

אַתָּה פֶּתַח לוֹ SELF, OTHER, AND STORY

פסח תשפ"ו | Pesah 5786

ADDRESSING THE CHILD who does not know how to ask about the story of the Exodus, the Haggadah tells us: "את פתח לו" - you open up for him." These simple words teach us that when we share our story, we open up for each other, creating a relational bond. And on an even narrower scale, they indicate also that there will be individual transformation: when you share the story, you open up.

The Exodus is a story of becoming, of learning who we are through the experiences of slavery and freedom, and of learning who the other is through shared memory, compassion, and worship. It is a story that builds our character and our sense of purpose, shaping our inner worlds as individuals, while also binding us in relationship with our people and with God.

This Pesah Reader explores how our identities and relationships are formed and transformed through the retelling of the Exodus. May the learning and reflection in these pages open something new for you this Pesah—within yourself, between you and others, and between you and our ever-unfolding story.

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Design by Jen Klor, www.jenklor.com
And by Rachel Jackson, www.binahdesign.com

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THE HADAR INSTITUTE

210 W 93rd St, New York, NY 10025
info@hadar.org
646.770.1468

To donate or sponsor future publications, please contact Jeffrey Stein at stein@hadar.org

WHO WE ARE

DR. TSIVIA FRANK WYGODA

is Beer Sheva and Southern Israel coordinator at Hadar. She holds a PhD in literature from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and her first book, *Edmond Jabès and the Archaeology of the Book*, was published in English in 2021.

ARIEL GORSKY

is senior director of operations at Hadar. Prior to joining Hadar, Ariel worked at UJA-Federation of New York. Ariel holds an MPA and an MA in Judaic studies from New York University, where she studied as a Wexner Graduate Fellow/Davidson Scholar.

RABBI AVITAL HOCHSTEIN

is president of Hadar in Israel. She holds a doctorate from Bar Ilan University in Talmud. She received ordination from R. Daniel Landes and from the Beit Midrash le-Rabbanut Yisraelit and is the co-author of *The Place of Women in Midrash* (2008).

RABBI DAVID KASHER

is director of Hadar West Coast. He received rabbinic ordination at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and a doctorate in legal studies from Berkeley Law.

RABBI ELIE KAUNFER

is president and CEO of Hadar. He received *semikhah* from his longtime teacher, R. Daniel Landes, and is currently completing a book on the weekday Amidah. He received a doctorate in liturgy from the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was also ordained.

RABBI AVI KILLIP

is executive vice president of Hadar and a member of the faculty. A graduate of the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College, R. Killip now serves on the Hebrew College Board of Trustees. She is the host of the Hadar podcasts *Responsa Radio* and *Ta Shma*.

RABBI KEILAH LEBELL

is director of Project Zug. She holds rabbinic ordination from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies and lives in Chattanooga, TN.

RABBI AVIVA RICHMAN

is rosh yeshiva at Hadar. She was ordained by R. Daniel Landes and has a doctorate in Talmud from New York University. She also studied in the Pardes Kollel and the Drisha Scholars' Circle.

RABBI JASON ROGOFF

is faculty and editor at Hadar. He was ordained in the Hadar Advanced Kollel and holds a PhD in Talmud from the Jewish Theological Seminary. He is the author, along with R. Joshua Kulp, of *Reconstructing the Talmud*, Volumes I and II (2014, 2019).

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HAMEITZ U-MATZAH

R. David Kasher

JUST BEFORE THE APEX of the Exodus drama—the final plague and the actual departure from Egypt—the Torah makes a sudden shift in genre. Exodus chapter 12 opens with, “This month will be for you the first of months,” the marking of the new moon, the first *mitzvah* given to Israel—and with that, the Jewish legal tradition officially begins. Having established the calendar, the Torah immediately begins detailing the rituals for what will become the first of its yearly observances: Pesah. At the center of those rituals are two related *mitzvot*—eating *matzah* and not eating *hameitz*—that together will serve as keys to understanding the role of the *mitzvot* in the life of the new people of Israel.

The basic reason for eating *matzah* is well-known: to remember that our ancestors left Egypt “in haste - בחפזון” (Exodus 12:11). They had to eat *matzah*, so we eat *matzah*, to remind us of the Exodus.¹

Yet the severity of the consequences for anyone who violates these laws may take us by surprise:

שמות יב:טו

שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מַצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ אֹךְ בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן
תִּשְׁבִּיתוּ שְׂאֹר מִבֵּיתְכֶם כִּי כָל אֹכֵל חֻמֶּץ וְנֹכְרֶתָהּ
הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן עַד יוֹם
הַשְּׁבִיעִי:

Exodus 12:15

Seven days you will eat *matzot*, but on the first day you will remove leaven from your houses, for anyone who eats *hameitz*, from the first day to the seventh day, **that person will be cut off from Israel.**

Kareit, or “cutting off” (spiritual excommunication from the people of Israel),² is the most serious punishment the Torah can issue. What is it about eating *hameitz* on Pesah that is so fundamentally egregious that it incurs expulsion from Israel? Conversely, what is it about eating *matzah*—among all the rituals of Pesah—that is so definitional that the Torah’s name for the holiday becomes “חג המצות - the Festival of Matzot”?³

An important clue that can help us make sense of this highly-charged polarity comes in the form of a play on words the Torah introduces two verses later. See if you can spot an oddity in this phrasing:

שמות יב:יז

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הַמַּצּוֹת כִּי בַעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הוֹצֵאתִי
אֶת צְבָאוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הַיּוֹם
הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם:

Exodus 12:17

Observe the *matzot*, for on this very day I brought your troops out of the Land of Egypt, so observe this day throughout the generations as an eternal decree.

Why are we being told to **observe** the *matzot*? Aren’t we supposed to **eat** the *matzot*? The Mekhilta, an early collection of *midrash* on the book of Exodus, exposes a double meaning encoded in the verse:

- 1 Based on Exodus 12 alone, *matzah* is not the obvious choice for the holiday’s central ritual. The Israelites were also told to “wear sandals and carry a staff - נָעִלְיֶכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמָקַלְכֶם בְּיָדְכֶם” (Exodus 12:11).
- 2 What exactly this punishment entails is the subject of some debate. In Tanakh, it seems to indicate expulsion from the people of Israel. In Rabbinic literature it is alternately described as the cause of physical death, or loss of spiritual reward in the world to come, or both. The most distinguishing feature of *kareit* is that it is not a punishment issued by human courts, but by God—incurred upon the commission of certain sins.
- 3 The Torah refers to the holiday as חג המצות four times (in Exodus 23:15 & 34:18, Leviticus 23:6, and Deuteronomy 16:16). The name חג הפסח (Hag Ha-Pesah), is used only once (in Exodus 34:25). The word פסח (*pesah*), by itself (the way we refer to the holiday today), in Tanakh always refers specifically to the sacrifice.

מכילתא מסכתא דפסחא ט

רבי יאשיה אומר: אל תקרא בן, אלא "ושמרתם את המצות". בדרך שאין מחמיצין את המצה, כך לא יחמיצו את המצוה, אלא אם באת מצוה על ידך, עשה אותה מיד!

Mekhlita Massekhta de-Pisha 9

R. Yoshiah says: Don't read it this way (*matzot*), but instead as, "Observe the *mitzvot*"—just as we do not allow the *matzah* to become "leavened," so too, we do not let a *mitzvah* become "leavened." Instead, if you have the opportunity to do a *mitzvah*, do it right away!⁴

Perhaps you had already made this connection. The words *matzot* and *mitzvot* sound so similar that, though they do not share a root, it is easy to associate them. R. Yoshiah points out that it isn't just a matter of sound; the two words are also "homographs," spelled exactly the same way in the Torah. This is possible because the letter vav (ו) can serve either as a consonant, with a "v" sound, or as a vowel, with an "o" sound. In Modern Hebrew, they are distinguished by adding a second vav to indicate a consonantal "v" (as the scribe of this passage did in order to make the point clear). But in the Torah, the two words are spelled the same way⁵: מצות.

If "observing the *matzot*" sounded a little odd, "observing the *mitzvot*" is a very common phrase, appearing all over Tanakh. Avraham was the first to be described as having "וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי" - observed My observances, My commandments" (Genesis 26:5). Deuteronomy alone has over thirty instances of some variation of the phrase. It even makes an appearance in the Ten Commandments, in the commandment prohibiting idolatry, which promises that God will reward those who observe faithfully, for God is:

שמות כ:ו

וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי.

Exodus 20:6

The One who does kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and **observe My commandments**.

Since we read the Torah every year, increasingly familiarizing ourselves with its language, we are likely to detect a hidden message in the instruction, "ושמרתם את המצות" - to observe the *matzot*, one that points us toward a broader consideration of our relationship to the commandments.

The lesson R. Yoshiah sees in this "visual pun" is very specific: we should treat the commandments like we treat baking *matzah*, and do them without delay. But the implications of this parallel are far broader. The allusion to the commandments is no side lesson—this is the very point of eating *matzah*. Eating *matzah* is itself a *mitzvah* that is meant to symbolize all of the *mitzvot*.

What, then, does *hameitz* symbolize?

Matzah, remember, is unleavened bread—but it is still bread. It is later called "לחם עני" - the bread of poverty" or "the bread of affliction" (Deuteronomy 16:3). It is not good bread. It is almost anti-bread. It is not supposed to be enjoyable. You are not supposed to be thinking about the pleasure of eating *matzot*, but of the commandment to eat them.

Hameitz, then, is **good** bread—doughy, delicious, gluten-filled bread. The kind of bread that makes your mouth water when you smell it baking. The kind of bread you remember.

Where do the people of Israel remember eating bread like this? Listen to their lament just after crossing the Sea of Reeds:

שמות טז:ג

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי יִתֵּן מוֹתֵנוּ בְּיַד ה' בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁבְתֵּנוּ עַל סֵדֶר הַבָּשָׂר בְּאֲכָלֵנוּ לֶחֶם לְשֹׁבַע כִּי הוֹצֵאתָם אֶתָּנוּ אֶל הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית אֶת כָּל הַקָּהָל הַזֶּה בְּרָעָב:

4 The Mekhilta first gives a legalistic interpretation of the verb, reading שמרתם to mean, "guard the *matzot*"—that is, watch over them carefully during the cooking process to make sure they don't become leavened: "If the dough starts to rise, one should douse one's hands with cold water and then pull it out."

5 That is almost always the case. There are four times in the Torah when *matzot* is spelled without a vav (מצת); see Exodus 12:18, 13:6, 29:2, and Leviticus 2:14. The only place in Tanakh where *mitzvot* is spelled with a double-vav is Nehemiah 9:10.

Exodus 16:3

The children of Israel said to [Moshe and Aharon], “Would that we had died by the hand of the Eternal **in the Land of Egypt**, when we sat by the pots of meat and **ate bread to our satisfaction**. But you have taken us out into this desert to kill this whole congregation by starvation.”

