mishkan, remains in force even after the destruction of the Temple.

This, he explains, is the view expressed in Maseches Sofrim, which concludes by stating that in the future the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt in Nissan.

Thus, the festival-like nature of Nissan reflects the enduring reality that the Mishkan—and the Divine Presence it represents—remains with us even in exile, protecting us from our enemies and sustaining us until we merit the final redemption, speedily in our days. Amen.

Shechina Even in Galus

See Sefer Mishna Sachir (Teuchtal) and the end of Sefer Shemos who understands that this is also the intent behind the concluding words of the Parsha/Sefer Shemos:

“לעיני כל בית ישראל בכל מסעיהם” — “before the eyes of all the House of Israel in all their journeys.”

The meaning is that it should always remain before the eyes of the entire Jewish people that this Mishkan, which we read about in this parashah—one to which Hashem caused His Presence to dwell—that very Mishkan and that Shechinah continues to accompany us even in exile.

The Divine Presence travels with us throughout our exile, protecting us from our enemies, nullifying harsh decrees that arise against us, and sustaining us through all our wanderings.

And ultimately, that same Shechinah will bring about our redemption, speedily in the coming days of Nissan.

This, then, is the meaning of the verse:

“לעיני כל בית ישראל בכל מסעיהם” — that the Divine Presence remains with the Jewish people throughout all the journeys of exile.

The Promise of All Promises

How powerfully do the words of the Beis HaLevi (Vayigash) resonate. He explains that when Yaakov Avinu was reassured, “Do not fear descending to Egypt... and I will surely bring you up,” he was being given the greatest promise of all. Hashem was assuring him that He would descend together with him and with Klal Yisrael into exile, and that His Name would remain bound with them throughout.

Even in the depths of exile, His presence never departs — remaining bound to Klal Yisrael, through whom His Name is revealed to the world.

Shabbos HaGadol

When We Became Great

The Tur (Orach Chaim 430) writes that the Shabbos preceding Pesach is called Shabbos HaGadol. The reason is due to a great miracle that occurred in the days leading up to Yetzias Mitzrayim.

The Torah commands that on the tenth of Nissan, each household should take a sheep for the Korban Pesach. The year of the Exodus, as noted in Seder Olam, the tenth of Nissan fell on Shabbos. On that day, each Jew took a sheep — the very deity of the Egyptians — and tied it to their bedposts in preparation for the Korban Pesach.

When the Egyptians saw this, they asked in astonishment, “What is this?” And Bnei Yisrael responded openly that they intended to slaughter these animals as an offering to Hashem. Though the Egyptians were enraged at the thought of their gods being slaughtered, they were miraculously unable to protest or prevent it.

It is in commemoration of this great miracle that the Shabbos preceding Pesach is called Shabbos HaGadol.

The Bach addresses the question raised by many as to why this miracle was associated with Shabbos rather than the tenth of Nissan. He explains that since Bnei Yisrael also crossed the Yarden on that date, calling it “great” could lead to confusion. Therefore, Chazal attributed the miracle to Shabbos, preserving its distinct identity.

Greatness Through Mitzvos

The Chizkuni (Bo 12:3) explains that the pasuk, “On the tenth of this month they shall take for themselves,” refers to a Shabbos. Since Bnei Yisrael performed their first mitzvah on that day — the taking of the Korban Pesach — it came to be known as Shabbos HaGadol.

The later authorities deepen this idea. With the giving of their first mitzvah, Klal Yisrael attained a new stature — they became “great.” Just as a minor, upon reaching the age of thirteen and becoming obligated in mitzvos, is called a gadol, so too Klal Yisrael, upon being commanded, entered a new dimension of greatness. As the Olelos Ephraim (Maamar 31) explains, this reflects the teaching of Chazal: “Gadol ha’metzueh v’oseh” — one who is commanded and fulfills is greater than one who acts voluntarily.

It is thus fitting that Shabbos HaGadol often falls in Parshas Tzav — a term that itself connotes command.

Greatness begins not with inspiration alone, but with obligation — with the moment we are commanded.

From Command to Devotion

The Chasam Sofer (Derashos, pp. קמ"ז old edition רל"ט - new edition s.v. Od Nir'eh Li) teaches a remarkable idea: Klal Yisrael possess a unique quality — the ability to generate mitzvos מתוך להבת אהבה להשי"ת, out of a burning love for Hashem, beyond what was explicitly commanded.

Thus, many of the central practices of the Seder night are not explicitly recorded in the Torah. The institution of the four cups corresponding to the four expressions of redemption, the custom of ein maftirin achar haPesach afikoman, and the abundance of speech, storytelling, and enactments throughout the night — all are expressions of this כוח of adding beyond the letter of the law. In every generation, these practices are renewed and expanded מתוך תוספת קדושה ואהבה. (See how he uses this to novelly explain the difference between the question of the chacham and that of the rasha.) Furthermore, the Geulah itself was precipitated by this very trait — when Bnei Yisrael went beyond what was commanded, taking the lamb and tying it to their bedposts, openly defying the Egyptians and placing their trust in Hashem. Thus, the very foundation of Geulah was born not only from obligation, but from a people who pursued greatness by choosing to do more.

Perhaps this is why it is called Shabbos HaGadol — for on that day, their greatness, in rising beyond what was required, was revealed.

Erev Pesach

The Yom Tov Before Yom Tov

There is a custom, cited in the Mishnah (Pesachim 50a), to refrain from performing work on Erev Pesach. Rashi explains that this practice is precautionary in nature. If people remain occupied with their work on Erev Pesach, they may become overly involved and neglect the necessary preparations for Yom Tov. Tosafos, however, challenges this explanation. If the concern were merely that one might become distracted with work and fail to prepare properly for the festival, such a prohibition should logically have been instituted for all Yamim Tovim, and not uniquely for Pesach. Tosafos therefore cites the Yerushalmi, which offers a different basis for the practice. The prohibition stems from the Korban Pesach. Just as one who brings a personal korban refrains from work on the day his offering is brought, so too Erev Pesach carries a similar restriction because of the communal offering of the Korban Pesach. Accordingly, the prohibition only begins after chatzos, the time when the Korban Pesach could be offered. This differs from an individual bringing a korban, who would refrain from work for the entire day.

Erev Pesach Nowadays

In our times, when the Korban Pesach is no longer offered, the Baal HaMaor maintains that the prohibition of work should likewise no longer apply. Tosafos, however, along with the Ran and the Ramban, rule that the prohibition remains in force even today. The Netziv, in Ha'amek Davar (Vayikra 23:5), raises a related question. Why does the Torah include **Erev** Pesach within the section describing the Yomim Tovim, when the festival itself begins only on the fifteenth of Nissan? He explains that the Torah's wording — "Pesach LaHashem" — indicates that the day itself possesses an aspect of Yom Mo'ed. The obligation to recite Hallel while offering the Korban Pesach gives the day a status akin to Mikra Kodesh. Accordingly, Erev Pesach is not merely a day of preparation for the festival but carries its own element of sanctity. Perhaps for this reason as well, the prohibition of work retains its force even today, despite the absence of the Korban Pesach.

TAANIS BECHOROS

Preparation For the Mitzvos

ToppPBottom of Form

It is customary for bechoros, the firstborn males of a family, to fast on

Erev Pesach. The source for this fast is found in Maseches Sofrim (21:3), although no reason is provided there for the practice. Additionally, this minhag is noticeably absent from the writings of the majority of the Rishonim. The Raavya and the Tur (O.C. 470), however, do cite the custom and suggest that the fast serves to commemorate the miracle of the firstborn being spared during Plague of the Firstborn. The commentators question the nature of this commemoration. It would seem more fitting to memorialize such a momentous salvation in a celebratory manner—as is typically done—rather than through fasting. Perhaps, upon closer examination of the wording in Maseches Sofrim itself (ibid.), as quoted by the Beis Yosef (O.C. 429:2), this puzzling custom can be clarified. After detailing the special events that occurred—and will, *iy"H*, yet occur—during the month of Nisan, Maseches Sofrim explains that this is why Tachanun is not recited and fasting is generally avoided throughout the month: “For this reason, since most of the month contains festive days... no Tachanun is said on any of the days of Nisan and one does not fast until Nisan has passed. The only exception is the firstborn, who fast on the eve of Pesach in thanksgiving for their rescue on the night of Pesach, and the very pious, on account of the matzah, so that they may eat it in the evening with relish.” From this wording it appears that the intended effect of the fast is not the restriction of food on Erev Pesach itself. Rather, its purpose is to enhance the performance of the mitzvos on the night of Passover. By fasting during the day, one arrives at the Seder with greater anticipation and appreciation, thereby performing its mitzvos in a more elevated and meaningful manner. Accordingly, the bechoros do indeed commemorate their salvation in a celebratory fashion—not through the fast itself, but through the heightened experience of the mitzvos on Pesach night that the fast helps create. (See Rav Eliyahu Levine in *Divrei Shirah*, Pesach §47, who elaborates on this approach, although without citing the precise wording of Maseches Sofrim, which appears to indicate this idea explicitly.)

A Fast Born of Longing

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Halichos Shlomo*, Pesach ch. 8, fn. 1) suggests a novel approach to the origin of the fast of the Bechoros on Erev Pesach. The Medrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 3:5) relates that originally the Avodah in the Mishkan was designated for the Bechoros. However, after they participated in the sin of the Eigel, they forfeited this privilege and were replaced by the Kohanim and Leviim, who had not sinned. Yet this replacement was not meant to be permanent. The *Ohr HaChaim* (*Bereishis* 49:28) writes that the Bechoros still retain a connection to the Avodah and await the future time when it will be restored to them, when they will once again serve alongside the Kohanim and Leviim. In the meantime, however, the constant presence of the

Kohanim in the Beis HaMikdash, and every aspect of their sacred service, served as a continual reminder to the Bechoros of their demotion and lost privilege. This sense of loss reached its peak on Erev Pesach, the busiest and most vibrant day of the year in the Beis HaMikdash. The Kohanim and Leviim stood at the center of a magnificent national service, offering the Korban Pesach amid the singing of Hallel, as thousands of Jews gathered in a grand sanctification of Hashem's Name. And the Bechoros stood on the sidelines. Their longing to participate in this sacred moment, to reclaim their role in the Avodah, was so intense that they simply could not bring themselves to eat. The pain was too sharp, the sense of loss too profound. It was in memory of this deep yearning for the Avodah — and for closeness to Hashem — that the fast of the Bechoros was established. Their fasting reflected a state in which the longing for spiritual service was so overwhelming that they were unable to partake in food. A truly powerful day and milestone to remember. See also the Levush (Orach Chaim 490:9) for a fascinating discussion of the enigmatic acronyms used to denote the Torah readings of Pesach — “משוך תורא, קדש בכספא, פסל במדברא, שלח בוכרא” — and how they may allude to the Bechoros' loss of their role in the Avodah.

Firstborn Females

See Aruch Hashulchan (470:3) who quotes those who say that even a firstborn female should fast, since it is certain that in Egypt the plague of the firstborn struck females as well. A proof for this is found in Midrash Shemos Rabbah (18), which states that Bisyah, the daughter of Pharaoh, was spared in the merit of Moshe. This indicates that the plague of the firstborn affected females as well.

Nevertheless, the custom is not so, because regarding females Hashem did not command that they be sanctified; the command of sanctifying the firstborn applied only to males.”

The Reading of the Korban Pesach

It is customary to read the Parshah of the Korban Pesach on Erev Pesach after Chatzos, the time when the Korban Pesach would historically be brought in the Beis HaMikdash.

A non-Jew's Eyewitness Account of the Korban Pesach

The celebration of Pesach in the Beis HaMikdash was a magnificent

spectacle. In his Siddur Beis Yaakov, Rav Yaakov Emden quotes (from the Sefer Shevet Yehudah) an extraordinary eyewitness account recorded by a Roman official stationed in Yerushalayim.

I have always found this testimony deeply inspiring, as it provides a real-time glimpse into our past through an unexpected lens. Perhaps this perspective can awaken within us a renewed longing for the glory of those days.

“When the month the Jews call Nissan begins, the king and the judges send runners and messengers throughout the countryside surrounding Jerusalem, urging the cattle and sheep herdsman to hurry and bring their animals. Large numbers of pilgrims would soon arrive for the festival, and sufficient livestock was needed for the sacrificial offerings and for the personal consumption of the festival participants. Anyone who ignored this summons risked having his property confiscated and donated to the Temple. The herdsman therefore hurried to comply.

“They would lead the animals through a river near Jerusalem in order to cleanse them of any dirt or mud. It is said that this is what Shlomo HaMelech meant when he wrote (Shir HaShirim 6:6): ‘Your teeth are like a flock of ewes that have come up from the washing.’

“When the flocks reached the hills around Jerusalem, the number of sheep was so vast that the green grass was completely hidden beneath a white sea of wool.

“When the tenth day of the month arrived, everyone went out to purchase the offering known as the Pesach. The Jews had a remarkable custom: when they went to obtain the offering, no one would say to another, ‘Move aside’ or ‘Let me pass.’ Even if King David or King Solomon himself were standing at the end of the line.

“I once remarked to the priests that this seemed contrary to the normal rules of courtesy. They explained to me that this custom demonstrates that status has no place in preparation for the Temple service, and certainly not during the service itself. At such times, every person is equally esteemed.

The Korban Pesach — Transcending Personal Stature

(See Meshech Chochmah on Beha’alosecha 9:7, who highlights the unique character of the Korban Pesach. Among its special features is that it underscores the importance of every individual Jew. Each member of Bnei Yisrael stands worthy of a direct connection with Hashem, without the need for intermediaries. This is reflected in the halachos of the Korban Pesach: although it belongs to the category of Korban Shelamim, whose owners normally give portions — the chazeh and

shok — to the Kohen, the Korban Pesach has no such requirement, minimizing distinctions of status between Kohanim and the rest of the nation.

Furthermore, the Gemara [Pesachim 65b] comments on what is stated in the Mishna that the first group exited the Temple courtyard with their Pesach lambs. It was taught in a baraisa: Each and every one would place his Pesach lamb in its hide and cast it over his shoulder behind him and carry it home that way. Rav Ilish said: They carried it home in the manner of Arab merchants [tayya'ut]. The Netziv [Haamek Davar Bo 12:21] suggests a source for this, based on the simple understanding of the Pasuk. Being that the mitzvah in the parshah was addressed to all of Klal Yisrael — that each household should take a lamb — one might have assumed that such tasks would be left to the simpler members of the household, those accustomed to handling and preparing an animal, rather than to the distinguished head of the household, for whom such labor is uncommon.

Therefore, Moshe specifically called to the elders of the generation and charged them: “Draw and take for yourselves sheep according to your families” — that they themselves should be personally involved in this mitzvah on behalf of the entire family.

From here we derive that which is taught in Pesachim (65b), that each individual would carry his korban Pesach on his shoulder, with its skin slung behind him. As Rav Ilish explains, this was done in the manner of those accustomed to such labor — and thus even the most prominent members of Klal Yisrael conducted themselves in this way. This, too, reflects a broader theme: that personal stature and honor were set aside in the service of the Korban Pesach.)

See further in the Derashos of the Chasam Sofer (pp. רנ"ז old edition -רצ"ה new edition s.v. the fourth question: Kulanu Mesubin), who asks: How is it possible that on this night all are equal — “as the people, so the priest” — that no one yields honor to another, neither to leaders nor son to father? This seems contrary to proper conduct and respect.

He cites an incident recorded in the siddur of Rav Yaakov Emden, who relates that when people entered to perform the korban Pesach, they did not accord honor even to King David. When questioned, they explained: in order to demonstrate that before Hashem there is no arrogance, and in His service all are equal.

So too on this night — the night of the Seder — distinctions fade. Wealth, status, and hierarchy are not recognized, for there is no wisdom or stature here other than the ability to recount Yetzias Mitzrayim. In this, all are equal — young and old alike. This is the meaning of “Ku-

lanu mesubin” — we all recline together as equals.

And this is further reflected in the teaching: “Whoever increases in the telling of Yetzias Mitzrayim is praiseworthy” — even one who is unlearned, if he recounts the story, is considered praiseworthy like the greatest scholar. Therefore, kulanu mesubin.

Kuk vos vert fun a mentch

This idea can be illustrated with a powerful story. A son once visited his father, the great Rav Shmuel Birnbaum, during his final days in the hospital. Weak and frail, the Rav lay there as his son held his hand and recited Tehillim. As the son prepared to leave, he suddenly turned back and said, “Father, I have never in my life left you without hearing a word of Torah or mussar. How can I leave now without hearing anything?”

Summoning his strength, the father replied softly:

“Kuk vos vert fun a mentch” - Look what has become of a person.

At the levayah, the son reflected and said:

“On the contrary — Kuk vos ken verren fun a mentch” - Look at what a person **can** become. See how high a person can rise.”

We all begin the same. Some rise higher, some less so — but the potential is equal.

Deeper Parallel

This idea echoes a well-known question: Why did the malach sent to destroy Sodom first go to Avraham with the other angels?

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky explains that the malach might have argued: “Why destroy human beings? What can they accomplish?” Therefore, he was first sent to Avraham’s home — to witness what a human being can become. Only then could he proceed to Sodom.

As the Sforno notes, the angels turned from “the house of chesed of Avraham” — having seen the heights of man — and only then went to Sodom.

The Korban Pesach — Where All Began Equal

Perhaps we can explain this with an additional dimension to this idea. The Korban Pesach was the first mitzvah given to Klal Yisrael as individuals. While Kiddush HaChodesh was entrusted to the Beis Din, the Korban Pesach was the first mitzvah performed by each and every Jew. In this sense, it represents a starting point — a moment when all of Klal Yisrael stood equal.

From that point onward, individuals would grow and develop — some rising to great heights, while others perhaps lagged behind. Yet this mitzvah remains rooted in that original moment of equality.

Accordingly, in the performance of the Korban Pesach, we return to that beginning. Personal stature and distinction are set aside, and all stand alike — reminded that we all began the same — and that the heights reached by others remain within the grasp of us all.

On the night of the Seder, we are reminded that before Hashem, all distinctions fade — and that within each person lies the potential to rise.

“When the fourteenth day of the month arrives, the priests ascend a ramp leading to a high tower in the Temple, which the Jews call the ‘Lul.’ They carry three silver trumpets and sound them loudly. After the blasts are heard, they proclaim:

‘People of God, listen! It is time to slaughter the Pesach for the sake of the One who caused His Name to dwell in this great and holy house.’

“When the people hear this announcement, they don their festive garments, for the festival effectively begins for them at midday — the time when the sacrifices are brought.

“At the entrance to the great courtyard stand twelve Levites outside holding silver rods, and twelve holding gold rods. Those on the outside maintain order among the crowds so that no one is injured in the rush to enter, and so tempers do not flare as people press forward.

“The crowd was once so dense that during one Pesach an elderly man and his offering were tragically trampled. The Levites inside the courtyard manage those exiting, and they close the gates once the courtyard is filled to capacity.

“At the slaughtering area stand rows of priests holding ladles of silver and gold. Each row is uniform: those led by a priest holding a silver ladle all hold silver ladles, and those led by a priest with a gold ladle all hold gold. This arrangement creates an atmosphere of extraordinary splendor.

“The priest at the head of each row receives the bowl filled with blood and passes it along the line until it reaches the altar. The priest standing by the altar pours the blood upon it and returns the empty bowl down the line. In this way every priest receives a full vessel and returns an empty one.

“The entire operation runs with remarkable efficiency. The priests move

the bowls back and forth like arrows shot by mighty warriors. They begin practicing this process thirty days in advance, ensuring that nothing will interfere with the smooth flow of the service.

“Two towering pillars stand nearby, and upon them stand two priests holding silver trumpets. They sound the trumpets whenever a new group enters the courtyard to offer their Pesach.

“This signals the Levites to begin singing Hallel with song and thanksgiving, accompanied by every musical instrument they possess. Indeed, all the instruments are brought out on that day. The owners of the offerings must also recite Hallel, and if the slaughtering is not yet completed when they finish, they repeat it.

“After the animal is slaughtered, the people enter the courtyards where iron hooks and forks line the walls for hanging the offerings while their hides are removed. If the hooks are unavailable, wooden poles are used — carried on the shoulders of two people with the animal suspended between them while the hide is removed.

“The appropriate portions are sent to the altar, and the owners return home happy and content — like soldiers returning victorious from battle. Among the Jews it is considered a disgrace not to bring the Pesach offering at its appointed time.

“The ovens used for roasting the offerings are placed near the entrances of the houses. I was told this is done to publicize their faith in God and to increase the joy of the festival.

“When the meat is roasted and eaten, the people sing praises so loudly that the sounds can be heard from afar. On the night of Passover, none of the gates of Jerusalem are closed, so that the countless crowds may freely come and go.”

Themes of the Night

There are multiple themes that are meant to be discussed and emphasized during the Seder night, and each of them finds expression in the various sections and rituals of the evening.

1. אמונה — Faith

When Hashem introduced Himself to Klal Yisrael at Har Sinai, His opening declaration was:

“אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם”

“I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt.”

The very first commandment to believe in Hashem is therefore intrinsically connected to Yetzias Mitzrayim. Egypt served as the grand theater in which Hashem displayed His absolute mastery, power, and control over every aspect of creation. The events of that redemption were meant to serve as an eternal testimony to His sovereignty over the world.

On this night we are charged to recount and relive the many wonders and miracles that occurred in Mitzrayim, internalizing that He—and only He—governs the world in its entirety.

This theme is reflected even in the structure of Hallel on the Seder night. Unlike other occasions, the recitation of Hallel is divided into two parts. The first portion is recited at the conclusion of Maggid, while the second part is recited later during the Hallel section.

The Levush (Orach Chaim 473) explains that this unusual division exists because the second chapter of Hallel — “בצאת ישראל ממצרים” (When Israel left Egypt) — deals explicitly with the miracles of the Exodus and therefore belongs within the narrative of the night itself.

But what of the first chapter of Hallel? Does it relate to the redemption from Egypt?

The Radak (Tehillim 113) explains that it serves as an introduction to the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. It highlights Hashem’s power “להגביה השפלים” — “ולהשפיל הגבוהים” — to elevate the lowly and humble the mighty. This theme was vividly demonstrated in Egypt, where the seemingly powerless nation of Israel was elevated, while the mighty Egyptians were brought low.

(See below: Snapshot of Maggid – Hallel: The Song of Survivors.)

Emunah Chushis — A Nation That Saw

Rav Yechezkel Levinstein would often say that every person can attain emunah chushis — a faith that is vivid and experiential. For the Torah itself declares to all of us: “Atem re’isem” — “You have seen.” This is not the account of a lone individual, but the testimony of an entire nation — six hundred thousand who witnessed it and transmitted it faithfully from generation to generation.

The Sefer HaChinuch, in his introduction, explains that the most firmly established truth in human experience is that which is accepted by the consensus of the majority. People rely upon testimony, and the greater the number of witnesses, the more certain and compelling that truth

becomes.

This can be compared to a person who is approached by a trustworthy individual and offered an extraordinary opportunity: to travel to an unfamiliar country, retrieve certain documents, and return — in exchange for a reward of one million dollars. Most people would immediately book a flight without hesitation.

Yet, this person may have never visited that country, and perhaps has never even seen a picture of it. Still, he harbors no doubt that it exists. Why? Because that which is universally known does not require proof. The very fact that it is spoken about, referenced, and recorded establishes its reality beyond question.

So too, our emunah is not built on distant belief, but on the living testimony of a nation that saw — and continues to see.

2. עבדות — Servitude

The same verse continues:

“מבית עבדים” — “from the house of slavery.”

The Ramban explains that Hashem emphasized this point to convey an obligation: since He redeemed the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage, they are therefore bound to serve and worship Him.

The Sforno adds that our experience in Egypt served as a training ground in the concept of servitude. Through the harsh reality of slavery, Klal Yisrael learned the discipline, commitment, and total dedication inherent in serving a master. That experience would ultimately be redirected toward the service of Hashem.

This idea is reflected in the words of Dovid HaMelech:

“אֲנִי ה' כִּי אֲנִי עֶבֶדְךָ, אֲנִי עֶבֶדְךָ בֶּן אִמָּתְךָ”

“Please, Hashem, for I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant.” (Tehillim 116:16)

Rashi explains that one cannot compare the submissiveness of a slave who was born into servitude with that of someone who was born free and later chose to become a slave. A person born into servitude is naturally conditioned to serve his master.

The Sforno further explains that a born slave serves instinctively and naturally, whereas one who becomes a servant later may do so only out

of external pressure or fear.

This transition from slavery to Divine service is expressed powerfully in the Yerushalmi (Pesachim 5:5). Chazal relate that on the night of the redemption, Pharaoh cried out across Egypt. Miraculously, his voice was amplified so that it could be heard throughout the entire land. With that booming voice he proclaimed:

“קומו צאו מתוך עמי!”

“Rise up and leave from among my people!”

And he continued:

“עד עכשיו הייתם עבדי פרעה — מכאן ואילך אתם עבדי ה'.”

“Until now you were servants of Pharaoh; from now on you are servants of Hashem.”

At that moment the Jewish people began reciting Hallel, declaring:

“הללויה הללו עבדי ה'” — “Praise Hashem, you servants of Hashem.”

For they were no longer servants of Pharaoh.

See Aruch HaShulchan O”C 473:22 for an elaborate discussion on this important topic.

