

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT TZAV • 14 NISSAN 5781 EREV PESACH • MARCH 27, 2021 • VOL 28 NO.20

SHABBAT PESACH • 21 NISSAN 5781 • APRIL 3, 2021

SHABBAT PARSHAT SHEMINI • 28 NISSAN 5781 • APRIL 10, 2021

SHABBAT PARSHAT TAZRIA / METZORA • 5 IYAR 5781 • APRIL 17, 2021

Four More Questions: Exploring the Connection between the Number Four and Pesach

by Rav Nota Schiller, Rosh HaYeshiva

For significant numbers of non-traditional Jews, the Pesach Seder is their last connection to ritual. Jews who build no succah, who don't know when Shavuot is, faithfully assemble year after year to eat matzah and tell about the going out of Egypt.

Mrs. S., an eighty-year-old woman from Ann Arbor, Michigan, told me that one year at her Pesach Seder she had forgotten the "shank bone" that traditionally goes on the symbolic Seder Plate, and her grandson went over to her refrigerator, took out a pork chop, and placed it on the Seder Plate.

Even at this home — however contradictory and somewhat confused — a semblance of Pesach ritual stubbornly persists. More than with other traditions, for some reason, a mysterious spiritual energy emanating from Pesach cuts deeper and longer into the collective Jewish conscience. Why?

Another question: The dominant recurring number in the Haggadah is four: We drink four cups of wine, we ask the "Four Questions," we tell of the "Four Sons." What is the connection between Pesach and the number four?

King Solomon says in Proverbs, "Listen, my son, to your father's ethic, and do not abandon the law of your mother." Without an investment of focused effort, one does not acquire the ethic of one's father. Hence the phrasing, "Listen to the ethic of your father." The "father's ethic" is encountered externally, like a voice. It must be engaged, admitted, and assimilated — and only then to be internalized.

"The law of your mother," on the other hand, is axiomatic. Innate, coming with the territory of being born Jewish, it functions intuitively. Hence the negative phrasing, "Do not abandon the law of your mother." Every Jew is imbued with this given intuition — to abandon it requires active rejection. When passive, it lingers — at least subliminally.



This "law of your mother" can be described as "minimal Jewishness." The Hebrew word "*Uma*" – nation – is from the same root as "*Ima*" – mother. Jewishness (apart from conversion) is established by having a Jewish mother, the giver of one's being. Whereas "listening to the ethic of one's father" is presented to us as choice, with accountability. It is an act of freewill, which at times is realized and at times is not.

Under the yoke of Egyptian slavery, only an elite core of Jews exercised this option, listening to "the ethic of your father." For the rank and file, the vast number of Jews, there remained only some vestiges of Jewish identity – minimal Jewishness, the "law of one's mother," the matriarchal mode.

Yet, this very "minimal Jewishness" was the pivot upon which the salvation would swing. That residual lingering consciousness sufficed to connect the Jewish people to their heritage and redemption. Without this minimum Jewishness, the floodgates of total assimilation would have burst open.

Providential guidance determined that history to take another course. In Egypt, minimal Jewish identity remained, and the precariousness of that identity heightened the urgency for immediate exodus.

Why is the number four a dominant recurring theme in the Haggadah? The number four symbolizes the matriarchs: Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. This, "the matriarchal four," this "law of our Mothers," is what sustains us in exile.

Egypt was a paradigm for all future exiles. Having built up sufficient "antibodies" to resist the malady of the Egyptian exile, the Jewish nation could then survive all future exiles. The covenant guaranteeing Jewish continuity was made with the patriarchs. Yet, the mechanism by which the pact functions is the matriarchal mode. Wandering through the bleak valleys of dispersion, minimal Jewishness would be the bridge connecting to the next peak of mitzvah performance, to the next moment of "listening to the ethic of your Father."

Returning to our original question: Why does Pesach linger so much longer in the collective unconscious of even the so-called secular Jew? Just as a given space has its special combination of topography, minerals and climate, likewise does time have its own unique landscape. When the calendar rolls around to that place in time called Pesach, the mystical minerals of that spiritual lode can be mined. Returning to the "time-station" called Pesach, G-d reaches out to Israel just as He did on that first Pesach. Every Jew feels and senses a re-actualization, a reawakening, of the matriarchal root core, of his personal identity and our national identity.

When describing the father's dialogue with the son who "does not know how to ask a question," the Haggadah directs us: "You begin for him." The word "you" here is written in the feminine Hebrew form of *aht*. Here too, we see the matriarchal mode as the mechanism for maintaining minimal connection, even for the son who does not know enough to ask. That will bridge to the moment when the father can fulfill the mitzvah of: "You shall tell it to your son." Ultimately, there will be that reunion of, "Listen, my son, to the ethic of your father, and do not abandon the Torah of your mother." The mitzvah of the Haggadah is just such a moment of reunion.

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of Ohr Somayach's alumni and friends *Pesach*
Kasher v'somayach! May you have a Kosher and
Festive Passover!**

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Tzav

What's So Bad About Bread?

"It will be eaten unleavened" (6:9)

I doubt that anyone in the audience watching *Grandma's Reading Glass* in 1900 realized that they were witnessing the birth of a new language. *Grandma's Reading Glass* is under a minute long and the plot is thin, to say the least. A small child looks through his mother's magnifying glass, at various objects around the room. What makes the movie a landmark is its use of sustained point-of-view shots. Meaning that, instead of just showing the child looking through the looking glass, the audience is seeing what the child is seeing. Prior to this, watching a film was like watching a play. The camera was set up in front of the scene and stayed put. *Grandma's Reading Glass* was the beginning of the "language" of film. A language that is so familiar to us now, that we do not even recognize that it has syntax like any other language.

But the syntax of film has a limitation. In a movie there is no past or future. Everything in a movie takes place in a continuous present. There is no "was" and no "will be" in a film. To change the tense of a movie, the director has to resort to the "flash-back," an inelegant device whereby the picture starts to blur and the sound becomes echo-y. It all seems like such a long time ago-o-o-o. And when we cut to that past scene, the language of film reverts to the present tense.

We can use this anomaly in the language of film to understand one of Judaism's most basic concepts.

Intuitively, time seems eternal. It seems that we are born into a world that has always been here, and we leave a world that will always be.

This idea is the basis of all atheism. If time was always here, then there was no creation, and if there was no creation, then – G-d forbid – there's no Creator.

The very first word in the Torah – *Bereishet* – contradicts that intuition. *Bereishet*, "In the beginning..." can be understood to mean "Beh" – standing for *Barah Reishit*, meaning, "G-d created the beginning." Time itself is a creation. It had a beginning. And anything that has a beginning must have an end.

Not only did G-d create beginning, but He re-creates that beginning every single nanosecond. The monolith called time does not exist. The language of film, its constant present tense, gives us a way to understand this reality. And there's another even more interesting aspect of film that illustrates this constant creation of time.

If you take an old movie film and unwind it, it's made up of thousands of individual pictures. The fact that we don't see a series of still images but a continuous flow of movement is due to something called "the persistence of vision," which says that the brain will form the impression of movement when slightly different images are presented to the eye faster than around 10 frames per second. The same idea holds true for digital movies.

There is no such thing as the continuity of time. There are just individual moments, like a child's "flicker book."

Which brings us to the question: “What’s so wrong with bread?”

The Exodus from Egypt saw the creation of a nation which would proclaim to the world the existence of a single Creator Who created everything – including time. It is time that turns matzah into bread. There’s no other difference. On the festival of Pesach, where we once again proclaim to the world that there is a Creator, we renourish our souls with the food that rejects the independence of time – the unleavened bread called matzah.

Shemini

Keeping Kosher

“Lest you become contaminated.” (11:43)

The road to holiness does not start with lofty ideals or sublime thoughts. It does not begin with a mind-expanding revelation or a “close encounter.” It cannot be produced by psychotropic drugs, nor can it be experienced by climbing the Alps or the Andes.

True, gazing down from Mont Blanc or Everest may fill us with awe at the Creator’s handiwork. Nature can truly inspire closeness to G-d, but all this inspiration will vanish like a cloud of smoke if we lack the fundamental ingredients needed to concretize inspiration into actuality.

The road to holiness starts with a few small boring steps – such as being a decent, moral person, and controlling our emotions and appetites.

As Jews, we may not eat what we like when we like. On Pesach we may not eat bread. On Yom Tov we

should eat meat. On Yom Kippur we may eat nothing. At all times, we may not eat the forbidden foods, which is the subject of this week’s Torah portion.

“Lest you become contaminated.” In Hebrew, this sentence is expressed as one word: *v’nitmayhem*. The spelling of this word is unusual. It lacks an *aleph* and thus it can also read as *v’nitumtem*, which means *“Lest you become dulled.”*

In our search for holiness and meaning in this world, our greatest assets and aids are the laws of *kashrut*. Kosher food is soul food. Food for the soul. Food that feeds our spirituality and sharpens our ability to receive holiness. Food that is not kosher does the reverse. It dulls our spiritual senses. It makes us less sensitive, less receptive to holiness. A Jew who tries to seek holiness sitting on top of some mountain in the Far East, living on a diet of salted pork, will find it impossible to achieve his goal. The view of the Ganges or the Himalayas (or his own navel!) may titillate his spiritual senses, but he will find no growth or nourishment reaching his core.

The spiritual masters teach that if a person contaminates himself a little, he becomes contaminated a great deal. Spirituality is a delicate thing. It does not take much to jam the broadcast from Upstairs. On the other hand, a little bit of holiness goes a long way. As the Torah teaches, *“You shall sanctify yourselves, and you shall become holy.”* (Lev. 11:44) A little bit of sanctity generates a lot of holiness. If we sanctify ourselves down here in this lowly world, with all its barriers to holiness, if we guard our mouths, our eyes and our ears, then the Torah promises us that we will be given Divine help to lift us to lofty peaks of holiness.

It all starts with one small step.

Tazria-Metzora

Windbag

"This is the law of the metzora." (14:2)

Two causes of the spiritual affliction called *tzara'at* were gossip and slander. The Torah considers these sins very grave. Habitual gossip and slander are equivalent to the three cardinal sins of idol worship, murder and adultery. Someone who habituates himself to this kind of speech forfeits his place in the future world. (*Erchin 15b*)

Primarily, we are physical creatures. At best, our soul is a lodger in the house of the body. We find spiritual concepts abstruse and difficult to grasp. A blood-strewn battlefield makes more of an impression on us than the silent holocaust of character assassination.