Egypt was the place of *hameitz*, the kind of bread that one eats to satisfaction. Egypt, we know from Genesis, has always been the place one goes to escape hunger. Avraham went down to Egypt “for there was a famine in the land” of Canaan (Genesis 12:10). Eventually, the whole world will travel to Egypt seeking the same refuge:

בראשית מא:נד-נה

וַיְהִי רָעֵב בְּכָל הָאֲרָצוֹת וּבְכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הָיָה לֶחֶם. וַתִּרְעֵב כָּל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּצְעַק הָעָם אֶל פַּרְעֹה לֶלֶחֶם.

Genesis 41:54-55

There was famine in all other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt, there was **bread**. And when the whole land of Egypt was hungry, the people called out to Pharaoh **for bread**.

Egypt, in the Torah’s landscape, is the kingdom of abundance. The Torah compares it to “the Garden of the Eternal” (Genesis 13:10)—that is, like another Eden

on Earth. It is thus the Land of Bread, the kind of bread that has had plenty of time to soak and expand.

There is, however, a catch. What do people do when they need the bread of Egypt? They must “call out” to Pharaoh and beseech him. The abundance of Egypt creates dependence on the powers of Egypt. That dependence eventually makes people weak, vulnerable to subjugation. When we are desperate, we will do anything. We might even say:

בראשית מז:יט

קִנְיָה אֶתְנוּ וְאֶת אֲדָמָתֵנוּ בִּלְחֶם וְנִהְיָה אֲנִיחֵנוּ וְאֲדָמָתֵנוּ עֲבָדִים לַפַּרְעֹה.

Genesis 47:19

Acquire us, and our land, **for bread**, and we, with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh.

Anyone upon whom one must rely for physical sustenance becomes one’s master. Any society in which one or a few people control all the material wealth is not a free society—or will not be one for long.

Bread has become a motif through which we can chart the descent into Egypt, the dependence on Pharaoh, and even the emergence of slavery in that land.⁶ *Hameitz*, the fullest form of bread, thus comes to symbolize all of those forces that must be left behind.⁷

Bread, then, also becomes the medium through which those forces are diminished. First, the bread itself is diminished: *matzah* is a bread that will provide survival, but not total satisfaction. In a very literal sense, the people of Israel are being taught to live with

6 Moshe is already employing this symbolic language when we get to an oft-quoted verse in his speech in the Book of Deuteronomy. Look at how he links the “observe the *mitzvot*” phrasing we have been considering, at the end of Deuteronomy 8:2, to the bread imagery in v. 3: “Remember all the way that the Eternal your God led you through the desert for forty years, in order to try you and test you, to know if your heart intended to **observe the commandments or not**. God caused you to suffer, and starved you, and then fed you manna, something neither you nor your ancestors had ever known, in order to let you know that a person does not live on **bread** alone, but on every utterance of God’s mouth does a person live.”

A prayer attributed to R. Alexandri (or, some say, R. Hamnuna), quoted in the Talmud (Berakhot 17a) picks up on this motif: “Master of All Worlds, it is revealed and known before You that it is our will to do Your will. But what stops us? The yeast in the dough and subjugation by the kingdoms. May it be Your will that You save us from their hands, and return us to perform the decrees of Your will, with a pure heart.” Rashi comments on this line:

שֶׁאִין שְׂבַעֲיָהּ – יֵצֵר הָרַע שֶׁבִּלְבָבֵנוּ הַמַּחֲמִיצֵנוּ:

The yeast in the dough—this is the evil inclination (*yetzeir ha-ra*) in our hearts, which leavens us (*ha-mahmitzeinu*).

The yeast in the dough and the subjugation by the kingdoms are often read as two separate problems, one internal and one external. But, in the scheme we have been tracing, they are directly related.

7 The Zohar (II:182a) puts it quite lyrically: מִרְשֵׁי דְלֵהוּ, מִרְשֵׁי אֲחֵרָא, מִהֵוּא רִשְׁו דְּאִקְרִי חֲמִץ. When Israel left Egypt, they left their domain, that other domain, the one called, “*hameitz*.”

less. Soon they will run out of *matzah* and be forced to call out to God—not Pharaoh—for their sustenance. God will respond by raining “לחם מן השמים - bread from the heavens.” These people’s entire orientation to bread is being shifted, training them to rely not on terrestrial powers, but heavenly ones.

The Torah has created a matrix of associated terms that allow us to reenact our people’s spiritual development through the particular *mitzvot* of Pesah. The weeklong replacement of *hameitz* with *matzah* is about more than just remembering the haste of the Exodus. It represents the larger transformation that the Exodus brings: the replacement of human power with divine authority. Our observance of the *mitzvot* proclaims that we are servants to no one but God. As we trade in the whims of a tyrant for the will of the Almighty, we are moving, once again, from *hameitz* to *matzah*, from *Mitzrayim* to *mitzvah*.⁸ ♦

8 All these terms have the double-consonant sound, מֵ-צַ (m-tz). They are linked in an alliterative pattern that draws them into a kind of dialogue with one another.

TELL THEM OUR STORY

R. Keilah Lebell

IN THE VERY MIDST of being liberated from Egypt, the Hebrew slaves are commanded to remember their liberation. What we know from the text's emphasis is that, in the actual moments of the Exodus, the people were in a hurry. And we can certainly imagine it was an intense and probably frantic experience. And yet, during this scramble, God and Moses speak to the people, commanding them at length that they should remember this experience for all time and mark it with the *pesah* sacrifice:

שמות יב:יד-טו

וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן וְחֻגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חֹג לַיהוָה
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם תִּחְגְּלוּ: שְׁבַעַת יָמִים מַצּוֹת
תֹּאכְלוּ.

Shemot 12:14-15

This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival for God throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

In the rushed moments of their fleeing, when perhaps they could have used a headstart to escape Pharaoh's clutches, the people are commanded to conduct a ritual meal and are instructed in the laws of *Pesah* (Shemot 12-13). The final plague has not even taken place when the Torah's narrative pauses, we readers on the edge of our seats, to lay out the ritual details.

Why would this be? Couldn't God and Moses have waited to give the people these instructions and commandments until after they escaped Egypt? Couldn't they have held the meal safely in the wilderness? After all, isn't this ritual designed to **remember** how God liberated them? It's difficult to understand why they would need this ritual **while** being liberated.

Could a born slave imagine such freedom, describe it, and thank God for it, before they have even left Egypt?

One answer to these questions can be found in contemporary thought. A now well-known study conducted by psychologists Marshall and Sara Duke of Emory University sought to determine what impact family stories have on children. Through recording and studying dinner conversations among four dozen families and testing the children afterward, the Dukes discovered that children who knew their family history—the particular stories of grandparents or the broader cultural narratives of their ethnic group—demonstrated greater resilience than children who did not: “The ones who know a lot about their families tend to do better when they face challenges. ... The more children knew about their family's history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem and the more successfully they believed their families functioned.”¹

When asked to explain these findings, the Dukes answered that a child who knows her family story—who knows, say, that her great-grandmother survived a boat ride from Poland to Ellis Island with only two feather pillowcases—is aware she belongs to a narrative that is bigger than her. She has what they call a strong “intergenerational self.” And when that child experiences her own challenges, she knows her great-grandmother did too, and that gives her strength.

As a result of these findings, Marshall Duke and others have publicly urged parents and grandparents to develop a strong family narrative, and to tell and retell family stories.

Looking back at Shemot, particularly Parashat Bo, one sees how the Torah interweaves narrative and memory. Even in the opening verses of the *parashah*, when God instructs Moses to approach Pharaoh, God tells Moses to anticipate some future time when Jewish

¹ Bruce Feiler, “The Stories That Bind Us.” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2013.

children will ask their parents about what happened in Egypt:

שמות י:א-ב

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל פַּרְעֹה כִּי אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי
אֶת לְבֹו וְאֶת לֵב עַבְדִּי לְמַעַן שְׁתִּי אֶתְחִי אֵלָה
בְּקִרְבּוֹ: וְלַמַּעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶךָ וּבֶן בְּנֶךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר
הִתְעַלְלִיתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֵת אֶתְחִי אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַתִּי בָם
וַיְדַעְתָּם כִּי אֲנִי ה':

Shemot 10:1-2

Then God said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display these My signs among them, and that you may recount in the hearing of your child and of your child’s child how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am God.”

So too in chapters 12 and 13, the verses narrate what is befalling the Hebrew slaves, but they are interpolated by commandments from God to commemorate these moments and to teach them to their children.

As strange or disjointed as this may seem to the reader, and all the more so to the Hebrew slaves themselves, perhaps God is stepping in here, in the midst of their frantic, fearful rushing, to say: “What you’re experiencing right now is historic. And I promise you, when you get to the other side of this horror—which you will—you need to remember this moment. You need to remember that you were once a slave, but I brought you out so you could be free, devoted to Me, no longer beholden to a tyrant. You are moving through something terrible, but you are going to make it out, and I don’t want you or your children or your children’s children to forget the gift of your freedom.”

At our Seder tables, we give all our attention and energy to teaching our children about our family story, the story of our people. Perhaps we could also apply

this wisdom beyond the Seder, in a way that looks like this: A child is facing something difficult. Maybe it’s as quick and minor as a fall on the sidewalk. Or maybe it’s a more serious, long-term struggle. The parent speaks to their child, saying, “What you are experiencing right now is hard. But, you want to know something? You come from a family that has gone through hard things. Your family members worked, struggled, and fought—so that you could be here. And you are! And because you’re part of this family, you’re strong and brave too. This hard moment will be part of your story, a story you get to tell, a story that’s part of our family story.”

What the Dukes and others have discovered in human psychology, the Jewish people have known since the Exodus. Since we were liberated and born as a nation, we have been taught to experience and to remember, and to teach our children what we remember. And it is true that knowing we are part of a bigger story can help us to see ourselves as less alone, belonging to something so big we can’t see the beginning or end of it.

But even more, what Shemot teaches us when it interweaves experience and memory is that storytelling itself is an act of liberation, a manifestation of freedom. When a person can, even in the midst of some terrible ordeal, pause to note how significant the moment is, to release themselves even momentarily from the experience—with enough distance to describe the experience as a story—that person has a kind of power.² The storyteller shapes the narrative and its meaning. In this way, telling an old family story and seeing our present experience as part of a story empowers a person immeasurably to carry on. ♦

2 Readers familiar with Viktor Frankl will notice the resonance between this notion of storytelling as liberating and the idea he taught and popularized in *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1984), p. 75, and elsewhere: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

THE DOG OF THE EXODUS: ON FREEDOM AND HUMANITY

Dr. Tsivia Frank Wygoda

AN UNLIKELY PROTAGONIST—a dog—hides in the margins of the Exodus story. This dog appears in Moshe's last address to Pharaoh, announcing the upcoming tenth plague:

שמות יא

ד וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בֹּה אָמַר ה' בַּחֲצֹת הַלַּיְלָה אָנִי
יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם: ה וַיָּמָת כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
מִבְּכוֹר פְּרִיעָה הַיֹּשֵׁב עַל כִּסְאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשֹּׁפָחָה
אֲשֶׁר אַחֲרֵי הָרָחִים וְכָל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: ו וְהָיְתָה צָעֲקָה
גְּדֹלָה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר כָּמָהוּ לֹא נִהְיְתָה
וְכָמָהוּ לֹא תִסָּף: ז וְלִכְלֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחְרָץ כָּלֵב
לְשׁוֹנוֹ לְמֵאִישׁ וְעַד בְּהֵמָה לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּן אֲשֶׁר יִפְּלֶה
ה' בֵּין מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Shemot 11

4 Moshe said, "Thus says God: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians, 5 and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the firstborn of the cattle. 6 And there shall be a loud cry in all the land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again; 7 **but not a dog shall whet its tongue at any of the Israelites**, at man or beast—in order that you may know that God makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel."