(See below: Snapshot of Maggid – Hallel: The Song of Survivors.)

3. הודאה — Gratitude

Chazal (Berachos 33b) relate that a certain individual once descended before the Aron as the prayer leader in the presence of Rabbi Chanina. As he prayed, he greatly extended his praise of Hashem, declaring:

“God, the great, mighty, awesome, powerful, strong, fearless, steadfast, and honored...”

Rabbi Chanina waited until the man completed his prayer and then asked him: “Have you finished recounting all the praises of your Master?”

The implication was clear: one should not attempt to heap praises upon Hashem, for such an effort will inevitably fall short — both in quality and quantity. As the Rambam explains (Moreh Nevuchim 1:59), any attempt by finite human beings to fully articulate the greatness of Hashem is inherently inadequate.

A similar idea appears in Makos (10a) regarding the verse:

“מי ימלל גבורות ה', ישמיע כל תהלתו”

“Who can express the mighty acts of Hashem or make all His praise

heard?" (Tehillim 106:2)

Chazal ask: Who is capable of expressing the mighty acts of Hashem? Only someone who can make all of His praise heard — something that is clearly beyond human ability.

This raises an obvious question. If we are so limited in our capacity to adequately praise Hashem, how can we be instructed on the night of the Seder to elaborate extensively in praise of Him? Indeed, we are told:

“כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח”

Whoever increases the telling of the story of the Exodus is praiseworthy.

Are we not concerned that our praises will inevitably fall short?

The Maharal (Gevuros Hashem, ch. 1) resolves this difficulty. The concern about praising Hashem inadequately applies only when praise itself is the objective. When one seeks to describe Hashem's greatness as an end in itself, the effort will always be insufficient.

However, when praise emerges as an expression of gratitude, the situation changes entirely.

In the context of thanksgiving, remaining silent would itself be inappropriate — even ungrateful. When one has received immeasurable kindness, he is obligated to express appreciation, even if his words cannot fully capture the magnitude of the gift.

Thus, on the night of the Seder, our praise is not merely an attempt to define Hashem's greatness. Rather, it is an expression of gratitude for the extraordinary kindness He showed our nation during Yetzias Mitzrayim.

Within that framework, we are encouraged to recount, elaborate, and expand the story by whatever means we can.

It would therefore seem that gratitude itself stands as one of the central themes of the night.

4. חינוך — Educating the Next Generation

The pesukim describing the obligation of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim repeatedly emphasize the phrase “בןך — your son.” The Torah's formulation suggests that the central purpose of this mitzvah is the transmission of our national story to the next generation.

The Seder night is therefore not merely a commemoration of the past; it is an act of education, ensuring that the foundations of our faith continue to live within our children.

Chazal underscore this educational focus in several practices designed specifically to engage children. The Gemara (Pesachim 109a) teaches that one should distribute roasted grains and nuts to children on Erev Pesach so that they remain awake and are encouraged to ask questions.

Similarly, Rabbi Eliezer states that one should grab the matzos quickly on the night of Pesach—meaning that the meal should proceed swiftly—so that the unusual haste will capture the children’s attention. Observing these atypical practices, they will naturally begin to ask questions about their meaning.

Indeed, the entire structure of the Seder is built upon curiosity and inquiry. The questions of the children serve as the gateway through which the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim is transmitted.

Boys and Girls

The Rema (Orach Chaim 471:2) rules that a katan who is not yet capable of grasping the discussions of Yetzias Mitzrayim may be fed matzah on Erev Pesach, since the prohibition of eating matzah that day only applies once a child is old enough to meaningfully participate in the Seder’s recounting of the Exodus.

The Magen Avraham (471:7) clarifies that this distinction applies equally to boys and girls. The Levushei Sarad (ibid.) directs us to Shulchan Aruch (472:14), where the Mechaber rules that women are obligated in the four cups of wine and in all the mitzvos of the night of the Seder.

The Aruch HaShulchan (472:15) develops this idea further. He writes that even according to the opinions that girls are not generally included in a father’s obligation of chinuch, on the night of the Seder they certainly are included. The reason is that the mitzvah of recounting Yetzias Mitzrayim is not merely another mitzvah among many; it is the very foundation of our emunah. Therefore, its transmission must encompass every member of the household.

From Generation to Generation

Thus, the Seder night stands as one of the most powerful educational moments in the Jewish calendar — a night devoted to ensuring that the faith, memory, and identity of our people are faithfully passed from one generation to the next.

Indeed, Chazal emphasize this idea in the well-known declaration of the Haggadah:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים.

This formulation underscores that the mitzvah of Yetziyas Mitzrayim is not merely a personal remembrance, but a generational charge. Each generation must experience and transmit the story anew, ensuring that the torch of faith is faithfully passed to the next generation.

The obligation of the Seder night therefore extends beyond individual fulfillment; it is fundamentally about continuity—instilling within children, boys and girls alike, the foundational belief that Hashem redeemed His people and continues to guide their destiny.

The Generational Charge of Yetziyas Mitzrayim

The Malbim explains the passage of the Haggadah “אפילו כולנו חכמים” in a striking way. Even if we are all wise, well-versed in the Torah’s discussions of Yetzi’as Mitzrayim; even if we are all discerning, capable of understanding ideas beyond what is explicitly stated; even if we are elders who remember what we ourselves have witnessed; and even if we know the entire Torah—nevertheless, we remain obligated to recount the story of the Exodus.

The reason for this is that the mitzvah of Yetzi’as Mitzrayim is not merely for our own benefit. Even if we personally no longer require the retelling, the obligation remains because of the generations that follow us. As we proclaim earlier in the Haggadah: “Had the Holy One, blessed be He, not taken our forefathers out of Egypt, we, our children, and our children’s children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.” Each generation must therefore know the story of the Exodus and give thanks to Hashem for the miracles He performed for us.

5. לידת עם השם — More Than Miracles: The Birth of a Nation

The Nesivus (Haggadah Maaseh Nissim – Rav Elazar ben Azaryah, Baruch Hamakom) raises an interesting observation. At first glance, constantly mentioning a single miracle might appear to diminish the praise of Hashem, as though one were limiting His wonders to that one event.

He illustrates this with a parable: If a person were to take in an orphan and care for him daily—raising him, feeding him, giving him drink, and providing for all his needs—and the orphan would constantly go around recounting only one kindness that his benefactor had done for him, it would give the impression that this was the only good deed ever performed for him. However, if the orphan were to constantly repeat the kindness that his benefactor opened his home to him, such praise would certainly be appropriate, for that act is the source and basis for all the continued kindness he receives thereafter.

Yetzi'as Mitzrayim on the night of the Seder is not merely another miracle to be remembered; it is the moment when Hashem formed us into His people and took us under His wings. Because it marks the very birth of our nation and represents the foundation of our relationship with Hashem, it occupies a unique place in our collective memory. This is the underlying theme of the Seder night and explains how this obligation to recall Yetzi'as Mitzrayim on Pesach, differs from our obligation to mention it throughout the year.

Hence, the uniqueness of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim lies in the fact that at that moment Hashem took us to be His nation. That event became the source and foundation of all the miracles He performed for us afterward and will yet perform for us in the future.

Furthermore, the Chasam Sofer (Derashos, Pesach 31) explains why simchah is not explicitly mentioned in the pesukim concerning Pesach. For, given the inherent holiness of the day — a day that serves as a sign between Hashem and His people, set aside for mitzvos and preserved in sanctity — there is no need to awaken joy within the Jewish heart. Is there any greater joy than this itself?

6. סיפור הנס — Retelling and Reliving

It is well known and self-evident that the recipient of a miracle must express gratitude to Hashem. However, there is an additional element of gratitude that is often overlooked: relating and publicizing the miracle itself.

Indeed, Tehillim is replete with verses that emphasize this form of thanksgiving, such as “שיחו בכל נפלאותיו” — “Speak of all His wonders” (Tehillim 105:2), and “ואספר מעשי י-ה” — “I shall recount the deeds of Hashem” (Tehillim 118:17).

Expressing thanks to Hashem is not limited to internal appreciation or verbal praise; it also includes telling the story of His wonders, ensuring that His kindness becomes known and remembered.

Shirah Through Story

The Maharsha (Megillah 14a) explains the Gemara's kal va'chomer of “ומה מעבדות לחירות אומרים שירה” in a novel way. When the Jewish people were redeemed from slavery to freedom, they sang Shirah—Az Yashir—which itself consists of recounting the miracles of Krias Yam Suf.

If so, the Gemara argues, from death to life—as occurred in the miracle of Purim—all the more so should require such praise. According to the

Maharsha, this praise is expressed through retelling the miracle itself. Thus, the obligation of reading the Megillah is essentially the fulfillment of that shirah: the recounting and publicizing of the miracle of Purim.

In this sense, the sippur of the miracle itself becomes the very expression of gratitude and praise to Hashem.

Publicizing the Actual Miracle: The Purpose of the Korban Todah

With the Korban Todah, forty loaves were brought together with the offering. Yet the time allotted for eating the sacrifice was only one day and one night, even though it is technically a type of Korban Shelamim, and Shelamim may normally be eaten for two days and one night. Moreover, this offering included many loaves, which greatly increased the amount of food to be consumed.

The Netziv explains that the purpose of the Korban Todah, which is brought in response to a miracle, is to recount the kindnesses of Hashem that He bestowed upon the individual. For this reason, the Torah increased the amount of bread while simultaneously shortening the time permitted for eating the offering more than by other Shelamim.

This arrangement ensured that the person would need to invite many people to partake in the meal on the day the offering was brought, thereby creating an opportunity for the miracle to be recounted before a large gathering.

Recounting Hashem's Kindness: From Bikkurim to the Haggadah.

Interestingly, see also the Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvos regarding the mitzvah of Bikkurim, where he writes that there is a mitzvah to recount the kindnesses that Hashem has bestowed upon us when bringing the first fruits.

This indicates that the essence of the mitzvah is the recounting of Hashem's kindness, while the time designated for fulfilling it is specifically when the Bikkurim are brought.

It is therefore plausible to suggest that the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim is precisely that—sippur: to relate and recount the multitude of miracles that Hashem performed for us throughout the entire process of the Exodus from Egypt.

The objective is not merely that we remember the event, but that we tell it. By recounting the many wonders and acts of Divine providence

that accompanied the redemption, we give expression to our gratitude and, at the same time, magnify and glorify the Name of Hashem. The very act of telling and publicizing His miracles becomes itself a form of praise, spreading awareness of His kindness and greatness.

Thus, the mitzvah is fulfilled not simply through recollection, but through narration—retelling the story of the redemption in a way that proclaims Hashem's greatness and ensures that His wonders continue to be known and celebrated.

Perhaps for this reason the Sages established that the section of "Ar-ami Oved Avi" be recited in the Haggadah, since it constitutes a Torah-based recounting of Hashem's kindnesses.

SIMANEI HASEDER

Each of the Simanei HaSeder appears as a header introducing the next section of the Seder. These should not be viewed merely as simple guides or previews of what is to follow. Rather, each of these headings carries a particular relevance to this unique night. Even seemingly routine acts—such as Kiddush or washing our hands—possess a special place and deeper meaning on Leil HaSeder. The primary purpose of this work is to highlight the unique significance each of these Simanim holds for this sacred evening.

Kadesh, Urchatz, Karpas...—these are the familiar words and melody with which nearly every Seder begins. As the night progresses, the head of the household announces them before commencing each section. The Yesod V'Shoresh HaAvodah (Shaar 9, Perek 6) reveals that these seemingly simple headings actually contain profound spiritual significance and mystical elements, and therefore they should be recited verbally. Indeed, this was the practice of many great Torah leaders.

Several explanations are offered for the custom of proclaiming these Simanim:

1. The Maharshal (Responsa 88) connects this custom to the verse: "For you there shall be singing as on a night when a festival is sanctified" (Yeshaya 30:29), implying that this night should be filled with melody and song.
2. The Chasam Sofer (Derashos, vol. 2, p. 258), in a lengthy discourse, emphasizes the importance of patience. He explains that our entire system of emunah revolves around this virtue, and he reflects on the

historic failures that resulted from its absence. He concludes that the purpose of announcing the Simanim is to train our children in patience—to sit and wait until the proper time to eat arrives. Every part of this night has its proper moment, and we must patiently await its turn.

3. The Machzor Vitri and Sefer HaPardes suggest that the Simanim were instituted so that no detail of this unique night would be forgotten and so that everyone present would remain aware of the order of the proceedings.

The Haggadah—Witness to an Unbroken Nation

This final explanation may also carry historical significance. Some opinions attribute the authorship of these Simanim to Rashi (see Machzor Vitri, Hilchos Pesach 65). However, the prevailing view is that they were composed by Rav Shmuel of Falaise (M'Plaizah), one of the Baalei Tosafos, and a contemporary of the S'ma"g and Rabbeinu Yechiel of Paris.

Rav Shmuel of Falaise was among the Torah scholars forced to defend the Talmud during the infamous Disputation of Paris in 1240. This was long before the invention of the printing press; all Torah texts were handwritten manuscripts. The verdict of the corrupt tribunal was catastrophic: twenty-four wagonloads of Jewish books were burned, an attempt to eradicate Torah learning and strip the Jewish people of their greatest treasure. To add to the tragedy, the leading Torah scholars of the generation were forced to watch as these sacred volumes were thrown into the flames.

One of the kinot recited on Tisha B'Av, Sha'ali Serufah Ba'esh, was composed by the Maharam of Rothenburg, who witnessed this horrific scene. The tragedy was so severe that its anniversary was established as a fast day (see Magen Avraham Orach Chaim 580:9 and Mishnah Berurah).

Perhaps it can be suggested that the Simanei HaSeder, authored by Rav Shmuel of Falaise to ensure that nothing would be forgotten during a time when Torah itself was threatened with destruction, have ultimately become a powerful symbol of its eternal survival. The beloved Haggadah revolves around these iconic Simanim.

According to the Jewish Book Council, the Haggadah is the most widely published Jewish book, with more than 3,500 printed editions and translations into over thirty-five languages. The Malbim, in the introduction to the second edition of his Haggadah, writes in a style reminiscent of the Gemara (Kiddushin 49b)—which speaks of “ten measures of wisdom descending to the world”—that nine measures of Torah

commentary descended to this world; the Haggadah received nine, and only one remained for the rest of the Torah.

This tattered, wine-stained Haggadah, sometimes even bearing the marks of fire and persecution, has survived countless attempts to destroy it. It stands as testimony that the flame of Torah can never be extinguished. Time and again we have defied the forces that sought to eradicate us, emerging stronger and more devoted to the study and dissemination of Torah.

Let us therefore embrace every aspect of this holy night. Let us strive to understand each of the Simanim and their connection to the Seder. And let us remember that these very Simanim stand as enduring testimony to the eternity of our Torah and the people who cherish it.

The Seder

A Night Without Simplicity

The first night of Pesach is universally referred to as “Leil HaSeder,” the night of the Seder. Significantly, it is not called “the night of matzah” or named after any of the other mitzvos performed on this evening. Rather, the title itself captures the essence of what the night demands of us—order and structure.

It is well known that the Torah is understood on four levels: פשט, רמז, סוד, דרוש, whose acronym forms the word פרדס. As a general rule, the deeper layers never contradict the foundational meaning. Peshat represents the plain or contextual meaning of the text. Remez conveys its hinted or allegorical meaning. Derash explores the interpretive and homiletical dimension, and Sod reveals its hidden, mystical depth.

Interestingly, the word סדר appears to contain only דרוש, סוד, and רמז, with the notable omission of פשט. Some commentators explain that this omission is intentional. Just as Shir HaShirim is described as Kodesh Kodashim—the Holy of Holies—its sanctity is so profound that it resists a simple or superficial interpretation. Its essence transcends the realm of ordinary explanation, and any attempt to reduce it to a purely basic meaning would diminish its lofty stature. Even in its most straightforward reading, it remains Kodesh Kodashim (Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz).

A Night of Divine Order

Similarly, the night of the Seder, surrounded by extraordinary holiness, contains no simple dimension. It is called Seder to imply that this night is so saturated with meaning and depth that only the realms of Sod, Derash, and Remez are present—entirely devoid of the level of Peshat,

of simplicity.

At the same time, the word Seder literally means order. The night of Pesach radiates precision and structure. The Maharil (Derashos, at the end of the Haggadah) emphasizes that every detail of the Seder must be followed carefully, even those that may appear small or insignificant, for each element carries profound significance.

Even the songs and poems recited during Nirtzah, which at times may seem childlike, are rooted in the deepest layers of Torah. The Chida (Chaim Sha'al, vol. I, siman 28) recounts an incident in which someone mocked the legitimacy of these poems, and he ruled that such mockery was so severe that it warranted the cherem—the ban of excommunication—placed upon that individual.

The Chidushei HaRim (quoted by the Sfas Emes, 5642) offers another explanation for the title Leil HaSeder, based on the teaching of the Maharal (Gevuros Hashem, introduction). Just as there exists order in the natural world, there is also order within the supernatural. Miracles themselves are not random disruptions of nature; they are part of the carefully orchestrated design of creation. On this night, we internalize this profound lesson—that even the seemingly abnormal and miraculous events are arranged with precision and occupy their exact place within Hashem's master plan.

The Same Seder

Rav Elya Lopian (Lev Eliyahu Devarim pg. 198) writes that he heard from a distinguished Torah scholar who had studied in Kelm, named Rav Betzalel, the grandson of the Gaon, the author of Malbushei Yom Tov. He related the following in the name of his grandfather:

When he would sit at the Seder and begin reciting the Haggadah, he would say:

'Just as I am now sitting in my home and conducting the Seder, so too are all the Jews in this city conducting the Seder as we are. And so too all the Jews in the surrounding district, and throughout the entire country, and indeed Jews all over the world are conducting the Seder tonight—drinking the four cups, eating matzah, and reciting the Haggadah exactly as we are.

All of us in our generation perform the Seder on the night of Pesach. And where did we see this practice? From our fathers before us. And where did they see it? From their fathers before them. And so it continues—each generation learning from the generation that preceded it—going back through the ages, through the Geonim, the Rabbanan Savorai, the Amoraim, the Tannaim, the Men of the Great Assembly,

and the Prophets, all the way back to the elders and the generation of Moshe and Aharon, Yehoshua and Kalev, and ultimately the Dor De'ah, the generation that received the Torah and left Egypt.

To them it was said: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt" (Shemos 19:4). And Chazal explain (see Mechilta, cited by Rashi there): "This is not a tradition handed down to you, nor am I sending you words through witnesses. Rather, you yourselves saw what I did to Egypt."

Thus, we perform the very same Seder as the Chafetz Chaim—the same Haggadah, the same matzah. We perform the same Seder as the Vilna Gaon, the Shelah, and the Arizal; as the Rambam and Ramban; as Ravina and Rav Ashi; as Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer.'

The table should be prepared early with our finest silver and tableware.

One should be ready to begin the Seder immediately after night-fall, following Maariv, so that the children remain awake and able to participate in this sacred experience.

Mitzrayim

The Enduring Nation of Mitzrayim

The land and nation of Mitzrayim occupy a somewhat unique place in history. Unlike many of the great civilizations of antiquity that disappeared entirely, Mitzrayim endured. While other nations faded from the world stage, Egypt somehow managed to survive the passage of time.

Even Sancherev, who famously uprooted and mixed the populations of the nations he conquered, did not permanently erase the identity of Egypt. The nation of Mitzrayim ultimately returned to its homeland after forty years (see Yechezkel 29:13, Tosafos Yevamos 76b s.v. Min-yamin, and Rambam Issurei Biah 12:25).

The Alter of Kelm, quoted by Rav Chatzkel Levenstein in Haggadah Yadov Emunah, suggests that the remarkable endurance of Mitzrayim was not coincidental. Rather, it served a profound purpose: to enable Klal Yisroel to properly fulfill the many mitzvos associated with Yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

Imagine the challenge of transmitting to our children the story that forms the foundation of our faith if it had taken place in a land that no longer existed and among a nation that had vanished entirely. Relating

such a narrative would become nearly impossible. Hashem therefore orchestrated that the land of Mitzrayim would endure, and that its people would survive the trials of history—all so that we could continue to recount the story of our redemption and properly fulfill the mitzvos connected to it.

Mitzrayim and the Blueprint of Redemption

Chazal in several places (Bereishis Rabbah 2:4, 16:4, among others) enumerate the four kingdoms representing the exiles endured by Klal Yisroel: Bavel, Madai, Yavan, and Edom. Interestingly, Galus Mitzrayim is not included in that list.

This omission reflects a deeper idea: the exile of Mitzrayim is understood to encompass all subsequent exiles. The Baal HaTurim (Shemos 6:6) explains that the four expressions of redemption correspond to the four future kingdoms. Thus, on the night when we celebrate our liberation from Egypt, we recognize that all the exiles and suffering throughout history were already embedded within that original redemption.

In other words, history unfolds according to a calculated Divine plan. Every event—whether positive or painful, natural or miraculous—occupies its precise place within the orderly design of creation.

A fascinating insight in this regard is offered by the Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan (SeMaK), one of the Baalei Tosafos. Chazal teach (Shabbos 31a) that one of the first questions a person will be asked in the Heavenly court is:

“ציפית לישועה?” — Did you await the redemption?

The SeMaK wonders where the Torah itself commands such an obligation—to actively anticipate the redemption. He explains that the source lies in the very first statement of the Aseres HaDibros:

“אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים.”

While this declaration certainly establishes the mitzvah of emunah, the SeMaK understands that it also teaches another principle: belief that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is a Go'el. Just as He redeemed us from Mitzrayim, so too will He redeem us from our present exile.

Chazal offer different explanations for the seemingly premature redemption from Egypt—after 210 years instead of the originally decreed 400 years. One view holds that the intensity of the suffering during those 210 years equaled the experience of four centuries of exile. Another opinion suggests that the remaining 190 years were dispersed throughout the later exiles endured by the Jewish people (see Tzlach,

Pesachim 116b, on the Mishnah of Rabban Gamliel).

According to this approach, the final redemption will serve as the ultimate completion of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim itself. We can now better understand why the declaration “אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים” is intrinsically connected to the anticipation of the final Geulah.

See below under Shulchan Orech, where the Beis HaLevi explains the custom of eating eggs at the Seder and its connection to this theme.

The Good Tidings of Exile

The Tzror HaMor (Bereishis 15:9) raises a striking question regarding the seemingly inconsistent conduct of Avraham Avinu. On the one hand, Avraham was compassionate toward the entire world, even praying for mercy on behalf of the people of Sodom. Yet when he was informed that his own descendants would be enslaved in Mitzrayim, he did not pray that they be spared the decree of exile. (See Shabbos 89b, where the Gemara discusses: “To whom shall we go?”). Furthermore, it seems puzzling that Hashem, in reward for all the service that Avraham rendered to his Creator, informed him of such difficult news—that his descendants would endure exile—apparently without cause.

He suggests that the intention of this message was quite the opposite. As a reward for Avraham's righteousness, Hashem actually gave him good tidings: the exile of Egypt. For it was through this experience that the descendants of Avraham merited the great spiritual attainments of Torah, priesthood, and kingship.

Had the Jewish people not descended to Mitzrayim and been refined in the Egyptian “furnace of iron”, they would not have become worthy of these lofty distinctions.

For this reason, Avraham remained silent and accepted the message.

This is comparable to a man that was beaten and taken to the hospital. During the surgery required to treat his injuries, the doctors discover a life-threatening growth that had gone unnoticed. Suddenly the blow that appeared to be nothing but misfortune becomes the very means through which his life is saved. What once seemed like a tragedy is now understood as the beginning of his healing.

The Haggadah

Preserving the Story of Redemption

The Oral Torah was originally not permitted to be written down. It was

transmitted to us by Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai, and we were entrusted with the responsibility of passing it on verbally to our children and to future generations. For a significant portion of our history, the only written Torah texts that existed were the twenty-four books of Tanach.

Rabbeinu Bachya (Ki Sisa 34:27) suggests that this restriction served an important purpose: it preserved the exclusive guardianship of Torah within Klal Yisrael. The Written Torah cannot be properly understood without its accompanying oral explanations. By ensuring that the Oral Torah remained unwritten, its interpretation could not easily be appropriated or distorted.

This reality changed when Rabbeinu HaKadosh courageously ruled that the prohibition should be set aside in order to preserve the eternity of Torah. Fearing that the traditions might be forgotten due to the upheavals of exile, he committed the teachings of the Oral Torah to writing.

Yet even during the era when writing the Oral Torah was generally prohibited, sections of the Haggadah were already written. The story of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim was clearly viewed as a cornerstone of our emunah and an indispensable vehicle for transmitting our history of redemption and faith.

The importance of this narrative is reflected in the halachah as well. The Magen Avraham (471:7) rules that the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim applies not only to boys but to girls as well. The Aruch HaShulchan (472:15) echoes this ruling and explains that on this night—given the profound significance of the message being conveyed—even those who are not ordinarily included in a father's obligation of chinuch must nevertheless be included. The transmission of the story of redemption must reach every member of the household.

The Kittel

It is customary to wear a Kittel at the Seder. Many explanations are offered for this minhag. At first glance, it appears somewhat ironic: the same garment worn on Yom Kippur to evoke awe and humility—since it is also the garment in which a person is buried (see Rema, Orach Chaim 609:3)—is worn as well on the night of the Seder.