For this reason, the *metzora* is brought to the *kohen*. This person, who was so cavalier with his words,

who did not understand the power of speech, stands in front of the *kohen*, and with one word the *kohen* decides his fate: "*Tahor*" or "*Tamei*." He is pronounced as being either "Pure" or "Impure." Just one word can return him to the society of man, and just one word can banish him to solitude and ostracism.

"For behold, He forms mountains and creates winds; He recounts to a person his conversation." (Amos 4:13)

Ostensibly, the first half of this verse has little to do with the second. However, the prophet is answering the question, "Of what importance is a word? Words have no substance."

"...behold, He forms mountains..."

G-d created lofty mountains, vast expanses of impervious rock. "*...And creates winds...*" – and yet the wind, which has no substance, wears them down to an anthill. "*He recounts to a person his conversation.*" This fact should remind us that even though our words are as formless as the wind, they have the power to reduce great worlds to nothing.

- Sources: *Dubner Magid and Mayana shel Torah in Iturei Torah*

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at <https://ohr.edu/holidays/pesach/>***

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shekalim 9-15; Shekalim 16-22; Yoma 2-8; Yoma 9-15

A Divine Guarantee

Rabbi Meir says, "Whoever has established permanent residence in the Land of Israel, speaks lashon hakodesh (the holy language of the Torah), eats produce only after terumah and ma'aser has been separated, and recites the Shma Yisrael prayer in the morning and evening – can be assured of having a place in the World to Come."

If a person lives in the place where Hashem wants him to live, speaks in the manner that Hashem wants him to speak, eats what Hashem wants him to eat and has an ongoing prayer-communication-connection to the One Hashem – he is living in accordance with his Creator's will and will certainly merit eternal life.

- Shekalim 9b

Black Fire and White Fire

Rabbi Pinchas said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, "The Torah that Hashem gave to Moshe was white fire into which black fire was etched, fire blended with fire, fire extracted from fire and given in fire."

Although a Torah scroll is written with black ink, its letters must be individually surrounded by the white parchment on which it is written. Each letter must be completely surrounded by parchment. This requirement is called *mukaf gvil*. The white parchment around the letters is an integral part of the Torah, and, without it, the Torah scroll is invalid. These two components – black ink and white parchment – although separate in nature, join together to form a valid Torah scroll. Our Sages teach that, in an analogous fashion, the "white fire" of the Torah – i.e. the more esoteric and deeper

aspects of the Torah – form a perfect mixture with the "black fire" – i.e. the more revealed and concrete aspects of the Torah – to form the unity of the Torah that Hashem gave us at Mount Sinai.

- Shekalim 16b

Another Seventh Day

"Seven days before Yom Hakippurim..."

Our next *masechta* in the *daf yomi* cycle is called Yoma, which literally means "the day," and is a reference to the day of Yom Kippur. It is not merely "a day" but is "the day." Although a person may do *teshuva* at any time on any day of the year, and in this way be atoned of any straying from the way of Hashem, the day of Yom Kippur is one that is uniquely suited for atonement. Our Sages teach that on Yom Kippur the *satan* (also known as the evil inclination and the angel of death) is not allowed to tempt a person to be distanced from Hashem, thereby making our path closer to Hashem much smoother and easier.

The Maharsha explains the hint in the opening words of our *mishna*, a reason why it starts with the number seven when teaching about Yom Kippur. There are six work-days during the week, followed by the seventh day, Shabbat, which is holier than the other days of the week and is a day on which we refrain from all manner of work. Likewise, there are seven days of Yom Tov during the year. Six of these days are: One day of Rosh Hashanah, two Yom Tov days of Succot (perhaps more exactly expressed as the first day of Succot and eighth day, which is called Shmini Atzeret), two Yom Tov days of Pesach and one Yom Tov day of Shavuot. These six days are certainly extremely holy, but certain work-activities

are permitted on them, such as cooking and carrying outdoors. The seventh Yom Tov of the year is Yom Kippur, a Yom Tov day that is holier than the other six days of Yom Tov. It is akin in nature to Shabbat and no form of work is permitted. In fact, the Torah calls Yom Kippur *Shabbat Shabbaton*. (Vayikra 23:32)

It is recommended to learn the continuation of the Maharsha's commentary on this opening to our new *Masechet*, where he offers fascinating insights into the connection and correlation between each holy day of Yom Tov and the letters of the holy Names of Hashem.

- *Yoma 2a*

Who Wants To Live?

Rabbi Yochanan elaborated on the meaning of the verse: "Fear and awe of Hashem lengthens life, while the years of the wicked are cut short. (Mishlei 10:27) He said, "The First Beit Hamikdash, which lasted for 410 years, was spanned by only 18 Kohanim Gedolim, while the Second Beit Hamikdash – during which there were many unworthy Kohanim Gedolim who bought their positions from corrupt rulers – more than 300 Kohanim Gedolim served in a 280-year span of its 420-year history. The conclusion is that due to their corruption they died within a year of their appointment."

- *Yoma 9a*

Of Homes and Gates

"It is written in the Torah: 'On the doorposts of your homes and your gates.' (Devarim 6:9) This teaches that the mitzvah of mezuzah applies even on the gates of your provinces and cities. These places have the obligation of the mitzvah for Hamakom (literally, 'the Place,' a reference to

Hashem, Who is the Place of the world, and not that the world is a place from Him)."

This *gemara* teaches that not only does the mitzvah of mezuzah apply to every halachic room of a home, but it also applies to gates that lead to these homes. More than forty years ago, this author asked HaRav Shalom Yosef Elyashiv a mezuzah question while accompanying him by foot to a Mishna Berurah *shiur* he regularly taught in Meah Shearim: "Is there a need to affix a mezuzah on a frame I had just made in our backyard garden from metal poles and vines that were meant as part of a pathway to our back door?" He answered that I need to affix a mezuzah on the appropriate pole-post, with a *beracha*, since it is considered a *shaar* (gate). I softly said (to myself, I thought), "Why didn't I think of that?!" He briefly glanced over at me and we continued walking without breaking stride.

The commentaries wonder why our *gemara* adds the reason of "These places have the obligation of the mitzvah for Hamakom." In the context of the teaching, they appear to be an unnecessary reason for the mitzvah, as the Torah's words are the reason for the mitzvah – and it explicitly states "in your gates." Here is an explanation I have seen offered for this apparent redundancy. Our Sages teach that a mezuzah arouses Divine protection for Jewish homes and the dwellers therein, and is also a factor for having a long life. But these reasons would seem to apply only to the mitzvah of affixing the mezuzah to the actual home's doorpost, where people dwell. To this end, we are taught that affixing the mezuzah to outer gates is *also* a mitzvah – because Hashem commanded us to do this. We see this in the wording of our *gemara*, "These places have the obligation of the mitzvah for Hamakom."

- *Yoma 11a*

Q & A

TZAV

Questions

1. What separated the *kohen's* skin from the priestly garments?
2. How often were the ashes removed from upon the *mizbe'ach*? How often were they removed from next to the *mizbe'ach*?
3. If someone extinguishes the fire on the *mizbe'ach*, how many Torah violations has he transgressed?
4. The portion of a flour-offering offered on the *mizbe'ach* may not be *chametz*. But is the *kohen's* portion allowed to be *chametz*?
5. When a *kohen* is inaugurated, what offering must he bring?
6. What three baking processes were used to prepare the *korban* of Aharon and his sons?
7. What is the difference between a *minchat kohen* and a *minchat Yisrael*?
8. When is a *kohen* disqualified from eating from a *chatat*?
9. What is the difference between a copper and earthenware vessel regarding removing absorbed tastes?
10. Can an animal dedicated as an *asham* be replaced with another animal?
11. How does an *asham* differ from all other *korbanot*?
12. Unlike all other *korbanot*, what part of the ram or sheep may be placed on the *mizbe'ach*?
13. What three types of *kohanim* may not eat from the *asham*?
14. In which four instances is a *korban todah* brought?
15. Until when may a *todah* be eaten according to the Torah? Until when according to Rabbinic decree?
16. How does a *korban* become *pigul*?
17. Who may eat from a *shelamim*?
18. What miracle happened at the entrance of the *Ohel Moed*?
19. Other than *Yom Kippur*, what other service requires that the *kohen* separate from his family?
20. What are the 5 categories of *korbanot* listed in this *Parsha*?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 6:3 - Nothing.
2. 6:4 -
A) Every day.
B) Whenever there was a lot.
3. 6:6 - Two.
4. 6:10 - No.
5. 6:13 - A *korban mincha* ~ A tenth part of an *ephah* of flour.
6. 6:14 - Boiling, baking in an oven and frying in a pan.
7. 6:15 - The *minchat kohen* is burnt completely. Only a handful of the *minchat Yisrael* is burnt, and the remainder is eaten by the *kohanim*.
8. 6:19 - If he is *tamei* (spiritually impure) at the time of the sprinkling of the blood.
9. 6:21 - One can remove an absorbed taste from a copper vessel by scouring and rinsing, whereas such a taste can never be removed from an earthenware vessel.
10. 7:1 - No.
11. 7:3 - It can only be brought from a ram or sheep.
12. 7:3 - The tail.
13. 7:7 - A *t'vul yom* (a *tamei kohen* who immersed in a *mikveh* yet awaits sunset to become *tahor*); a *mechusar kipurim* (a *tamei* person who has gone to the *mikveh* but has yet to bring his required offering); an *oman* (a mourner prior to the burial of the deceased).
14. 7:12 - Upon safe arrival from an ocean voyage; upon safe arrival from a desert journey; upon being freed from prison; upon recovering from illness.
15. 7:15 - a) Until morning b) Until midnight
16. 7:18 - The person slaughters the animal with the intention that it be eaten after the prescribed time.
17. 7:19 - Any uncontaminated person (not only the owner).
18. 8:3 - The entire nation was able to fit in this very small area.
19. 8:34 - The burning of the *parah adumah* (red heifer).
20. *Olah* (6:2); *mincha* (6:7); *chatat* (6:18); *asham* (7:1); *shelamim* (7:11).