The appearance of a dog—the first in the Torah!—in verse 7 is puzzling: Why does Moshe mention these animals in his speech to Pharaoh? What exactly do the words "whet its tongue" - *יחרץ לשונו* mean? The general sense, however, is clear, that the dogs in Egypt will not show aggression toward the Israelites (including their animals), allowing the slaves to escape to freedom

unhindered. In this way, the dogs' silence acts as a recognition and enabling of the Israelites' new status as free people. An old midrashic tradition even reads the commandment of throwing carcasses to the dogs as a reward for their ancestors' behavior in Egypt, and a recognition of a permanent debt we owe to dogs.¹

In a deeply moving essay, "The Name of a Dog,"² Emmanuel Levinas offers a modern exegesis of Shemot 11:7, one that shifts the focus from the Exodus and its active memory, to a situation where the lines between human and animal were brutally blurred by the actions of humans themselves.

Levinas first weighs various symbolic interpretations of dogs in our society. The philosopher then rejects the symbolic, mythic, and legendary dogs and, by means of a personal memory of his internment during World War II, recalls a real one: Bobby.

A wandering dog in the Nazi labor camp where Levinas was a prisoner of war, Bobby would greet the group of French Jewish soldiers and show them affection. Bobby was the only living being to relate to the prisoners as human beings:

And then, about halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work. He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we

1 Shemot 22:30, and see Mekhilta quoted by Rashi on לבלב תשלבון אותו.

2 Emmanuel Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights," in Seán Hand (trans.), *Difficult Freedom* (1990), pp. 151-153.

returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men. (Levinas, 153)

In Levinas' reading, a direct line, a genealogical tradition, leads from the Exodus to Bobby, and from the silence of the Egyptian dogs to the happy sounds of the stray dog in the Nazi camp: "He was a descendant of the dogs of Egypt. And his friendly growling, his animal faith, was born from the silence of his forefathers on the banks of the Nile" (153).

The silence of the Egyptian dogs enabled the Israelites' freedom, but Bobby's sounds had a different function: they affirmed the humanity of the prisoners in a context wholly designed to deny it, where humans were robbed of their humanity and "other men, called free... stripped us of our human skin" (152-153).

This act of recognition became a profound statement in itself, and a powerful assertion of humans' intrinsic worth:

At the supreme hour of his institution, with neither ethics nor logos, the dog will attest to the dignity of its person. This is what the friend of man means. There is a transcendence in the animal! And the clear verse with which we began (i.e., Shemot 22:30) is given a new meaning. It reminds us of the debt that is always open. (152)

Levinas uses the two mirroring anecdotes—the mysteriously silent dogs in Egypt, and Bobby the stray dog in a Nazi camp—to unlock a fundamental philosophical insight about the nature of humanity and our relationship with the other. He argues that our very status as humans is intrinsically linked to our recognition of the other. When humans fail in this fundamental ethical responsibility, when they debase themselves by denying the humanity of others (as the Nazi jailers did), it can be an animal—the ultimate "Other" in many human hierarchies—that steps in to fulfill this crucial role of affirmation.

The dog, in its innocent gaze and joyful greeting, reflects back the humanity that the oppressors sought to erase. But Bobby's recognition of the prisoners as humans also became a silent and powerful indictment

of the jailers' inhumanity. Levinas suggests that the debt we owe dogs is not only an acknowledgement of an ancient deed; it also indicates a standard of humanity that is up to us to maintain, always.

We began with a singular detail in the great narrative of the Exodus: no dog will harm the Israelites on their way to freedom. Levinas, through a personal anecdote from his incarceration as a French Jewish soldier, extracts from this puzzling detail a message of humanism that goes beyond the historical and the particular: when humans refuse to recognize other humans as such, a dog's joyous barking can be both a recognition of humanity and an indictment of moral failure. The dogs of Egypt help us to expand the limits of the Pesah story and the cast of its protagonists; to reflect on the relationship between freedom and humanity; to respect and honor what we owe to every animal—and to every human. ♦

WHAT WERE THE SAGES DISCUSSING IN BENEI BERAK?

R. Elie Kaunfer

ON SEDER NIGHT, we tell a story about another Seder in which five sages discuss the Exodus all night long. I have always wondered: What were they talking about?¹ Which part of the story were they curious to recount, and what engaged them so deeply all through the night such that their students had to remind them it was time to recite Shema?

I want to imagine a conversation based on a different story about these five sages together, the only other time we find this grouping in Rabbinic literature. This other story, which appears in the Talmud and various midrash compilations, describes R. Yehoshua, R. Tarfon, R. Elazar ben Azariah, and R. Akiva coming to visit R. Eliezer, who is sick.²

Three of the Sages, R. Tarfon, R. Yehoshua, and R. Elazar ben Azariah, compliment R. Eliezer, perhaps trying to cheer him up. They claim, each in turn, that he is better than the sun, the rain, and even one's parents, because those offer gifts only in this world, but R. Eliezer—through his teaching—leads them to the world to come.

But it is R. Akiva who says something different in this conversation, and literally gets R. Eliezer to sit up straight in bed. R. Akiva tells the story of Menashe, one of the worst kings of Israel. In fact, according to the anonymous opinion in Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:2, he is one of three kings who will never merit the world to come.

But Menashe's story is not so simple, because it is

told twice—once in Kings, and again in Chronicles. In the first telling, Menashe is evil through to his final days (2 Kings 21:4-6,16).

In the second telling, though, in 2 Chronicles (33:1-21), Menashe lives a life of idolatry and wickedness, but then has a change of heart. He is captured, put in chains, and sent to Babylonia. That is when he prays to God, realizes that YHVH is the true God, and does genuine *teshuvah*. God hears Menashe's prayer, and restores him to the throne in Jerusalem. Then Menashe tears down the altars he had built and reinstates proper worship to the Temple. Indeed, according to R. Yehudah's dissenting opinion in the *mishnah* referenced above, this turn of events means Menashe will indeed be admitted to the world to come.

R. Akiva understands from this story that sometimes suffering can have benefits and yield change.³ The implication of telling this story to R. Eliezer, who is sick in bed, is clear: perhaps there is something that R. Eliezer did wrong and for which he must now repent. The suffering of his illness—parallel to Menashe's suffering in exile—can be an occasion for self-examination and change. It seems a bit much to accuse R. Eliezer of the same level of sin as Menashe.⁴ And yet, R. Akiva may be subtly urging R. Eliezer to examine his deeds, and to search out his own wrongdoing.

In some *midrashim*, Menashe's turnaround becomes an illustration of the extent of God's capacity for forgiveness. Menashe prays to God, but the angels try

1 It seems the Haggadah, as we recite it today, imagines a conversation begun by R. Elazar ben Azariah about the meaning of Deuteronomy 16:3 ("all the days of your life"). But this discussion does not originate in the Haggadah; it is a quote from Mishnah Berakhot 1:5, and not necessarily related to the Seder night conversation.

2 This story appears in Bavli Sanhedrin 101a-b; Sifrei Devarim #32, ed. Finkelstein, pp. 57-58; Mekhilta Massekhta de-va-Hodesh 10, ed. Horowitz-Rabin, pp. 240-241. See further E.E. Urbach, *Hazal*, p. 392, nn. 79 and 80.

3 This is a common tannaitic approach to suffering (see the sources in the previous note), although in later periods, other rabbis rejected positive aspects of suffering. See, for instance, Bavli Berakhot 5b and E. E. Urbach, *Hazal*, pp. 392-396.

4 Although, see Tosefta Hullin 2:24 for R. Eliezer's portrayal as attracted (albeit briefly) to Christianity, and some fallout of this in later Rabbinic literature in Holger Michael Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (2011), pp. 213-236.

to block his prayer. They say to God: “How could You accept the prayer of one who was an idol worshiper of the worst degree?!” But God responds:⁵

תלמוד ירושלמי סנהדרין י"ב, דף כח טור ג
אם איני מקבלו בתשובה הרי אני נועל את הדלת
בפני כל בעלי תשובה.

Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:2 (28c)

If I don't accept his repentance, behold I will
be locking the door of repentance for all
penitents!

In later Rabbinic imagination (in Pirkei de-R. Eliezer 43), there played out a scenario in which even Pharaoh becomes—like Menashe—a model penitent. He is spared from the Sea and becomes the King of Nineveh. When Yonah comes to prophesy destruction, it is Pharaoh—the king of this sinning city—who leads his people in a process of *teshuvah*.

These five rabbis, then, who themselves no longer live in the fully redeemed reality of the Exodus, but in the wake of the Temple's destruction, might be interested in the power of *teshuvah*. In their retelling of redemption, perhaps they are taking stock, considering their own accountability, and reaching out to God in faith that “the gates of *teshuvah* are always open” (Eikhah Rabbah 3:15).

I like to imagine them wondering if on this night of freedom they were meant to examine their own deeds, and ask for their own forgiveness. Indeed, although we don't always notice this aspect of Pesah, forgiveness is a major theme of the holiday: Pesah is known as a day of judgment on the crops of the year to come (Mishnah

Rosh Hashanah 1:2); in Musaf, when reciting the poems asking God to grant dew, the prayer leader wears a *kittel*, normally reserved for High Holidays; and the peak of the Dayyeinu song concludes with the building of the Temple to offer atonement for our sins.

Maybe one underlying anxiety on Seder night is how we understand our own responsibility to God in light of our freedom, or, perhaps more to the point, in light of our current exile. What if we aren't perfect? Is the story of Pesah only good for the righteous, but those who sinned are forever doomed? Do we use our freedom to serve God and take responsibility for our choices the way we should?

The story of Menashe offers an unexpected possibility: even egregious sinners can repent. This might be hard to swallow—but that is what makes God different from humans, and from angels. God will accept the *teshuvah* of even the worst sinner—even Menashe, even Pharaoh. And if God can do that, surely God can forgive us.

This is a conversation for all night—and for the ages! ♦

⁵ See also Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 24 (ed. Mandelbaum, p. 364). Compare the often-discussed story of God rebuking the angels for rejoicing at the death of the Egyptians in Bavli Megillah 10b.