Garments of Truth

1. Rav Shimon Schwab once led the Seder in his home. After the second cup of wine, the children began to grow restless and somewhat giddy, detracting from the uplifting atmosphere of the night. Rav Schwab sud-

denly became very serious. Grasping the lapels of his Kittel, he cleared his throat and addressed them:

“In this Kittel they will bury me. Tonight, I am telling you a true story. It is not a myth, nor a fairy tale. It really happened. And even if this were the last day of my life, the final moments on earth, I would tell you this very story—because it is emes, unequivocally true.”

Perhaps the Kittel lends credibility and sincerity to the words we share with our children on this sacred night. By wearing this solemn garment, we declare that the faith we transmit tonight is one we hold until our very last day. The message is delivered with urgency—as though this were our final opportunity to pass it on—because the responsibility of transmitting our tradition rests upon us.

The torch of faith that has been carried for nearly three thousand years is now in our hands. It is our sacred duty to pass that torch to our children. Though the flame may have flickered at times throughout history, tonight it burns brightly once again.

Garments of Holiness

2. The Maharal (Gevuros Hashem 51) explains that wearing a Kittel resembles the white garments worn by the Kohen Gadol when he entered the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur. This striking comparison offers a glimpse into the holiness and spiritual heights that can be reached on this extraordinary night.

3. The Netziv (introduction to Haggadah Imrei Shefer) offers another perspective that helps explain this custom as well as many of the unusual practices of the Seder. He writes that every Seder is meant to recreate the original Seder, when the Korban Pesach was brought. Just as one would approach the mitzvah of eating the Korban Pesach—partaking from what was essentially the “table of Hashem”—with reverence and seriousness, so too we, even while living in exile, seek to replicate that same mindset and conduct.

Garments of Dignity

The Gemara (Kiddushin 40a) teaches that if a person feels overcome by his yetzer hara, he should go to a place where he is not known, dress in dark garments, and act according to his impulses rather than desecrating Hashem’s Name publicly. Rashi explains that dark clothing is degrading and unbecoming of honorable people, and this sense of diminished dignity may help him restrain himself.

By contrast, white garments symbolize honor, purity, and dignity. It is therefore fitting that on this night—when we celebrate freedom, royal-

ty, and our elevated status as Hashem's nation—we wear garments of white.

It is customary for a married man to wear a Kittel at the Seder. There are differing opinions regarding whether an avel or a chosson during his first year of marriage should do so. One who is uncertain of his family's custom may wear the Kittel.

Top of Form

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The Ke'arah

A Plate of Redemption

The Ke'arah, or Seder plate, is typically placed in a prominent position on the table. Arranged upon it are many of the central themes of the night, each according to one's family minhag. The most widely practiced arrangement follows the layout of the Arizal, commonly illustrated in many editions of the Haggadah.

The purpose of the Ke'arah is to display the foods around which the discussions of the night revolve. Thus, we point to the matzah when declaring "מצה זו", and to the maror when explaining its meaning (see Rambam, Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 8:3-4). The Tur (Orach Chaim 473:7) maintains that the Ke'arah, together with the matzah, should remain on the table throughout the entire recitation of the Haggadah.

The Netziv (Ha'amek Davar, Re'eh 16:3) suggests that this practice is connected to the matzah being described as "לחם עני" — lechem oni, which Chazal interpret as bread "over which many words are spoken" (see Pesachim 36a), referring to the lengthy narrative of the Haggadah. (See the Netziv there for a fascinating explanation as to why this is the only place in the Torah where matzah is called lechem oni.)

In addition, a roasted piece of chicken and a roasted egg are placed on the Ke'arah. The roasted meat recalls the Korban Pesach, while the egg represents the Korban Chagigah. These two offerings were associated with the Pesach sacrifice, as the Chagigah was brought alongside it (see Pesachim 114b, and Rashi).

Both offerings are closely connected to the mitzvos of matzah and maror, as the Torah states regarding the Korban Pesach: "על מצות ומרורים" — "with matzos and bitter herbs shall they eat it" (Bamidbar

9:11). For this reason, we specifically commemorate these two korbanos on the Seder night, given their direct connection to the central mitzvos of the evening (see Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, end of chapter 50).

The egg and the roasted meat should ideally be prepared before Yom Tov. If one forgot to do so, they may be roasted on Yom Tov, but they must then be eaten—at least a small amount—the following day.

Bottom of Form

The Four Cups

Four Cups, Five Promises

At the Seder we drink four cups of wine, each associated with a specific mitzvah of the evening. One cup accompanies Kiddush, the second is drunk after the Haggadah, the third follows Birchas HaMazon, and the fourth accompanies Hallel.

The number four corresponds to the four expressions of redemption mentioned in the Torah:

וְהוֹצֵאתִי, וְהַצַּלְתִּי, וְגֵאלְתִּי, וְלִקַּחְתִּי — “I will take you out, I will save you, I will redeem you, and I will take you as My people” (see Bereishis Rabbah 88).

However, upon closer examination, a curious omission emerges. In the same sequence of verses (Shemos 6:6–8) there is a fifth expression: וְהֵבֵאתִי — “I will bring you into the land.” Yet this phrase does not seem to receive its own cup.

Indeed, some Rishonim (see Maharil quoting the Rosh, and Raavad on the Baal HaMaor, Pesachim 118) maintain that the fifth cup, commonly known as the Kos Shel Eliyahu, corresponds to this fifth expression of redemption. Nevertheless, the question remains: why does וְהֵבֵאתִי not stand alongside the other four expressions with its own obligatory cup?

The Meshech Chochmah (Va'eira 6:9) offers a fascinating insight. He notes that the promise of וְהֵבֵאתִי—bringing the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael—appears only once and is never repeated again in the narrative. He explains that when the Torah states “They did not listen to Moshe because of their crushed spirits and cruel bondage,” it refers specifically to this promise of entry into the Land. The people were so overwhelmed by their suffering that their immediate concern was simply to escape their affliction; the distant promise of entering Eretz

Yisrael did not resonate with them at that moment. As a result, this expression was not reiterated.

Accordingly, on the night when we recount the story of the Exodus from Mitzrayim, the Chachamim focused on the four expressions directly related to redemption from slavery and omitted **וְהַבֵּאתִי**, which speaks of a later stage of redemption. (See also Likutei HaPardes, attributed to Rashi, p. 34.)

Wine and the Language of Redemption

Alternatively, the four cups correspond to the four times the word “כוס” (cup) appears in the dream of the Sar HaMashkim, which he related to Yosef—an event that ultimately set the stage for the redemption of Egypt (see Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:1). This explanation is particularly meaningful, as it subtly recalls Yosef, the first of the Shevatim to descend to Egypt, whose role might otherwise seem absent from the narrative of the Seder (see also the discussion under Karpas).

Some Rishonim (see Tosafos Mordechai, Pesachim, Perek 10) ask why the four expressions of redemption are commemorated with wine rather than with four matzos. One explanation is that a slave could never drink wine, as intoxication would impair his ability to serve his master. Thus, the very act of drinking wine symbolizes freedom from servitude.

The Meshech Chochmah (Va'eira) offers another insight. There is perhaps no substance that symbolizes separation more than wine, as wine touched by a non-Jew becomes prohibited for Jewish consumption. It was precisely through maintaining such separateness that Klal Yisrael merited redemption, for they preserved their language, clothing, and names even while living in Egypt. This commitment to maintaining a distinct Jewish identity is therefore appropriately celebrated through wine, the very symbol of separation.

Reclining / Leaning (Heseibah)

From Slavery to Royalty

The matzah (for Motzi Matzah, Korech, and Afikoman) and the four cups of wine must be consumed while reclining to the left side. This act symbolizes our freedom, for slaves do not have the liberty to eat and drink in such a relaxed and luxurious manner.

Additionally, the Rambam (Pirush HaMishnah, Pesachim 10:1) explains that on this night we are obligated to conduct ourselves as kings and dignitaries, following the customs of royalty during their meals. The

Rambam teaches that the celebration of the Seder goes beyond simply marking our release from slavery. We are also celebrating our elevation to the status of “ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש”—a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation. The Seder commemorates not only the transition from slavery to freedom, but the transformation from slavery to royalty, highlighting the privilege of belonging to this special nation.

A source for this idea appears in Midrash Rabbah (Beshalach 20:18). On the verse “And Hashem led the people around (וַיֹּסֶב אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָעָם)”, Chazal derive that even the poorest Jew must recline at the Seder. The Midrash notes the connection between the word וַיֹּסֶב (vayasev—He led them around) and יֹסֵב (yasev—to recline), suggesting that this posture reflects the dignity and freedom bestowed upon the Jewish people during the Exodus.

Remembering and Practicing

Some commentators question why this Midrashic source is not cited by the Rishonim, who instead emphasize the more general explanation of “דרך חירות”—the manner of free people (see Rashi and Rashbam, Pesachim 99b). It may be suggested that two distinct elements are contained within the practice of reclining.

One aspect is זכר לחירות—a remembrance of the freedom experienced at the Exodus, an attempt to relive that extraordinary moment of liberation. The second aspect is דרך חירות—conducting oneself in the manner of free individuals.

This dual idea is reflected in the wording of the Rambam. He writes that we are obligated to eat while reclining “in order to eat like kings and dignitaries, until it is an act of freedom.” The Rambam thus appears to incorporate both elements: recalling the freedom of the Exodus while simultaneously behaving in the dignified manner of free people.

This also explains why we continue to recline today, even though in our times reclining is no longer considered a sign of luxury. (The Maharil even notes that reclining was sometimes associated with the eating posture of the sick, and see Raavyah as well.) Nevertheless, the act remains part of the mitzvah because it serves as a symbolic reenactment of the freedom experienced during Yetzi’as Mitzrayim, not merely as a contemporary display of aristocratic behavior.

Although both matzah and reclining symbolize freedom, there is a fundamental difference between them. Matzah inherently commemorates the freedom of the Exodus from Mitzrayim, while heseibah becomes symbolic of the freedom from Mitzrayim only when it accompanies the narrative and actions through which we relive that freedom (see Pesa-

chim 108a).

Heseibah All Night

The Rambam writes (Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:8): "With regard to the remainder of one's eating and drinking, if he reclines, it is praiseworthy."

Rav Shimon Moshe Diskin (Masaas HaMelech Bo 12:27) writes to explain this: earlier the Rambam writes (7:6), "In every generation a person is obligated to present himself as if he himself has now left the slavery of Egypt." He then continues (7:7): "Therefore, when a person eats on this night, he must eat and drink while reclining, in the manner of free people."

From this it emerges that the concept of reclining (heseibah) is part of the obligation to demonstrate that one has left Egypt. The very idea of demonstrating or showing is itself a form of telling. Just as there is a form of storytelling through speech, there is also storytelling through actions.

Since the Haggadah teaches that "Whoever elaborates in recounting the Exodus from Egypt is praiseworthy," it follows that the more one reclines, which is itself a form of recounting the Exodus through action, the more praiseworthy he is.

This, then, is the source of the Rambam's formulation. He deliberately uses this same expression—"הרי זה משובח"—to indicate that increasing one's reclining, as an expression of freedom, is itself another form of sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

- **Heseibah is performed by reclining the entire body to the left side, not merely tilting the head.**
- **Even left-handed individuals recline to the left.**
- **Failure to recline when required may necessitate repeating the eating or drinking, which will be discussed in the relevant sections.**
- **Women are generally not required to recline, although they may do so if they wish.**
- **However, women should not eat the matzah while standing.**

□ **If a woman forgets to recline, she does not need to repeat the mitzvah.**

Top of Form

Kadesh

Holiness for the impure

Even those who have the custom to wash their hands before Kiddush throughout the year should not do so on the night of the Seder (Mishnah Berurah 473:6). While many people wash their hands before performing mitzvos, on the night of the Seder we deliberately leave our hands “impure.” This practice commemorates the fact that Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim despite our spiritual impurity and unworthiness. We therefore hope that the holiness of this night will likewise elevate us, despite our own shortcomings (see Avnei Nezer, quoted by Shem MiShmuel).

The Beginning of the Story of Redemption

Although Kiddush precedes every Shabbos and Yom Tov meal, on the night of Pesach it assumes a unique role as part of the structure of the Seder itself. Normally, the rule of Kiddush b'makom seudah requires that Kiddush be followed immediately by the meal. If there is a significant interruption, the Kiddush is invalidated.

Yet on the night of the Seder there is an apparent interruption—Karpas and Maggid—between Kiddush and the meal of matzah. This is because the Kiddush of Pesach is intrinsically connected to the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 29:1) explains that the purpose of Kiddush is to proclaim the greatness and sanctity of the day. Similarly, the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim is to describe the significance of Pesach and the miracles that occurred on this day. Thus the Kiddush of the Seder night, which itself contains the theme of Zecher L'Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, serves as the opening declaration of the story that unfolds throughout the Seder.

Accordingly, everything said and done at the Seder—particularly the narrative of the Haggadah—is viewed as a continuation of that Kiddush, and therefore does not constitute a halachic interruption (hefsek) between Kiddush and the meal (see Haggadah of Rav Chaim Palagi).

Most people assume that the berachah of Borei Pri HaGafen recited at

Kiddush is simply the same blessing made before drinking wine in any other setting. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Minchas Shlomo 1:18:7) suggests otherwise. The blessing before drinking wine at Kiddush thanks Hashem not only for the physical enjoyment of the wine, but also for the privilege of fulfilling the mitzvah of Kiddush through it.

Therefore, even someone who dislikes wine and drinks it only to fulfill the mitzvah must still recite the blessing. The berachah acknowledges both the enjoyment of the wine and the opportunity to perform a mitzvah through it (see Ritva Rosh Hashanah 29a, Maharam Shik O.C. 319).

The Opening Declaration of Redemption

There is also a longstanding requirement to mention Yetzi'as Mitzrayim in Kiddush on Shabbos (Pesachim 117b), and failure to do so may invalidate the mitzvah (see Biur Halacha 271:1). The Rashbam there suggests that the obligation of Kiddush on Shabbos and Yom Tov is derived from the Kiddush of Pesach night, implying that the original paradigm of Kiddush is rooted in the Seder night itself.

Other Rishonim, such as the Ba'al Halachos Gedolos (Hilchos Kiddush v'Havdalah, p. 91), derive the obligation of Kiddush for each Yom Tov from its own verse, indicating that each festival possesses a unique form of Kiddush.

Similarly, Ma'or HaAfeilah (Rabbeinu Nesanel ben Yeshaya of Yemen, 1392) writes that the Torah commandment to recount the miracles of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim on the fifteenth night of Nissan is itself the Kiddush of the night of Pesach.

From these sources it emerges that the Kiddush of the Seder night is fundamentally different from all other Kiddush recitations. It is not merely a declaration of sanctity; it also serves as the opening fulfillment of the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, the central mitzvah of the evening.

(For further discussion, see below under Maggid – Why Don't We Recite a Berachah on the Haggadah.)

□ **The baal habayis should not pour wine for himself; rather, another should pour for him, in keeping with the conduct of free men.**

□ **Accordingly, it is customary for all participants at the Seder to pour wine for one another, as an expression of free-**

dom and dignity.

□ **Kiddush may only be recited after nightfall, approximately 45 minutes after sunset.**

□ **The Kiddush cup (becher) should be rinsed inside and out beforehand.**

• **Red wine is preferable, based on the verse: “אל תרא יין כי יתאדם” (Mishlei 23:31), which praises wine whose rich color enhances its appeal.**

□ **Red wine also recalls the blood of the Korban Pesach and Bris Milah, the mitzvos performed by the Jewish people in Egypt (Ohr Zarua, Pesach 256). Some also connect it to Makkas Dam and other associations with redemption (see Taz 473:9, Pri Megadim A.A. 472:13).**

□ **If drinking strong wine is difficult, it may be diluted with grape juice or water, provided that the mixture still contains at least half wine. If necessary, grape juice alone may be used.**

□ **The cup should ideally hold at least 4.4 ounces, though in pressing circumstances 2.9 ounces may suffice.**

□ **One should ideally drink most of the cup in one continuous act or a few successive gulps, within approximately 3–4 minutes.**

□ **The cup must be drunk while reclining (heseibah) to the left. Failure to recline may require drinking another cup under certain circumstances.**

□ **During Kiddush one should have in mind that he is fulfilling three mitzvos:**

- 1. Kiddush of the day,**
- 2. the first of the four cups, and**
- 3. the beginning of Sippur Yetzi’as Mitzrayim.**

Bottom of Form

Top of Form

URCHATZ

Sanctify yourselves. Be holy.

We wash our hands prior to eating the karpas vegetable, which has come into contact with liquids, without reciting a berachah. Although we do not generally observe this practice during the year, on the night of the Seder we do so as an added measure of purification, in recognition of the unique kedushah of the night.

Ordinarily, washing hands is referred to as “Rachtzah,” as we will do later in the Seder before eating the matzah. The term “Urchatz,” however, is written with a vav, implying a connection to the previous step, Kadesh. It is as if the instruction reads: “Kadesh — and then Urchatz.” This differs from the other simanim of the night, which stand independently.

Perhaps this wording reflects the idea that this washing itself is an extension of kedushah. From a strictly halachic standpoint, this washing is not absolutely necessary. Rather, it is performed as an additional act of sanctification, appropriate for this elevated night.

In this sense, the author of the simanim may be conveying a deeper message: on the night of Pesach, when we celebrate our unique status as the chosen people, we are called upon to elevate ourselves — to go above and beyond the ordinary.

Wash — even for a vegetable for which we might not ordinarily be careful to wash.

(This idea is attributed to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.)

Additionally, many of the customs observed during the Seder are meant to recreate elements of the Seder as it was practiced during the era of the Korban Pesach, when the laws of tumah and taharah were actively observed. (See Netziv, introduction to his commentary on the Haggadah.)

It is customary to bring a washing cup and basin to the table, allowing the head of the household to wash at the table itself — an expression of the freedom and dignity characteristic of the night.

Although no berachah is recited, one should not speak between the washing and the eating of the karpas. This appears to be Pashut based on the Gemara in Berachos (42a). See also Halichos Shlomo (9:183) and Kovetz Halachos (23:3) in the name of Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky.

Bottom of Form

KARPAS

This “snack” of a vegetable dipped into salt water serves several purposes within the Seder.

It appears that at one time there was an actual vegetable known as “Karpas.” The Chasam Sofer (Shu”t Orach Chaim 132) records that his teacher, Rav Nosson Adler, exerted great effort to identify this vegetable and ultimately concluded that it is what we know today as celery.

One explanation for selecting this vegetable relates to a symbolic allusion contained within its letters. The letters כִּרְפִּיס, when rearranged, form the phrase סִי פֶרֶךְ, hinting to the six hundred thousand Jews who were subjected to crushing labor (avodas perech) in Egypt.

Mechiras Yosef

Another interpretation is offered by Rabbeinu Manoach (Hilchos Chametz U’Matzah 8:2), who notes that the word “Karpas” alludes to the “Kesonos Pasim,” the special garment worn by Yosef. This garment played a central role in the story of Mechiras Yosef, the sale of Yosef by his brothers.

A connection between karpas and pasim is also suggested in the Gemara (Megillah 12a). The verse describing Achashverosh’s royal feast states:

“חור כרפס ותכלת” (Esther 1:6)

The Gemara asks: What is karpas? Rav Yosei bar Chanina explains that it refers to “karim shel pasim”—fine velvet cushions.

Some Sephardic Haggados add another symbolic layer: dipping the karpas into salt water corresponds to the brothers dipping Yosef’s coat into blood. In this way, the Seder subtly incorporates Mechiras Yosef—the immediate cause that ultimately led to the descent of the Jewish people into Egypt—into the narrative of our redemption.

Free to Question

My father shlit”a often notes another simple yet profound perspective. The Gemara (Pesachim 114b) states that the entire purpose of karpas is “כדי שישאלו התינוקות”—to prompt the children to ask questions.

In a deeper sense, this too relates to the episode of Mechiras Yosef. The brothers were perplexed by their father Yaakov’s preferential treatment of Yosef, yet instead of asking for clarification, they allowed their confu-

sion to grow into resentment.

Chazal therefore instituted this unusual act specifically to encourage children to ask questions about behaviors they do not understand. Indeed, this is the very essence of the Seder and the mitzvah of “והגדת לבנך.” The Torah seeks to cultivate a relationship in which children feel comfortable asking any question without fear of their parents’ response.

□ **Almost any vegetable whose berachah is Ha’adamah (except maror) may be used for karpas. Many people use potatoes, celery, radishes, or carrots.**

□ **Ideally, one should hold the vegetable in his hand before making the berachah.**

□ **The vegetable should be dipped in salt water or vinegar.**

□ **After dipping, one recites the berachah of Borei Pri Ha’adamah, having in mind that this berachah will also cover the maror later in the Seder. If one forgot to have this intention, he should not make a new berachah on the maror.**

□ **One should eat less than a kezayis (approximately half an egg).**

□ **The custom is not to eat karpas with hesaibah (reclining).**

YACHATZ

The leader of the Seder breaks the middle matzah in two. The smaller portion is returned to its place between the two whole matzos, while the larger piece is wrapped and set aside to be eaten later as the Afikoman.

The wrapping of the Afikoman is based on the verse:

“משארותם צרורות בשמלותם”

“Their leftovers were bound up in their garments.” (Shemos 12:34)

This imagery is cited by the Rokeach, who explains that the wrapping of the matzah recalls the way the Jewish people carried their dough with them when they hurriedly left Egypt.

The smaller portion remains on the table throughout the recita-

tion of the Haggadah. This reflects the concept of “Lechem Oni”, the bread of the poor, over which we recite many words (devarim harbeh)—namely, the lengthy narrative of the Haggadah (Shulchan Aruch HaRav 473:36). Like a poor person who eats a minimal portion, the broken matzah symbolizes humility and deprivation.

The larger portion is wrapped and hidden for the Afikoman. There is a long-standing custom for children to “steal” the Afikoman. This custom may relate to the ruling cited by the Ba’er Heitev (473:19) that the Afikoman should be placed between a pillow and its cover (see Tzafun).

Acharonim explain that this practice symbolizes safeguarding the Afikoman, which commemorates the Korban Pesach (or the matzah eaten in its place). Just as the Korban Pesach required careful guarding, so too the Afikoman must be protected (see Har Tzvi, Pesachim 34a). The children, in a playful sense, test the adults’ ability to “watch” and guard the matzah.

Why Do We Break the Matzah?

This practice raises an interesting question. If the purpose of having a broken piece of matzah on the table is to represent Lechem Oni, why do we deliberately break a whole matzah? Why not simply begin the Seder with broken matzah already present?

Perhaps the answer can be found in a fascinating explanation of the Kol Bo (on Ha Lachma Anya). The declaration “Ha Lachma Anya” serves as an announcement to the children explaining why we divide the matzah in the manner of a poor person. Our forefathers in Egypt ate poor man’s bread because of the haste of their departure. They would call out to others:

“Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat.”

According to this understanding, the broken matzah represents how the Jewish people shared their bread with those in need, breaking their loaves in half to distribute to others who had not prepared provisions. The act of breaking the matzah therefore memorializes these acts of kindness and mutual care among Klal Yisrael.

Reliving the Spiritual Depravity

The Chasam Sofer, in a fascinating derashah (Pesach, p. 536 s.v. Mah), offers another profound explanation.

On the night of the Seder we are commanded to view ourselves as if we personally left Egypt. We attempt to vividly experience both the bitterness of slavery and the sweetness of freedom.

The Chasam Sofer suggests that this exercise must also include the spiritual dimension of exile. The Haggadah itself declares:

“מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו”

“Originally our ancestors were idol worshippers.”

We therefore attempt to imagine the empty spiritual life of idolatry and the transformation into the meaningful existence of servants of Hashem.

To illustrate this, we lift the matzah as though we are about to eat it—but without reciting a berachah. We then break the bread, symbolizing the conduct of those who consume food without awareness, gratitude, or blessing. This dramatization portrays the spiritual poverty that characterized our ancestors before their redemption.

A Beautiful Afikoman Custom

Another beautiful custom associated with the Afikoman is to place it over one’s shoulder, stand up, and proclaim:

“This is how Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim.”

This practice is mentioned by the Magen Avraham (473:22) and Shulchan Aruch HaRav (477:5). Some families even encourage their children to walk around the house in this manner, reenacting the Exodus.

The more vivid, animated, and experiential the Seder becomes, the greater the impression it leaves upon the children*.

☐ **Break the middle matzah into two pieces.**

☐ **Return the smaller piece to its place between the two whole matzos.**

☐ **Wrap the larger piece and set it aside for the Afikoman.**

☐ **Ideally, the portion remaining on the table should be at least the size of a kezayis, so that the berachah of Hamotzi**

can be recited upon it.

*** A Fascinating Custom**

The Kaf HaChaim (473:123) records a remarkable custom. The matzah is wrapped in a cloth and tied to the shoulder of a child. The child then knocks on the door and the following exchange takes place:

“Who is it?”

“A Jew.”

“Where are you coming from?”

“From Mitzrayim.”

“Where are you going?”

“To Yerushalayim.”

“What are you carrying on your shoulder?”

“Matzah.”

In the Spinka Haggadah a variation of this dialogue appears. When the child answers that he is coming from Egypt, he is asked:

“How is that possible? Egypt is an impregnable fortress from which no slave has ever escaped!”

The response is then proclaimed together:

“Tonight is Leil Shimurim, the night that Hashem took six hundred thousand Jews out of Egypt.”