Q & A

SHEMINI

Questions

1. What date was "yom hashemini"?
2. Which of Aharon's *korbanot* atoned for the Golden Calf?
3. What *korbanot* did Aharon offer for the Jewish People?
4. What was unique about the *chatat* offered during the induction of the *Mishkan*?
5. When did Aharon bless the people with the *birkat kohanim*?
6. Why did Moshe go into the *Ohel Mo'ed* with Aharon?
7. Why did Nadav and Avihu die?
8. Aharon quietly accepted his sons' death. What reward did he receive for this?
9. What prohibitions apply to a person who is intoxicated?
10. Name the three *chatat* goat offerings that were sacrificed on the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*.
11. Which he-goat *chatat* did Aharon burn completely and why?
12. Why did Moshe direct his harsh words at Aharon's sons?
13. Moshe was upset that Aharon and his sons did not eat the *chatat*. Why?
14. Why did G-d choose Moshe, Aharon, Elazar and Itamar as His messengers to tell the Jewish People the laws of *kashrut*?
15. What are the signs of a kosher land animal?
16. How many non-kosher animals display only *one* sign of *kashrut*? What are they?
17. If a fish sheds its fins and scales when out of the water, is it kosher?
18. Why is a stork called *chasida* in Hebrew?
19. The *chagav* is a kosher insect. Why don't we eat it?
20. What requirements must be met in order for water to maintain its status of purity?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 9:1 - First of *Nissan*.
2. 9:2 - The calf offered as a *korban chatat*.
3. 9:3,4 - A he-goat as a *chatat*, a calf and a lamb for an *olah*, an ox and a ram for *shelamim*, and a *mincha*.
4. 9:11 - It's the only example of a *chatat* offered on the courtyard *mizbe'ach* that was burned.
5. 9:22 - When he finished offering the *korbanot*, before descending from the *mizbe'ach*.
6. 9:23 - For one of two reasons: Either to teach Aharon about the service of the incense, or to pray for the *Shechina* to dwell with Israel.
7. 10:2 - Rashi offers two reasons: Either because they gave a halachic ruling in Moshe's presence, or because they entered the *Mishkan* after drinking intoxicating wine.
8. 10:3 - A portion of the Torah was given solely through Aharon.
9. 10:9-11 - He may not give a *halachic* ruling. Also, a *kohen* is forbidden to enter the *Ohel Mo'ed*, approach the *mizbe'ach*, or perform the *avoda*.
10. 10:16 - The goat offerings of the inauguration ceremony, of *Rosh Chodesh*, and of Nachshon ben Aminadav.
11. 10:16 - The *Rosh Chodesh chatat*: Either because it became *tamei*, or because the *kohanim* were forbidden to eat from it while in the state of *aninut* (mourning).
12. 10:16 - Out of respect for Aharon, Moshe directed his anger at his sons and not directly at Aharon.
13. 10:17 - Because only when the *kohanim* eat the *chatat* are the sins of the owners atoned.
14. 11:2 - Because they accepted the deaths of Nadav and Avihu in silence.
15. 11:3 - An animal whose hooves are completely split and who chews its cud.
16. 11:4,5,6,7 - Four: Camel, *shafan*, hare, and pig.
17. 11:12 - Yes.
18. 11:19 - Because it acts with *chesed* (kindness) toward other storks.
19. 11:21 - We have lost the tradition and are not able to identify the kosher *chagav*.
20. 11:36 - It must be connected to the ground (i.e., a spring or a cistern).

Q & A

TAZRIA

Questions

1. When does a woman who has given birth to a son go to the *mikveh*?
2. After a woman gives birth, she is required to offer two types of offerings. Which are they?
3. What animal does the woman offer as a *chatat*?
4. Which of these offerings makes her *tahor* (ritual purity)?
5. Which of the sacrifices does the woman offer first, the *olah* or the *chatat*?
6. Who determines whether a person is a *metzora tamei* (person with ritually impure *tzara'at*) or is *tahor*?
7. If the *kohen* sees that the *tzara'at* has spread after one week, how does he rule?
8. What disqualifies a *kohen* from being able to give a ruling in a case of *tzara'at*?
9. Why is the appearance of *tzara'at* on the tip of one of the 24 "limbs" that project from the body usually unable to be examined?
10. On which days is a *kohen* not permitted to give a ruling on *tzara'at*?
11. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow (e.g., the head or beard), what color hair is indicative of ritual impurity?
12. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow, what color hair is indicative of purity?
13. If the *kohen* intentionally or unintentionally pronounces a *tamei* person "*tahor*," what is that person's status?
14. What signs of mourning must a *metzora* display?
15. Why must a *metzora* call out, "*Tamei! Tamei!*"?
16. Where must a *metzora* dwell?
17. Why is a *metzora* commanded to dwell in isolation?
18. What sign denotes *tzara'at* in a garment?
19. What must be done to a garment that has *tzara'at*?
20. If after washing a garment the signs of *tzara'at* disappear entirely, how is the garment purified?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 12:2 - At the end of seven days.
2. 12:6 - An *olah* and a *chatat*.
3. 12:6 - A *tor* (turtle dove) or a *ben yona* (young pigeon).
4. 12:7 - The *chatat*.
5. 12:8 - The *chatat*.
6. 13:2 - A *kohen*.
7. 13:5 - The person is *tamei*.
8. 13:12 - Poor vision.
9. 13:14 - The *tzara'at* as a whole must be seen at one time. Since these parts are angular, they cannot be seen at one time.
10. 13:14 - During the festivals; and ruling on a groom during the seven days of feasting after the marriage.
11. 13:29 - Golden.
12. 13:37 - Any color other than golden.
13. 13:37 - He remains *tamei*.
14. 13:45 - He must tear his garments, let his hair grow wild, and cover his lips with his garment.
15. 13:45 - So people will know to keep away from him.
16. 13:46 - Outside the camp in isolation.
17. 13:46 - Since *tzara'at* is a punishment for *lashon hara* (evil speech), which creates a rift between people, the Torah punishes measure for measure by placing a division between him and others.
18. 13:49 - A dark green or dark red discoloration.
19. 13:52 - It must be burned.
20. 13:58 - Through immersion in a *mikveh*.

Q & A

METZORA

Questions

1. When may a *metzora* not be pronounced *tahor*?
2. In the *midbar*, where did a *metzora* dwell while he was *tamei*?
3. Why does the *metzora* require birds in the purification process?
4. In the purification process of a *metzora*, what does the cedar wood symbolize?
5. During the purification process, the *metzora* is required to shave his hair. Which hair must he shave?
6. What is unique about the *chatat* and the *asham* offered by the *metzora*?
7. In the *Beit Hamikdash*, when the *metzora* was presented "before G-d" (14:11), where did he stand?
8. Where was the *asham* of the *metzora* slaughtered?
9. How was having *tzara'at* in one's house sometimes advantageous?
10. When a house is suspected as having *tzara'at*, what is its status prior to the inspection by a *kohen*?
11. What happens to the vessels that are in a house found to have *tzara'at*?
12. Which type of vessels cannot be made *tahor* after they become *tamei*?
13. Where were stones afflicted with *tzara'at* discarded?
14. When a house is suspected of having *tzara'at*, a *kohen* commands that the affected stones be replaced and the house plastered. What is the law if the *tzara'at*:
 - a. returns and spreads;
 - b. does not return;
 - c. returns, but does not spread?
15. When a person enters a house that has *tzara'at*, when do his clothes become *tamei*?
16. What is the status of a man who is *zav* (sees a flow):
 - a. two times or two consecutive days;
 - b. three times or three consecutive days?
17. A *zav* sat or slept on the following:
 - a) a bed; b) a plank; c) a chair; d) a rock.If a *tahor* person touches these things what is his status?
18. What does the Torah mean when it refers to a *zav* who "has not washed his hands"?
19. When may a *zav* immerse in a *mikveh* to purify himself?
20. What is the status of someone who experiences a one-time flow?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 14:2 - At night.
2. 14:3 - Outside the three camps.
3. 14:4 - *Tzara'at* comes as a punishment for *lashon hara*. Therefore, the Torah requires the *metzora* to offer birds, who chatter constantly, to atone for his sin of chattering.
4. 14:4 - The cedar is a lofty tree. It alludes to the fact that *tzara'at* comes as a punishment for haughtiness.
5. 14:9 - Any visible collection of hair on the body.
6. 14:10 - They require *n'sachim* (drink offerings).
7. 14:11 - At the gate of Nikanor.
8. 14:13 - On the northern side of the *mizbe'ach*.
9. 14:34 - The Amorites concealed treasures in the walls of their houses. After the conquest of the Land, *tzara'at* would afflict these houses. The Jewish owner would tear down the house and find the treasures.
10. 14:36 - It is *tahor*.
11. 14:36 - They become *tamei*.
12. 14:36 - Earthenware vessels.
13. 14:40 - In places where *tahor* objects were not handled
14.
 - a. 14:44-45 - It is called "*tzara'at mam'eret*," and the house must be demolished;
 - b. 14:48 - the house is pronounced *tahor*;
 - c. 14:44 - The house must be demolished.
15. 14:46 - When he remains in the house long enough to eat a small meal.
16. 15:2 -
 - a. He is *tamei*;
 - b. he is *tamei* and is also required to bring a *korban*.
17. 15:45 - Only a type of object that one usually lies or sits upon becomes a transmitter of *tumah* when a *zav* sits or lies on it. A *tahor* person who subsequently touches the object becomes *tamei* and the clothes he is wearing are also *tamei'im*. Therefore:
 - a. *tamei*;
 - b. *tahor*;
 - c. *tamei*;
 - d. *tahor*.
18. 15:11 - One who has not immersed in a *mikveh*.
19. 15:13 - After seven consecutive days without a flow.
20. 15:32 - He is *tamei* until evening.

INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

The Quinoa Conundrum

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Generally speaking, this time of year is the busiest for rabbis the world over; fielding questions on every aspect of the myriad and complex laws of Pesach observance. Yet, interestingly, the question that often seems to be highest on people's minds is not about chametz or even cleaning properly. No, the biggest issue during the Pre-Pesach Rush in recent years seems to be whether quinoa (pronounced Keen-Waah) is considered *kitniyos* and whether *Ashkenazim* can eat it on Pesach. Perhaps, it has something to do with the fact that the U.N. declared 2013 as the "International Year of the Quinoa." After having received this question numerous times in one day, this author has decided to thoroughly examine the issue.

Quinoa Questions

Quinoa has developed an international following. Packed with protein (essential amino acids) and fiber, as well as magnesium, phosphorus, calcium and iron (and, naturally, cholesterol free!), quinoa packs quite a dietary punch. Although billed as the "Mother of All Grains" and the "Super Grain," this native of the Andes Mountains (think Bolivia and Peru) is actually a grain that is not. It does not even contain gluten. It turns out that quinoa is really a member of the "goose-foot" family (*Chenopodium*), related to beets and spinach. However, while its health benefits sound terrific, it still may be problematic on Pesach.