THE SEDER AS A LESSON IN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Ariel Gorsky

THE TORAH ISSUES a clear mandate to adults at the Seder,

שמות יג:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֶבְרָא זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֹאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

Shemot 13:8

And you shall tell your child on that day, "It is because of what God did for me when I went free from Egypt."

But what exactly does this *mitzvah* entail? And how is it different from this very similar injunction?

שמות יג:

זָכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יִצְאָתָם מִמִּצְרָיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים כִּי בְחוּצָה יָד הוּצִיא ה' אֶתְכֶם מִצֵּה.

Shemot 13:3

Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, from the house of bondage, how God freed you from it with a mighty hand.

Many commentaries understand the *mitzvah* of "telling" to be anchored in time.¹ It is on this night in particular that we must tell our children the story of Pesah, as opposed to remembering it, which is something that we are meant to do every day.

Beyond an issue of timing, the *mitzvah* of "remembering" (*zekhirah*) and the *mitzvah* of "telling" (*sippur*) differ in other key ways. R. Hayyim Soloveitchik mi-Brisk² offers three distinctions between *zekhirah* and *sippur* in his selected commentary on the Talmud:

R. Hayyim mi-Brisk on the Talmud #40

- 1 To fulfill the *mitzvah* of remembering one only needs to remember themselves. However, with retelling the Exodus, the *mitzvah* is to tell the story by way of question and answer, as it is written "it will be, when your child asks" (Shemot 13:14). ... The child will ask "what is different about this night?" (Mishnah Pesahim 10:4), the parent will answer "we were slaves" (Devarim 6:21). ...
- 2 In retelling, the storyteller starts with shame and concludes with praise. But to fulfill the *mitzvah* of remembering sufficiently, you only have to remember the Exodus from Egypt itself.
- 3 The nature of the commandment to tell is about the *mitzvot* of Seder night. As we said, "Rabban Gamliel said: All who do not say these three things on Pesah do not fulfill their obligation. These things are *pesah*, *matzah*, *maror*" (Mishnah Pesahim 10:5).

ר' חיים מבריסק, חידושו על הש"ס, סימן מ

לקיים מצוות זכירה אין צריך להזכיר אלא לעצמו, אבל בסיפור יציאת מצרים המצוה היא לספר לאחר דרך שאלה ותשובה, בדכתיב "והיה כי ישאלך בנך" (שמות יג:יד). ... הבן שואל "מה נשתנה" (משנה פסחים יד:), והאב משיב "עבדים היינו" (דברים ו:כא). ...

1 See, e.g., Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Positive Mitzvah #157.

2 1853-1918, ancestor of the famous American rabbinic family.

ב בספור צריך המספר להתחיל בגנות ולסיים בשבח,
ולקיים מצוות זכירה סגי בזכירת יציאת מצרים לחוד.

ג מצוה לספר טעמי המצוות של אותו לילה, כמו
שאמרנו: "רבן גמליאל היה אומר – כל שלא אמר
שלושה דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו, ואלו הן
פסח, מצה ומרור" (משנה פסחים י:ה).

With these three answers, R. Hayyim maps out what it means to fulfill the *mitzvah* of “telling” on Pesah night. His ideas make a strong case for what we call experiential education, and have implications for how we think about education broadly, beyond our Seder table.

R. Hayyim’s first point is that one must engage in a back-and-forth, a dialogue, a question and answer, with others. We might have thought that a frontal presentation on the story of the Exodus would be sufficient, but without active participation from those around us, we cannot successfully fulfill the *mitzvah* of *sippur*.

He then demands that our retelling follow a narrative arc, a journey from beginning to end, from shame to praise. Between the shame and the praise lay a great deal of pain and suffering as well as miracles and redemption. This narrative arc serves the goal of dialogue; the deeper we go into what really happened, the more we share, the more material the children have to engage with. This process cultivates curiosity and, crucially, questions.

Finally, R. Hayyim claims that in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of telling our children the story of the Exodus, we must not only speak, but act. Our explanations are accompanied by pointing and (in the cases of *matzah* and *maror*) eating. The Seder offers ample further opportunity for experiential education—from leaning to one side when we drink wine to dipping our potatoes in salt water. In order to completely fulfill the *mitzvah* of *sippur*, our telling must involve acting out the very things we describe.

R. Hayyim mi-Brisk helps us understand that we can hold our sacred memories through life in two

different ways. While the experiential education of *sippur* is performed once a year, the act of *zekhirah* is ongoing. Indeed, the Haggadah quotes Mishnah Berakhot 1:5 to remind us that we need to remember the Exodus every day:

"למען תזכר את יום צאתך מארץ מצרים כל ימי חייך" (דברים טז:ג). "ימי חייך" – הימים. "כל ימי חייך" – הלילות.

“In order that you remember the day you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life” (Devarim 16:3). “Days of your life”—the days; “all the days of your life”—the nights.

But then, occasionally, we must not only remember what happened, but curate an educational experience for others. We are not only remembering for ourselves; we are teaching those around us about what happened, and without taking shortcuts. We go question by question and answer by answer, as we embark on the entire journey of the Exodus, all while taking action as part of the telling.

Beyond the Exodus, each of us carries foundational stories that we remember every day. How might we transform our own personal and family *zekhirot* into careful and intentional observances of telling and transmission? If we can overcome shyness and embarrassment, we can curate experiences that, like the Seder, encourage questions, face the shame and disgrace head-on, invite us to live out our own redemption, and cement the story in deep gratitude.

How might this act of experiential education change each of us? How might it change our relationships with loved ones? As you retell the Exodus this year, I invite you to identify another place in your life where you can go beyond *zekhirah* and emulate the *mitzvah* of “telling your child.” ♦

METAPHORS OUT OF MITZRAYIM



A delightful part of the Exodus story in Tanakh is its rich use of metaphors. God took the Israelites out of Egypt with a “strong hand and outstretched arm” (Devarim 26:8), and carried them out “on eagles’ wings” (Shemot 19:4). In Rabbinic literature, we find a treasury of additional metaphors used by our Sages to describe various aspects of the Exodus from Egypt.

Here’s one particularly stunning example of a Rabbinic conversation that uses metaphors about the Exodus:

פסיקתא דרב כהנא יא

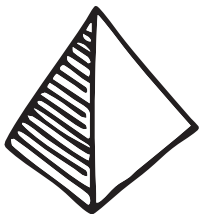
ר' יוחנן הוה יתיב דרש ביצד היו המים עשוין לישר' בחומה.
דרש ר' יוחנן באילין קנקיליא.
אדיקת שרח בת אשר ואמרת תמן הוינא ולא הוון אלא באילין אמפומטא.

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11

R. Yohanan sat and investigated: How did the water become for the Israelites like a wall [at the splitting of the Sea]?

R. Yohanan interpreted: It was like lattice-work.

Serah bat Asher looked out and she said: I was there, and it wasn't like that—it was like doors that open on a pivot.



There are many remarkable things about this brief passage, including the detail that Serah bat Asher (daughter of the biblical Asher) would have had to be over a thousand years old in order to be in conversation with R. Yohanan of talmudic times! In fact, some commentators (e.g. R. Avraham Gombiner, the Magen Avraham) suggest that Serah was listening to R. Yohanan's teaching from Gan Eden (the world to come) and spoke from there.

In either case, metaphors are the language of choice in this conversation between one of the greatest teachers of aggadic material in the Talmud and a quasi-immortal figure who was said to have been at the actual event of the splitting of the Sea, and this underscores just how powerful metaphors can be to help us think, probe, explore, and create.

R. Yohanan's metaphor of “lattice-work” imagines an interplay of overlapping bars and spaces holding back the waters at the splitting of the Sea. “Lattice work” in the Rabbinic period was

associated with judges and rulers,¹ and so this image might connect the miraculous moment at the Sea to the theme of God's judgement that is woven throughout the Exodus telling.

Meanwhile, Serah bat Asher's metaphor evokes movement and a kind of "door" that opened either into the Sea or to the dry area where the Israelites were walking. Pivot doors were common in Egypt² and were also symbolic of passing through various realms. As such it is a particularly fitting image for the Israelites' movement from slavery to freedom.

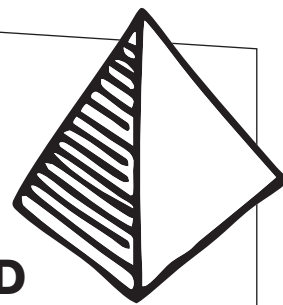
Both metaphors give us a chance to focus on different details, imagine the reality in higher definition, and get inside the experience of the Exodus.

In light of the insights from this *midrash*, we are excited to share with you an activity to enrich your Seder conversations. Use the prompts below to have your own "R. Yohanan and Serah" conversation!

1 The same word is used to describe the screens set up in front of judges; see, e.g., Bereishit Rabbah 78:8.

2 "An Early Egyptian Door-Socket." *Museum Bulletin* V, no.1 (January, 1934), pp. 9-13, <https://www.penn.museum/sites/bulletin/1315/>.

METAPHORS OUT OF MITZRAYIM: ACTIVITY AND CONVERSATION GUIDE



Choose a moment during the Seder that discusses a key aspect of the Exodus story, then offer the prompt:

What was it like to...

[describe the moment, e.g., carry *matzah* on our backs, mark the doorpost, eat the bitter herbs...]?



One participant responds with a metaphor of their choosing:

It was like...

[insert metaphor].



The next person says:

I was there, and it wasn't like

[repeat what last person said];

it was like...

[insert new metaphor].



Continue like this around the whole table.

Afterward, invite participants to turn and discuss:

- Why did you choose this particular metaphor?
- How did this activity make you think about the story and the experience differently?

THE DIPPING POINT: KARPAS AND THE HALAKHIC FLOW OF THE SEDER

R. Jason Rogoff

WHY DO WE BEGIN the Seder by dipping a small piece of a vegetable—*karpas*—and eating it?

Like so many elements of the Seder, *karpas* carries both a historical story and an experiential purpose. Historically, it reflects a dining custom of the ancient world that our Rabbis inherited and reshaped as an expression of freedom. Experientially, it is meant to catch our attention, spark questions, and draw children—and adults—into the unfolding drama of the night. In tracing how our tradition has understood this small bite of veggies, we can see how *halakhah* and ritual adapt across time, balancing fidelity to the past with the lived experience of the present.

What is *karpas*?

In the times of the Mishnah, formal banquets began with a series of appetizers. The Mishnah (Pesahim 10:3) describes *hazeret* (lettuce) as one of the items dipped at the beginning of the Seder as part of the appetizer courses, presumably because it was commonly used as such. The practice of beginning the Seder with appetizers continued into the post-talmudic period. Early Haggadot (10th-11th century) indicate that the Babylonian custom was to eat fruits and vegetables, while Eretz Yisraeli Sedarim added rice, eggs, and meat. One of the earliest Eretz Yisraeli Haggadot includes special *berakhot* that were recited over the various appetizers that were eaten before the main course of *matzah*.¹

As eating practices evolved, the Mishnah's description of lettuce as the standard vegetable for the first dipping at the Seder became puzzling. After all, lettuce (*hazeret*) also appears in the Mishnah's list of vegetables that may be used to fulfill the obligation of eating bitter herbs, *maror* (2:6). For the later Babylonian rabbis, this created a problem: by eating lettuce at the beginning of the Seder, one would effectively be eating *maror* too early. The Mishnah captures this tension in its famous question: "Why do we dip twice?" (10:4).