Similarly, the Chok Yaakov (477:1) cites the work Pesach Me’uvin, which describes a custom of holding a walking stick, wearing travel shoes, and proclaiming the verse:

“כך תאכלו אותו... מתניכם חגורים, נעליכם ברגליכם ומקלכם בידכם”

“Thus shall you eat it: your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand.” (Shemos 12:11)

He adds that it was his custom to keep his belt tightened throughout the Seder, symbolizing readiness for departure, until after the Afikoman.

This is the primary mitzvah of the night. During this section we fulfill the commandment of “והגדת לבנך” — “You shall tell your children.” We recount the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, transmitting our history and faith to the next generation.

Yet on this night, words alone are not sufficient.

The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:5) teaches:

“בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים”

“In every generation, a person must view himself as though he personally left Egypt.”

The Rambam (Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:6) intensifies this requirement:

A person must present himself as if he himself has now emerged from the slavery of Egypt.

At first glance, this obligation seems almost impossible to fulfill. How can we—who have never experienced the brutality of slavery—truly feel the sweetness of liberation?

The Maharal (Gevuros Hashem 54) offers a profound insight. The obligation is not necessarily to recreate the exact physical experience of slavery and redemption. Rather, we must internalize the belief that even if we ourselves had been in Egypt, Hashem would have performed those miracles for us as well.

Indeed, the Maharal suggests an even deeper thought: even if only one person in Egypt had been worthy of redemption, Hashem would have overturned the natural order and performed all those miracles to redeem that individual.

And if that one individual had been me, Hashem—out of His immense love for every Jew—would have transformed the world and performed every miracle just for me.

(See also Meshech Chochmah on Shemos 6:7–8, who expresses a similar idea based on the striking statement of Rav Simai in Sanhedrin 111a.)

Another Perspective

Rav Yaakov M'Lisa (Maaseh Nissim, s.v. Bechol Dor V'Dor) offers a different interpretation.

We are not required to imagine that we personally experienced

the physical redemption from Egypt. Rather, we are meant to rejoice in the result and purpose of that redemption.

From that moment until today, we have been the chosen people, the children of Hashem. Despite centuries of exile, persecution, and adversity, the Jewish people continue to flourish and endure.

Since the Exodus, Hashem has guided, protected, and sustained our nation, ensuring that the flame of Klal Yisrael continues to burn through the generations.

Why Is There No Berachah?

Since Maggid fulfills a biblical commandment, one might ask: why is no berachah recited before performing this mitzvah?

Several explanations are offered:

1. Kiddush Already Mentions Yetziyas Mitzrayim

The Ri"af (quoted by the Avudraham and Pri Chadash 473) explains that the minimal obligation may already be fulfilled during Kiddush, when we say "Zecher L'Yetziyas Mitzrayim."

2. There Is No Fixed Text

The Rashba writes that since there is no required text, and any discussion of the Exodus fulfills the mitzvah, a formal berachah cannot be instituted.

3. The Actions Precede the Story

According to the Rosh (Teshuvos 24:2), the primary obligation is to perform the symbolic acts of the Seder. When the children ask about these unusual actions, we respond by recounting the story of the Exodus.

4. The Mitzvah Itself Is Praise

Some explain that no berachah is recited because the mitzvah itself is a form of blessing and praise to Hashem. Similar to Birchas Hamazon and Birchas HaTorah, where the mitzvah itself consists of blessing Hashem, the essence of Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim is praising Him. This culminates with the berachah "Asher Ge'alanu" at the end of Maggid.

Why Is It Called "Maggid"?

The section is called "Maggid" or "Haggadah" rather than Amirah or Dibur. The Avudraham notes that the terminology may be bor-

rowed from the verse:

“הגדתי היום לה' אלוקיך” (Devarim 26:3)

an expression of gratitude and acknowledgment before Hashem.

In Lashon HaKodesh, words are precise. There is a subtle distinction between Amirah and Haggadah.

Amirah does not necessarily require absolute truth. For example, when Avraham Avinu asked Sarah to say she was his sister, he used the phrase:

“אמרתי נא אחותי את”

But Haggadah implies truthful testimony. Just as “Haggadas Eידus” in Beis Din requires precise and truthful testimony, the word Haggadah conveys the recounting of something that is inherently true.

See Haggadah Nagid V'Nafik, Rav B. Gittleson, p. 48, for an extensive discussion -

ועי"ש ביאור נפלא בפסוקים פרשת לך לך יב' יח' יט' -מה זאת עשית לי למה לא הגדת לי כי אשתך היא: למה אמרת אחותי היא וגו'

A Lesson in Conviction

A friend who had recently joined his family's business once pointed out a flaw in one of their products to the company's top salesman. His father was furious.

“You never tell a salesman about the flaws of the product,” he said.

“If he doesn't believe in what he's selling, he won't be able to sell it convincingly.”

On the night of the Seder we become Maggidim—those who recount and proclaim the story of our faith and history.

But in order to transmit this message effectively to the next generation, we must first ensure that the emunah is firmly rooted within our own hearts.

Only then can we truly be “Maggid”—able to convey the story with sincerity, conviction, and truth to the next link in our precious chain.

Snapshot of Maggid

See The Maggid Illuminated section

There is no need to wash and rinse the second cup, as it was washed before Kiddush.

The second cup of wine should be filled before beginning the recitation of the Haggadah.

Wine should not be consumed after the pouring of the second cup and during the Haggadah.

Other beverages are subject to dispute among the poskim; water, however, is permitted.

According to the Aruch HaShulchan (473:7), no berachah is recited on the water, as it is covered by the berachah on the wine.

The Matzos are uncovered when reciting “Ha Lachma Anya” and remain uncovered until Ma Nishtana.

The mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi’as Mitzrayim is so central to our faith that the Magen Avraham (471:7) rules that both boys and girls are included in this obligation. The Aruch HaShulchan (472:15) echoes this ruling and explains that, given the magnitude of the messages conveyed on this night, girls must also participate in hearing and discussing the story of the Exodus.

Bottom of Form
Ma Nishtana is recited by children and adults alike, including the one leading the Seder if necessary.

It is customary to cover the Matzos and raise the cup while reciting “V’Hi She’amda.”

The cup is raised as if to declare: “V’Hi” — this wine, which symbolizes the separation of Klal Yisroel from the other nations (see above, Four Cups, quoting the Meshech Chochmah), is what has stood by our fathers and by us (Netziv).

Afterward, the Matzos are uncovered again.

Many have the custom to spill drops of wine—often using the forefinger—while mentioning each of the Ten Makkos.

Perhaps the most critical segment of Maggid is “Rabban Gamliel Hayah Omer”, where we explain the meaning of the three central elements of the Seder:

Pesach, Matzah, and Maror.

As Rabban Gamliel teaches, whoever has not explained these three

has not properly fulfilled his obligation.

The Matzos are covered again and the cup is raised while reciting “Lefichach...” until the conclusion of the berachah “Ga'al Yisrael.” Minimally, one should raise the cup during “Lefichach” and the berachah, and may then place it on the table for the recitation of Hallel.

אשר גאלנו – The Berachah

The Blessing of Personal Redemption

The Maggid section concludes with the berachah of “אשר גאלנו”, in which we thank Hashem for the wondrous miracles He performed during the redemption from Egypt.

This blessing resembles the berachah of “שעשה ניסים לאבותינו” recited on Chanukah and Purim, but with one fundamental distinction. Those blessings refer to the miracles performed “for our forefathers” – לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ. By contrast, the wording of our berachah—“אשר גאלנו”, “Who redeemed us”—indicates that we ourselves were beneficiaries of that redemption. The Seder night is structured to help us develop the feeling that we personally experienced the Exodus, and the language of this berachah reflects that theme (see Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach).

Alternatively, some explain that this berachah functions as a blessing over the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim. Unlike most mitzvos, whose blessings are recited before their performance, this blessing is recited after the mitzvah has been completed.

The Chasam Sofer explains this unusual structure through a striking comparison. It resembles the blessing recited by a ger at the conclusion of the conversion process. Prior to conversion, the individual was not yet fully part of the covenant and therefore could not recite the blessing. Only after completing the process can the blessing be uttered.

Similarly, the Seder night is designed to recreate the experience of leaving Egypt. As the story unfolds, we relive the stages of exile and spiritual degradation—recalling how our ancestors had descended into idolatry. In that state, it is as though we ourselves would be unworthy of reciting a blessing. Only after recounting the full narrative of redemption and spiritual transformation do we arrive at the point where we can properly declare: “אשר גאלנו”—that Hashem has redeemed us.

After “Ga'al Yisrael,” recite Borei Pri HaGafen and drink the second

cup with Heseibah (reclining).

If one forgot to recline while drinking the second cup, he should drink another cup of wine during the meal while reclining.

RACHTZAH

Preparing for the Kedushah of the Mitzvos

Although our hands were already washed earlier before Karpas, we wash them again at this stage of the Seder. This second washing is required out of concern that during the recitation of the Haggadah, while we were speaking, gesturing, and engaged in discussion, our hands may have inadvertently become soiled.

The Beis Yosef (Magid Meisharim, Tzav) offers a deeper insight. As we now enter the next stage of the Seder—where we will soon perform additional mitzvos—we seek to prepare and elevate ourselves for the heightened level of kedushah that accompanies them. Washing our hands represents an act of purification in anticipation of holiness, as the verse states (Vayikra 16:19): “And he shall purify it and sanctify it.”

Accordingly, the washing performed before eating the Matzah on the night of the Seder carries a dimension that differs from the washing performed throughout the rest of the year. Ordinarily, Netilas Yadayim before bread is a halachic preparation for eating. On the night of the Seder, however, it also serves as a spiritual preparation, elevating ourselves as we approach the sacred mitzvos that commemorate the redemption.

Thus, Rachtzah is not merely a practical act of cleanliness, but an act of sanctification as we prepare to partake of the mitzvos of the night.

It is customary to bring a washing cup and basin to the table for the leader of the household. This practice reflects the theme of the night, demonstrating freedom and royalty, as distinguished individuals would have their hands washed at the table rather than leaving the meal to do so.

One must be careful not to speak between the washing and the recitation of the berachah, and likewise not to speak after the berachah—while drying the hands—until the Matzah is eaten, so as not to create an interruption between the washing and the mitzvah of eating the Matzah.

MOTZI-MATZAH

The Bread that Changed Meaning

The mitzvah of eating Matzah is one of the Torah obligations of the Seder night. The Chasam Sofer (Shu"t Choshen Mishpat 196) notes that it is the last remaining biblically commanded mitzvah that involves eating, as we no longer have the opportunity to fulfill the Torah's other eating mitzvos such as Korbanos or Terumah. He laments that this special mitzvah can be fulfilled only once each year, and therefore urges that it be performed with great care and precision.

(Much has been written to clarify his exact intent. Perhaps the Chasam Sofer meant that this is the last remaining Torah commandment requiring the eating of a specific food item.)

See above under Kadesh for the novel insight of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, which applies here as well. In brief, the berachah of Hamotzi recited before eating the Matzah does not merely express gratitude for the physical enjoyment of the food. Rather, it also acknowledges the spiritual privilege of fulfilling the mitzvah of eating Matzah. We therefore thank Hashem both for the food itself and for granting us the opportunity to perform a mitzvah with it. (See below under Borech for a similar concept suggested by Rav Moshe Feinstein regarding Birchas HaMazon following the meal.)

The Avnei Nezer (O.C. 535:19) presents a fascinating insight regarding this mitzvah. It is generally assumed that the mitzvah begins with the act of eating the Matzah. However, based on his analysis of the mitzvos of eating Terumah and Korbanos, he suggests that the mitzvah may actually begin earlier—from the moment one takes the Matzah and begins bringing it toward his mouth for consumption.

The symbolism of Matzah conveys seemingly conflicting messages. On the one hand, it reminds us of the bread of affliction that we ate in Mitzrayim. Because it was inexpensive and filling, it was commonly fed to slaves (see Ramban, Re'eh 16:2; Avudraham, and others). On the other hand, the Matzah commemorates liberation and redemption, as we declare in the Haggadah in the words of Rabban Gamliel: that our ancestors' dough did not have time to rise before Hashem redeemed them.

(See however Maharal, Gevuros Hashem 51, who strongly disputes the notion that Matzah was specifically slave food.)

Yet the deeper message of the Matzah is clear: Hashem works in ways that transcend human expectations. The simple bread that for centu-

ries symbolized bitter servitude was suddenly transformed into the ultimate symbol of freedom. What once represented oppression became the very emblem of redemption.

Furthermore, the Jewish people ate Matzah in Mitzrayim because they were constantly rushed back to work and had no time to allow their dough to rise. When the redemption began, they might have expected to finally enjoy the bread of leisure and freedom. Yet Hashem orchestrated events differently. Even when they had sufficient time, their dough miraculously did not rise.

According to Me'ayin Beis HaSho'eivah (Bo 12:39), this carried a powerful message: although they had been freed from Pharaoh, their role as servants had not ended—it had merely been transformed. From that moment onward, they were no longer servants of Pharaoh but servants of Hashem.

Thus, on this night we eat Matzah to commemorate that miracle and to celebrate the transition from servitude to Pharaoh to servitude to Hashem.

The Kezayis portions of Matzah should be distributed to the participants before washing. This prevents an unnecessary hefsek (interruption) between the washing, the berachos, and the eating. It also ensures that the berachah of Hamotzi is recited over broken matzah – Lechem Oni (Halichos Shlomo 9, note 265).

The leader of the Seder holds all three matzos and recites the first berachah, HaMotzi, just as we do over bread throughout the year. Since it is unclear whether the berachah should be said over the top whole matzah or the middle broken matzah, both are held together, while the third matzah remains present to serve as Lechem Mishneh.

After the berachah of HaMotzi, the bottom matzah is set down, and the berachah “Al Achilas Matzah” is recited over the remaining matzos.

When reciting Al Achilas Matzah, one should have in mind that the berachah will also apply to the Korech and the Afikoman.

One should not speak until after eating the Korech, so as not to interrupt the mitzvah.

The Shulchan Aruch (475:1) rules that the one reciting the berachos should eat two kezaysim—one from each of the two matzos over

which the berachos were recited. However, this requirement applies only to the one making the berachah. All other participants fulfill the mitzvah with one kezayis (see Rav Moshe Feinstein, Haggadah Kol Dodi 14:3; Halichos Shlomo 9:40).

It is difficult to provide an exact measurement for a kezayis, since matzos vary in thickness and size. As a general guideline:

Hand-baked matzah: approximately one-third of a matzah

Machine matzah: approximately one-half of a matzah

Since it is nearly impossible to distribute the full amount from the top two matzos, additional matzos should be available at the head of the table to complete the required measure. Nevertheless, each participant should receive at least a small piece from each of the top two matzos.

Some have the custom to dip the matzah in salt.

The matzah must be eaten while reclining (Heseibah). If one forgot to recline, he must eat another kezayis without reciting a new berachah.

Each participant should eat the required kezayis within a short time span:

- Ideally within four minutes
- If necessary, within nine minutes

MAROR

The Bitterness of Slavery

The mitzvah of Maror is performed to recall the bitterness of the slavery in Mitzrayim. The Mishna lists five species that are acceptable for use as Maror. Some of those vegetables are no longer clearly identifiable today, but the prevalent tradition is to use romaine lettuce, iceberg lettuce, or horseradish, which are understood to belong to the acceptable species.

The Hebrew name for horseradish, "Taamcha," has been explained as an acronym for "Tamid Mesaprim Kevod Kel"—“(the creations of Hashem) constantly proclaim His glory” (Chasam Sofer, Shu”t O.C. 132). Even the foods that remind us of our most difficult periods ultimately serve to declare the honor of Hashem.

Although the lettuce used for Maror today is generally not bitter (see Chayei Adam 130:3; Aruch HaShulchan 473:16), it still serves as a fitting reminder of the bitterness of slavery. Chazal (Toras Kohanim, Behar 7) teach that the suffering in Mitzrayim was not only physical but also deeply degrading. Besides burdening the women with crushing physical labor, the Egyptians humiliated strong men by assigning them trivial, “women-like” tasks. Thus, even work that was not physically difficult was emotionally destructive (Chofetz Chaim, Darchei Yisrael, Sha’ar Avodas Hashem 5).

The Bitterness of Not Tasting the Bitterness

Additionally, based on the Beis HaLevi (Shemos 3:7), it can be suggested that a person may sometimes become accustomed to even the most degrading circumstances. Over time, one might forget that dignity and normalcy ever existed. This condition may be even worse than the suffering itself. Perhaps this, too, is an aspect of the slavery that we seek to remember through the eating of Maror.

The Maror must be eaten raw. Any lettuce or horseradish that has been soaked for twenty-four hours becomes invalid due to the principle of Kavush K’Mevushal—that soaking or pickling is halachically equivalent to cooking. This often disqualifies commercially prepared horseradish.

Nowadays, the mitzvah of Maror is Rabbinic (D’Rabbanan), since biblically it was connected to the eating of the Korban Pesach. Therefore, there is greater room for leniency regarding the required measurements.

Approximately one large lettuce leaf is sufficient for the required Kezayis.

Many have the custom to combine ground horseradish with the lettuce. Since the mitzvah is fulfilled with the lettuce itself, it is not necessary to eat a full Kezayis of horseradish. If one wishes to measure it, the amount is approximately 0.28–0.38 ounces (roughly ½ to of a standard one-ounce shot glass).

The Maror is dipped into Charoses and then shaken off, so that the sweetness of the Charoses does not overwhelm the bitterness of the Maror.

When reciting the berachah on Maror, one should also have in mind the Maror that will be eaten later during Korech.

Maror is not eaten while reclining (Heseibah).

Each participant should eat the required Kezayis within a short time span:

- **Ideally within four minutes**
- **If necessary, within nine minutes**

KORECH

A Remembrance of the Mikdash

The bottom (thus far unbroken) Matzah is taken and we sandwich the Matzah and Maror together, as Hillel did during the times of the Bais HaMikdash. In those days, Hillel would eat them together alongside the Korban Pesach, which we sadly can no longer do.

This remembrance is performed specifically at this point in the Seder, immediately after eating Maror, which today is only a Rabbinic mitzvah due to the absence of the Korban Pesach.

A similar concept appears in Sukkah (41a). The Mishnah teaches that after the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted that the Lulav should be taken all seven days, even outside the Mikdash, as a remembrance. He also decreed that it should remain forbidden to eat from the new grain for the entire day of the Omer waving, in anticipation that the Mikdash may be rebuilt speedily.

The connection between these two enactments is puzzling (see Tosafos ibid.). The Imrei Emes (quoted in Daf al Daf, Sukkah ibid.) explains that after Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted the Lulav for seven days as a permanent reminder of the lost Mikdash, the nation fell into great despair. They sensed that the Galus would be long and difficult, and their spirits were broken. Therefore, he immediately instituted a second enactment of hope, reminding them that the Bais HaMikdash may be rebuilt at any moment.

A similar dynamic occurs on this night. After concluding the mitzvah of Maror, which today is only D'Rabbanan, we feel a sense of sadness over the absence of the Korban Pesach and the many Biblical mitzvos associated with it. We therefore replicate what once was and conclude with a prayer of hope.

Based on the Yerushalmi (Pesachim 9:1), if the Bais HaMikdash

would be rebuilt before Pesach Sheini, the entire Klal Yisroel could still bring a Korban Pesach. Perhaps for this reason the verses recited during Korech are those associated with Pesach Sheini (Beha'aloscha) rather than the verses describing Pesach Rishon (Bo).

The Meshech Chochmah (Bo 13:8) offers a related insight. The Haggadah teaches that the mitzvah of "V'Higadeta L'Bincha" applies only "when Matzah and Maror lie before you." The commentators are puzzled by the omission of the Korban Pesach. Rav Meir Simcha explains that the ultimate purpose of the Exodus—that we serve Hashem instead of Pharaoh—is sometimes most clearly expressed during exile. When we remain faithful to Hashem despite persecution and hardship, this becomes the greatest demonstration of our commitment.

It is precisely when only Matzah and Maror lie before us—without the Korban Pesach—that Hashem declares: "Ba'avur Zeh", it is because of this unwavering devotion that I redeemed you from Egypt.

Two pieces are taken from the bottom Matzah and the Maror is sandwiched between them.

It is nearly impossible to distribute the entire required amount from the bottom Matzah alone. Additional Matzos should therefore be available, though each participant should receive at least a small piece from the bottom Matzah.

Both the Matzah and Maror should ideally be a Kezayis. However, smaller measurements may be used for Korech:

☐ **Matzah: approximately 1/6 of a hand Matzah or 1/4 of a machine Matzah (Mishnah Berurah 486:1).**

☐ **Maror: either one large lettuce leaf or approximately 0.28–0.38 ounces of horseradish (roughly 1/2- of a standard one-ounce shot glass).**

In extreme circumstances, one may even use less than a Kezayis of Maror for Korech (Kol Dodi; Orchos Rabeinu vol. 2 p.75; Kovetz Halachos Rav Shmuel Kaminitzky 30:2. See also Avnei Nezer O.C. 383:6).

Customs differ whether the Korech is dipped in Charoses. If it is dipped, it should be shaken off so the sweetness does not over-

whelm the Maror.

Korech is eaten with Heseibah (reclining). If one forgot to recline, he does not need to repeat it.

The Korech should be eaten within a short period:

- **Ideally within four minutes**
- **If necessary, within nine minutes.**

Some have the custom to say “Zecher L’Hillel” only after eating Korech to avoid an unnecessary interruption, while others permit it to be said before eating.

SHULCHAN ORECH

Celebration Amid Longing

The Seder meal should be eaten joyously, as the Torah states: “וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּחַגְּךָ – You shall rejoice on your festival.” There is an obligation to eat meat and drink wine at every Yom Tov meal (Mishnah Berurah 529:11).

However, there is a dispute among the authorities whether the mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov begins already on the eve of Yom Tov or only during the daytime (see Shaagas Aryeh 68). The Chazon Ish (O.C. 129), in a novel approach, suggests that the first night of Pesach is unique in this regard. Because of the tremendous joy associated with the bringing of the Korban Pesach, there was clearly a mitzvah of Simchah even at night.

Rav Yose (Pesachim 117a) supports this idea when he proves that the origin of Hallel was with Moshe Rabbeinu, not with Dovid HaMelech. He asks: Is it possible that from the time of the Exodus until the era of Dovid, the Jewish people would slaughter their Korban Pesach each year and not sing Hallel? Certainly not. This demonstrates the profound joy and song that accompanied the offering of the Korban Pesach.

There is also a custom to eat a hard-boiled egg during Shulchan Orech, as a remembrance of mourning (Aveilus) (Rema 476:2). The Rema explains that this practice is connected to the fact that the eve of Tisha B’Av always falls on the same day of the week as the first night of Pesach.

The Beis HaLevi (Derashah 4) deepens this connection. Chazal teach that the Jewish people left Egypt after 210 years instead of the originally decreed 400 years. The remaining years of suffering were therefore

distributed among the future exiles. Accordingly, the redemption from Egypt cannot be viewed as completely finished, since the darkness of later exiles was still destined to unfold. The ultimate redemption will only arrive with the coming of Mashiach.

For this reason, even on the night when we celebrate our redemption, we recall the mourning of the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash and express our longing for the final Geulah, which will complete the process that began with Yetzi'as Mitzrayim. (See above under Mitzrayim, regarding the explanation of the Sefer Mitzvos HaKatzar and the obligation of "Tzipisa L'Yeshu'ah?")

Another reason given for the custom of the egg relates to its symbolism. Nearly all foods become softer the longer they are cooked in water. The exception is the egg, which becomes harder the longer it remains in boiling water.

This serves as a powerful analogy for Klal Yisroel. Throughout history we have endured countless persecutions—oppressions, furnaces, and even gas chambers. Yet rather than weakening us, these hardships have often strengthened our resolve. Like the egg, the more we were subjected to the fires of suffering, the more resilient and committed we became (Rav Meir Shapiro).

Many people have the custom to dip the egg in saltwater.

Although it is praiseworthy to eat the entire meal while reclining (Heseibah), the prevalent custom today is not to do so.

It is customary to eat a hard-boiled egg during the Seder meal. It is not necessary to eat the egg from the Ke'arah, and another egg may be used.

One should not eat any roasted or grilled meat or chicken at the Seder meal, even if it was pot-roasted, so that it should not appear as if one is eating the Korban Pesach outside the Beis HaMikdash.

One should be careful not to overeat during the meal, since the Afikoman must be eaten with an appetite. If one is already completely full and must force himself to eat it, he may not properly fulfill the mitzvah of Afikoman, which some Rishonim consider the primary fulfillment of the mitzvah of Matzah.

One should also be mindful of the time, ensuring that the Afikoman will be eaten before Chatzos (halachic midnight).

TZAFUN

The Hidden Korban Pesach

At the end of the Seder meal, we eat Matzah as a remembrance of the Korban Pesach, which in the times of the Bais HaMikdash was eaten at the conclusion of the meal.

The word “Afikoman” literally means “that which comes after” or “dessert.” It is used here as an allusion to the halachic rule: “אין מפטירין” —no dessert may be eaten after the Korban Pesach (Shiltei Giborim, Pesachim ch. 10). Alternatively, the Levush (478:1) explains that it is called Afikoman because of its fondness and significance, like a beloved dessert served at the end of a meal.