Kitniyos Clash

It is well known that the actual prohibition of chametz on Pesach pertains exclusively to leavened products produced from the five major grains: wheat, barley, oats, spelt, or rye. Yet, already in place from the times of the Rishonim, there was an Ashkenazic prohibition against eating *kitniyos* (legumes; ostensibly based on its semi-literal translation of "little things") on Pesach, except in times of famine or grave need. Although several authorities opposed this prohibition, nonetheless

the ban is binding on Ashkenazic Jewry in full force, even today.

The nature of the problem is referred to in slightly different terms by our great luminaries: the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* references the *kitniyos* restriction as an *issur*, the *Mishnah Berurah* calls it a *chumrah*, the *Aruch Hashulchan* says it's a *geder*, Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank calls it a *gezeirah*, Rav Moshe Feinstein refers to it as a *minhag*, and the Klausenberger Rebbe denotes it as a *takanah*. But, nevertheless, they all maintain that the *kitniyos* prohibition is compulsory on all Ashkenazic Jewry. In fact, the *Aruch Hashulchan* avers that "once our forefathers have accepted this prohibition upon themselves, it is considered a *geder m'din Torah*, and one who is lenient is testifying about himself that he has no fear of Heaven." He adds, echoing Shlomo Hamelech's wise words in *Kohelet* regarding a *poretz geder*: "One who breaks this prohibition deserves to be bitten by a snake."

Several reasons are given for the actual prohibition, including that *kitniyos* often grow in close proximity to grain; are commonly stored together with grain and therefore actual chametz might actually end up mixed inside the *kitniyos* container; cooked dishes made from grain and *kitniyos* look similar; and that *kitniyos* can likewise be ground up into flour — a "bread" of sorts can actually be made from them. Since there are many who will not be able to differentiate between these "breads" and their biblically forbidden chametz counterparts, *kitniyos* was deemed as prohibited.

Potatoes, Peanuts, and Corn...Oh My!

So how does our quinoa measure up? Although it has been used in the Andes for millennia, it has only recently gained popularity around the world. Does quinoa fit the *kitniyos* criteria or not?

Perhaps we can glean some insight into quinoa's *kitniyos* status from *halachic* precedents of other now-common food staples that were introduced long after the *kitniyos* prohibition started, such as potatoes, peanuts and corn.

It would seemingly be quite difficult for anyone to mix up potatoes with chametz grain, so citing that rationale to regard potatoes as *kitniyos* is out. But, potatoes can be and are made into potato flour and potato starch, and there are those who do bake “potato ‘bread’! If so, why would potatoes *not* be considered *kitniyos*? According to this, shouldn't they be forbidden for *Ashkenazim* to partake of on Pesach?

In fact, a not widely known teaching of the *Chayei Adam* seemingly considers potatoes as *kitniyos*, and the *Pri Megadim* mentioned that he knows of such a custom to prohibit potatoes on Pesach as a type of *kitniyos*. However, the vast majority of authorities rule that potatoes are not any form of *kitniyos* and are permissible to all on Pesach.

One of the main reasons for this is that at the time when the *Ashkenazic* Rishonim established the decree prohibiting *kitniyos*, potatoes were completely unknown! It is possible that had they been readily available, they might have found themselves on the “forbidden list” as well. Yet, since they were never included, and do not fit most of the *kitniyos* criteria, contemporary authorities could not add “new types” to the list.

However, it must be noted that there are other important reasons why potatoes were excluded. Of the four criteria given for the decree of *kitniyos*, potatoes fit only one, that it can be made into flour, and that a “bread” of sorts can be baked from it. No one would mix up a potato with a grain kernel!

As Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach noted, *Klal Yisrael* never accepted the *kitniyos* prohibition with the inclusion of potatoes.

We find that similar “New World” logic was used by several *Poskim*, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, to permit peanuts for Pesach for those who did not

have an opposing *minhag*. Yet, this was not as widely accepted since peanuts, a true legume, and as opposed to potatoes, can get mixed up with grain. In fact, the *minhag* in Yerushalayim (dating back at least several centuries) is to consider both the peanut and its oil to be *kitniyos*.

On the other hand, we find that another New World crop, corn, was seemingly unanimously included as part of the *kitniyos* prohibition. Aside from the fact that the words *corn* and *grain* both stem from the same root, corn is actually only the name for the grain called maize, which is used in the United States, Canada, and Australia. In other parts of the English-speaking world and much of Europe, the term “corn” is a generic term for cereal crops, such as real *chametz* – wheat, barley, oats, spelt or rye. In fact, the infamous British Corn Laws (1815-1846) were concerning wheat and other grains – not corn!

Additionally, corn exhibits many characteristics of real-deal *kitniyos*: it grows near other grains, has small kernels, is made into flour (that can be easily confused with grain flour), and corn bread is made from it. Therefore, since corn fits many criteria of *kitniyos*, as opposed to potatoes, it was included in the prohibition.

Contemporary Quinoa Controversy

All this said, we ask: “Which category should quinoa be a part of?”

- Like the potato and be excluded from the prohibition?
- Or like corn and be considered *kitniyos*?

Actually, contemporary authorities and Kashrus agencies have been debating this very question.

It turns out that quinoa is halachically similar to the peanut, meaning that its status is debated.

View # 1 – Quinoa is not *Kitniyos* (Star-K, cRc, and Kof-K)

Several major American Kashrus agencies, including the Star-K, who follow the *psak* of Rav

Moshe Heinemann, and the cRc (Chicago Rabbinical Council), following the *psak* of Rav Gedalia Dov Schwartz, as well as the Kof-K, maintain that quinoa is essentially Kosher for Pesach. Since it is not even remotely related to the five grains (it is also not a legume and not botanically related to peas and beans, which are of the original species of *kitniyos* included in the decree), and was not around at the time of the *kitniyos* prohibition, it is not considered *kitniyos*. Additionally, the Star-K tested quinoa to see if it would rise – yet, instead, it decayed, which is a sure sign that it is not a true grain. The only issue, according to them, is the fact that quinoa is processed in facilities that other grains are processed in. Therefore, they maintain, if quinoa is processed in facilities under special, reliable Pesach supervision, there is no Pesach problem. In fact, every year since, the Star-K has given special Kosher for Passover *hashgacha* on certain types of quinoa.

View # 2 – Quinoa is Classified as *Kitniyos*

However, Rav Yisrael Belsky, *zatzal*, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaas and chief *Posek* for the OU, disagreed. He argued that since quinoa fits every criterion for *kitniyos*, it should be included in its prohibition. Quinoa is the staple grain in its country of origin. It is grown in proximity of and can be mixed up with the five grains. It is collected and processed in the same way (and in the same facilities) as the five grains, and is cooked into porridge and breads, the same as the five grains. He maintained that it should be compared to corn, which was, for similar reasons, included in the *kitniyos* prohibition.

Although quinoa is a New World food item and was not included in the original prohibition, nevertheless, he explained that that line of reasoning applies exclusively to items that are not clearly *kitniyos*, to foods that may share only several characteristics with *kitniyos*. However, since quinoa and corn would certainly have been included in the *gezeira* had they been discovered, as they share every criterion of *kitniyos*, they are consequently, by

definition, considered *kitniyos*. This stringent view is shared by the rulings of Rav Dovid Feinstein, Rav Osher Yaakov Westheim of the *Badatz Igud Rabbanim* of Manchester, and Rav Shlomo Miller of Toronto, among other well-known *Rabbanim*.

The OU and OK's Approach

On the other hand, the OU's other main *Posek*, Rav Herschel Schachter, Rosh Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (Y.U.), permits quinoa, concluding that if it processed in a special facility with no other grains, it should be permitted for Passover use.

Due to the difference of opinions of their top *Poskim*, until fairly recently, the OU did not certify quinoa as Kosher for Pesach. However, in late 2013, the OU made a decision allowing quinoa for Pesach, provided that it is processed with special Passover supervision. In fact, the OU recommended quinoa for Pesach 2014, and actually started certifying special Pesach processing runs. This certification continued for Pesach 2015, and currently the OU continues to grant special Pesach supervision annually for quinoa.

Similarly, although the OK considered quinoa *kitniyos* for many years, in 2018 they reversed their longstanding policy and no longer regard quinoa as *kitniyos*. As such, they presently allow it to be served at their Pesach programs, provided that it has supervision and certification for Pesach. However, they currently do not actually grant certification to quinoa as “Kosher for Passover.”

Other Agencies and *Poskim*

Although by 2019 all the American “Big Five” kashrut agencies had either permitted or actually certified quinoa for Pesach, on the other hand, not every kashrut agency in North America agrees with this permissive ruling. For example, the *Hisachdus HaRabbanim* (CRC) does not recommend quinoa for Pesach, as they consider it *kitniyos*, as does the COR of Toronto and the MK of Montreal. This is also the *Badatz Eidah Hachareidis* of Yerushalayim's approach, as in their annual *Madrichei HaKashrus* they maintain that food

items which are planted in the ground as seeds (*zironim*), harvested as seeds (*garinim*) and are edible, are considered *kitniyos*. As mentioned previously, the Yerushalmi *mesorah* for this goes back centuries. They therefore quite definitively include quinoa as *kitniyos*.

The View from Israel

Other *Poskim* who ruled similarly include Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, who determined that quinoa should be considered *kitniyos* after being shown it and hearing from representatives of various *kashrus* agencies. Also, Rav Asher Weiss (the renowned *Minchas Asher*) addressed this topic in his weekly *halacha shiur*, as well as in several responsa (including one to this author), and concluded that it is indeed *kitniyos*. This is also the opinion of Rav Yehoshua Yeshaya Neuwirth, venerated author of *Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa*, Rav Yaakov Ariel of Ramat Gan, and Rav Mordechai Najari of Ma'aleh Adumim. Similarly, the current Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rav Dovid Lau, wrote that quinoa is permitted on Pesach only for “*Ochlei Kitniyot*.” This also appears to be the Israeli Rabbanut’s position.

Additionally, the largest Sefardic kashrut agencies in Israel, the *Beit Yosef* and Rav Shlomo Machpud’s *Yoreh Deah*, although giving *hashgacha* on quinoa for Pesach, both qualify that it is reserved exclusively for “*Ochlei Kitniyot*,” squarely calling quinoa *kitniyot*. In light of all this, in addition to the *Badatz Eidah Hachareidis*’s prevailing approach of following the Yerushalmi custom that is based on the students of the Vilna Gaon, it seems much less likely to see quinoa gracing Pesach tables in Eretz Yisrael.