Rather than eliminate the first dipping, our Rabbis devised two strategies that preserved fidelity to the Mishnah while reinterpreting its meaning. First, they encouraged the use of any vegetable for *karpas* other than those eligible for *maror*. This explains the wide range of *karpas* customs we see today—parsley, radishes, potatoes, celery—each family choosing something different to avoid confusing *karpas* with *maror*. Reflecting this, the word *karpas* according to Yerushalmi Shevi'it 9:1 (38c) means parsley.

Second, they infused the practice with a new layer of meaning. The Talmud (Pesahim 114b) explains that the dipping is done "so that it will stand out for the children," transforming a Greco-Roman dining custom into a ritual gesture aimed at one of the central goals of the Seder: keeping children curious and engaged so that we can tell them the story of the Exodus.

¹ See Joshua Kulp, *The Schechter Haggadah* (2009), p. 185.

² According to Rabbinic law (see, e.g., Berakhot 33a), a person who makes an unnecessary *berakhah* (known as a *berakhah le-vatalah*) violates one of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not take God's name in vain" (Shemot 20:7). Halakhic authorities take this seriously, and concern to avoid a *berakhah le-vatalah* is what undergirds the debates that follow.

How much *karpas* should you eat?

This turns out to be a detailed question in the history and *halakhah* of the Seder, and is closely linked with two laws of saying *berakhot* for eating food.²

The first area of *halakhah* that is relevant is the *berakhah aḥaronah*, the blessing after eating. Every act of eating has a *berakhah* before it in order to acknowledge God's role in preparing food for us, but not all eating necessitates a *berakhah aḥaronah* afterward. This after-blessing is linked to whether you have eaten a significant amount of food, rather than just a nibble or a taste. The minimum amount of food that requires a *berakhah aḥaronah* is a *ke-zayit*, about an olive's worth—not a lot, but also not nothing. Because of this requirement for the *berakhah aḥaronah* (which, for vegetables, is *borei nefashot*), the amount of *karpas* you eat might have consequences for the rest of the Seder: if you were to eat a *ke-zayit* of *karpas*, then a requirement for saying *borei nefashot* would seem to kick in.

The second area of *halakhah* around eating that matters here is that one *berakhah* can cover many different items of food. If the only thing you are about to eat is a plate of vegetables, you can say *borei peri ha-adamah* once and then enjoy the entire plate, without needing to add another *berakhah* until *borei nefashot* at the end—after which, if you wanted to eat a new plate of vegetables, you would have to say a new *borei peri ha-adamah*. Similarly, when a meal begins with bread (like the *matzah* at the Seder), you can say *ha-motzi* and then eat the entire meal, without worrying about specifically what other foods you are eating, and then say one *Birkat ha-Mazon* at the end. This also has consequences for *karpas*: since both *karpas* and *maror* are vegetables, can you say one *berakhah* before *karpas* and cover both? Or, since the *Maggid* and then the *ha-motzi* blessing for *matzah* occur between eating these two vegetables, perhaps a second *borei peri ha-adamah*

is required for *maror*—either because the *karpas* is considered its own mini-meal or because there has been too much happening in the meantime?

Over time, practices around *karpas* have adapted to keep in mind these rules and questions. In the early period in Bavel, at least one voice in the Talmud seems to assume that *karpas* was a substantial appetizer.³ This is also reflected in other early rulings: R. Sa'adia Gaon requires *borei nefashot* after *karpas* and the Rambam specifies it must be a *ke-zayit*.⁴

The Rashba,⁵ however, takes seriously the recasting of what was once a normal appetizer course into a specifically surprising practice to prompt children's questions. Given that *karpas* is not, according to this view, designed to be a substantial part of the meal (and the Talmud itself implies that there is no *berakhah aḥaronah* for it),⁶ the Maharil,⁷ in order to remove any doubt about the *berakhah aḥaronah*, suggests that you should specifically eat less than a *ke-zayit* of this first bite in order to make sure that no *borei nefashot* is necessary. This recommendation was taken up and codified in the Shulḥan Arukh (Orah Hayyim 473:6). Consequently, many Haggadot include the explicit instruction that less than a *ke-zayit* of *karpas* must be consumed.

And yet, it is also impossible to deny the evidence of the other (and mostly earlier) practice, reflected in the Talmud, R. Sa'adia Gaon, the Rambam, and the early Haggadot. Even when intended to prompt children's surprise, and despite the halakhic questions about saying *borei nefashot* or not, *karpas* was—at least according to some people at some times—a substantial appetizer course.

Can you eat appetizers during the Seder before *matzah*?

The Mishnah (Pesahim 10:1) prohibits eating on the day leading up to the Seder from Minhah until nightfall,

3 The question put in the mouth of Rav Hisda in Pesahim 115a: "After one fills their belly with lettuce, do they then recite another blessing over it?"

4 Siddur Rav Sa'adia Gaon, p. 136 (Iraq, 882-942); Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Hameitz u-Matzah 8:2.

5 Responsa Rashba, ha-Meyuḥas le-Ramban #202. R. Shlomo ben Avraham (Catalan, 1235-1310).

6 When outlining the procedure for eating a non-lettuce vegetable for *karpas*, the Talmud (Pesahim 114b) says that you should "bless on other vegetables *borei peri ha-adamah* and eat, and then bless *al akhilat maror* and eat." There is no *borei nefashot* in this procedure, because otherwise the *maror* should trigger a new blessing of *borei peri ha-adamah*. See also Rashi and Rashbam's comments on Pesahim 114b, s.v. *peshita*.

7 Responsa Maharil #25. R. Ya'akov ben Moshe Moelin (Germany, c.1365-1427).

and Rashi's explanation is that the *mitzvah* of eating *matzah* is best fulfilled hungrily (commentary on Bavli Pesahim 99b). During the talmudic period, however, the prohibition on eating would end at nightfall and participants in the Seder would partake in appetizer courses (i.e., *karpas*)—including fruit, vegetables, and even meat—before eating *matzah* (Tosefta Pesahim 10:5; Bavli Pesahim 107b). However, since the Maharil and Shulhan Arukh held that one should not eat more than a *ke-zayit* of *karpas*, many *poskim* prohibit eating from the beginning of the Seder until eating *matzah* at the beginning of the meal.

Use your judgment here. If you are especially hungry—for example, if you're a firstborn who has been fasting since sunrise—or if eating a small amount would improve your ability to concentrate during the Seder, it is appropriate to serve a light appetizer course.⁸ The key is moderation, so as not to spoil your appetite for *matzah*. But it is certainly permitted to eat a fuller *karpas* course than one small bite of celery.

And what about the question of the *berakhah aḥaronah*? In the end, it comes down to whether the *karpas* is truly part of the Seder meal or whether Maggid separates it from the meal proper. If Maggid consists of a full separation (after all, it is usually quite long!) then it is its own mini-meal, and if you eat a *ke-zayit* you should probably say *borei nefashot* before embarking on Maggid. But if *karpas* is the first part of the meal that includes Maggid, then the *borei peri ha-adamah* made at the beginning, knowing that *maror* will be coming down the line, can run through the interruptions; therefore, no *berakhah aḥaronah* is necessary, even if you eat more than a *ke-zayit*. Whether the Maggid constitutes a separation is a medieval debate.⁹ But given that one of the most important modern *poskim* thinks that no *borei nefashot* is necessary for *karpas*, even if you eat

more than a *ke-zayit* (since, at the end of the day, the *karpas* can be covered in the general Birkat ha-Mazon), it is reasonable not to worry about including this extra liturgy which is otherwise unmentioned in almost all Haggadot.¹⁰

From the first bite of the Seder, we are pulled into an important debate over its form and function: On the one hand, the Mishnah, early Haggadot, and some halakhic authorities envision a Seder that begins like any festive meal—with a genuine appetizer of vegetables. On the other, the Rashba, Maharil, and Shulhan Arukh reframe *karpas* as a ritual of deliberate minimalism: less than a *ke-zayit*, its function only to spark children's curiosity and draw them into the story. This tension captures the dual nature of the Seder itself. It is both a meal and a narrative, an act of eating and an act of remembering. Too much food too early risks dulling the appetite for *matzah*, the core *mitzvah* of the night. Too little, however, risks leaving us hungry, distracted, and unable to tell the story. ♦

8 Yalkut Yosef Pesah vol. 3 p. 235 and Nitei Gavriel Pesah 80:4 suggest that those who cannot concentrate on the Haggadah due to hunger should eat a small portion of food after reciting Kiddush, then say *borei nefashot*, and then eat less than a *ke-zayit* at *karpas*.

9 See discussion in Tur and Beit Yosef Orah Hayyim 474.

10 Mishnah Berurah (Orah Hayyim 176:2).

ניכור מול חמלה:

שני מודלים של התייחסות לזר

הרב אביטל הובשטיין

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַמּוֹ הִנֵּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם
מִמֶּנּוּ. הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי
תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֵף גַּם הוּא עַל שְׂנְאֵינוּ
וְנִלְחָם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ. (שמות א', ט"ו)

במקום ההשוואה המתחרה, פרעה היה יכול לדמיין השוואה משלימה: למשל, "רב ועצום" עבורנו, או "ונלחם" עימנו, או יעץ לנו כיוסף, או "ונוסף גם הוא" עלינו ונלחם בשונאינו. אבל כנראה שבשביל הערכת מציאות חיובית צריך להיות חדש מחבר, אשר מכיר את עברו ובוחר לדעת, לדעת על יוסף ופועלו למשל, ולהכיר באפשרות לפעול מתוך קשר. במקום תפיסת סכום אפס, פרעה היה יכול לחשוב על שותפות ורווח לכול. אבל לא. פרעה החדש בוחר בהשוואה מבדילה: "רב ועצום ממנו". וכשהראש גולש למחשבות מבדילות אין פלא שהשלב הבא הוא דמיון של מלחמה: "ונוסף גם הוא על שונאינו ונלחם בנו".

כאן מגיע השלב השלישי – רושם המלחמה מכניס את פרעה לתודעה של הישרדות. לכן, עליו להגן על עצמו כנגד מי שהוא תופס כאויבים הרבים והעצומים המבקשים ברעתו:

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ עָלָיו שְׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוּ בְּסַבְלָתָם...
וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרָה. וַיִּמְרְרוּ
אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה... וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
לְמִלְלֹת הָעִבְרִית... בְּלִדְכּוֹ אֶת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת
וַרְאִיתָן עַל הָאֲבָנִים אִם בֶּן הוּא וְהִמָּתֵן אֹתוֹ....
(שמות א', י"א, י"ג-ט"ז)

מלך מצרים נצרך לאמצעי הגנה התקפיים ועוצמתיים: שרי מיסים, סבל, עבודה, עבדות, מירור החיים, ולבסוף: צו מוות על הבנים.