This stage of the Seder is called Tzafun, meaning “hidden.” The Ba’er Heitev (473:19) writes that the Afikoman should be placed between the pillow and its cover. Some Acharonim suggest that this practice represents a form of “guarding” the Afikoman, since it symbolizes the Korban Pesach, which was required to be carefully protected (see Har Tzvi, Pesachim 34a).

As mentioned earlier (see Maggid), every word in Lashon HaKodesh precisely reflects its meaning. There are two ways to hide something. One is to bury it and forget about it entirely—a complete concealment. The other is to conceal it while still keeping it in mind, perhaps even watching it from a distance.

When Yocheved gave birth to Moshe and needed to hide him from Pharaoh’s decree, the Torah states: “וַתְּצַפְּנֵהוּ – she hid him” (Shemos 2:2). This type of hiding clearly occupied her thoughts constantly.

Similarly, when we reach the point in the Seder where we recall the Korban Pesach, which we unfortunately cannot offer today, we remove the Matzah that had been hidden and call this stage Tzafun—a reminder that although the Korban Pesach is absent, it remains very much in our consciousness and longing.

The Rokeach (quoted by Beis Yosef 477 and Magen Avraham 476:2) writes that one should be careful not to say that he is too full to eat the Afikoman, nor should he view eating it as a burden.

The Afikoman should ideally be eaten before Chatzos (halachic midnight).

If the Afikoman becomes lost, another piece of Matzah may be

used in its place.

Ideally, one should eat two Kezaysim of Matzah for the Afikoman. However, if this is difficult, one Kezayis is sufficient.

Since the Afikoman is Rabbinic (M'drabbanan), one may rely on the smaller measurement of a Kezayis. Two smaller Kezaysim together approximate the larger measure used for Motzi-Matzah, which is roughly one-third of a hand-baked Matzah or one-half of a machine Matzah.

The Afikoman must be eaten while reclining (Heseibah). If one forgot to recline but remembered before Birchas HaMazon (or before Mayim Acharonim), he should eat the Afikoman again while reclining. If he remembered only afterward, he does not need to repeat it.

After eating the Afikoman, one may not eat or drink anything further, aside from the remaining cups of wine. Water, seltzer (plain or flavored), lemonade, or tea are permitted (Rav Shmuel Kaminetzky).

On the second night of Pesach, there is greater leniency, and one may drink any non-alcoholic beverage after the Afikoman (see Pri Megadim; Mishnah Berurah 481:1; Chayei Adam 130:19).

BARECH – Birchas HaMazon

Beracha Acharona of Matzah

The third cup of wine is poured and Birchas HaMazon is recited.

Tosafos (Berachos 42a) refers to the Seder meal as “Shulchano Shel Makom” – the table of Hashem. This concept carries halachic implications as well (see Shulchan Aruch 477:2) and should inspire heightened feelings of gratitude while reciting Bentching.

Additionally, since Matzah is the only remaining Biblical mitzvah that requires eating a specific food, the Birchas HaMazon recited after this meal carries a special significance.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe O.C. 1:55) suggests that Birchas HaMazon at the Seder is unique. It is not merely a blessing recited after eating; rather, it can also be viewed as a Berachah connected to the mitzvah of eating Matzah itself.

(See above under Kadesh and Motzi-Matzah for the related insight of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, who explains that the blessings before

those mitzvos also include gratitude for the opportunity to perform the mitzvah.) Furthermore, in the sefer Imrei Binah by the Mahar \ddot{a} ” Ash (Yoma 79b; pg. 58a), it is recorded that the Chasam Sofer explained that Birchas HaMazon on the night of the Seder assumes a unique character. Generally, one is not obligated to recite Birchas HaMazon unless he has eaten a measure that provides satiation within his stomach. Nevertheless, on the night of Pesach — when we are seated at the table of the Merciful One — one is obligated to recite Birchas HaMazon even for a mere kezayis that passes through the throat. Consequently, even the consumption of a mere kezayis is deemed satiation, obligating one in Birchas HaMazon. He further suggests that this obligation may even rise to the level of a Biblical requirement.

The Tur (484:1) rules that on the night of the Seder, one may be Motzi another person with Birchas HaMazon even if he himself is not obligated to Bentch. The Avudraham (quoted by the Beis Yosef) challenges this ruling based on the Yerushalmi, which states that only one who ate may recite Birchas HaMazon on behalf of others.

The Beis Yosef resolves this difficulty by explaining that the cup of Birchas HaMazon on the Seder night is obligatory. Therefore, it resembles the blessing recited on Matzah, where one may fulfill the obligation on behalf of others. In this sense, Birchas HaMazon at the Seder can be viewed not merely as a blessing on food but as part of a mitzvah (see Mishnah Berurah 484:7 and Sha’ar HaTzion 5).

This idea aligns with the words of the Rambam (Chametz U’Matzah 7:10), who writes that each of the Four Cups is deliberately paired with a mitzvah. The third cup is paired with Birchas HaMazon, and the blessing therefore assumes the character of a Birchas HaMitzvah.

Halachah also encourages conducting the Seder with at least three adults, allowing Birchas HaMazon to be recited with a Zimun (Shulchan Aruch 479:1). While many understand this primarily in relation to the recitation of Hallel (see Mishnah Berurah), the Netziv (Haggadah Imrei Shefer) suggests that the concept of Zimun itself is particularly meaningful on the Seder night.

The essence of Zimun is that one person invites others to join him in blessing Hashem for the food they have eaten. Through this invitation, individuals unite as one group in the service of Hashem. This unity reflects the transformation that occurred at the time of the Exodus, when the Jewish people emerged from Egypt not merely as individuals but as one nation. Thus, even the act of Zimun becomes an expression of appreciation for Yetzi’as Mitzrayim.

It is ideal for the cup to be rinsed inside and out beforehand (Hid-dur Mitzvah – Mishna Berura 479:1).

The third cup of wine is poured.

It is customary that the Ba'al HaBayis leads Birchas HaMazon on the first night of the Seder.

Birchas HaMazon is recited over the third cup.

The third cup must be drunk while reclining (Heseibah).

If one forgot to recline while drinking the third cup, he does not drink another cup.

One may not drink in between the third and fourth cup.

Redemption Leads Directly to Belonging

Maharal (Gevuros 60) suggests that since the four cups correspond to the four expressions of redemption, with the third being “וגאלתי” and the fourth “ולקחתי”, Chazal (Pesachim 117b) established that one may not drink between these two cups. For these two are intrinsically bound — the redemption itself was only in order that Hashem take Yisrael as His nation and become their God. As such, no separation is made between them.

The Cup of Eliyahu

There is a widespread custom to add a special cup for Eliyahu HaNavi at the Seder. Although this practice has no explicit source in Chazal, many commentators have offered explanations for its significance. These explanations generally fall into four categories:

- 1. Anticipation of Redemption** – The cup reflects the belief that Eliyahu may arrive at the Seder to herald the end of our Galus and announce the coming of Mashiach.
- 2. Eliyahu's Presence** – Some suggest that Eliyahu HaNavi spiritually visits every Seder, and the cup is placed in his honor.
- 3. Symbolic or Practical Reasons** – Others maintain that Eliyahu does not literally appear, and the cup serves symbolic or

practical purposes related to the structure of the Seder.

4. Strengthening Emunah – The Mishnah Berurah (480:10) explains that the cup is meant to reinforce our faith. Just as Hashem redeemed us from the slavery of Mitzrayim, so too we believe that He will redeem us from the current Galus as well. (See above under Mitzrayim and Shulchan Orech for further discussion of this connection.)

For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Eliyahu HaNavi, written by my father-in-law Shlit"á, particularly Chapter 37. An excerpt from that work is also included at the back of this booklet.

It is not necessary to rinse the cup before pouring the fourth cup.

The fourth cup of wine is poured.

According to most customs, the Cup of Eliyahu is poured at this time as well.

Shefoch Chamascha

Opening the Door to Geulah

The Rema (O.C. 480:1) writes that some have the custom to recite "Shfoch Chamascha" before the section of "Lo Lanu." At that time, the door is opened. The reason for opening the door, he explains, is to remind ourselves that this night is "Leil Shimurim" — a night guarded and protected by Hashem, even in exile.

Through this expression of faith, we demonstrate our trust in Hashem's protection, and in the merit of this Emunah, Mashiach will come and Hashem will pour out His wrath upon the nations that oppressed Israel (citing the Mahariv). The Rema concludes: "וכן נוהגים" — this is the accepted custom.

Some have the custom to call out "Baruch Haba!" in greeting to Eliyahu HaNavi, expressing our belief that the month of Nisan is destined to be the month of redemption (Aruch HaShulchan 480:1).

Others simply proclaim "Leil Shimurim!"—a declaration that this night is a night of Divine protection, as the Torah states: "Leil Shimurim Hu LaHashem."

Both customs serve to strengthen our Emunah and reinforce the anticipation that just as Hashem redeemed us in the past, so too He will

redeem us again speedily in our days.

Opening the Door for Moshiach

Orchos Chaim (Lunil – Seder Leil Pesach 37) cites that some communities have the custom not to lock the doors of the rooms in which they sleep on the night of Pesach. The reason for this practice is based on the teaching of Chazal (Rosh Hashanah 11a) that “In Nisan we were redeemed, and in Nisan we will be redeemed in the future.”

The Torah describes the night of the Exodus as “ליל שְׁמֵרִים הוּא לֵה” (Shemos 12:42), which Chazal explain (Rosh Hashanah 11b) to mean a night that has been guarded and prepared since the six days of Creation for redemption.

Therefore, the doors are left open in anticipation that if Eliyahu HaNavi arrives to herald the coming of Mashiach, the house will already be open and one will be able to go out to greet him immediately.

There is great reward for such faith, for we find that our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt only because of their faith, as the verse states: “ויאמן העם – and the people believed” (Shemos 4:31).

Similarly, the future redemption will come in the merit of faith, as it is written: “תשורי מראש אמנה” (Shir HaShirim 4:8), and “וארשתוך לי באמונה” (Hoshea 2:22).

Thus, the open door on the night of the Seder expresses our unwavering belief that just as redemption came in the past through emunah, so too the final redemption will arrive through emunah as well.

Renewed Faith and Belief

Rav Yerucham Olshin (Yareach L'Moadim, Maamar 46) offers an insightful explanation as to why this expression of faith—opening the door and proclaiming Shfoch Chamascha—is performed toward the end of the Seder.

The Seder night is designed to strengthen our Emunah through the recounting of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim. Only after one has carefully conducted the Seder—retelling the miracles, praising Hashem, and internalizing the messages of redemption—does he reach a heightened level of faith and conviction.

It is at that point, after the Seder has elevated our awareness of Hashem's providence, that we are capable of expressing the profound belief that redemption can arrive at any moment. Therefore, we open the door and await Eliyahu HaNavi, demonstrating that through the faith cultivated during the Seder, we truly believe that Mashiach may come

tonight.

Did You Believe?

The Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan (Mitzvah 1) addresses the famous teaching of Chazal (Shabbos 31a) that when a person faces judgment after his lifetime, he is immediately asked: “צפית לישועה – Did you await the redemption?”

The Smak asks: Where is this obligation written in the Torah? Where do we find a commandment that one must actively anticipate the coming of redemption?

He answers that this obligation is included in the very foundation of Emunah, as expressed in the first of the Aseres HaDibros:

“אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם” (Shemos 20).

Just as we are obligated to believe that Hashem redeemed us from Egypt, so too we are obligated to believe that He will redeem us again and gather us from among the nations, as it is written:

“וְיָשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ... וְקִבְּצֶךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים” (Devarim 30).

According to the Smak, the belief in the future Geulah is therefore not merely a hopeful idea but a direct extension of the mitzvah of Emunah itself. Just as we affirm the redemption of the past, we must live with the conviction that Hashem will redeem us again.

A Child's Faith

When Rav Ahron Yaakov Svei (July 9, 1934 – April 24, 2020), the well-known Chabad Dayan was about seven years old, his father passed away and the family fled to Uzbekistan. His mother decided to send him to study in the underground Tomchei Temimim Yeshivah in Samarkand.

When they parted, she promised him that one day she would come to visit him.

Nearly a year passed. Finally, one day she boarded a train to Samarkand to see her young son. As the train made its way across the countryside, a troubling realization suddenly struck her. She did not actually know where the yeshivah was located. How would she find her son in a strange city?

As the train pulled into the station in Samarkand, her anxiety grew. But the moment the train doors opened and she stepped onto the platform, all of her worries disappeared.

Standing there on the platform was her young son, Aharon Yaakov,

waiting for her.

Surprised and deeply moved, she asked him, “How did you know I was arriving today?”

The boy answered simply:

“Mother, you promised that you would come. So every day when the train arrived, I stood here and waited for you.”

This simple faith captures the essence of “צפית לישועה”—awaiting redemption.

We may not know when the train of redemption will arrive, but Hashem has promised that it will. And so every day we stand ready, watching and waiting.

HALLEL

A New Song of Redemption

The recitation of Hallel on the night of the Seder is unique. We first recite the opening portion of Hallel before drinking the second cup, and then complete the remainder after the meal over the fourth cup.

The first section of Hallel relates specifically to the generation of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim and is therefore included as part of the general Mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim. The second portion of Hallel, however, deals primarily with other redemptions and the ultimate future Geulah, and for this reason it is separated and recited later in the Seder.

Tosafos (Sukkah 38a) notes that although women are generally not obligated to recite Hallel, they are obligated to do so on the night of the Seder because they too were included in the miracle of the Exodus.

According to Tosafos, the Hallel of the Seder is not merely the regular recitation of Hallel, but rather the type of Hallel that is recited by those who personally experienced a miracle. As the Haggadah declares: “ונאמר לפניו שירה חדשה” – Let us recite a new song before Him.”

Such is the level of joy and gratitude on this night that we sing Hallel as though the miracle occurred to us personally (Emek Berachah, Haggadah §3).

See Hallel section in Maggid Illuminated, הלל – The Song of Survivors, for a discussion as to why Hallel is split on this night.

After Shfoch Chamascha, the door is closed, and the Haggadah continues with the recitation of Hallel.

The Ba'al HaBayis should lead the Hallel. The congregation responds to "Hodu" and "Anna Hashem" in the same responsive manner commonly practiced in Shul.

The cup of wine does not need to be held throughout the entire recitation of Hallel.

It is permitted to sing the words of Hallel, and even to repeat complete Pesukim as part of the singing.

One may also offer explanations or insights on the Pesukim of Hallel, provided this is done between verses and does not interrupt the flow of the recitation.

After concluding Hallel, the fourth cup is drunk with Heseibah (reclining).

If one forgot to recline while drinking the fourth cup, he does not drink another cup.

NIRTZAH

Accepted with Favor

The inspiring Seder comes to a close with "Chasal Siddur Pesach" and a series of songs of praise. At first glance, some of these songs may appear simple—perhaps even childish. Yet, as mentioned earlier (see The Seder), even these poems are rooted in the deepest and most mystical elements of Torah. The Chida (Chaim Sha'al, vol. 1:28) records an incident in which someone mocked these Seder poems, and rules that such behavior warranted the cherem (ban/excommunication) that was imposed upon him.

The song "Echad Mi Yodea - Who Knows One?" might seem to be nothing more than a playful rhyme. At the conclusion of such an uplifting night, one might expect a lofty and dramatic finale—something that would preserve and internalize the spiritual elevation of the Seder. Instead, we encounter a simple counting song that associates numbers with familiar elements of Jewish tradition.

However, after the many efforts invested throughout the evening—recounting the miracles of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim, strengthening our Emunah,

and elevating our spiritual awareness—we are expected to emerge from the Seder with a new perspective. Just as a person naturally assumes that an overseas journey will be taken by airplane, a spiritually refined individual, upon hearing the number one, instinctively thinks of Hashem.

The message of the Seder to its now elevated participants is that the world itself should appear in a more spiritual light. Even the most mundane things—such as numbers—can direct our thoughts to the foundations of our faith:

One is Hashem. Two are the Luchos.
And so on.

For one whose Emunah has been strengthened, the entire world becomes a reminder of Hashem's presence.

May we, as Ba'alei Emunah, merit to view the world through this lens and pray that our Seder was indeed "Nirtzah"—accepted and pleasing in the eyes of Hashem.

It is customary to recite Shir HaShirim after the Seder.

One should also try to remain awake learning about Yetzi'as Mitzrayim until sleep overtakes him.

And with hearts full of hope we conclude:

לשנה הבאה בירושלים!

ILLUMINATIONS OF MAGGID

The Tiferes Yisrael (Avos 2:14 and introduction to Seder Kodshim) offers timeless guidance on how to approach any subject that one wishes to truly understand. He suggests that a person should examine the matter through seven fundamental questions: **Who, What, To Whom, When, Where, How, and Why.**

If we seek to analyze the Haggadah and its various components, this framework provides an excellent method. By organizing the

discussion of the Seder around these questions, we can better appreciate the structure of the night and the depth behind each of its elements.

הא לחמא עניא

This Bread or Like That Bread?

There is a discussion among the Poskim regarding the correct formulation: כהא לחמא, היא לחמא עניא, or even כלחמא היא. The Magen Avraham (473:24), quoting Darkei Moshe (O.C. §473:7), citing the Mateh Moshe (Siman 630), records that some refrain from saying “היא לחמא עניא”, since this is not the very bread that Bnei Yisrael ate in Mitzrayim.

As support, a proof is brought from the pasuk: “למען יראו את הלחם אשר האכלתי אתכם” — even though this is not the exact bread that was eaten, for it had already been consumed; rather, it refers to a representation of that bread. So too here, our matzah serves as a representation of the original lechem oni.

However, this proof is not conclusive. There, the reference is to the tzintzenes ha'man, from which some of the original manna remained; thus, it is appropriate to say “את הלחם אשר האכלתי”. Here, however, we bake fresh matzos, and it would seem less precise to declare “היא לחמא” — “this is the bread.”

Therefore, one who phrases it as “כהא לחמא” or “היא כלחמא” — “like this bread” — has not erred.

Top of Form

Chok Yaakov (473: 33), quoting Pesach Me'uvim (Siman 249) cites that anshei ma'aseh would open the door upon reciting “כל דכפין ייתי” — reasoning that if the door remains closed, how can the needy enter?

In contrast, the Ra'avan (Pesachim §439) maintains that this invitation is not intended for those outside, but is directed toward the members of one's own household.

One should say היא לחמא עניא loudly.

Ha Lachma Anya

Introduction or Obligation?

Notably, the recitation and text of “הא לחמא עניא” is not mentioned in the Gemara, and appears to be a later enactment, instituted after the Talmudic period. Although the Rambam includes it in the text of the Haggadah at the end of Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah, he omits it from his formal halachic rulings — indicating that it is not sourced in chazal.

This raises the question: is “הא לחמא עניא” considered part of the mitzvah of Maggid or not?

The Rema (O.C. §473), citing the Kol Bo and the Maharil, rules that the text of “הא לחמא עניא” should be recited in a language understood by women and children. The Vilna Gaon explains that this requirement stems from the obligation of “והגדת לבנך”, implying that it is indeed part of the mitzvah of Maggid.

This understanding is stated explicitly as well by the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc., s.k. 62-63), who writes that “הא לחמא עניא” constitutes the opening of the Haggadah, and a fulfillment of “והגדת לבנך”.

The Language of Galus

The Haggadah begins with a paragraph that is strikingly not written in Hebrew, but in Aramaic: Ha Lachma Anya – This is the bread of affliction / the poor man’s bread. The choice of language itself is puzzling, and the passage is not sourced in Chazal.

The Chasam Sofer (Haggadah, on Chad Gadya) suggests a powerful explanation. He proposes that this paragraph was authored in the first year after the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash—the first time that Klal Yisroel sat down to the Seder without the Korban Pesach.

In that painful moment, these words were deliberately composed in Aramaic, the language of the exile, to give expression to the nation’s anguish.

Matzah, as we know, represents both slavery and freedom. It recalls the bread of affliction eaten in Egypt, yet it also commemorates the hurried redemption when the dough did not have time to rise. But that year, the Jew sitting at the Seder table in Galus turned to his children and said:

“Ha Lachma Anya” — this is the bread of affliction.

This year, it symbolizes only suffering and exile.

Last year, when the Korban Pesach was still brought, only those who had been properly invited could partake of it. But now, with the Korban Pesach absent, the father continues:

“Kol Dichfin Yeisei Veyeichol” — anyone who is hungry may come and eat.

Yet even in the depths of loss, the paragraph concludes with words of hope and faith:

“Hashata Hacha – this year we are here.”

We sit in exile, lacking the centerpiece of Pesach.

“L’shana Haba’ah B’Ara D’Yisrael.”

Next year we will be free, back home in Yerushalayim.

See below (Korech) for a related idea in the writings of the Meshech Chochmah.

This timeless message should serve as our anthem of hope as well. Even when we feel somewhat displaced, we can channel those feelings toward the deeper reality—that we are still living in Galus—and pray that we soon merit to celebrate Pesach properly, with the Korban Pesach in Yerushalayim.

The Evolving Seder Experience

Indeed, the Rambam, at the outset of his Nusach HaHaggadah, offers a brief introduction, writing: “נוסח ההגדה שנהגו בה ישראל בזמן הגלות כך” — “This is the text of the Haggadah that the Jewish people have practiced during the time of exile,” after which he includes “הא לחמא עניא”.

This wording suggests that “הא לחמא עניא” reflects an established custom of the exile, rather than an original enactment from the time of Chazal — consistent with the approach of the Chasam Sofer.

Furthermore, this formulation aligns with the insight of the Netziv (Ha’amek Davar, Re’eh 16:3), who elaborates on the many distinctions between the Seder as it was observed in the time of the Beis HaMikdash and its form in galus — reinforcing the idea that elements of our Haggadah are shaped by the reality of exile. In this sense, the Seder itself becomes a living expression of our history — preserving the past, while reflecting the present.

When Matzah Became Lechem Oni

The Netziv (Ha'amek Davar, Re'eh 16:3) observes that throughout the Torah, matzah is not described as lechem oni — bread of affliction — except in this context. This suggests that the simple meaning of the pasuk is that matzah, when eaten plain and unadorned, is considered lechem oni.

Accordingly, in the time of the Korban Pesach, when the matzah was eaten together with it, or in close proximity to it, it would not bear the designation of lechem oni. Only in our times, in the absence of the Korban Pesach, does the matzah fully assume the identity of lechem oni.

This may shed light on the use of the phrase Ha Lachma Anya. According to the Chasam Sofer, this passage was instituted after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash — in the first year that the Seder was conducted without a Korban Pesach. It is specifically then that the term lachma anya — lechem oni — becomes most fitting, as the matzah, no longer accompanied by the Korban Pesach, now fully reflects not only the bread of affliction, but the reality of a Seder experienced in exile.

The Satiating Bread of Compassion

Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (Haggadah Seridei Aish) related that in his youth he observed a remarkable phenomenon in his hometown. The townspeople would painstakingly set aside the few coins they managed to earn in order to prepare their Shabbos meals. Yet it was often these very impoverished Jews, rather than the wealthy members of the community, who would invite those in need to join them at their table and share in their modest provisions.

After feeding their guests from their hard-earned food, the hosts themselves might be left with little more than a kezayis of bread. Yet somehow they remained completely satisfied. Their fulfillment was not physical but spiritual—they were filled with the inner joy of knowing that someone else had been fed and satisfied.

This, explains Rav Weinberg, is the deeper meaning of the opening words “הא לחמא עניא”. Although we sit down to partake of lachma anya, the bread of poverty, we nevertheless extend an invitation to all who are in need. We demonstrate that even when our own means are limited, we are prepared to find satisfaction not in what we consume, but in the happiness and nourishment of others.

See there for a beautiful explanation of the Gemara (Berachos 20b), “And how can I not show favor to Yisrael?”, based on this profound idea.

Bottom of Form

מה נשתנה – The Questions

The Questions of the Night

The purpose of the Mah Nishtanah questions is to prompt an exploration of the Torah mitzvos unique to this night, such as the eating of matzah and maror. At the same time, we encourage the child to inquire about unusual behaviors he has already observed during the Seder—such as dipping and reclining. The four cups of wine are not mentioned in the questions, since at the time the questions are asked they have not yet been fully experienced and therefore would not naturally provoke inquiry (see Maaseh Nissim).

These questions also highlight a deeper tension embedded within the Seder night. On the one hand, we display signs of freedom and royalty, such as reclining and drinking wine. On the other hand, we recall the hardship and bitterness of slavery through the matzah and maror. The questions therefore raise a fundamental issue: What exactly is the theme of the night—freedom or slavery?

Alternatively, following the more widely accepted understanding that there are four questions, the Aruch HaShulchan (473:21) interprets the phrase Mah Nishtanah not as a question, but as an exclamation of astonishment. He supports this reading with similar usages in Tanach, such as “מה גדלו מעשיך ה'” — “How great are Your works, Hashem!” (Tehillim 92:6), and “מה טובו אהליך יעקב” — “How goodly are your tents, Yaakov!”.

According to this interpretation, the child is not merely asking questions but expressing wonder: How extraordinary this night is! The many unusual practices of the Seder inspire amazement and curiosity—Mah Nishtanah!

The Fifth Question

Contrary to popular assumption, the Vilna Gaon suggests that there are actually five questions in Mah Nishtanah. According to his view, the opening line — “מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות” — is itself a distinct question. For most mitzvos of the Torah are performed during the daytime, and one will not find a mitzvah that is designated specifically, and only at night. (Some of the night time mitzvos can also be fulfilled

during the day, either independently or as a make-up.) Thus, the child's question is fundamental: Why is this night uniquely filled with positive mitzvos, whereas other nights of the year are devoid of such obligations?