A Balanced Approach

Rav Avraham Blumenkrantz, *zatzal*, in his annual *Kovetz Hilchos Pesach*, took a middle of the road approach, acknowledging both sides of this quinoa

quarrel. He did not give *carte blanche* for everyone to use it on Pesach, but concluded that anyone who suffers from gluten or any Pesach-related allergies or conditions (e.g., celiac) may comfortably use quinoa on Pesach without hesitation. This is also the opinion of Rav Dovid Ribiat, author of *The Thirty-Nine Melachos*, as well as the view of the London Beis Din (KLBD).

Rav Mordechai Tendler, grandson of Rav Moshe Feinstein and author of *Mesoros Moshe*, told this author that this is the approach that he felt his venerated grandfather would have taken, and not (as many mistakenly opine) that Rav Moshe would have permitted it outright, had quinoa been introduced while he was still alive.

In this author’s estimation, the point Rav Tendler was making is that there seems to be a common misconception that Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his oft-cited *teshuva* defining peanuts’ *kitniyos* status, gave a blanket *hetter* for any “New World” food item. In this author’s opinion, this is not entirely correct as, as I mentioned previously, everyone considers corn as *kitniyos* even though it was introduced long after the *kitniyos* restriction. Rather, Rav Moshe used that as a *sevara* (and he was neither the first nor the only *Posek* to do so) to explain why potatoes were not included in the restriction, as well as peanuts for those who did not have an existing *minhag*.

Meaning, Rav Moshe held that *minhag* and similarity to all *kitniyos* factors also play an important role in classifying *kitniyos*. Therefore, he did not intend to give a blanket permit for every “new food.” As such, Rav Tendler was relating that it would seem tenuous at best to apply that *teshuva* as the exclusive basis to a *hetter* permitting quinoa for Pesach.

This is also the understanding of his uncle, Rav Moshe’s son, Rav Dovid Feinstein, as well as his father and Rav Moshe’s son-in-law, Rav Moshe Dovid Tendler, both of whom do not recommend *Ashkezaim* eating quinoa on Pesach. In fact, this is explicitly written as Rav Moshe’s halachic view in the recently published *Mesoros Moshe* vol. 2, where Rav Moshe related that although corn is also a

New World food item, it was nonetheless added to the restriction since it fits many of the same criteria of the prohibited *kitniyos*, as opposed to potatoes and peanuts.

Quinoa Conclusion?

It seems that there truly is no quiet clear-cut conclusion to this contemporary kashrus controversy. May one eat it on Pesach? One must ask his own personal, local *halachic* authority for

guidance to clear up any quinoa /*kitniyos* kashrus confusion or questions.

All else being equal, in this author's mind one thing is certain, regarding a holiday that is all about *mesorah* and tradition: Quinoa was not served at Bubby's Seder!

**Rabbi Yehuda Spitz* is the author of recently published, highly acclaimed *sefer* called *Food: A Halachic Analysis*, published by Mosaica Press, which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue of *Ohrnet Magazine* by Rabbi Shlomo Simon.

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A Pesach Cleaning Primer

The following instructions are by no means a complete halachic guide for Pesach. A Rabbi should be consulted for any questions and doubts that arise, and refer to the many books available that present the halachot in detail. The following instructions are based on classes given by Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg.

1. All places or articles into which chametz (leavened grain products, eg. bread, crackers, cake) is usually brought during the year must be cleansed and checked for chametz before the evening preceding the seder. The search for chametz (details of which can be found in the Haggadah) is started at nightfall on the evening preceding the seder.
2. Any article or place which is not used on Pesach, which is closed up and sold, does not need to be checked for chametz.
3. Chametz which has been rendered inedible (even to an animal) by being soaked in a foul-tasting liquid such as detergent, "Draino", bleach or ammonia is not considered chametz.
4. There is no obligation to check and destroy chametz that is less than the size of an olive (approx. 30 grams) and is so dirty that a person would not eat it.
5. Surfaces, closets and cracks where it is possible that chametz has entered should be washed, ensuring that detergent enters all cracks and crevices.
6. Kashering for Pesach is done in the same way as during the year
7. It is customary to also cover any surfaces that have been kashered and that will be used for food or for utensils on Pesach e.g. tables, countertops, cabinets and stovetops, with plastic, linoleum or aluminium foil.
8. Any chametz that will not be consumed or destroyed before Pesach, must be sold to a Gentile before the time of prohibition of chametz (the time of the prohibition is printed in Jewish calendars and newspapers) for all of Pesach. The transaction should be performed by a Rabbi, since the laws are complex and a contract is necessary. The chametz that has been sold must be stored away until after Pesach.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Pesach: The Sickle and the Exile

On the second night of Passover, we begin *Sefirat HaOmer* (“counting of the Omer”), which counts the fifty days from when the annual barley offering was brought in the Holy Temple until the holiday of Shavuot. The Torah commands that this counting begin “when the sickle (*chermesh*) commences upon the standing-grain” (Deut. 16:9). This expression refers to using the sickle to harvest barley on the second night of Passover, to be brought as part of the annual Omer-offering the next morning. Yet, when the *mishna* (*Menachot* 10:3) describes the public affair of cutting the Omer, it uses a different word for the tool used: *magal*. The *mishna* reports that the harvester would hold up a *magal*, and ask the assembled crowd, “Is this a *magal*?” And those in attendance would answer, “Yes!” He would then ask again, “Is this a *magal*?” And the crowd would again respond, “Yes!” This leads us to the obvious question: Why does the *mishna* call the tool used for harvesting barley a *magal*, since the Torah calls it a *chermesh*? Are *chermesh* and *magal* synonyms? Is there a difference between these two words?

The word *chermesh* appears twice in the Bible — both times in the Book of Deuteronomy: Once when describing the Cutting of the Omer (as mentioned above), and once when prohibiting a worker from using a *chermesh* to harvest the landowner’s produce for his own consumption (Deut. 23:26). Similarly, the word *magal* also appears twice in the Bible, both in conjunction with the tool used for harvesting (Jer. 50:16, Yoel 4:12). When it comes to the Mishna, the word *magal* appears multiple times (*Sheviit* 5:6, *Menachot* 10:3, *Keilim* 13:1, 15:4), but *chermesh* never appears in the Mishna (although it is found once in the *Tosefta*, see *Tosefta Bava Metzia* 2:14).

What is the relationship between the words *chermesh* and *magal*? Each time that *chermesh* appears in the Bible (Deut. 16:9, 23:26), the Targumim translate the Hebrew *chermesh* into

Aramaic as *magla*. This suggests that while the Biblical word *chermesh* is Hebrew, the Biblical word *magal* is actually a Hebraicized form of the Aramaic word *magla*. Indeed, the *Sifrei* (to Deut. 23:26) also explains that *chermesh* means *magal*. This would suggest that the two terms in question are actually synonymous, but that *chermesh* is of Hebrew origin, while *magal* is of Aramaic origin. This accounts for why the Book of Deuteronomy, which was written earlier, would use the purely Hebrew term for the harvesting tool in question, while the later prophets (Jeremiah and Yoel) and the *mishna*, which were written after Aramaic became more prevalent, would use the Aramaic-influenced term.

Indeed, Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* writes that the word *magal* is a cognate of the Arabic word *almunajil* (“sickle”). Maimonides (in his commentaries on *Peah* 4:4 and *Sheviit* 4:6) also uses that Arabic term to define *magal*. According to this, *magal* should technically be *mangal*, with an extra NUN in the middle, but the NUN is dropped as often happens. Maimonides, in his commentary to *Sheviit* 5:6, writes that the *mishnaic* term *magalyad* means “a small *chermesh*,” again showing that the words *magal* and *chermesh* mean the same thing.

Israeli archaeologist Dr. Shmuel Yeivin (1896-1982) writes that some scholars have proposed that *chermesh* refers to a “sickle,” while *magal* refers to the larger “scythe.” However, Yeivin rejects this proposal arguing that there is no basis in the Bible for such a distinction. He also notes that from an archeological perspective, this explanation is untenable because there is no evidence of the existence of the scythe in Biblical Times. Thirdly, he explains that in Mishnaic Hebrew, the term *magal* referred to both a sickle and a scythe, but that they differentiated between the two by using a modifier attached to the word *magal*, like we saw earlier where the smaller sickle is called a *magalyad* (while the larger scythe is called a *magal-kotzer*).

Instead, Yeivin explains that both *chermesh* and *magal* refer to the exact same harvesting tool, but that the term *magal* is of later usage (hence, its appearance in the books of the prophets), while Deuteronomy uses the more archaic word *chermesh*.

Yeivin further suggests that the word *chermesh* is related to the Hebrew word *chalamish* (“flintstone”), given the interchangeability of REISH and LAMMED. As a result of this, he proposes that perhaps the *chermesh* was a cruder harvesting tool made of stone (from the earlier “Stone Age”), while the *magal* was a more technologically-advanced version of the same tool that was made of metal (from the later “Bronze Age” or “Iron Age”).

There are two more theories as to the etymology of the word *chermesh*: Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 25:6) theorizes that Hebrew words with seemingly four-letter roots in which the final letter is a SHIN are really derived from three-letter roots, with the added SHIN as a radical unrelated to the core root. Using that methodology, he explains that the root of the word *chermesh* is the triliteral CHET-REISH-MEM, *cherem* (“destroy” or “ban”), and the added SHIN means that *chermesh* denotes the tool used for destroying or cutting. Dr. Shlomo Mandelkorn (1846-1902), in his concordance of Biblical Hebrew *Heichal HaKodesh*, also suggests that *chermesh* is derived from *cherem*.

Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, offers another theory as to the etymology of *chermesh*. He argues that the quadrilateral root of *chermesh* actually reflects the merging of the two biliteral roots CHET-REISH (“hole”) and MEM-SHIN (“move”), because this tool cuts (i.e. “creates a hole”) grain and allows it to be moved from its present location.

The Italian Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe David Valle (1697-1777) writes that the word *chermesh* is a portmanteau of the words *cherem* (“ban”) and *aish* (“fire”), thus associating it with the realm of justice, as opposed to *magal*, which he understands as alluding to the realm of mercy. Alternatively, Rabbi Valle reads the word *chermesh* as an acronym for the phrase: “*chafetz retzono marbeh sheilato*,” which essentially teaches that the more a person

tries to attain all his wants and desires, the needier he will end up being.