הבחירה לדעת: ראייה וחמלה

בת פרעה מייצגת את ההפך מאביה. בבחירות שהיא עושה, בהתנהגויות שלה ובמערכות היחסים השונות שהיא מקיימת, נבנות ומתעצבות לנגד עינינו אפשרויות חלופיות.

הידרדרות היחסים בין מצרים לבני ישראל בפרשת שמות מהירה. אילו ערכים, רגשות ותפיסות מאפשרים לה לקרות, ואלו יכולים למנוע ממנה להתפתח? לפנינו עיון בשתי דמויות, פרעה ובתו, המהוות שני מודלים ליחס אל הזר: הראשון דמות מרכזית בנרטיב המקראי, ואילו השנייה דמות שולית עליה מסופר מעט; האחד מייצג את תהליך הידרדרות היחסים בין מצרים לישראל, והשנייה מייצגת מודל של מערכת יחסים המיוסדת על אומץ לקרבה ובאמון בפריין הדדי.

הבחירה לא לדעת

"וַיִּקֶם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף" (שמות א', ח') – כך מתגלה לפנינו פרעה. "מלך חדש" – באופנים רבים, חידוש הוא רגע של בחירה. חידוש הוא הזדמנות לשאול: איך ייראה הקשר לעבר? מלכים חדשים קמים ונופלים, זו דרכו של עולם, אבל עד כמה הם יהוו חידוש – כאן יש בחירה. מעניין לשים לב שהתורה בוחרת להצמיד את מאפיין החידוש של המלך ("ויקם מלך חדש") לחסרון ידיעה ("אשר לא ידע את יוסף").

"אשר לא ידע את יוסף" – חוסר הידיעה של פרעה מעורר תהייה: האם מדובר במלך שאינו מכיר את ההיסטוריה של ממלכתו, או שמא מדובר בבחירה בבורות? היותו מלך מצרים, מוקף חרטומים, מעצימה את הרושם שלפנינו בחירה לא לדעת. ומכאן נשאל: האם הבחירה בבורות היא למעשה בחירה לנתק קשר עם העבר? האם חוסר ההיכרות עם יוסף, אחד מן המדינאים המשמעותיים ביותר של עברו, הוא הפניית עורף אל מול המסורת השלטונית בה צמח פרעה? האם חוסר הידיעה את יוסף היא ביטוי לחוסר היכרות וניכור כלפי אחרים (בני ישראל), גרים שבקרוב עמו? חידוש שצומח מתוך חוסר ידיעה הוא בחירה בעלת השלכות ערכיות, שהרי **ידיעה היא אמצעי לקשר, וקשר הוא עניין מחייב**. כך הבחירה לא לדעת היא בעצם בחירה בניתוק שמשמעה הסרת אחריות.

שלב שני בהידרדרות היחסים בא לידי ביטוי בהערכת המציאות העתידית. דרכו של פרעה בהערכה זו מבוססת על נתק מן העבר, חוסר קשר וחוסר ידיעה, ונותר אפוא רק להניח את הרע מכל:

כבר בהצגתה הראשונית, מתוארת בת פרעה כאדם רואה:

וְתָרַד בַּת פְּרָעָה לְרֹחֶץ עַל הַיָּאָר וְנִעְרְתִּיהָ הַלֵּכֶת
עַל יַד הַיָּאָר וְתָרָא אֶת הַתִּבָּה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף
וְתִשְׁלַח אֶת אִמָּתָהּ וְתִקְחָהּ. וְתַפְתַּח וְתִרְאֶהוּ
אֶת הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה נֶעֶר בֶּכֶה וְתַחְמַל עָלָיו וְתֹאמֶר
מִי־לִדִּי הָעֶבְרִים זֶה. (שמות ב', ה'-ו')

במקום ההתנהלות המנתקת של אביה – "אשר לא ידע" – בת פרעה בוחרת לראות, וראייה זו מניעה אותה לפעולה. בניגוד לאביה, שמזהה בראייתו קבוצה אתנית שלמה, בת פרעה רואה ילד, על אף שיוכו החברתי. היא מגיבה לראייה זו באופן פתוח, מקרב ואף מחבר. היא נותנת למה שהיא רואה לגעת בה, להשפיע עליה ולשנות אותה: "ותשלח את אמתה... ותחמול עליו".

המדרש מצביע על חוסר בהירות שבביטוי "ותשלח את אמתה ותקחה". פשט הדברים הוא לכאורה שליחה של השפחה להביא את התיבה. אולם למילה 'אמה' משמעות נוספת: חלק מן הזרוע. לפיכך, חולקים החכמים ביניהם: "רבי יהודה ורבי נחמיה, חד אמר: ידה, וחד אמר: שפחה" (בבלי סוטה י"ב). המחלוקת שבמדרש מצביעה על בלבול או עמימות שבפסוק עצמו: האם האמה היא אדם נבדל העומד לצדה של בת פרעה או איבר מגופה עצמה? ושמה שתי האפשרויות – אחת הן. בת פרעה היא אדם מחובר ומחבר, היא קשורה בשפחתה כידה שלה, אשר נשלחת ליצור חיבורים אנושיים חדשים.

אך החיבור לא מסתיים בסקרנות. משראתה בת פרעה את התינוק הבוכה בתיבה היא מבינה מיד את זהותו – "מילדי העברים זה" – אולם עובדה זו אינה מרתיעה אותה.

עם הבחירה לראות את הפרט, ולתת למה שהיא רואה לגעת בה, גם פה, כפי שהיה אצל פרעה, ישנו שלב שני של הערכה מציאות עתידית. אולם אצלה, ההערכה מתרחשת מתוך הקשר אל החדש שנחשף. וכך: "ותראהו... ותחמל עליו ותאמר מילדי העברים זה" (שמות ב', ו'), ולבסוף: "ויהי לה לבן" (שם, י'). בת פרעה ראתה, ומתוך ידיעה והכרה של משה, בת פרעה גם ראתה עבורם עתיד משותף, עתיד בו היא אימו של הילד. בכך מדגימה בת פרעה שמפגש פתוח, בו יש מקום להשפעה, שינוי ואף פגיעות, מאפשר להתחיל לדמיין עתיד משותף.

משנוצר קשר מתוך ראייה וחיבור, קשר שעל בסיסו ניתן לדמיין עתיד משותף, מתגבשת תודעת עתיד של חוסן. תודעת הישרדות מוחלפת בתודעה של אחריות, כלפי

עצמך וכלפי אחרים. תודעת מציאות סכום אפס מוחלפת ביכולת לדמיין הפרייה הדדית וחיים לכול.

בת פרעה מחזיקה תודעה זו, כפי שניכר מן השם שהיא נותנת לילד: "ותקרא שמו משה ותאמר כי מן המים משיתהו" (שמות ב', י'). לו היה שמו של משה מבוסס רק על עברם המשותף של בת פרעה ומשה, עבר בו הוא נראה ונבחר, היה שמו צריך להיות "משוי" – זה שנמשה מן המים. אולם מן הפסוקים עולה שהשם שנתנה בת פרעה לבנה משקף היטב את תפיסת עולמה: משה יוכל בעתיד למשות אחרים – להיות מושה. כפי שהתורה מספרת לנו אף הוא יגדל ויבחר לראות ולדעת: "ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל-אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא..." (שמות ב', י"א). אכן, בת פרעה איננה הדמות היחידה שרואה ויודעת. כמוה אחרות משה: "ותמצב אחתו מרחק לדעה מה יעשה לו" (שמות ב', ד'). ותכונה זו היא אף דרכו של הקב"ה: "וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים" (שמות ב', כ"ה).

לראות או לא לראות

הבחירה לא לראות, הבחירה לא לדעת עבר ומסורת ולהתנתק מדמיון "יוסף" שסביבותו, הבחירה לפרש הבדלים באופן תחרותי – "רב ועצום ממנו", במקום רב ועצום בעבורנו או איתנו – כל אלה מעצימות תפיסת מציאות בה רק אחד יכול לשרוד, ומכניסות אותנו לתודעת הישרדות שעשויה בקלות להוביל לרוע ולמלחמות.

בעוד פרעה פועל מתוך התנכרות, חשש ותוקפנות, בת פרעה פועלת בבתמונה מקבילה והפוכה: ראשית, היא בוחרת לראות ולדעת, לתת לעצמה להרגיש ולהיות פגיעה. "ותחמול" – על אף שזהו ילד מילדי העבריים. בשלב שני, מסוגלת בת פרעה על בסיס הראייה וההכרה לדמיין עתיד משותף – "ויהי לה לבן". במקום משחק סכום אפס ותפיסה של הישרדות השוואתית, מדמינת בת פרעה חיים משותפים הצומחים דווקא מתוך ראיית האחר והמוכנות להיות פגיעים. התוצר הוא מרחב של ראייה נכונה, המעוגנת בתפיסה עצמית של חוסן ויכולת להגיב ולפעול.

פרשת שמות מציעה לנו לבחור בראייה ובידע אודות עברנו, לבחור בחידוש מחבר בקרקע להיכרות עם מי שסביבנו, גם אם הם שונים מאיתנו. כך היא מחנכת אותנו לדמיין מציאות עתידית מרחיבת חיים, בה יש מקום לכול. זוהי תפיסה שמנחה אותנו להיחלץ מתודעת ההישרדות ולאמץ תפיסה עצמית המאופיינת בחוזק, בראייה של האחר, בפגיעות ופתיחות לכך שמה שנראה ישפיע עלינו, ומתוך כך, ביכולת לקחת אחריות – עלינו ועל אחרים. ♦



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The Seder and the Song of Songs: A Love Story in Four Scenes