We wonder, where do we in fact find an answer to this question in the Haggadah? Perhaps an answer can be found in the words of the Ohr HaChaim (Bo 13:8). He grapples with an apparent contradiction: the pasuk states "והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא" — "you shall tell your child on that day," yet Chazal teach that the mitzvah of sippur takes place specifically at night, when matzah and maror are before us. The Ohr HaChaim explains with a profound insight: "הלילה ההוא יום יקרא" — that night is considered "day," not night. As the Zohar (II, 38a) teaches, the night Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim was illuminated like the brightness of a summer day. Accordingly, this transformation itself must be included in "והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא" — not only recounting what happened, but conveying that the night itself became day. When this dimension of the mitzvah is fulfilled, the question is itself answered. For on this night, we recount that the night itself was transformed into day — and is therefore endowed with mitzvos accordingly.

עבדים היינו – The Short Answer

From Servants of Pharaoh to Servants of Hashem

The opening response of "Avadim Hayinu" provides the fundamental explanation for the questions of the night.

At its core, the theme of the Seder is gratitude. We express our appreciation to Hashem for redeeming us from the bondage of Mitzrayim and granting us freedom (see Rambam, Avudraham).

Alternatively, the purpose of recounting the story of Mitzrayim is to strengthen our emunah—our faith in Hashem. The extraordinary demonstrations of power and mastery displayed during the Exodus reveal that Hashem alone governs every aspect of creation. Reflecting on these miracles reinforces our belief that every event in our lives unfolds under His direct control (see Sefer HaChinuch, Ralbag).

A third perspective suggests that by recounting our slavery we are meant to contemplate the very concept of servitude itself. The message is not merely that we were freed from bondage, but that our status as servants has not fundamentally changed. Rather, we have simply transferred our allegiance from Pharaoh to Hashem. We were once servants of Egypt; now we are servants of the Ribono Shel Olam (based on

Ramban and Sforno on Shemos 20:2).

This idea may be symbolized by the matzah itself. As suggested in Me'ayin Beis HaSho'eivah (Bo 12:39), even after leaving Egypt Klal Yisrael discovered that their dough had not risen and they were once again eating the bread associated with slavery—matzos. The message was profound: although we had left Pharaoh behind, we had not abandoned the identity of servants. Instead, we had been elevated to a far greater form of servitude—the service of Hashem.

אפילו כולנו חכמים - Who Is Obligated

The Universal Obligation

Although the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim involves recounting a story that is already recorded in the Torah, everyone is obligated to participate in this important mitzvah. Even the greatest scholars—those who are already well versed in every detail of the Exodus—must devote this night to its retelling.

The reason is that the purpose of the mitzvah extends beyond the mere transmission of information. Even those who know the story must still engage in the Seder in order to express their gratitude to Hashem, strengthen their emunah, and reaffirm their sense of servitude to Him.

Alternatively, the Malbim explains that the primary focus of the mitzvah is not simply the knowledge of the story, but the relaying of it to the next generation. Since the mitzvah is fundamentally directed toward ensuring that the story of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim is transmitted to future generations, even the most learned individuals are fully obligated. Their knowledge and stature do not exempt them from the responsibility of passing the torch of our tradition onward.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Elaboration is Praiseworthy

The Measure of the Man

Regarding the statement of the Haggadah, "כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים" — "הרי זה משובח" — "Whoever elaborates more in recounting the Exodus

from Egypt is praiseworthy” — it was said in Kelm in the name of the Alter of Kelm that the intent is not merely that the act itself is praiseworthy.

Rather, the meaning is that the person himself becomes praiseworthy. By immersing himself in the story of Yetzi’as Mitzrayim and reflecting deeply upon it, he becomes a different kind of person, elevated to a higher and more refined level.

מעשה ברבי אליעזר – How and When

An Endless Tale

The ideal manner of fulfilling the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi’as Mitzrayim is by expanding upon and elaborating on the story and its many details. As the Haggadah declares: “כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח” — the more one recounts and discusses the Exodus from Egypt, the more praiseworthy he is.

Although the Torah generally forbids adding to its commandments (Bal Tosif), this mitzvah is unique. The expansion encouraged here does not constitute an addition to the mitzvah itself, but rather a more complete fulfillment of its essence—the act of recounting and reflecting upon the redemption (see Rav Avraham ben HaGra, and Netziv – Imrei Shefer).

Furthermore, even those who maintain that the mitzvah of eating matzah is limited to chatzos, such as Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, who was among the sages present at this gathering, nevertheless agree that the praise and discussion of Yetzi’as Mitzrayim may continue beyond midnight (see Meshech Chochmah).

The Netziv (Haggadah, s.v. Kol HaMarbeh) explains that even if one continues the Sippur Yetzi’as Mitzrayim beyond the formal time of the mitzvah, he is still considered praiseworthy. He adds that although the primary mitzvah of Sippur may have concluded, one who continues speaking about the Exodus nevertheless fulfills the mitzvah of mentioning Yetzi’as Mitzrayim daily.

Accordingly, the placement of the statement “כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח” immediately before the story of the sages in Bnei Brak becomes clear. Among the sages present was Rabbi Eliezer, who maintains that the Korban Pesach may be eaten only until midnight. According to his view, the primary timeframe of the mitzvah would have already ended at chatzos. Yet despite this, the sages continued recounting the story of the Exodus throughout the entire night.

Indeed, the narrative suggests that the discussion would have continued even further, had their students not arrived to remind them that the time had come to recite Krias Shema of Shacharis. Their conduct therefore illustrates the principle of Kol HaMarbeh: even after the formal obligation of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim has passed, extending the narrative remains both praiseworthy and spiritually meaningful, as it continues to fulfill the mitzvah of remembering Yetzi'as Mitzrayim.

Beyond Obligation — A Night That Invites More

Perhaps the unique nature of the mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim — which, unlike other mitzvos, is not constrained by bal tosfif — can be understood in light of the words of the Chasam Sofer (Derashos, pp. עווד נראה לי [old ed.] – קמ"ז [new ed.], s.v. עווד נראה לי).

He teaches a remarkable idea: Klal Yisrael possess a unique quality — the ability to generate mitzvos מתוך אהבה להשי"ת, out of a burning love for Hashem, going beyond what was explicitly commanded.

Accordingly, many of the central practices of the Seder night are not explicitly recorded in the Torah. The institution of the four cups corresponding to the four expressions of redemption, the practice of אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן, and the abundance of speech, storytelling, and enactments that fill the night — all are expressions of this capacity to add beyond the letter of the law. In every generation, these practices are renewed and expanded מתוך תוספת קדושה ואהבה. (The Chasam Sofer employs this idea to explain, in a novel way, the distinction between the question of the chacham and that of the rasha.)

Furthermore, the very Geulah itself was precipitated through this trait — when Bnei Yisrael went beyond what was commanded, taking the lamb and tying it to their bedposts, openly defying the Egyptians and placing their trust in Hashem.

Thus, the foundation of Geulah was born not only from obligation, but from a people who pursued greatness by choosing to do more.

אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה - The Daily Mitzvah to Remember

Tonight is Different

In addition to the mitzvah of recounting the Exodus on the night of Pesach, there is also a daily obligation to mention Yetzi'as Mitzrayim both during the day and at night. This obligation is reflected in the statement of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, who derives from the verse

“למען תזכור את יום צאתך מארץ מצרים כל ימי חייו” that the Exodus must be remembered not only by day but even at night.

Despite their similarity, there are three fundamental differences between the daily mitzvah of remembering the Exodus and the mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim on the night of the Seder.

On the night of Pesach, the mitzvah requires:

- 1. A question-and-answer format**, encouraging inquiry and discussion.
- 2. Beginning with disgrace and concluding with glory**—recounting our lowly origins (our forefathers were idol worshippers and we were slaves) and ending with our redemption.
- 3. Explaining the meaning behind the mitzvos of the night**, such as Pesach, matzah, and maror, and understanding their significance (Rav Chaim Soloveitchik).

These elements transform the recounting of the Exodus on the Seder night from a simple mention into a comprehensive narrative experience, designed not merely to remember the event, but to relive and internalize it.

כנגד ארבעה בנים – To Whom

Speaking to Every Soul

Until this point, the Haggadah has discussed the Exodus primarily from a logical and conceptual perspective. At this stage, however, the Haggadah turns to the Pesukim of the Torah to demonstrate that the mitzvah of recounting the Exodus is not merely a tradition, but a Torah obligation (see Malbim).

The Torah explicitly instructs us to relay the story of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim to our children—“והגדת לבנך”. The transmission of this story from one generation to the next lies at the very heart of the Seder night.

Because this mitzvah is so significant, the Torah recognizes that children differ in interest, temperament, and intellectual capacity, and therefore requires that the message be conveyed in a manner suited to each child (see Ritva). Thus, the Haggadah introduces the framework of the four sons, illustrating that the responsibility of the parent is not merely to speak, but to teach each child according to his unique ability and perspective.

This section is introduced with the declaration “ברוך המקום ברוך הוא”, a blessing for the gift of the Torah. The Torah is unlike any other body of

knowledge: as divine wisdom, it can be understood and absorbed on multiple levels simultaneously. Each of the four sons engages the Torah according to his own level, yet each one can legitimately fulfill the mitzvah in his own way (Rav Chaim Soloveitchik).

From Mind to Heart — The Goal of Sippur

There are three categories of intellect: chochmah, binah, and daas.

Chochmah is knowledge — for example, simply knowing that fire has the ability to burn.

Binah is understanding — grasping the inner workings of fire, how and why it burns.

Daas, however, is something entirely different: it is connection and experience — sensing and feeling the reality of the subject. It is the difference between knowing about fire and feeling its heat, as one who has lived through it.

Chazal teach (Pesachim 116a): “לפי דעתו של בן אביו מלמדו”. The goal of the Seder is not merely to inform, but to engage daas — to bring ourselves, and our children, to feel Yetzias Mitzrayim.

On this night, it is not enough to know that it happened, nor even to understand how it happened. The obligation is to experience it — to live it.

When Knowing Isn't Enough

Landon Jones was an ordinary, energetic fourteen-year-old boy — running, laughing, living like any child his age. Then one morning, he woke up... and something fundamental was gone.

Not his ability to eat. Not his ability to drink. But the desire — the most basic signal of survival.

He no longer felt hunger. He no longer felt thirst. Food could sit in front of him all day, untouched. Water meant nothing to him. His body, which once instinctively cried out for nourishment, had fallen silent.

And that silence was dangerous.

Because although Landon knew, intellectually, that a person must eat to live — that without water the body weakens, deteriorates, and ultimately fails — knowledge alone was not enough. Without the internal sensation, the gnawing hunger and the aching thirst, there was nothing compelling him to act.

Slowly, the consequences became visible. The pounds melted away.

Doctors searched desperately for answers. But no certainty, no cure — and the danger remained.

Landon's story reveals something hauntingly profound:

A person can know what keeps them alive... and still be unable to live by it.

Without feeling, knowledge is not enough. Without that inner drive, even the most basic truths may never translate into action. And in that gap — between knowing and feeling — lies a very real danger.

והשבות אל לבבך — Bringing Knowledge to Life

“וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך” — knowledge must be brought back to the heart.

Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz would often say that the two most distant points in the world are the mind and the heart — a testament to how difficult it is to internalize and feel what we already know.

The Seder is the night that bridges that distance — transforming knowledge into feeling, and information into lived experience — as we attempt not merely to know the story, but to feel it, to live it, and to become part of it.

יכול מראש חודש - When

When the Geulah Truly Began

The Haggadah briefly entertains the possibility that the discussion of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim should begin already from Rosh Chodesh Nissan, nearly two weeks before Pesach.

This surprising suggestion may be understood in light of the fact that the redemption from Egypt was not only a physical salvation, but also a profound spiritual redemption. The first stage of this spiritual transformation began when Klal Yisrael received their first mitzvah as a nation—“החודש הזה לכם”, the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh. At that moment, they began to emerge from their state of servitude and were entrusted with the responsibility of living under the commandments of Hashem.

For this reason, Chazal seriously entertain the possibility that the dis-

cussion of the Geulah should commence from that very day. The redemption began not only when we left Egypt physically, but when we were granted the spiritual framework of mitzvos.

Indeed, the Haggadah teaches: “כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח”—the more one elaborates in recounting the Exodus, the more praiseworthy he is. As explained by Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, the praise is not merely directed at the act itself, but at the person who engages in it. One who expands upon the story and appreciates the spiritual riches that emerged from the redemption reveals an elevated character—he himself becomes praiseworthy.

The Rich and the Poor

Rav Yitzchak Elchonon explained this with a Mashal. Once, a ship was nearly wrecked at sea and was in great danger. On the ship were many different types of people—poor, wealthy, and those of moderate means. Suddenly, salvation arrived from Heaven and the ship was saved from the peril.

Each of the survivors praised and thanked Hashem for their deliverance. However, the gratitude and praise expressed by the wealthy was not the same as that of the poor. The poor, whose lives are filled with hardship, do not experience as great a sense of joy as the wealthy, whose fortune smiles upon them and whose lives are filled with comfort and enjoyment.

So too with the redemption from Mitzrayim. That salvation had two dimensions.

The first was the most obvious: the Jewish people were freed from physical slavery and bodily suffering.

The second was far more elevated: they were redeemed from the spiritual impurity and corruption of Egypt, liberated from spiritual bondage, and thereby merited later to receive the Torah and become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

A simple person, whose understanding focuses only on the physical freedom from slavery, has little reason to elaborate extensively in recounting the story of the Exodus.

However, one who expands at length in recounting Yetzi'as Mitzrayim demonstrates that his gratitude extends to the spiritual redemption as well. By doing so, he testifies about himself that he is a person of greater depth and understanding in Torah and Judaism.

Thus, “כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח”—one who elaborates more in recounting the Exodus reveals that he himself is praiseworthy, a person of elevated character and deeper comprehension.

בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך

The Narrative of the Matzah and Maror

The Rosh (Shu”t 24:2), when addressing the question of why we do not recite a blessing over the recitation of the Haggadah, explains that the Torah commanded many actions as a remembrance of Yetzi’as Mitzrayim, yet no specific blessing is recited over them. For example, the sanctification of the firstborn and the various festivals are all associated with remembering the Exodus from Egypt, but we do not recite a blessing stating that these acts are performed specifically as a remembrance of the Exodus. Rather, Hashem commanded that we perform certain actions, and through those actions we naturally come to remember Yetzi’as Mitzrayim. The remembrance does not depend exclusively on verbal narration; if someone asks about the meaning of these practices, we then explain their significance. That explanation itself becomes the Haggadah—the recounting that emerges from the remembrance of the Exodus.

This idea aligns beautifully with the insight of the Malbim (Ki Savo 26:3), who explains that the term הגדה does not necessarily denote speech alone. In the declaration of the bringer of Bikkurim, “הגדתי היום לה” אלוֹקֵיךְ”, the word haggadah can refer to the publicizing of a message through an action. Thus, the very act of bringing the first fruits serves as the declaration itself. Similarly, on the night of the Seder, the actions we perform—eating matzah, drinking the four cups, reclining, and displaying the symbols of the Seder—are themselves a form of Haggadah, proclaiming and publicizing the story of Yetzi’as Mitzrayim even before a single word is spoken.

It is thus explained that the performance of the mitzvos of Pesach, matzah, maror, and the Haggadah are essentially one unified mitzvah. What we verbally articulate is merely an addition to the mitzvah of the day, which centers on the acts of Korban Pesach, matzah, and maror.

Accordingly, it emerges that the verbal explanation indeed relates to the mitzvah of Pesach, matzah, and maror themselves. Nevertheless, it is correct to consider all of this as part of the Haggadah, for even the mitzvos themselves constitute a form of “telling”—the acts themselves serve as a declaration of the story. See below Rav Gamliel for further elaboration.

מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה - What

From Idolatry to Faith

This section marks the point at which the primary mitzvah of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim truly begins. As the Gemara (Pesachim 116a) teaches, the narrative must follow the principle of "מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח"—one must begin with disgrace and conclude with praise and glory.

The Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:3) explains that the prolonged stay in Mitzrayim nearly caused the faith planted by Avraham Avinu to be uprooted entirely. Klal Yisrael came dangerously close to abandoning the monotheistic belief of their forefathers and returning to the errors of idol worship.

Indeed, the spiritual decline in Egypt brought the Jewish people to a level reminiscent of the pre-Avrahamic era, when humanity as a whole had strayed into idolatry. To highlight the depth of this spiritual fall, the Haggadah introduces the figure of Terach, Avraham's father, who himself was an idol worshipper.

Significantly, this reference appears here, and not earlier in the Haggadah before Avadim Hayinu. The purpose is to emphasize that the redemption from Egypt was not merely a physical liberation from slavery, but also a spiritual restoration—a return to the faith that Avraham Avinu had originally introduced to the world.

והיא שעמדה — The Promise That Endures

The promise that Hashem made to Avraham Avinu at the Bris Bein HaBesarim was not limited to the exile of Mitzrayim alone. Rather, it extends to all the exiles that Klal Yisrael would endure throughout the generations. It is by virtue of this promise that, whenever enemies rise against us to destroy us, Hashem continually saves us from their hands.

Rav Eliezer Ashkenazi (Maaseh Hashem) further explains that the event of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim itself would have long been forgotten among the nations, and the great revelation of that time would not have endured — were it not for this ongoing reality. For in every generation, enemies rise against us to destroy us, and Hashem saves us from their hands. Through this constant cycle, Hashem's power and His love for us are revealed anew in every generation. Accordingly, the phrase "והיא שעמדה" refers not only to the original promise made to Avraham Avinu, but to this very phenomenon — that in every generation they rise against us to destroy us, and Hashem delivers us. This itself fulfills the Divine intent: that His presence be made known through us, His nation. For it is specifically through our survival — despite those who

seek to annihilate us — that His enduring love and providence are most clearly revealed. Thus, what appears as the greatest danger becomes the very vehicle through which the eternity of Klal Yisrael — and the presence of Hashem — is proclaimed.

The Cup of Separation

There is a custom, cited by the Rokeach in the name of his father, to raise the cup of wine while reciting “והיא שעמדה”. On a simple level, this practice is based on the pasuk: “כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא” (Tehillim 116:13), which the Radak explains as an expression of lifting a cup of wine in recognition of salvation. However, the Meshech Chochmah (Va'eira) offers a deeper insight (see Haamek Davar Va'era 6:6 for a similar idea). There is perhaps no substance that symbolizes separation more than wine, as wine touched by a non-Jew becomes prohibited for Jewish consumption. It was precisely through maintaining such separateness that Klal Yisrael merited redemption — preserving their language, their clothing, and their names even while immersed in Mitzrayim. Accordingly, this commitment to distinct Jewish identity is appropriately symbolized through wine — the very substance that embodies separation. Perhaps this is why we raise the cup while declaring “והיא שעמדה”, as we are not only recalling our salvation, but expressing its very cause — that it was this steadfast separateness that preserved us. For as we have seen, “והיא שעמדה” is not merely a promise of protection, but a pattern of survival — one sustained by a people who remained distinct, and through that distinction, endured.

The Enduring Miracle of Our Existence

Rav Yaakov Emdin (Sulam Bais El Sulam Gadol Chavak 2) presents an astounding perspective on how this promise not only lives, but intensifies as time progresses. He writes: How can one deny this and not be ashamed, when he reflects upon our existence — we, a nation scattered in exile for thousands of years, pursued, oppressed, and targeted more than any other nation, yet never destroyed? All the mighty nations of old have vanished without a trace, while we, who cling to Hashem, remain alive. Not a single letter of the Torah has been lost, nor have the words of Chazal faded. Time itself has not prevailed over us. What can even the greatest philosopher say — that all of this is mere chance? When one reflects upon this, it stands as a greater wonder than all the miracles of Egypt. For the longer the exile endures, the more evident the miracle becomes, just as the prophets foresaw — and not one of their words has failed. Where, then, is the voice of denial? It dissipates like smoke. Let a person contemplate this, and he will come

to recognize that Hashem is the Eternal God — and turn to Him with a full heart.

Seeing What They Never Saw

Rav Meir Heisler (Mei HaDaas, p. 241) recounts an astounding shmuess he heard from Rav Chatzkel Levenshtein. It is important to preface that Rav Chatzkel devoted his entire life to clarifying and internalizing emunah — particularly emunah in Yetzias Mitzrayim. He would vividly relive those miraculous events, even arranging the chairs in his dining room and walking between them in order to visualize Krias Yam Suf. So real was this to him, that at his levayah, Rav Shlomo Wolbe remarked: “Today, we have lost the last Jew who left Mitzrayim.” Rav Heisler expressed his amazement at the level of emunah a person can truly reach! Rav Chatzkel presented a startling perspective. He began by asking: Who has it better — I, or those who left Mitzrayim? For me, it is better. Whatever miracles they saw — I have also seen. Yetzias Mitzrayim, Matan Torah, the forty years in the Midbar — I was there. I feel it as though I experienced it myself. But what I have seen — they have not. I have witnessed two thousand years of galus. I have seen the lone sheep among seventy wolves — and yet it endures. Nu — who has it better?

אָרָמִי אוֹבֵד אָבִי - The Complete Story

Telling the Whole Story

The Haggadah’s extensive analysis of Yetzi’as Mitzrayim through the verses of “Arami Oved Avi,” the passage associated with the mitzvah of Bikkurim, initially appears puzzling. One might have expected the Haggadah to rely on verses that directly describe the events of the Exodus itself.

Furthermore, the Rambam (Hilchos Chametz U’Matzah 7:4) writes that beyond the general praise accorded to one who elaborates on the story of the Exodus (ibid. 7:1), there is a particular commendation for one “who adds and speaks at length in expounding this section”—the passage of Arami Oved Avi.

The significance of this specific section can be understood in several ways:

1. A Complete Narrative

The Parsha of Bikkurim is the only sequence of verses in the Torah that presents the story of the Jewish people in its entirety—beginning with our earliest origins and culminating with our arrival in Eretz Yisrael.

Since the Seder night is an expression of gratitude, it is fitting that the story be told in a comprehensive manner, encompassing the entire journey from the depths of exile to the fulfillment of redemption.

2. A Personal Narrative

Rav Shlomo Kluger suggests that this passage was chosen because it is written in the first-person perspective: “They dealt harshly with us, afflicted us, and imposed hard labor upon us.” This formulation enables the speaker to recount the story as if he himself personally experienced the events, fulfilling the principle that every individual must view himself as if he personally left Egypt.

Lechem Oni

The Gemara (Pesachim 36a) cites Shmuel, who explains the term לחם עוני – lechem oni to mean bread over which many matters are recited (onin), alluding to the Seder night, when the story of the Exodus is recounted while eating matzah.

The Ohr Sameach (Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:4) questions why the term oni is used to describe the recitation of the Haggadah, since the Torah typically employs the expressions אמירה (amirah) or והגדת (vihi-gadta) when referring to verbal narration.

He suggests that the term oni specifically refers to the section of “ארמי אובד אבי”¹, the parsha of Bikkurim, which forms the centerpiece of the Haggadah. In that passage the Torah uses the expression “וענית ואמרת”²—you shall respond and say—introducing the narrative recited when bringing the first fruits.

Accordingly, the Ohr Sameach proposes that this may be the source for the Rambam’s ruling that the primary focus of Sippur Yetziyas Mitzrayim lies in expounding the passage of Arami Oved Avi, and that one who elaborates and expands upon it is praiseworthy—the well-known principle of “כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח.”³ Thus, the matzah is called lechem oni because it is the bread over which we recite and elaborate upon that very passage, speaking devarim harbeh in recounting the redemption.

Forever Answering

“You shall respond and say (וענית ואמרת)” — we find that the beginning of speech is sometimes referred to as ‘answering’ (ענייה). For example: “And Miriam answered them” (Shemos 15:21). The meaning there is that Miriam began to say to them, “Sing to Hashem.” Similarly, later the Torah states: “And the Leviim shall answer and say” — meaning they

initiate the proclamation.

It is therefore possible that in situations where there is an implicit question—“What is this?”—the beginning of the speech is called an answer. Thus, when Miriam went out with the tambourine in her hand and all the women followed her, it is clear that they gathered for a particular purpose and were honoring Miriam by allowing her to begin. Therefore the verse states: “And Miriam answered.”

When thanking Hashem we are forever in a state of ענייה—an eternal response—for no matter how much we say, our words can never fully repay or adequately express the boundless kindness He bestows upon us.

The Ten Makkos

Miracles and Wonders

The Rambam (Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:1) writes: “It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders that were performed for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan... and whoever elaborates on the events that occurred is praiseworthy.”

It is noteworthy that the Rambam does not merely state that we are obligated to recount the fact that we left Mitzrayim. Rather, he emphasizes the obligation to relate the “miracles and wonders” that Hashem performed for our ancestors there (as noted by Mori V'Rabi Rav Moshe Shapiro).

This wording suggests that a special focus should be placed on discussing the Ten Makkos, which represent the most striking and dramatic demonstrations of the miracles and wonders that accompanied the redemption.

Indeed, the Mishnah Berurah (473:64), quoting the Chayei Adam, records a custom that when the Ten Makkos were recited at the Seder, the Jewish servants or workers who were assisting with the meal would be called to the table so that they too could hear the recounting of the miracles that Hashem performed on behalf of Klal Yisrael.