In another Kabbalistic exposition related to these words, Rabbi Chaim Vital (1543-1620) offers an esoteric explanation of the cutting of the Omer (Deut. 16:9), which he homiletically interprets as speaking of a person’s lifespan. The way he reads it, the hidden message in that passage is that once a person reaches the age of twenty and becomes liable for Divine punishment for his sins, a person remains in that situation for the next fifty years – until he reaches the age of seventy, the archetypal lifespan of a human in the Bible. In supporting this explication of the verse, Rabbi Chaim Vital notes that the word *chermesh* has a *gematria* value of 548, which equals the *gematria* of the phrase “and the Angel of Death” (reminiscent of popular depictions of the Grim Reaper with his scythe/sickle). Thus, as Rabbi Chaim Vital explains, it is the word *chermesh* that introduces the element of punishment and death to the interpretation of this verse. Rabbi Vital then asserts that the Bible uses the word *chermesh* here, instead of *magal*, precisely to teach us this lesson!

Concerning the word *magal*, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that its root is the two-letter GIMMEL-LAMMED, which primarily means “round.” Other words derived from this include *gal* (“heap” of stones in a circular formation), *galgal* (“wheel”), and *megillah* (a “scroll,” which is rolled up). He explains that *magal* relates to this root because the sickle’s blade is curved and almost forms a circle.

Rabbi Pappenheim also traces the words *galut* (“exile”) and *geulah* (“redemption”) to this two-letter root. His particular way of connecting those words to the core meaning of GIMMEL-LAMMED is a bit complex, but I would suggest that the connection lies in the cyclic nature of the exile-redemption-exile paradigm that prevails until the final redemption. In light of this understanding, I would like to further suggest that the rabbis preferred the word *magal* to *chermesh* because the word *magal* etymologically fits with the theme of Passover that stresses the freedom associated with the transition from *galut* to *geulah*.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

WHEN ENOUGH IS NOT ENOUGH

One of the many highlights of my Seder is the paragraph beginning with the words, “How many goodly benefits have we received from Hashem!” It is such a highlight to me because of its incredibly catchy tune, plus the constant repetition of the refrain “*Dayeinu* – Enough!” As a child, I waited and waited during Seder night until it was time to sing it, and, as everybody began, I would belt it out at the top of my lungs. I am not sure that anyone else among the many participants present particularly enjoyed my annual performance, but I certainly did! Of course, when I was younger I never really understood the words and I was not overly aware of what I was singing – but that did not dampen my enthusiasm. The thrill of singing it at the Seder was truly unparalleled. Even today, decades later, as I sit at the Seder with my children and grandchildren, I am overwhelmed with delight when I see just how excited they are to join me in a grand rendition of *Dayeinu*. It may not be the stuff that operas are made of, but whatever might be lacking in musical prowess is more than made up for with huge amounts of gusto and equal amounts of unbridled joy.

As I got older, it began to occur to me that, in my mind, some parts of the song did not seem logical. For example: If Hashem had given us their wealth and had not split the sea for us, *Dayeinu*. Why would it have been *Dayeinu*, why would it have been enough? How were we supposed to travel through the water if Hashem had not made a passageway for us? Or: If He had sunk our oppressors and not supplied us with our needs in the desert for forty years, *Dayeinu*. But, how were we supposed to survive in the hostile environment of the desert without Hashem looking after us? And, perhaps the most puzzling of all: If He would have gathered us at Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, *Dayeinu*. Our Sages teach that the world was created so that the Jewish nation could receive the Torah. What could possibly be the point of Hashem bringing us all the way to Mount

Sinai in the most miraculous fashion and then not giving us His Torah?

Over the years, I have found many different approaches to the meaning of *Dayeinu*, but there is one explanation whose message strongly resonates within me. The 19th century prodigy Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel [Wisser], known by the acronym of his Hebrew name – *Malbim* – wrote a commentary on Tanach that is regarded as a classic in Torah scholarship and displayed exquisite mastery over Biblical Hebrew grammar. He explains that in the context of the poem, the word *dayeinu* does not mean “enough.” Rather, it means “it is sufficient.”

Sufficient for what? To acknowledge the extent of our debt of gratitude to G-d for everything that He has done for us. The Rabbis explain that acknowledging a debt of gratitude is not measured by the benefactor’s efforts. It is measured by the impact on the recipient. When someone benefits from someone else – whether the benefactor did or did not need to provide the benefit and whether it was or was not a bother for him – the beneficiary has a responsibility to recognize that he owes his benefactor a debt of gratitude. This recognition, explains the Malbim, is what *Dayeinu* is conveying. The Malbim’s explanation is so clear, and yet sometimes the more obvious something is, the less we realize it.

The Malbim also provides insight into how we can recognize and react to the kindnesses that were done to us. *Dayeinu* begins with the very last moments of our slavery in Egypt and concludes with the building of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. However, we do not just recount that once we were slaves and that the Holy Temple was built in Jerusalem. Rather, *Dayeinu* breaks down the experience into smaller parts so that we can begin to have a greater

understanding of the enormity of what Hashem did for us. Each verse in the poem points to another

moment for realizing each distinct detail as being comprised of countless other details that we should also be noticing. The Malbim teaches us that the closer we analyze something, the greater is our ability to identify more and more aspects that we need to be thankful for. The more individual parts that we can break an action down into, the greater will be our appreciation. His lesson is even more applicable when things look particularly bleak because there is *always* a need and reason to acknowledge Hashem's goodness. When Rabbi Aharon Kotler – the legendary visionary and founder of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood – was at the end of his life, suffering terribly, his wife tried to encourage him by telling him that it will be good. And Rabbi Kotler's reply was, "It is *already* good – it will be *better*." A person who lives in a state of perpetual spiritual

awareness recognizes an immeasurable gratitude to Hashem – regardless of the present circumstances.

This year, as with each year, I look forward to Seder night with great anticipation. I look forward to sharing it together with my children and grandchildren, and I am absolutely waiting for the moment when we all sing *Dayeinu* together. And just before we begin, I hope to remind everyone present of the Malbim's explanation for the word *dayeinu*. It expresses our need to look carefully at our lives and personally thank Hashem for *everything* that He gives us. And then we can truly declare "*Dayeinu!*"

We do not say "it's enough!" We can never have "enough" of Hashem's blessings. But "*Dayeinu*" – each individual blessing that Hashem has bestowed upon us is enough of a reason by itself for us to give heartfelt thanks to Him. Each blessing is a reason to sing aloud our thanks, enthusiastically and with heartfelt feeling.

**Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet on
The Morning Blessings
by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Tzav

The Torah addresses Aharon and his sons to teach them additional laws relating to their service. The ashes of the *korban olah* – the offering burned on the Altar throughout the night – are to be removed from the area by the *kohen* after he changes his special linen clothing. The *olah* is brought by someone who forgot to perform a positive commandment of the Torah. The *kohen* retains the skin. The fire on the Altar must be kept constantly ablaze. The *korban mincha* is a meal-offering of flour, oil and spices. A handful is burned on the Altar and a *kohen* eats the remainder before it becomes leaven. The Torah portion describes the special *korbanot* to be offered by the *Kohen Gadol* each day and by Aharon's sons and future descendants on the day of their inauguration. The *chatat*, the *korban* brought after certain accidental transgressions, is described, as are the laws of slaughtering and sprinkling the blood of the *asham* guilt-korban. The details of *shelamim*, various peace *korbanot*, are described, including the prohibition against leaving uneaten until morning the remains of the *todah*, the thanksgiving-korban. All sacrifices must be burned after they may no longer be eaten. No sacrifice may be eaten if it was slaughtered with the intention of eating it too late. Once they have become ritually impure, *korbanot* may not be eaten and should be burned. One may not eat a *korban* when he is ritually impure. Blood and *chelev* (certain animal fats) are prohibited to be eaten. Aharon and his sons are granted the breast and shank of every *korban shelamim*. The inauguration ceremony for Aharon, his sons, the Mishkan and all of its vessels is detailed.

Shemini

On the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan, Aharon, his sons, and the entire nation bring various *korbanot* (offerings) as commanded by Moshe.

Aharon and Moshe bless the nation. G-d allows the Jewish People to sense His Presence after they complete the Mishkan. Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, innovate an offering not commanded by G-d. A fire comes from before G-d and consumes them, stressing the need to perform the commandments only as Moshe directs. Moshe consoles Aharon, who grieves in silence. Moshe directs the *kohanim* regarding their behavior during the mourning period, and warns them that they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Mishkan. The Torah lists the two characteristics of a kosher animal: It has split hooves, and it chews, regurgitates, and re-chews its food. The Torah specifies by name those non-kosher animals which have only one of these two signs. A kosher fish has fins and easily removable scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden families are permitted. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Details are given of the purification process after coming in contact with ritually-impure species. The Jewish People are commanded to be separate and holy – like Hashem.

Tazria

The Torah commands a woman to bring *korbanot* after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. The Torah introduces the phenomenon of *tzara'at* (often mistranslated as leprosy) – a miraculous affliction that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A *kohen* must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is *tzara'at* or not. The *kohen* isolates the sufferer for a week. If the malady remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the *kohen* decides the person's status. The Torah describes the different forms of *tzara'at*. A person whose *tzara'at* is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The

phenomenon of *tzara'at* on clothing is described in detail

Metzora

The Torah describes the procedure for a *metzora* (a person afflicted with *tzara'at*) upon the conclusion of his isolation period. This process extends for a week and involves *korbanot* and immersions in the *mikveh*. Then, a *kohen* must pronounce the *metzora* pure. A *metzora* of limited financial means may substitute lesser offerings for the more expensive animals.

Before a *kohen* diagnoses that a house has *tzara'at*, household possessions are removed to prevent them from also being declared ritually impure. The *tzara'at* is removed by smashing and rebuilding that section of the house. If the *tzara'at* signs reappear, the entire building must be razed. The Torah details which bodily secretions render a person spiritually impure, and thereby prevent his contact with holy items. And the Torah defines how one regains a state of ritual purity.