An excerpt of a Project Zug course
from Rabbi Aviva Richman

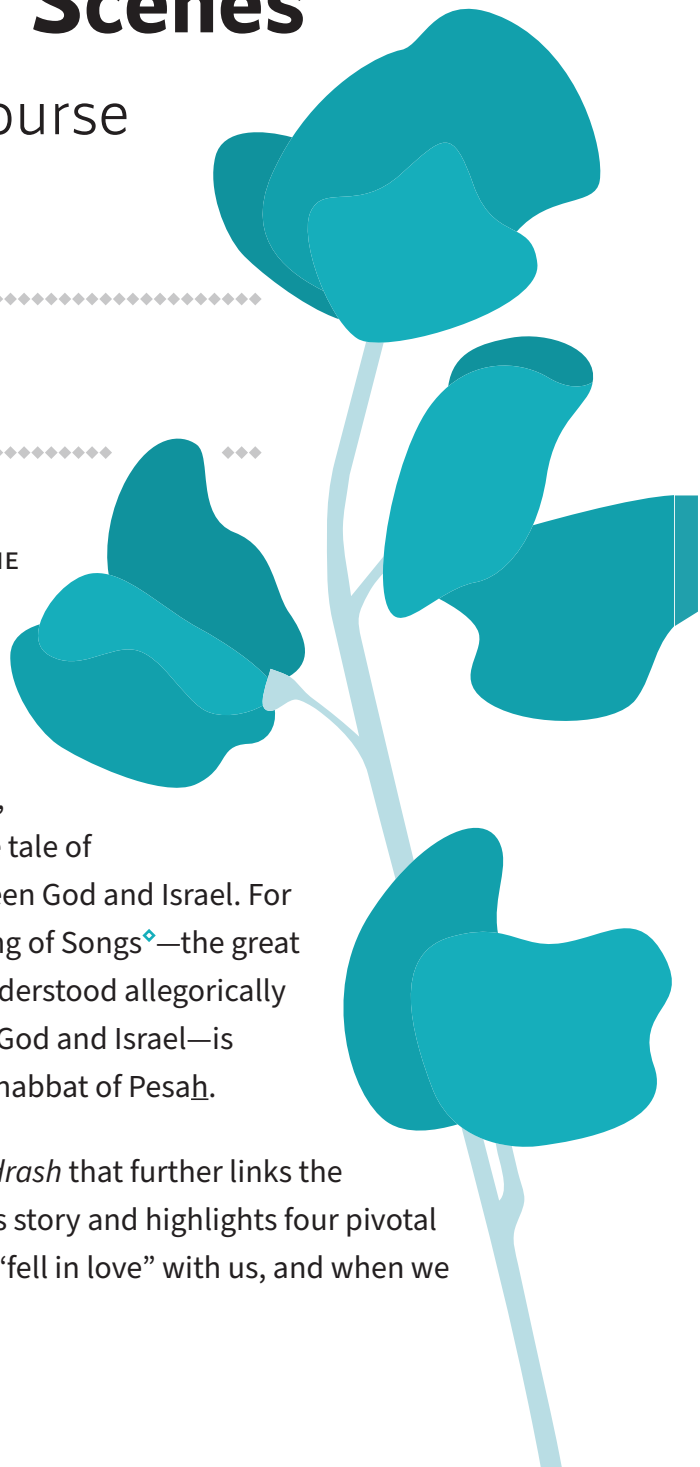
SESSION 1 In Egypt: Love in Hard Times

◆ Song of Songs

In Hebrew, Shir Ha-Shirim. Strictly speaking, the Song of Songs is not one poem but several stitched together. Traditionally, these poems were written by King Solomon, son of King David. While David was renowned for his musical ability and therefore associated with the Psalms, Solomon was renowned for his wisdom and connected to the biblical books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

PEOPLE LOVE TO TELL AND RETELL THE story of how they fell in love, relishing in the highlights, the pivotal moments, and even the challenges and obstacles that stood in the way. In some respects, the Exodus is a love story, too—the tale of the burgeoning relationship between God and Israel. For this reason, it is fitting that the Song of Songs—[◆]the great biblical love poem traditionally understood allegorically as a story about the love between God and Israel—is customarily read publicly on the Shabbat of Pesah.

We will explore in this course a *midrash* that further links the text of Song of Songs to the Exodus story and highlights four pivotal moments representing when God “fell in love” with us, and when we “fell in love” with God.



First, ask your *havruta* this question:

Do you relate to the metaphor of “love” as a way of describing the divine-human relationship? Why or why not?

THE VERSES

The first thing to do when learning a *midrash* is to examine the verses upon which it is based. Take a look at them in their own right here before moving to the first part of the *midrash* below.

SOURCE #1 ס

שיר השירים ב:א-ג

¹אֲנִי חֲבַצְלֵת הַשָּׁרוֹן
שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים:

²כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה בֵּין הַחוֹזִים
כֵּן רַעִיָּתִי בֵּין הַבָּנוֹת:

³כְּתַפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיָּעַר
כֵּן דּוּדִי בֵּין הַבָּגִים

בְּצִלּוֹ חִמְדָּתִי וַיִּשְׁבְּתִי
וּפְרִיו מְתוֹק לְחִכִּי:

Song of Songs 2:1-3♦

¹I am a rose of Sharon,
A lily of the valleys.

²Like a lily among thorns,
So is my darling among the maidens.

³Like an apple tree among trees of the forest,
So is my beloved among the youths.

I delight to sit in his shade,
And his fruit is sweet to my mouth.

Questions from Rabbi Aviva Richman

In the allegorical reading of this book, the male speaker (who describes his “darling” as “a lily among thorns”) is God and the female speaker (who describes her “beloved” as “an apple tree among trees of the forest”) is Israel.

1. Try to extrapolate from the description of the earthly relationship to a heavenly one between us and God. What do these images tell us about the kind of relationship God has with us? What do they tell us about the kind of relationship we have with God?
2. Can you identify the images in the verses with aspects of the divine-human relationship? For example, who are the “maidens” in the allegorical reading? What is the “tree”? What are the “fruits”?

♦ Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah

An early collection of *midrashim* (approx. 6th-7th centuries CE) anchored around the Song of Songs. It is part of what we call “Midrash Rabbah,” the “Great Midrash,” a loose anthology of *midrashim* that covers the five books of the Torah and the five “Megillot” (Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Esther, Ruth, Lamentations).

♦ shadow (*tzilan*)

I.e. protection.

♦ Ramses

Joseph brought his family to Egypt during a terrible famine. According to Genesis 47:11, they settled in an area called Ramses (elsewhere called Goshen). Additionally, Exodus 1:11 names Ramses as one of the garrison cities built by the Israelite slaves.

♦ sanctified feast

As understood midrashically, this verse is about the first Pesah in Egypt (“the night of the sanctified feast”). Therefore, it proves that the Israelites sang a song that night. Today we replicate this with our recitation of Hallel.

THE LOVE OF SEDER NIGHT

Our *midrash* from Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah♦ atomizes the phrase “a rose of Sharon” (*havatzelet ha-Sharon*) in four different ways, each evoking different linguistic resonances. This section of the midrash connects the phrase “*havatzelet ha-Sharon*” to the words “*havivah*,” “*tzilan*,” and “*shirah*,” and links each of these words to the departure from Egypt. (Take the whole course to learn the other three sections!)

SOURCE #2 ס

שיר השירים רבה ב:א

דָּבַר אַחֵר, אֲנִי חֲבֻצֶלֶת
הַשָּׁרוֹן, אֲנִי הִיא וְחֲבִיבָהּ
אֲנִי, אֲנִי הִיא שֶׁהֵייתִי חֲבוּיָה
בְּצֵלָן שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם, וְלִשְׁעָה
קָלָה בְּנִסְגִּי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
לְרַעְמֶסֶס, וְהִרְטַבְתִּי מַעֲשִׂים
טוֹבִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁנָה, וְאָמַרְתִּי
לְפָנָיו אֶת הַשִּׁירָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
(ישעיה ל, כט): הַשִּׁיר יִהְיֶה
לָכֶם בַּלַּיִל הַתְּקַדֵּשׁ חָג.

Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 2:1

Another interpretation: “I am a rose (*havatzelet*) of Sharon.” I am she, and beloved (*havivah*) am I; I am she who was beloved in the shadow (*tzilan*)♦ of Egypt, and in a short time the Holy Blessed One gathered me to Ramses♦ and I bloomed with good deeds like a lily, and I said before [God] a song (*shirah*), as it is said: “You will have song on the night of the sanctified feast” (Isaiah 30:29 ס).♦

Questions from Rabbi Aviva Richman

1. While the word “shadow” could have scary connotations, here it may refer more to shelter, reminding us that Egypt was originally kind to our ancestors, giving them “shade” during a famine, and describing the Israelites’ time there as being somewhat sheltered. Do you think it is virtuous or inappropriate to remember this aspect of our history in Egypt on Seder night? Why or why not?
2. Read through this midrashic lens, celebrating the paschal offering on Seder night itself (even prior to actually leaving Egypt) becomes a climax of our love for God and God’s love for us. What do you think about this aspect of the Seder? Have you ever experienced the night in this way?

♦ Psalms 113-118

This is an ancient grouping of psalms sung in the Temple—and in traditional services today!—on new moons and other holidays. The Seder is the only occasion when Hallel is sung at night, instead of during the day.

♦ Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai

The houses of Hillel and Shammai. While it is not totally clear what bodies these refer to, it is likely that the 1st century CE rabbinic scholars, Hillel and Shammai, had disciples and students whose opinions are quoted in our sources under the names of “Beit Hillel” and “Beit Shammai” respectively. Their debates are frequent throughout Rabbinic literature. In terms of actual practice, we today almost always follow Beit Hillel—as indeed we do in this case.

♦ The Tosefta

The Tosefta is a collection of early Rabbinic teachings (1st-3rd centuries CE in the Land of Israel), a companion to the Mishnah (from roughly the same time and place).

♦ redemption

The second cup of wine is drunk on this blessing, “Who redeemed Israel.”

♦ Egypt

Psalm 114 begins with the words “When Israel left Egypt.”

3. The love here is described as blossoming over a long period of time, from Jacob’s descent to Egypt to the slaves’ liberation. What kind of love have you experienced that builds up over time like this? What does this characterization say about the love between God and us?
4. The “song” in the verse is understood to be Hallel, the psalms we sing at Seder night (Psalms 113-118). ♦ In what ways might singing be an expression of love?

HALLEL AND REDEMPTION

The structure of the Seder has us begin Hallel on the second cup of wine, said on the blessing of redemption before the meal, and complete the psalms after the meal—but there is a disagreement as to how much of Hallel should be sung in the first part. This is the subject of an early debate between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai, ♦ and their argument underscores the significance of this initial song that we recited while still in Egypt. While we are still in the midst of uncertainty, with nothing other than the hope of redemption, how can we sing a song of thanksgiving?

SOURCE #3

תוספתא פסחים י:ט

עד היכן הוא אומר?

בית שמאי או' עד אם הבנים שמחה.

ובית הלל אומ' עד חלמיש למעינו מים. וחותם בגאולה.

אמרו בית שמאי לבית הלל וכי כבר יצאו שמזכירין יציאת מצרים?

Tosefta ♦ Pesahim 10:9

How much of Hallel do you say [on the second cup of wine]?

Beit Shammai say: Until the end of Psalm 113 (□) (“a joyful mother of children”).

But Beit Hillel say: Until the end of Psalm 114 (□) (“the flint into a fountain of waters”). And [the leader] closes with a blessing for redemption. ♦

Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel: Had they left yet so that we should mention the Exodus from Egypt? ♦

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

◆ sixth hour

In Rabbinic time, the sixth hour is roughly midday.

אמרו להם בית הלל אפילו
הוא ממתין עד קרות הגבר
הרי אילו לא יצאו עד שש
שעות ביום! היאך אומר את
הגאולה ועדין לא נגאלו?!

Beit Hillel said to them: It wouldn't even be enough to wait until the rooster crows—they didn't really leave until the sixth hour!◆ How can you say the blessing for redemption if they hadn't yet been redeemed?