This practice reflects the broader spirit of the Seder: the story of redemption is meant to be shared with everyone present, ensuring that all participants are able to appreciate and reflect upon the miracles through which Hashem redeemed His people.

Miracles Born of Commitment

However, the Rambam's formulation appears to limit the obligation to recounting the miracles that occurred on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, which would seemingly exclude the Ten Makkos, as they took place prior to that night.

Perhaps it can be suggested that merely recounting Hashem's ability to manipulate and alter the natural order of the world is not, in itself, the primary focus of the Seder. In truth, all of nature is itself a miracle, constantly sustained and directed by Hashem. The miracles of the Exodus that are most worthy of emphasis are those that came about through the commitment, faith, and sacrifice of Klal Yisrael.

On the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, Klal Yisrael demonstrated extraordinary devotion by performing the mitzvos of Korban Pesach and Bris Milah in the face of great danger and opposition. It was these acts of dedication that precipitated the final redemption. Accordingly, the Rambam emphasizes the miracles associated with that night, highlighting not only Hashem's intervention in nature, but also the covenantal relationship between Hashem and His people, forged through their willingness to act with faith and courage.

Miracles of Love

The Rambam (Sanhedrin 25:2) writes that one must not treat members of Klal Yisrael with levity, even if they appear to be simple or unlearned individuals. One may not step over the heads of the holy people, for even the most ordinary among them are "the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and the hosts of Hashem whom He brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand."

The Rambam's description of Klal Yisrael as the nation whom Hashem took out of Mitzrayim "with great power and a strong hand" requires explanation.

Rav Shlomo Kluger suggests that, in general, Hashem prefers to govern the world through the orderly framework of teva—nature. The very fact that He chose to suspend the natural order and perform open miracles on behalf of Klal Yisrael demonstrates the depth of His love for them. In a sense, Hashem "set aside" His preferred system of nature in order to redeem His people. The miracles of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim therefore reveal that Hashem's love for Klal Yisrael surpasses even His commitment to the natural order that He established.

If this is how Hashem regards His people, we too must treat every member of Klal Yisrael with the utmost respect and dignity, regardless of their stature or level of scholarship.

Perhaps this idea also sheds light on the prominence given to the Ten Makkos during the Seder. Although the plagues themselves did not occur on the fifteenth of Nissan, they vividly demonstrate Hashem's unparalleled love and concern for Klal Yisrael—one of the central themes of the night. For this reason, it is fitting that we devote time to elaborating upon them as part of the story of redemption. Perhaps this is the depth of the meaning of the Chaya Adam's words "so that they too could hear the recounting of the miracles that Hashem performed on behalf of Klal Yisrael".

The Ten Miracles

The Miracles of Distinction

The Mishnah (Avos 5:5) teaches:

"Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in Egypt, and ten at the sea. The Holy One, Blessed is He, brought ten plagues upon the Egyptians in Egypt and ten at the sea."

The miracles performed for Klal Yisrael in Mitzrayim consisted of their being saved and spared from the ten plagues that struck the land. Regarding nearly every plague, the Torah explicitly emphasizes that Hashem distinguished between the Egyptians and the Jewish people, ensuring that the suffering was directed only toward the Egyptians (the exception being the plague of lice, see Rabbeinu Yonah to Avos ad loc.).

Ordinarily, however, Divine retribution follows the principle that "once the forces of destruction are unleashed, they do not differentiate between the righteous and the wicked." Under normal circumstances, such devastation would affect all those within its reach. The fact that Klal Yisrael were completely spared from the suffering of the plagues was therefore itself a great miracle, requiring special Divine intervention.

The order of the Mishnah's statement is noteworthy. It first mentions the miracles performed for the Jewish people, and only afterward the plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians. At first glance this seems reversed, as the plagues appear to be the primary event.

The Chasid Yaavetz (Avos ad loc.) explains that this order reflects the true purpose of the plagues. Their primary objective was not merely to punish the Egyptians, but to demonstrate the special relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. The clearest expression of this chosenness was the fact that the Jewish people remained completely un-

scathed while the devastating plagues swept through the land.

Timeline of the Ten Makkos

The Mishnah (Eduyos 2:10) teaches that the judgment of the Egyptians—the period during which the Ten Makkos were administered—lasted twelve months.

At the same time, Rashi (Shemos 7:25) explains that each of the plagues lasted one month. This seems to present a difficulty: if each plague lasted a month, the ten plagues should have spanned ten months, not twelve.

Several explanations are offered by the Mefarshim. One possibility is that there was a two-month interruption in the sequence of the plagues, accounting for the additional time (see Maharsha, Rosh Hashanah 11b). Alternatively, the statement that each plague lasted a month may not be exact; rather, each plague may have extended slightly longer than a month, bringing the total to twelve months (see Gra to Seder Olam ch. 3 and Tiferes Yisrael ad loc.).

A third approach is suggested by the Midrash (Tehillim 78). According to this explanation, each plague itself lasted seven days, followed by twenty-three days without a plague, serving as a warning period before the next one. Thus, every plague cycle lasted thirty days—seven days of the plague and twenty-three days of respite—resulting in a total span of twelve months for the entire sequence.

Purpose of the Ten Makkos

Ten Plagues, Three Lessons of Faith

The primary purpose of the Ten Makkos could not have been merely punishment or retribution against the Egyptians. Had punishment been the sole objective, a single devastating plague—such as Makkas Bechoros—would have sufficed. Likewise, if the goal was simply to liberate Klal Yisrael, Hashem could have easily incapacitated the Egyptians and allowed the Jewish people to leave without resistance. Why, then, was it necessary to bring ten distinct plagues?

The Maharal explains that the plagues were deliberately designed to demonstrate to the entire world the absolute omnipotence of Hashem. Each plague revealed His mastery over another aspect of creation, serving as a public proclamation of His complete dominion over the universe. These ten manifestations of Divine power conveyed the message expressed in the verse (Shemos 9:14):

“בעבור תדע כי אין כמוני בכל הארץ” — “So that you will know that there is none like Me in the entire earth.”

The Malbim (Haggadah, U'vimorah Gadol) offers a complementary explanation. The primary purpose of the plagues was to instill emunah within Klal Yisrael. After centuries of exposure to Egyptian idolatry, their faith had been weakened. The gradual and carefully structured sequence of plagues allowed the Jewish people to witness and internalize the fundamental truths of faith. Hashem revealed His power slowly and deliberately, ensuring that these lessons would be deeply absorbed.

Furthermore, the Malbim (Vaeira 7:14) explains that the plagues were arranged in three groups of three, each designed to convey a different foundational principle of emunah:

1. D'tzach – to teach that Hashem exists.

“7:17) (בזאת תדע כי אני ה'”).

2. Adash – to demonstrate that Hashem actively supervises and governs the world.

“8:18) (למען תדע כי אני ה' בקרב הארץ”).

3. B'achav – to reveal that His power is supreme and incomparable.

“9:14) (בעבור תדע כי אין כמוני בכל הארץ”).

This structure is reflected in the Pesach Haggadah, where Rabbi Yehudah provided mnemonic groupings—D'tzach, Adash, B'achav. From this we see that Chazal themselves understood the plagues as carefully organized stages, each conveying a distinct and essential lesson in emunah.

מידה כנגד מידה – Measure for Measure

The Precision of Hashem's Justice

Chazal (see Tanna D'vei Eliyahu 7, Mishnas Rebbi Eliezer 19, among many other sources) elaborate at length on the precise correspondence between the actions of the Egyptians and the punishments they received through the Ten Makkos. Each plague reflected a form of midah k'neged midah—measure for measure—demonstrating that the punishment was carefully tailored to fit the crime.

Chazal further teach that the Egyptians were punished not only for the harm they actually inflicted upon the Jewish people, but even for the evil they had intended or planned, despite the fact that some of those schemes were never ultimately carried out.

Through these punishments, Hashem—whose very essence is truth (Emes)—demonstrated how perfect justice prevails, and how every action ultimately receives its fitting response.

Indeed, the Derashos HaRan (Derashah 3) emphasizes that even in our own time, one of the clearest signs of Divine Providence is when the consequences of wrongdoing appear specifically in the very area where the sin was committed. When the punishment mirrors the wrongdoing itself, it reveals that events are not random, but rather guided by the precise hand of Hashgachah Pratis.

Pharaoh and the Plague of Blood

Chazal note that Pharaoh himself was not afflicted by the first plague. The Midrash Mishnas Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 19), cited in Torah Sheleimah (Shemos, אֹת צ), derives this from the verse:

ויפן פרעה ויבא אל ביתו

“Pharaoh turned and went into his house.”

(Shemos 7:23)

From this the Midrash understands that Pharaoh returned home and found that he still had water, and therefore he dismissed the suffering around him.

Remarkably, Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in Meshech Chochma (Shemos 7:23), arrives at the same conclusion independently from the wording of the verse. This parallel insight is a testament to his mastery and clarity in Torah, discerning from the pasuk itself what Chazal revealed in the Midrash.

One cannot help but note the troubling portrait of leadership that emerges from this scene. A true leader empathizes with the plight of those he governs. Pharaoh, however, returned home, saw that he himself still had water, and simply turned his back on the suffering of his people.

Tzefardeia

The Language of Moshe's Prayers

Chazal teach that there are ten different expressions of prayer (see Midrash at the beginning of Va'eschanan and Sha'arim B'Tefillah). An interesting example appears during the plagues, when Pharaoh repeatedly asked Moshe to pray for their removal.

During the plague of Tzefardeia, Pharaoh said:

העתירו אל ה'

(Shemos 8:4)

Yet the Torah records that Moshe “וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה'” — Moshe cried out to Hashem.

The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, Shemos 8:8) explains that the word **ויעתר** refers to a pitchfork that turns over grain. Chazal (Sukkah 14a) teach that just as the pitchfork overturns the grain, so too the prayers of the righteous can transform the attribute of judgment into mercy.

For example, the Torah says regarding Yitzchak:

וַיִּעֲתֶר יִצְחָק לֵה' לִנְוֹכַח אֲשֶׁתוֹ כִּי עִקְרָהּ הִיא

Since Rivkah was barren, the situation needed to be completely reversed, and therefore the Torah uses the expression **ויעתר**.

Accordingly, during the plague of Tzefardeia, the decree was not fully transformed. Although the frogs disappeared, they died afterward and their remains filled the land with stench. Since the situation was not entirely reversed, the Torah uses the expression **ויעתר** rather than **ויעתק**.

In contrast, during the plague of Arov, the animals departed entirely, and therefore the Torah uses the expression **ויעתק**, indicating that Moshe's prayer completely overturned the decree.

This idea may also explain the wording regarding the plague of Arbeh. There too the Torah states that Moshe **ויעתק אל ה'**, and the plague disappeared entirely without any lingering effect.

The Ramban, citing Rabbeinu Chananel, writes that from the time Moshe prayed for the removal of the locusts, Egypt was never again afflicted by locusts.

At first glance this is puzzling. Why should the plague of locusts differ from the other plagues?

According to the above explanation, the answer becomes clear. Since Moshe's prayer was expressed with **ויעתק**, the decree was completely overturned, leaving no trace behind.

Kinim and Arov

The order of the plagues is well known: Dam, Tzefardeia, Kinim, Arov. Yet an interesting observation emerges from a verse in Tehillim.

The pasuk states:

אָמַר וַיָּבֹא אֲרוֹב כְּנִים בְּכָל גְּבוּלָם

“He spoke and Arov came, and lice throughout their borders.”

(Tehillim 105:31)

The Malbim notes that the verse mentions Arov before Kinim, suggesting that even when the plague of Arov arrived, the lice had not yet disappeared. According to this reading, the two plagues overlapped, and Kinim remained present throughout the land while Arov was already striking Egypt.

Kinim — A Plague of Humiliation

Regarding the plague of lice, the Torah states:

וְתָהִי הַכְּנִים בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה
(Shemos 8:13)

The Malbim (Va'eira 8:14) notes an unusual aspect of this plague. Unlike many of the other plagues, the Torah does not describe its removal.

In fact, the Malbim explains that the plague of Kinim never fully departed. Even after the following plague of Arov arrived, the lice still remained among the Egyptians, as hinted to in the verse in Tehillim:

אָמַר וַיָּבֵא עֲרוֹב כְּנִים בְּכָל גְּבוּלָם
(Tehillim 105:31)

This implies that when the wild animals arrived, the lice were still present throughout their land.

The Malbim adds that the plague of Kinim served a unique purpose among the plagues, as it was primarily a plague of disgrace to humiliate the Mitzriyim.

For this reason it came without prior warning, and unlike other plagues, it did not completely disappear afterward. The humiliation remained with the Egyptians long after the initial blow.

A Deeper Pattern Within the Makkos

The Hagahos Maimoniyos (end of Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah, Nusach HaHaggadah, os 2) explains the deeper significance of the סימנים דצ"ך attributed to Rabbi Yehudah.

Citing the Riv"א, he reveals that the structure of the סימנים conveys that within the final grouping — Kinim, Shechin, and Choshech — the plagues did not function in isolation. Rather, each one operated in conjunction with the others. When Kinim struck, it was accompanied by elements of Shechin and Choshech as well, though Kinim remained the dominant manifestation.

This is alluded to within the very arrangement of the words themselves.

When written in alignment and read vertically, the first letters form Choshech, the second Shechin, and the third Kinim — revealing an intrinsic קשר between these plagues.

Thus, the סימנים are not merely mnemonic devices, but vehicles conveying deeper insight into the nature and interplay of the makkos. Even within the makkos, what appears separate is often deeply interconnected.

Another interesting point emerges from the words of the Rambam in his commentary to the Mishnah (Avos 5:4). In describing the miracles of the plagues, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes that Bnei Yisrael were not affected. However, regarding Kinim, the Torah does not explicitly state that the plague did not affect them.

From this the Rambam concludes that the lice were indeed present among the Jews, yet they did not cause them harm or suffering.

Arov

When introducing the plague of Arov, the Torah states:

הנני משליח בך ובעבדיך ובעמך ובבתיך את הערוב
ומלאו בתי מצרים את הערוב וגם האדמה אשר הם עליה
(Shemos 8:17)

The verse concludes with an unusual phrase: “and also the ground upon which they are.”

The Vilna Gaon explains that different species of animals require different climates and environments in order to survive. The plague of Arov therefore brought not only the wild animals themselves, but the very ground and climate necessary for their survival. Each animal arrived together with its natural habitat, allowing creatures from many different environments to coexist in Mitzrayim.

In this way the plague demonstrated that Hashem’s mastery extends not only over the creatures themselves, but over the entire natural order that sustains them.

Arov — The Beginning of a Relationship

When Moshe warned Pharaoh about the plague of Arov, the Torah states:

למחר יהיה האות הזה
“Tomorrow this sign will occur.”
(Shemos 8:19)

Why did Hashem delay the plague until the following day, and why was

the exact time of the plague announced — something not done with most of the other plagues?

The Netziv, in Ha'amek Davar, explains that this was deliberate. By announcing the precise time of the plague, the Egyptians were given the opportunity to flee to Goshen, where the plague would not strike. Many Egyptians therefore came there together with their families to escape the terror of the wild animals.

Through this interaction, Egyptians and Jews began to develop familiarity and goodwill.

This helps explain a change in the Torah's wording regarding the borrowing of the Egyptian vessels. Earlier the Torah states:

ושאלה אשה משכנתה ומגרת ביתה
(Shemos 3:22)

that a woman should request vessels from her neighbor. Later the Torah says:

וישאלו איש מאת רעהו
(Shemos 11:2)

that each man should request from his companion.

The Chizkuni asks: how could the Egyptians be described as “רעהו”, companions of the Jews? Were they not their oppressors?

He explains that after the plagues the Egyptians had begun to relate to the Jews with a degree of friendship and respect, and were therefore willing to lend them their vessels.

The Netziv adds that this transformation developed gradually. Initially the interaction was limited to neighbors, but once the Egyptians began fleeing to Goshen from the time of Arov, relations broadened significantly.

He further notes that during the plague of Choshech, when the Egyptians were immobilized and could not move for three days, they were unable to obtain food or other necessities. Since “ולכל בני ישראל היה אור” במושבותם, the Jews were able to move freely and provide them with what they needed.

Through these acts, Bnei Yisrael found great favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, paving the way for the eventual fulfillment of the command to request their vessels.

A Moral Lesson at the Sea

The Torah states regarding the departure from Egypt:

וחמשים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים
(Shemos 13:18)

Rashi explains that “חמושים” means that Bnei Yisrael left Egypt armed.

The Chasam Sofer (beginning of Beshalach) raises a striking question. If the Jewish people left Egypt armed and prepared for battle, why did Hashem not instruct them to fight the Egyptians when they were pursued at the Sea? Hashem could have assisted them and allowed them to defeat the Egyptians through natural means.

Why was it necessary instead for Hashem to perform the great miracle of Krias Yam Suf, splitting the sea and destroying Pharaoh’s army within it?

The Chasam Sofer explains that it would not have been morally appropriate for the Jewish people themselves to wage war against Egypt. After all, Egypt had once hosted them.

For this reason the Torah commands:

לא תתעב מצרי כי גר היית בארצו
(Devarim 23:8)

One should not despise an Egyptian, since the Jewish people once lived in his land.

Chazal express this idea with a powerful phrase:

בירא דשתית מיניה מיא לא תשדי ביה קלא
(Bava Kama 92b)

“Do not throw a stone into the well from which you drank.”

Therefore, although Bnei Yisrael left Egypt armed and capable of fighting, Hashem did not allow them to wage battle against the Egyptians. Instead, He performed the miracle of splitting the sea, allowing the Egyptians to be defeated without the Jewish people raising their swords against them.

Thus the Torah teaches not only the greatness of the miracle, but also a profound lesson in moral sensitivity and gratitude.

Barad — The Hailstones That Never Fell

Chazal teach (Berachos 54b) that when Moshe prayed for the plague of hail to stop, the storm ceased immediately. However, the hailstones

that were already descending toward the earth did not disappear. Instead, they were suspended in midair.

Some of those very stones later resumed their descent during the time of Yehoshua, when they struck and killed the fleeing Amorite soldiers in battle. Chazal further teach that some of these stones will yet complete their journey in the future during the war of Gog and Magog.

The Maharsha explains the deeper idea behind this phenomenon. The agents of Hashem are eager to fulfill the mission for which they were sent — to execute Hashem's justice upon His enemies. Even though Moshe's prayer halted their immediate mission, their task was not canceled entirely. Rather, the hailstones remained suspended until the time would come for them to fulfill that mission elsewhere.

Thus the stones that were sent during the plague of Barad eventually continued their role in punishing the enemies of Hashem in the days of Yehoshua, and will again do so in the future.

Arbeh

Regarding Makkas Arbeh, the pasuk states: "Vayanach b'chol gevul Mitzrayim" (Shemos 10:14). The Baal HaTurim notes that the word "vayanach" appears twice in the Torah — here, and regarding Shabbos: "Vayanach bayom hashevi'i" (Shemos 20:11). From this, he derives that the locusts "rested" on Shabbos.

This would indicate that Makkas Arbeh did not continue on Shabbos.

However, this gives rise to a compelling question: from the words of the Baal HaTurim, it appears that specifically Makkas Arbeh ceased on Shabbos — implying that the other makkos did continue even on that day.

What, then, distinguished Makkas Arbeh from all the other plagues, that it alone did not persist on Shabbos?

Interestingly, it is brought in Kovetz Moriah (year תשנ"ב; p. 'לה), in the name of the Pnei Yehoshua, that in fact none of the makkos applied on Shabbos. He cites a Midrash indicating that no plague was active on Shabbos. However, from the aforementioned Baal HaTurim it seems otherwise, as his comments imply that specifically Makkas Arbeh did not occur on Shabbos — suggesting that the other makkos did continue even on Shabbos.

When Moshe Declared — and Hashem Carried Out

The Rishonim — among them the Ramban, Daas Zekeinim, and the Rosh — note that with regard to Makkas Arbeh, we do not find that Hashem explicitly told Moshe which plague was to come.

Building upon this, the Chasam Sofer offers a striking insight. He prefaces his words with a disclaimer: were it not for the hesitation to express such an idea, one might suggest that Hashem did not dictate to Moshe which specific plague to bring upon Pharaoh. Rather, Hashem granted Moshe the authority at that moment to declare as he saw fit, and He, in turn, would fulfill the will of His servant and bring his counsel to fruition.

This, he explains, is alluded to in the words “למען תספר” — that Moshe would be able to recount to his children and grandchildren how Hashem upheld and realized his decisions.

In this light, the makkos were not only manifestations of Divine power, but also a profound expression of the unique partnership between Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu.

Perhaps, in light of this, we may suggest an additional layer of understanding. We noted earlier that Makkas Arbeh did not operate on Shabbos, as indicated by the Baal HaTurim that the locusts “rested” — וינח — on the seventh day.

According to the approach of the Chasam Sofer, that this makkah followed Moshe Rabbeinu’s declaration, it is possible that its cessation on Shabbos reflects a parallel to shevisas behemah — just as one’s animals need to rest on Shabbos (and not do work for its owner), so too that which came about through Moshe’s directive was bound by that framework of rest.

Choshech — Trust Born in Darkness

Regarding the plague of darkness, the Torah states:

ולכל בני ישראל היה אור במושבותם
(Shemos 10:23)

Rashi explains that during the days of darkness the Jewish people were able to move freely within Egyptian homes while the Egyptians themselves were immobilized. In doing so, the Jews were able to see where the Egyptians kept their valuables.

Later, when Bnei Yisrael asked to borrow vessels of gold and silver, some Egyptians denied possessing such items. The Jews were then able to say: “It is in such-and-such a place,” since they had already seen

exactly where those items were kept.

The Chizkuni raises a difficulty. The Torah later states:

וְהָיָה נִתְּנָה אֶת חֵן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם וּשְׂאִילוֹם

that Hashem granted Bnei Yisrael favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and they willingly lent them their vessels. If the Jews had to reveal where those valuables were hidden, where is the element of goodwill?

Chazal (Shemos Rabbah 14:3) explain that during the three days of darkness the Jews entered Egyptian homes and saw their possessions — yet they took nothing. When later the Egyptians hesitated to lend their vessels and the Jews pointed out exactly where they were located, the Egyptians realized something remarkable: had the Jews wished to deceive them, they could easily have taken those items during the days of darkness and no one would have noticed.

Recognizing the honesty and restraint of Bnei Yisrael, the Egyptians developed tremendous trust and respect, and they willingly lent them their vessels.

This insight complements what we noted earlier (see “Arov — The Beginning of a Relationship”), where the Chizkuni and Netziv explain that from the time of the plague of Arov, interaction between Egyptians and Jews increased, gradually creating familiarity and goodwill. The events of Choshech further deepened that trust, ultimately allowing the Jewish people to fulfill the promise:

וְאַחֲרַי כֵּן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכּוּשׁ גָּדוֹל

Thus, even within the darkness of Egypt, the groundwork for redemption — and for the wealth with which Bnei Yisrael would leave — was quietly being laid.

Choshech — The Power of Faith

The Torah states regarding the plague of darkness:

וְהָיָה חֹשֶׁךְ אֶפְלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
(Shemos 10:22)

Chazal teach that during these days many of the wicked among Bnei Yisrael perished, since they had no desire to leave Egypt. This occurred specifically during the days of darkness so that the Egyptians would not witness their downfall and claim that the Jewish people were suffering just as they were.

The Rosh, in his commentary to the Torah (Bo 10:22), raises a striking question: if the wicked died during the plague of darkness, why did Dasan and Aviram, who were certainly among the most notorious sinners, survive?

He answers that although they were indeed wicked, they did not despair of the redemption. They still believed that the geulah would come.

This explanation can be better understood in light of another comment of the Rosh. On the verse:

והאמין בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה
(Bereishis 15:6)

the Rosh explains that the “tzedakah” attributed to Avraham was not an act of charity, but rather the merit of his faith in Hashem’s promise.

From this he derives that when the prophets speak of redemption through “tzedakah,” such as:

ציון במשפט תפדה ושביה בצדקה (Yeshayah 1:27)
ווצדקה תרומם גוי (Mishlei 14:34)

the term refers not only to acts of kindness, but also to the tzedakah of complete faith — the merit of believing in Hashem’s promises of redemption.

Accordingly, it is understandable why Dasan and Aviram survived the plague of darkness. Despite their many faults, they still believed that the redemption would come. That faith itself was considered a form of tzedakah, and in its merit they were spared.

A similar idea is expressed by the Chida (cited in the Siddur HaMe-forash) regarding the blessing:

את צמח דוד עבדך מהרה תצמיח... כי לישועתך קוינו כל היום

The very fact that we await and hope for the redemption is itself a merit that helps bring it about. Our anticipation of the geulah becomes part of the cause that hastens its arrival.

Choshech — A Test of Faith

The Torah states regarding the plague of darkness:

ויהי חשך אפלה בכל ארץ מצרים שלשת ימים
(Shemos 10:22)

Chazal teach that during these days many of the wicked among Bnei

Yisrael perished, since they had no desire to leave Egypt. This occurred during the days of darkness so that the Egyptians would not witness their downfall and claim that the Jewish people were suffering just as they were.