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions
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by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

Food: A Halachic Analysis

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Mosaica Press (2021) 483 pages

I was tempted to begin my review of Rabbi Spitz's newest addition to Ohr Somayach's Jewish Learning Library by saying that one cannot read it and remain *parve*. But that sounded too corny (which is *parve*) so I rejected it in favor of the following:

When I was asked by Ohrnet's editor, Rabbi Moshe Newman, to review Rabbi Spitz's book, *Food: a Halachic Analysis*, I was hesitant. I told him that I would consider it. It is a big book – with more than 480 pages. And I thought to myself, it's probably very densely written with esoteric discussions on the various problems involved in the certification of food products and most likely filled with extensive footnotes, referencing *halachic* discussions. In short, I thought it was going to be quite boring.

Boy, was I wrong! This book reads more like a fast-paced, page-turning detective novel than a dry *Halacha sefer*. But that is its uniqueness and brilliance. The author has managed to write a *sefer* that is both comprehensive in its treatment of every topic discussed and excellently written. Even the footnotes, which account for most of the text, are intriguing and well written.

In his Foreword to the *sefer*, attesting to Rabbi Spitz's scholarship Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz, well known for his own encyclopedic knowledge, noted several remarkable features of this book:

“Accuracy: many *halachic* works, both in English and in Hebrew, will quote or paraphrase sources based on how those sources are cited in earlier works without bothering to verify the original source. More than once, this has led to the widespread perpetuation of error, as a mistake or omission by one author gets

automatically followed by later authors, as each one uses the predecessor text as the source. Rabbi Spitz has gone to great effort to trace every quoted *psak* and *sevara* to its original source and does not rely on secondary quotations or paraphrases. And if there is ambiguity in the reports he will note it.

“A completeness: When Rabbi Spitz addresses a topic, he will give you all the views on the topic. He does not limit himself to a selection of the views he finds most persuasive. He includes many oral *psakim* that cannot always be found in writing and carefully documents the source of them as well....”

The subjects discussed are also very topical and are quite interesting. They include, among others, the following chapters headings: Hard Cheese Complexities; The Great Dishwasher Debate; Genetically Engineered Meat; Buffalo Burgers and Zebu Controversy; The *Erev Pesach* Meat Scandal; The *Halachic* Adventures of the Potato; The Quinoa-Kitniyos Conundrum; The Coca-Cola Kashrus Controversy; *Chodosh* in *Chutz La'aretz*; Margarine, Misconceptions, and *Maris Ayin*; *Chalav Yisrael*: A *Halachic* History; *Kashering* Teeth; and my favorite – Leeuwenhoek's *Halachic* Legacy: Microscopes and Magnifying Glasses.

He masterfully shows connections between stories in the *Chumash* and contemporary *halachic* issues. In discussing the need for a *hekker* (a physical object which functions as a reminder not to mix milk and meat) when two or more individuals are eating their separate dairy and meat meals at the same table, he brings *halachic* sources that cite the story in *Parshat Vayera* of *Avraham Avinu* feeding the three angels, disguised as Arabs, tongue and butter. The Torah

tells us: “And he stood over them, under the tree, and they ate.” Why was it necessary to mention the fact that *Avraham* stood over them while they ate? Because, say these authorities, the three might have been eating milk and meat meals at the same time – and *Avraham* needed to supervise them to ensure that one would not take food from the other’s plate. A *shomer* (a supervisor) can also function as a *hekker*.

I was particularly impressed by Rabbi Spitz’s mastery of the science behind many of the Halachic issues discussed. In his chapter on genetically engineered meat, he seems to have a firm grasp on the biology and chemistry involved in its making. This is especially important in today’s world of food production, which is increasingly high-tech and difficult for even the average rabbi, not involved in this specialty, to understand.

Rabbi Spitz seems to be indefatigable in his research. Even after exhausting all the written literature on a topic, he recounts extensive discussions of these issues with the top *poskim* of our day.

I have seen many excellent *halacha sefarim* in English which are informative, some which are even scholarly, but none which are informative and scholarly and humorous. As an example, in his chapter titled “Microscopes and Magnifying glasses,” he concludes as follows:

“Still, the bottom line is that using a magnifier or microscope to see something that *cannot* be seen at all by the naked eye would have no *halachic* bearing whatsoever, ‘*bein lehakel bein lehachmir*’. So, although Leeuwenhoek’s (the inventor of the microscope) impact on the world in various important areas is immeasurable, nevertheless, his *halachic* legacy remains – quite ironically – microscopic.”

I highly recommend this book to every Jew who likes to eat, wants a deeper understanding of keeping kosher – and who has a sense of humor.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Tzav

In With the Old – In with the New

There were two daily commandments regarding the leftover ashes on the Altar that were to be performed before arranging the pyre and kindling the Altar fire. The first, *terumat hadeshen*, consisted of taking one shovel filled with charcoal ash and placing it near the Altar. The second, *hotza’at hadeshen*, consisted of cleaning the Altar from all its ashes and removing it from the Jewish camp.

The act of cleaning the Altar was a housekeeping function, necessary to prepare the Altar for the new day’s service. But the act of removing a handful of the ashes of yesterday’s service was an act of service with a different function. Each day’s handful of ashes

was carefully placed next to the Altar, with special care taken so that it would not scatter. These ashes were placed on the east side of the Altar – the side entrance for the people – so that they would serve to all as a remembrance of yesterday’s service.

These ashes had profound significance – they reminded the nation, at the transition to the service of the day that is about to begin, that the new day does not bring new tasks. The task that is incumbent upon us today is the same task that was incumbent upon us yesterday. Every Jewish grandchild stands in the place where his first ancestors already stood, and each new day adds its contribution to the fulfillment of the one task assigned to all generations. The mission is unchanging.

Atoning Consecration

Normally, an object used in the Temple service which has completed its function is no longer subject to the prohibition of *me'ilah* – use of that object or remnant for profane purposes. This is the case with the *remainder* of the ashes, excluding this one daily handful. However, the *terumat hadeshen* – the handful removed – retained its holy character forever. Its holiness was never exhausted. This is because, in a deeper sense, the purpose of lifting the ashes was not to deposit them – that would have rendered them exhausted after deposit. Rather, because these ashes serve to recall the past throughout the future, that mission sustains their holy character forever.

If the *terumat hadeshen* begins the new day with a reminder that today's service presents the same task as yesterday's, *hotza'at hadeshen* signifies that the old must be cleared to make way for fresh devotion. We are to approach the task as though we had never accomplished anything before. While the memory of yesterday's performance is to anchor our mission, it should not inhibit our own performance. Yesterday's accomplishments belong to yesterday. Each day begins a new task. Every trace of yesterday's devotion must be removed so that the new day can begin on a new basis.

While performing these acts of service, the *kohen* wore older and more worn-out priestly garments. He wore these humble garments when occupied with yesterday's service to signal that we should not pride ourselves on past accomplishments. Rather, every day summons our full energies and devotion.

In Rav Hirsch's day, reports circulated of recently discovered sections of earth in the Beis Yisrael neighborhood of Jerusalem, which were determined to be ashes of animal origin. A study in Germany in 1855 determined that this was the place where the Altar's ashes had been ultimately placed. Its location is only a few blocks from Ohr Somayach Yeshiva – a fitting symbol of the unchanging task with renewed devotion that characterizes the mission of the Yeshiva.

- Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 6:3-4

It is the eighth and final day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. Aharon is commanded to bring an offering – a calf as a sin-offering and a ram as an ascent-offering.

This is the only offering that requires a calf – a young, two-year-old calf, which is nearly at the age of maturity (three years). It is fitting that the *kohen* who is about to serve in the Sanctuary should represent himself with an animal approaching the age of maturity. Later, when he has already assumed the office of anointed *kohen*, he represents himself with a cow.

The two offerings represented his personal commitment to adhere to the lofty heights of his calling (the sin-offering), and his commitment to be a leader and model for the community, striding before them and guiding them to the heights of perfection (the ascent-offering).

There is another symbolism to the calf. This sin-offering was meant to atone for the sin of the golden calf, even though atonement has already been effected for this sin. Aharon had made the golden calf as a symbol of the powers *subservient* to G-d. But the people adopted a heathen belief and turned the golden calf into what they saw to be a divine power, ruling *coordinately* with G-d. In order to purify this stain, Aharon slaughters the calf, showing mastery over it. He then takes the blood of the calf and devotes it to the one G-d, showing that all serve Him. Through this offering, he expresses that the same physical force to which the heathen world bends its knee rules also within man. But man can rule over it with his moral freedom. Once nature is mastered by man's free will, then it too is sanctified and joined to G-d's service. When man grasps this truth, he atones for the sin of idolizing nature. The false god of nature – within and without – is subordinated.

The ascent-offering reverses the failure of Aharon to lead and guide the people. Instead of yielding to them as he once did, he vows to adhere always to

walk before them, to show them the way that leads to G-d.

It is with these two offerings of the individual and leadership commitment that the Sanctuary – the place of atonement – is consecrated.

- Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 9:2

Tazria-Metzora

Corrected Social Sin

The final step in the purification process of the Metzora is the offering of three sheep: one as a guilt-offering, one as an ascent-offering, and one as a sin-offering. The combining of these three shades of dedication is almost without parallel. (The *nazir* also brings all three types offering, but in the case of the *nazir*, the sin and ascent-offerings may be birds.) Furthermore, all three are accompanied by libations of oil, flour and wine – a phenomenon without parallel.

Tzara'at is a punishment not just for slander, but for other cardinal social sins, including haughtiness, deceit, bloodshed, rabble-rousing, perjury, sexual immorality, robbery and stinginess. (*Arachin 16a*; *Vaykira Rabbah, Metzora*). One who discovers a *tzara'at* mark (*nega*) understands that he has been “touched” by the finger of G-d (*nega* means touch). He understands that his social behavior provoked G-d's anger. On account of his foul social behavior, he is removed from the community. Because he incited unrest among his brethren, he is separated from everyone.