Explanation from Rabbi Aviva Richman

Beit Shammai think we have to stop our recitation of Hallel **before** the words that describe Israel leaving Egypt, because at this early part of the night the Israelites had not in fact left Egypt. They understand the Seder as a reenactment of the Exodus—thus it is appropriate to discuss leaving Egypt only at the time our ancestors actually left. But Beit Hillel think we **should** recite those words. In the same reenactment, they point towards Hallel as referring to an anticipated departure from Egypt that hasn't yet come to pass.

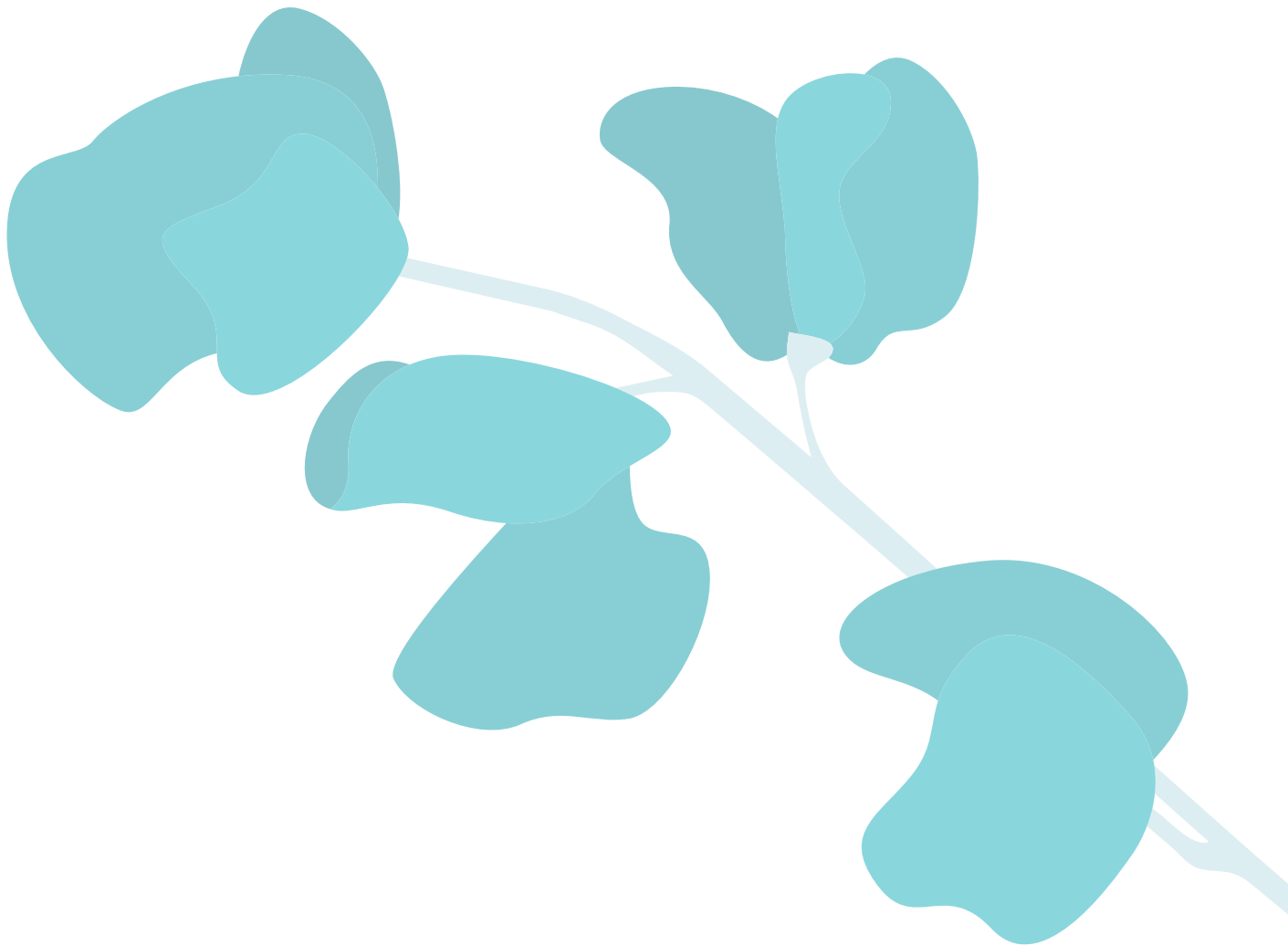
Questions from Rabbi Aviva Richman

1. Which model do you find more compelling? How close a reenactment of the Exodus should the Seder be?
2. What decisions would you make in crafting your Seder if you were trying to follow Beit Shammai's path of as close a reenactment as possible?

Beit Hillel respond to Beit Shammai with a contradiction in their opinion. Beit Shammai think that the timing of the Seder should roughly coincide with the actual timing of the Exodus—and yet, both Beit Hillel **and** Beit Shammai agree that they say the blessing of “redemption” with the first part of Hallel. This blessing celebrates the redemption from Egypt; but the redemption hasn't happened yet within the reenactment since the Israelites were not redeemed until around 12pm the next day. So, say Beit Hillel to Beit Shammai: would you suggest that we hold off reciting the blessing of redemption until 12pm the following day!? Clearly, the answer is that no one expects the Seder to last upwards of 16 hours! It is inconsistent, say Beit Hillel, to delay Hallel in order to coincide with the time of redemption and not to delay the blessing for redemption. In this blessing for redemption early on in the night, argue Beit Hillel, it is only appropriate that we sing about marching out of Egypt even as our feet were still firmly planted and waiting, inside.

◆ For Further Reflection ◆

1. The *midrash* traces an arc where our relationship with God climaxes in finding our own voice based on the word “Sharon,” interpreted playfully as “the one who sings.” What do you make of the fact that this first moment of singing goes all the way back to Egypt, before we were redeemed?
2. What can these sources about an early song teach us about the power to imagine, hope, and vision beyond current realities and limitations, and the way this can propel us into relationship with God?
3. When you reflect back on a relationship that has been in your life for a long time, what does it mean for you to give weight to the earliest formative moments? How did these early moments affect your sense of self-expression? How might that map onto your understanding of what it means to be in relationship with God?



A RITUAL MADE FOR ALL:

PESAH SHEINI

R. Avi Killip

REDEMPTION CANNOT HAPPEN without everyone. We learn this lesson from the Seder ritual, when we open our homes by inviting guests and asserting that all who are hungry should come and eat. But the idea of radical inclusion is perhaps most clearly found in the laws of the *pesah* sacrifice itself. Every person should join a group that will offer the *pesah* sacrifice and eat the entire offering together.¹ Nobody can be left out. This mandate to include everyone in this sacrifice extends so far as to necessitate the creation of an additional make-up holiday for those who were unable to participate in the primary *pesah* offering. This second-chance holiday is called *Pesah Sheini* (“Second Passover”), and falls each year exactly one month after *Pesah*.²

The Mishnah in *Pesahim* summarizes who is obligated to participate in the *Pesah Sheini* ritual:

משנה פסחים ט:א

מי שהיה טמא או בדרך רחוקה ולא עשה את
הראשון — יעשה את השני.

שגג או נאנס ולא עשה את הראשון — יעשה את
השני.

Mishnah *Pesahim* 9:1

One who was ritually impure or on a distant journey and did not observe the first [*Pesah*] should observe the second.

One who unwittingly forgot or was prevented beyond their control and did not observe the first should observe the second.

Pesah Sheini offers a chance for those who missed the

first holiday to still be part of the *mitzvah*. The people showing up to partake of this second *pesah* offering are extremely diverse. They share the same need for a second chance, but the reasons that have brought them there are many and very different. Some were on a journey, while others were home but impure and therefore not able to participate. Some missed the first holiday completely by their own mistake, while others were held up or prevented by some outside force that they couldn't control. The talmudic discussion that follows (on *Pesahim* 93a) quotes a tradition that expands the participant list, detailing even more different and specific cases including lepers, menstruating women, women who have recently given birth, and even one who missed the day intentionally. Most strikingly, the Talmud extends the categories found in the Mishnah to include a child who comes of age and an adult who converts to Judaism between *Pesah* and *Pesah Sheini*.

The Jews joining together in groups to offer a *pesah sheini* offering are not brought together because they all share one singular experience. Their lives over the previous month have looked very different. Yet, *Pesah Sheini* manages to bring them together as one people, to include them all in a ritual that is meant for all.

So much of *Pesah* has traveled through the years and is still a part of our lives today, but the *pesah* sacrifice itself has not. With the disappearance of the animal offering, we have also lost *Pesah Sheini* as an active holiday. Yet, there is so much we can learn from the structure and the values expressed in this radically inclusive ritual. *Pesah Sheini* is an opportunity to include those who find themselves on the margins, to invite them in to form community with each other, without blurring their own distinct experiences.

From *Pesah Sheini* we learn that who is “in” and who is “out” is not static. Our communities are dynamic and always changing. Over the course of a life, we will likely each move between categories, and so will the people

1 See Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Korban Pesah* 2:1.

2 See Numbers 9.

around us. Sometimes these moves are good, healthy, and intentional. Pesah Sheini reminds us that people go on journeys and they return home. We should give ourselves permission to take big journeys—real and metaphorical—and trust that we will find our way back into community. Likewise, we must let others travel and welcome them back upon return.

Other times, we may find ourselves outside of the community for reasons that are harder. Just because we participated in Pesah this year doesn't mean we won't need Pesah Sheini next year. Life is full of the unexpected. Some years we fall outside the community because we are in mourning, struggling with illness, or even because we are home with a newborn. But our tradition asserts that everyone who is impure can become pure again. This is radical and not a given. The Torah gives all of us rituals for returning to community, and Pesah Sheini acknowledges and celebrates that possibility.

The Pesah Sheini ritual teaches us not to assume that just because someone is usually included, they will stay included. We should always be asking, "Who is left out now/here/this year?" The expanding categories of people who may need a second Pesah remind us to watch out for who else may need to be invited in.

In the absence of the Temple, halakhic impurity is no longer a reason for exclusion from today's Pesah meals and communal singing of Hallel, yet we continue to mark this second Pesah, this day of second chances, on our calendars. May this day offer us the opportunity to see all those who have been left out of our communities, for whatever reason, and invite them to eat and sing with us now. ♦

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Peninsula Sinai Congregation
Foster City, CA

Rutgers Hillel
New Brunswick, NJ

Shaare Tefila Congregation
Olney, MD

**Smith College Center for Religious &
Spiritual Life**
Northampton, MA

Temple Beth El Mekor Chayim
Cranford, NJ

Temple Beth Israel
Waltham, MA

**Temple Beth Shalom of Cambridge/
Tremont Street Shul**
Cambridge, MA

Temple Beth Sholom
Cherry Hill, NJ

Temple Beth Tzedek
Williamsville, NY

Temple Beth Zion
Brookline, MA

Temple Emanuel
Newton Centre, MA

Temple Israel of Natick
Natick, MA

Temple Israel of Sharon
Sharon, MA

Temple Judea
Laguna Hills, CA

Temple Sinai
Brookline, MA

Tikvat Israel Congregation
Rockville, MD

Tufts Hillel
Medford, MA

Washington Square Minyan
Brookline, MA