The Chasam Sofer (beginning of Beshalach, on the verse וחמשים עלו בני ישראל) offers a remarkable perspective on those who died during this period. He suggests that these individuals were not necessarily already deserving of death. Rather, they were judged “על שם סופם,” similar to the concept of the ben sorer u’moreh, who is judged based on the path he is destined to follow.

Hashem, he explains, tested Bnei Yisrael with two great trials to determine whether they were worthy of receiving the Torah.

The first test occurred during the days of darkness. The Jews could see their Egyptian neighbors and their possessions, and they could easily have taken revenge against their oppressors or seized their wealth and fled. Yet Bnei Yisrael restrained themselves. They did not harm the Egyptians and did not take anything from them, because they believed that Hashem would redeem them with great honor.

The second test occurred on the night of the first Pesach. The Jews remained confined within their homes while a terrible cry was heard throughout Egypt — a cry unlike any that had ever been heard before. Those inside could not know whether the cries came from Egyptians or perhaps from fellow Jews, nor whether war, fire, or some other calamity was unfolding outside. Yet they trusted the words of Moshe Rabbeinu and did not leave their homes.

Through these two tests, Hashem separated those who could remain steadfast in faith from those who could not endure such trials. Those who could not withstand the test perished during the days of darkness.

Yet even so, writes the Chasam Sofer, they died as innocent people, since their death was not for past sins but because they would not have been able to withstand the spiritual challenges that lay ahead.

Makkas Bechoros — “I and Not an Angel”

The Torah states regarding the plague of the firstborn:

ועבר ה' לנגוף את מצרים וראה את הדם על המשקוף ועל שתי המזוזות... ולא יתן המשחית לבוא אל בתיכם לנגוף
(Shemos 12:23)

This verse presents a puzzling difficulty. The Haggadah emphasizes

repeatedly that the plague of the firstborn was carried out directly by Hashem:

אני ולא מלאך, אני ולא שרף, אני ה' — אני הוא ולא אחר

If so, why does the verse say “ולא יתן המשחית לבוא אל בתיכם לנגוף” — that Hashem would not allow the destroyer to enter the Jewish homes? If Hashem Himself was striking Egypt, what role does a “destroyer” play here?

The Vilna Gaon (quoted in the Sefer Koheles Yitzchak end of Balak – see also Chumah HaGra on the mentioned Pasuk) offers a fascinating explanation.

Indeed, the plague of the firstborn itself was carried out directly by Hashem, as the Haggadah explains. However, there is always another force operating in the world — the מלאך המוות, the angel of death, who is responsible for carrying out the natural decrees of death upon those whose appointed time has arrived.

On the night of Makkas Bechoros, even Jews who might otherwise have been destined to die through the ordinary course of the angel of death were protected. Hashem did not allow the destroyer to enter their homes at all, so that no Jew would die that night.

This was necessary so that the Egyptians would not claim that the same decree had struck both nations. The redemption had to be absolute and unmistakable: only the Egyptians were struck, while the homes of Bnei Yisrael were completely protected.

A fascinating application of this principle is noted by the Koheles Yitzchak, who uses it to resolve a puzzling formulation in Parshas Balak (Bamidbar 25:9). The idea is that when Hashem wishes to punish people for a specific sin, He may suspend the ordinary decrees of death so that only those meant to be punished will die.

The Koheles Yitzchak relates a remarkable story involving the Vilna Gaon and Rav Feivel, in which this idea was discussed, and a message was conveyed from Heaven affirming that this explanation reflects אמת — the truest expression of Torah understanding.

כמה מעלות טובות – דינו – Full Recognition of Hashem's Kindness

Counting Hashem's Kindnesses

Following the extensive exposition of the Parsha of Bikkurim, in which

the grateful farmer expresses his appreciation to Hashem for the fruits of the land, the Haggadah momentarily shifts its focus to reflect upon the series of events that led to this culmination.

The passage of Dayeinu reviews the many stages of redemption and kindness that Hashem bestowed upon Klal Yisrael—from the Exodus itself to the giving of the Torah and the building of the Beis HaMikdash.

The Rashbatz explains that when one wishes to properly thank a benefactor, it is not sufficient to acknowledge the final gift alone. True gratitude requires recognizing every step, effort, and act of kindness that contributed to the gift ultimately reaching one's hands.

In this spirit, the Haggadah carefully enumerates the many acts of Divine kindness that preceded our arrival in the Land of Israel. By reflecting upon each stage individually, we demonstrate a complete and thoughtful recognition of Hashem's kindness.

Dayeinu — An Introduction to Hallel

The Malbim, in his commentary to the Haggadah, explains that the section of Dayeinu serves as a preparation for Hallel. He notes that the structure and wording of the passage are often misunderstood.

The phrase “Dayeinu” does not mean that any one of the stages of redemption would have been sufficient for us and that we would not have desired the next stage. Heaven forbid that one should suggest that it would have been “enough” to arrive at Har Sinai without receiving the Torah.

Rather, the meaning of Dayeinu is that each individual kindness alone would have obligated us to praise and thank Hashem to the fullest extent of our ability.

This idea is similar to the expression found in our prayers:

אילו פינו מלא שירה כים ולשונונו רינה כהמון גליו... אין אנחנו מספיקים להודות לך ה' אלוקינו על אחת מאלף אלפי אלפים ורבי רבבות הטובות שעשית עמנו

Even if our mouths were filled with song like the sea and our tongues with praise like its waves, we would still be unable to thank Hashem adequately for even one of His countless kindnesses.

Accordingly, when the Haggadah says:

אילו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה — דיינו

the meaning is not that we would have been satisfied without the Torah. Rather, even that single act of kindness — bringing us close to Har Sinai — would itself have obligated us to praise Hashem endlessly.

How much more so when the kindnesses are “כפולה ומכופלת למקום”, doubled and multiplied many times over. Each stage of redemption increases our obligation to praise Hashem.

Thus Dayeinu naturally leads into Hallel, for after reflecting on the multitude of Hashem’s kindnesses, we recognize that the only appropriate response is to praise, glorify, and exalt Him without limit.

Dayeinu — A Chain of Kindness

The final line of Dayeinu reads:

ובנה לנו את בית הבחירה לכפר על כל עונותינו

The Yaavetz explains that the Beis HaMikdash itself served as a form of protection for Klal Yisrael. When the measure of sin became too great, Hashem would pour out His wrath upon the wood and stones of the Temple, thereby sparing the Jewish people.

However, in light of the idea expressed by Rav Shlomo Kluger, the scope of this concept may be even broader. Moshe argues after the sin of the Golden Calf:

למה ה' יחרה אפך בעמך אשר הוצאת מארץ מצרים בכח גדול וביד חזקה

Rav Shlomo Kluger explains that Hashem deliberately redeemed the Jewish people with overwhelming miracles so that the immense effort invested in their redemption would serve as a defense for them in the future. When something is acquired only through great effort, it is not easily discarded.

Accordingly, the phrase “לכפר על כל עונותינו” may be understood as the culmination of the entire passage of Dayeinu. Every stage of the redemption — the Exodus from Egypt, the splitting of the sea, the giving of the Torah, and the building of the Beis HaMikdash — represents another expression of Hashem’s extraordinary commitment to His people.

Each act of kindness deepens the bond between Hashem and Klal Yisrael, and together they form a lasting protection, ensuring that even when we falter, we are not easily cast aside.

Thus, all the kindnesses listed in Dayeinu ultimately contribute to the same end: לכפר על כל עונותינו.

רבן גמליאל - פסח, מצה ומרור

The Meaning of the Mitzvos of the Night

The words of Rabban Gamliel may be the most pivotal section of the Haggadah, for they summarize the central ideas of the night by explaining the meaning behind the mitzvos we perform. These explanations are deliberately presented in a question-and-answer format—“על מה שום מה?”—highlighting the reflective nature of the Seder (see Toldos Adam).

Ordinarily, we do not seek to uncover the reasons behind the mitzvos, as the ideal form of service is to fulfill Hashem's commandments simply because they are His will. On this night, however, the focus on the meaning of the mitzvos serves a different purpose. As the Tzelach (Pesachim 116b) explains, the emphasis here is not on the reasoning of the mitzvah itself, but on the purpose of the redemption that these mitzvos commemorate.

The mitzvos of Pesach, Matzah, and Maror therefore become the concluding summary of the Maggid section. Through them we recognize that our liberation from Egypt was not merely an escape from slavery. Rather, we were redeemed in order to redirect the very discipline, commitment, and devotion that characterized servitude—now in the service of a higher Master, the Ribbono Shel Olam.

הלל – The Song of Survivors

From Servants of Pharaoh to Servants of Hashem

On the night of the Seder we recite Hallel in an unusual manner, dividing it into two parts so that its opening chapters can be incorporated into the narrative of Sippur Yetzi'as Mitzrayim. Before beginning, we introduce it with the declaration: “ונאמר לפניו שירה חדשה” —“Let us recite a new song before Him.” This “new song,” explains the Emek Berachah, is the song of one who feels as if he has personally experienced the miracles of redemption.

For this reason, the first two chapters of Hallel are recited at this stage of the Seder. The second chapter speaks directly of the miracles of the Exodus, making it particularly fitting to include it within the narrative of the night (see Levush, Orach Chaim 473).

Chazal (Yerushalmi Pesachim 5:5) add a remarkable description of the final moments before the redemption. On the night of the Exodus, Pharaoh cried out in desperation, and miraculously his voice was amplified so that it could be heard throughout the entire land. With this thunderous proclamation he declared:

“Rise up, go out from among my people. Until now you were servants

of Pharaoh; from now on you are servants of Hashem.”

At that moment, Klal Yisrael began to recite Hallel, proclaiming: “הללויה הללו עבדי ה'”—“Praise Hashem, you servants of Hashem!”

For they were no longer the servants of Pharaoh.

The significance of the first chapter of Hallel on the night of the Seder thus becomes clear: it is the triumphant song of those who have just emerged from slavery and entered the service of Hashem.

Hallel — Framing the Pesach Experience

Alternatively, the Maharal (Gevuros 62) offers a novel explanation for why Chazal divided Hallel into two parts. Hallel is meant to be recited in connection with the Korban Pesach — specifically at the time of its consumption, during the meal (and today, at the time of eating matzah).

Had Hallel been recited entirely before the meal or entirely afterward, its connection to the Korban Pesach would not be apparent. Therefore, Chazal instituted that Hallel be divided, with one portion recited before the meal and the remainder afterward, thereby framing the seudah and clearly linking Hallel to the Pesach experience. In this way, the Hallel does not merely accompany the Seder — it surrounds and defines the very essence of the night.

A Father's Hallel

Rav Matisyahu Salomon points to the Pesukim in Shoftim (6:13) that describe a time of severe oppression under Midian. When the angel of Hashem appeared to Gideon, he responded with a piercing question:

“Please, my master, if Hashem is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about, saying: ‘Did Hashem not bring us up from Egypt?’”

Rashi explains that Gideon was referring to the words his father would recite when saying Hallel on the night of Pesach, when he would say: “When Israel went out of Egypt...” Gideon argued: If our fathers were worthy and miracles were performed for them, then let those miracles occur for us as well.

It is noteworthy that Gideon did not merely say that he had heard about the Exodus, but specifically that his father recited Hallel. The implication is that the story of the Exodus was not conveyed to him merely as historical information, but as a living experience expressed through the recitation of Hallel.

Chazal explain that the previous night had in fact been Pesach, and Gideon had heard his father reciting Hallel. Gideon sensed that his father was not simply reciting ancient words describing a distant miracle, but was expressing personal gratitude, as if he himself had just been redeemed.

This reflects the ideal mindset of the Seder night: “בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים.” One must experience the redemption as a present reality.

Gideon internalized that message. When he later addressed the angel, he was essentially saying: if we truly sing Hallel as people who have just been redeemed, then let that redemption continue now as well.

It was this deep internalization of the living reality of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim that made Gideon worthy to become the savior of Israel. In this sense, Gideon did not merely hear Hallel—he understood it. And that understanding became the very strength through which redemption would come: “לך בכחך זה.”

No One Compares to a Father

Rav Elya Baruch Finkel would relate a story about a student from the Mir Yeshiva who had the opportunity to spend the Seder night with the Chafetz Chaim, of blessed memory. He was uncertain whether it would be better for him to sit in the presence of such a great tzaddik or to return home to be with his father for the Seder.

He went to ask the mashgiach, Rav Yerucham, for guidance. Rav Yerucham ruled that he should go home and be with his father. As proof, he cited the words of Rashi.

After all, Gideon was already at that time a leader and judge in Israel. Why then did he say, “Last night I heard my father reciting Hallel and saying: ‘When Israel went out of Egypt’”? Had he never heard about the Exodus before? Had he not learned the story on his own?

From here we see that there is a special value in hearing the story of Yetzi'as Mitzrayim specifically from one's father.

It may be compared to mother's milk. Doctors acknowledge that even the finest substitute formula in the world cannot truly match the nourishment of a mother's milk. Similarly, the story of the Exodus that one hears from his father is entirely different from any other retelling.

Furthermore, we learn from here that it is not enough to have heard the story once in the past. Even though Gideon had surely heard it the previous year, there is a unique value in hearing the story again from

one's father each year anew.



כּוּס שֶׁל אֵלִיָּהוּ
THE CUP OF ELIJAHU

There is a widespread custom throughout the Jewish world to place and pour a special cup of wine on the table at the Pesach Seder. No one present drinks from the cup and it is called *בוס של אליהו*, *the Cup of Eliyahu*.

In truth, *Chazal* make no mention of this tradition and thus there is no definitive source for its origin. This chapter will present some of the reasons provided by various commentators, which fall into three categories.

(A) The Seder night is when Eliyahu may very well appear in the flesh to herald the end of our *Galus*. We therefore place a cup of wine in his name as a symbol of our faith that he will arrive; or, because he like all other Jews will have the obligation to drink wine on the Seder night, we prepare it in advance for our anticipated guest.

(B) Eliyahu visits every Seder in spirit form, just as he attends every *bris milah*. Knowing that so exalted a visitor will grace our homes, we put out a cup of wine in his honor.

(C) Although Eliyahu makes no appearance, corporeally or otherwise, there are symbolic and/or practical reasons for preparing the cup.

The Safest of Nights — an Auspicious Time for Geulah

There is a Midrash¹ that on the Seder night, Eliyahu together with Mashiach will make their long-awaited appearance.

מה ראָה לומר (שמות יב:מב) "ליל שמרים?" שבו עָשָׂה גְדֻלָּה לְצַדִּיקִים כָּשֵׁם שְׁעָשָׂה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם. בו הַצִּיל לְחֻזְקֵיהֶוּ, ובו הַצִּיל לְחַנּוּנֵיהֶוּ וְחַבְרֵיהֶוּ, ובו הַצִּיל לְדַנְיָאֵל מִגַּב אַרְצוֹת, ובו מְשִׁיחַ וְאֵלֵיהֶוּ מִתְגַּדְּלִין. שְׁנֵאמַר (ישעיה כא:יב) "אָמַר שְׁמֹר אֶתְהָ בִקְרֹן גַּם לַיְלָה."

Why is it written (Shemos 12:42), "A night of protection?" For on it He did great things for the righteous, just as He did for Israel in Egypt.² On it He saved Chizkiyahu³ and on it He saved Chananiah and his friends⁴ and on it He saved Daniel from the

1. *Shemos Rabbah* 18:12.

2. The exegesis that the first night of Passover would be auspicious for the righteous is based upon either the plurality of the word *שְׁמֵרִים*, *protections*, and/or because the verse ends with *לֵיל שְׁמֵרִים לְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדוֹרֵתָם*, *It is a night of protection for all the Children of Israel for their generations*. The words *לֵיל שְׁמֵרִים הוּא לַיהוָה*, *It is a night of protection for Hashem*, also appear at the beginning of the verse. But as that relates to the Almighty, *shimurim* is understood by *Rashi* not as a night of protection, but as a *night of anticipation* for which He eagerly awaited, to redeem His children from Egypt.

3. When Sancheriv came to attack Yerushalayim, as in *Il Melachim* Ch. 19.

4. Mishael and Azariah, as in *Daniel* 3.

lions' den⁵ and on it, Mashiach and Eliyahu will be exalted.⁶ For it is written (Yeshayahu 21:12), "The Watchman said, 'Morning is coming, but also night.'"⁷

This Midrash concurs with and elaborates upon the opinion of Rav Yehoshua, who says:⁸ בְּיָסֵן נִגְאָלוּ בְּיָסֵן עֲתִידִין לְגָאֵל. In [the month of] Nissan they were redeemed, in Nissan they are destined to be redeemed. The miraculous night following the fourteenth of Nissan ushered in Israel's exit to true freedom back in Egypt and proved to be a night of wonders in future generations as well. How fitting, then, that it should prove to be the ultimate night of protection that will initiate the end of our people's suffering forever.

With this Midrash in mind, the earliest known explanation for the custom to prepare the Cup of Eliyahu is offered by Rav Zelikman of Benga.

וְהִנֵּה רְאִיתִי יֵשׁ בְּנֵי אָדָם בְּלֵיל הַפֶּסַח שְׂמוֹזְגִין כּוֹס מִיַּחַד וּמִעֲמִידֵין עַל הַשְּׁלֶחַן וְאוֹמְרִים שְׁזֶה הַכּוֹס לְאַלְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא. וְלֹא יִדְעוּתִי מֵאַיִן זֶה הַטֵּעַם. וְנִרְאֶה דֶּהֲטַעַם יוֹצֵא מִהֶכָּא. שְׂאֵם יָבֵא אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא בְּלֵיל פֶּסַח כְּאֲשֶׁר אָנוּ מְקוּיִם וּמְחַכִּים לוֹ בְּזֶה הַלַּיְלָה, וְצָרִיךְ גַּם הוּא לְכוֹס. . דְּאֶפְלוּ עָנִי שְׂבִישְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִפְחָתוּ לוֹ מֵאַרְבַּע כּוֹסוֹת. וְאִי לֹא הָיָה כּוֹס מוֹכֵן לְשֵׁם אִם כֵּן צָרִיכִים אָנוּ לְהַתְעַסֵּק לוֹ בְּכוֹס וְדִלְמָא יִמְנַע מִסֻּדְרָא שֶׁל פֶּסַח. וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם הָרִי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח.

I have seen that there are people who pour a special cup on the night of Pesach⁹ and place it upon the table and say that this cup is for Eliyahu HaNavi. And I do not know from where this originates. It appears that the reason originates from here: If Eliyahu HaNavi would come on the night of Pesach — as we hope and anticipate on this night — he would also need a cup [to drink]. For even a pauper in Israel should have no less than

5. As in Daniel Ch. 6.

6. According to Radal and Eitz Yosef, the correct text is מְתַגְלִין, they will be revealed. Even without a change in the actual text, the intent of the Midrash seems to be that they will actually appear in the flesh. (This Midrash disagrees with the clearly stated opinion of Eruvin 43b that Eliyahu and Mashiach will not arrive concurrently. It also sides with the position (questioned by Rav Chaninah, ibid., 43a and elucidated below in Chapter 38, under the heading, *Opinion of the Baal HaManhig*) as to whether or not there are halachic boundaries ten handbreadths above the ground. Clearly, in the opinion of this Midrash there are none; thus Eliyahu and Mashiach will not be violating the 2,000-cubit limitation when they travel — in the flesh — to Earth on Yom Tov.)

7. That is to say, the Almighty proclaims that redemption (morning) is nigh, as is the night on which it is to occur.

8. See *Rosh Hashanah* 11a. R' Eliezer, however, contends that the redemption will take place in Tishrei. Indeed, Rav Yehoshua cites (ibid., 11b) the verse of לַיְלַת שְׂמֵרַיִם as proof that the night of Pesach is לַיְלַת שְׂמֵרַיִם וְכִּי בְרֵאשִׁית יְמֵי בְרֵאשִׁית, a night set aside [for redemption] since the six days of Creation.

9. It was clearly not such a widespread custom in those days.

of opportunity exists for us to accrue extra merit to hasten our beloved prophet's entering through our portals to herald the imminent arrival of Mashiach ben David.

Bris Milah, a Prerequisite for the Korban Pesach

Although there is a positive commandment for every Jewish male to be circumcised,¹¹ a non-circumcised Jew can fulfill virtually all the mitzvos of the Torah. Nevertheless, when it comes to the *Korban Pesach*, the Torah writes,¹² וְכָל עֶרְלָא לֹא יֵאָכֵל בּוֹ, *no uncircumcised male may eat of it.*¹³ Based upon this unique restriction, *Maharam Chagiz* offers a novel approach, paraphrased as follows:

And regarding the preparation of the Cup of Eliyahu, may he be remembered for good, it [is a custom that] has roots below and beautiful branches above. For you are certainly aware of the reason that a special chair is prepared for Eliyahu on the occasion of a bris milah and that he is known as the Malach HaBris. For he has been granted a reward in that the mouth that spoke negatively about Israel for abandoning its covenant is the same mouth that validates and testifies on behalf of Israel, for he is now transformed into the advocate who witnesses that Israel fulfills [the commandment of] circumcision.

With that we can understand the custom in Israel to prepare for him on the night of Pesach a cup of faith and a place to recline and a set table, upon which Israel fulfills the obligation of the Pesach. For one of the statutes and upright laws of the Almighty is that anyone uncircumcised may not eat from it, even someone whose brothers died because of their bris milah.¹⁴

Thus, there is no doubt that blessing will come, for Eliyahu zachur latov, will come to every home in Israel to see the fulfillment of one commandment which is actually two, Pesach and milah. And he ascends on our behalf to heaven to advocate on behalf of the community and individuals to hasten and accelerate their redemption and the liberation of their souls with the final Geulah.

And if these reasons are found in other sefarim, Hashem the Judge knows

11. A father has a special obligation to either circumcise his son or arrange for his son's *bris*. However, if he fails to do so and no one from the community arranges for the child's *bris*, then when the child becomes an adult, the mitzvah becomes his own obligation.

12. *Shemos* 12:48.

13. Though an uncircumcised male may also not eat *terumah* or *kodashim*, those prohibitions are derived from the *Korban Pesach* (see *Rashi* to *Pesachim* 61b).

14. I.e., the exclusion is not to be understood as a punishment for non-fulfillment of a commandment. Even a Jew who is exempt from being circumcised because it would endanger his life cannot partake of the *Korban Pesach*.

that I have not seen them until now and I have merited sharing life with them. But let these [novel Torah thoughts] be attributed to them.

To know that Eliyahu HaNavi — in spirit form — traverses the globe on the night of Pesach to further fulfill his mandate as the *Malach HaBris* and to reinforce the special bond the nation of Israel has with God ... is reassuring. True, we are unable to sacrifice the *Korban Pesach* in our day, but we have an indefatigable advocate who argues before the Master of the World, “Your children uphold the mitzvah of *bris milah* and are primed and ready to once again sacrifice the *Korban Pesach*. Please redeem them from exile so that they indeed may do so!”

Four or Five Cups

There is a dispute among the *Geonim* and *Rishonim*¹⁵ if the proper Seder tradition is to drink four cups of wine or five cups. The source of the disagreement is whether or not the correct text of a Baraisa reads, *בּוֹס הַמַּיִשִּׁי*, *fifth cup*, or *בּוֹס רְבִיעִי*, *fourth cup*. As we are unsure whether we are required to drink a fifth cup or not, most halachic authorities rule that we are *not* to do so out of doubt. It is reputed¹⁶ that the Vilna Gaon explained that the custom of *בּוֹס שָׁל אֵלֶיָּהוּ* is due to this question. Because we are unsure as to whether a fifth cup is needed, we pour a fifth cup but do not drink from it. It is referred to as the *Cup of Eliyahu* because, as with all other halachic uncertainties, when he arrives to herald the *Geulah*, Eliyahu will reveal to us the correct Torah ruling regarding the fifth cup as well.

A Receptacle for Leftovers

Rav Chaim Benveniste¹⁷ provides a utilitarian reason for the custom of the extra cup. Once one drinks from a cup of wine, the leftover wine in that cup is considered *pagum*, tainted, and may not be used for a mitzvah. The generally accepted halachic opinion is that if fresh wine is added to that cup, the wine may now be used. However, some are of the opinion that adding fresh wine does not allow the wine to be used.¹⁸ According to those opinions, once one drank any of the four cups of wine at the Seder, any wine left in his cup should be emptied, but it must not be poured back into the

15. *Pesachim* 118a. See *Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 471 at length.

16. See *Divrei Eliyahu (Parashas Va'eira)*.

17. *Pesach Meuvin*, 182.

18. See *Mordechai to Mesechta Berachos (Os 183)*.

large wine pitcher, for it would taint the entire pitcher. He then adds that he observed the custom of some Ashkenazic Jews who would place an empty cup on their table into which they poured the wine that was left in their cups. They referred to the cup as כוס שֶׁל אֵלִיָּהוּ. He comments that the custom pleased him and that he too would do so. He concludes by saying that he would drink the wine from this Cup of Eliyahu during the meal.¹⁹

Why Eliyahu's name would be applied to a cup of leftovers is not explained. In fact, *Maharam Chagiz* quotes this custom, but condemns associating such a mundane practice with the name of the great Eliyahu HaNavi. Perhaps it can be suggested that — as with the question of four or five cups — it was referred to as the Cup of Eliyahu simply because the need for a receptacle is a matter of halachic dispute and we await Eliyahu's ruling on the matter.

19. When not being used for a mitzvah, tainted wine is not an issue.

CHAG KASHER

V'Sameach



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