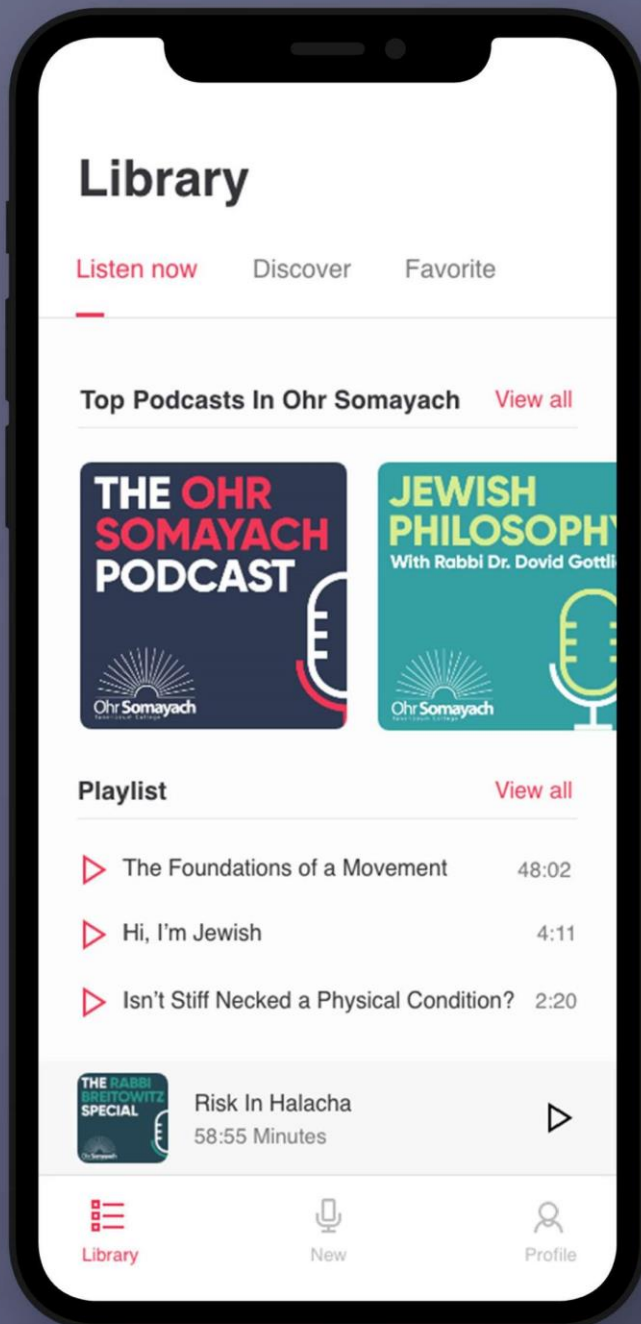
His offerings are intended as corrective measures for these social sins. All three animals are to be sheep – he must view himself as one who has been shepherded by G-d. In his arrogance – the root of all social sin – he forgot G-d. Part of his restoration includes reducing his ego and accepting his position

as a sheep in the flock being shepherded by G-d. All three offerings must be accompanied by flour, oil and wine, because upon re-entry into G-d's community, he must remember that all his possessions, his existence (flour), prosperity (oil) and joy (wine) in life depend on his faithfulness and duty, and not on his own power and devices.

The guilt-offering is most prominent among the three – and it reflects a personality who is on the verge of desolation due to his selfishness in the sphere of control and interests (The term for guilt-offering, *asham*, is related to the word for desolation, *shamem*.)

Normally, the blood of a guilt-offering is applied entirely to the Altar. But, in our case, the blood is applied to various parts of the *metzora*. This is highly significant, and seemingly paradoxical. We might have expected the blood – representing the life force – to be dedicated to the Altar as a sign of subordination and dedication to G-d. But instead, the blood is placed on the *metzora* himself! This guilt-offering represents the progress from desolation into life and health. An integral part of that process is a commitment to rehabilitate man's *own personality*. Man's care for his own personality, his aspirations for life and health, his healthy self-esteem and fulfillment are also endeavors dedicated to G-d. Part of the process of shedding the ego and arrogance that has put him on the verge of desolation is developing a healthy and vibrant sense of self and purpose. Only then can he rejoin the ranks of community, purged of social sin.

- Source: Commentary Vayikra 14:10, 14



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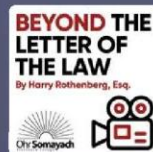
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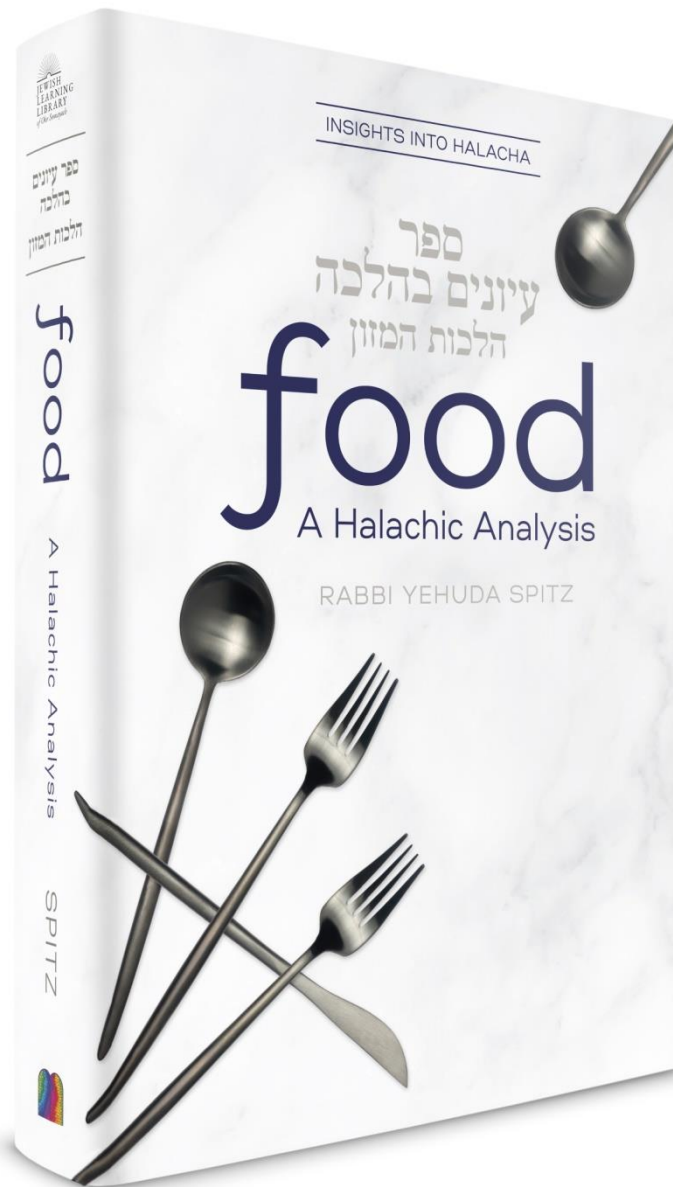
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Seder Night Companion

SEDER NIGHT is a highlight of the Jewish calendar for parents and children alike. It is the night that revolves around children, and parents are reminded of the importance of their role as educators. (Thankfully the Haggadah gives them lots of tools and tips!)

Rabbi Sacks זצ"ל explains that on the eve of the original Pesach, at the very moment when a new chapter in the life of the Jewish people began, we found out what it means to be a Jew: "About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators" (Radical Then, Radical Now, p. 32). Being a Jew means being both a student and an educator, and Seder night is our opportunity to focus on both these roles.

This educational companion to Seder night will give you some ideas and thoughts on several of the core pages from the Haggadah and how Rabbi Sacks understands them. As well as educational insights, like all *Ceremony & Celebration: Family Editions*, this Pesach instalment also includes activities, stories, and reflection questions in each section, designed to engage all the participants around your Seder table, young and old alike.

You will notice many extracts from Rabbi Sacks' writings, all sourced from *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*, published by Koren. This guide is designed to be used in conjunction with a Haggadah; it is not a replacement for one.



MA NISHTANAH



IN A NUTSHELL

There are four places in the Torah where it speaks of children asking questions about Pesach – and each of these four verses are the sources for the four children’s questions (see page 4). This inspired a tradition that the story of the Exodus from Egypt must be told, wherever possible, in response to the questions asked by children, and this is where the idea for the four questions in *Ma Nishtanah* comes from. The origin of the text is the Mishnah (Pesachim 10:4) although the words have changed slightly over time to reflect our changing practices (for instance, since the destruction of the Temple, we can no longer bring the Korban, so the fifth question (on serving roast meat) is no longer included in *Ma Nishtanah*).



DEEP DIVE

The Torah has two words for inheritance, *yerushah* and *nachalah*, and they represent the two different ways in which a heritage is passed on across the generations. The word *nachalah* comes from the root *nachal*, which also means ‘river’. It represents an inheritance that is merely handed down, without any work on the part of the recipient, as water flows in a river. *Yerushah*, by contrast, means active inheritance. R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch pointed out that *lareshet*, the verbal form of *yerushah*, sometimes means ‘to conquer’ or ‘to capture’. It means actively taking hold of what one has been promised. An inheritance for which one has worked is always more secure than one for which one has not. That is why Judaism encourages children to ask questions. When a child asks, they have already begun the work of preparing to receive. Torah is a

yerushah, not a *nachalah*. It needs work on behalf of the child if it is to be passed on across the generations.

Commentary on Ma Nishtanah,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

How does *Ma Nishtanah* and the role of children asking questions affect your experience of the Seder?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

Religious faith has often been seen as naive, blind, accepting. That is not the Jewish way. Judaism is not the suspension of critical intelligence. To the contrary: asking a question is itself a profound expression of faith in the intelligibility of the universe and the meaningfulness of human life. To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer. The fact that throughout history people have devoted their lives to extending the frontiers of knowledge is a compel-

ling testimony to the restlessness of the human spirit and its constant desire to go further, higher, deeper. Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith – that history is not random, that the universe is not impervious to our understanding, that what happens to us is not blind chance. We ask not because we doubt, but because we believe.

The Art of Asking Questions,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

How is asking questions “an expression of faith”? Doesn’t it show a lack of faith?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Why do you think we encourage children to ask questions on Seder night?
2. Are there any bad questions?
3. Do all questions have answers? What do we do if no one we know has the answer to a question?



A STORY FOR THE NIGHT OF STORIES

Isidor Rabi won the Nobel Prize in physics in 1944. When he was asked why he became a scientist, he replied: “My mother made me a scientist without ever intending to. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: ‘So? Did you learn anything today?’ But not my mother. ‘Izzy,’ she would say, ‘Did you ask a good question today?’ Asking good questions made me a scientist.”

Do you get more invested in learning when you are encouraged to ask questions?



IN A NUTSHELL

This is the beginning of the *Maggid* section of the Haggadah – the main section where we tell the story of the Exodus. It is also the start of the response to the questions asked in the *Ma Nishtanah*. Before we delve into the depths of the story of the Exodus itself, the Haggadah makes sure we realise how we are personally affected by this historical event. It reminds us that if not for the Exodus, we would still be slaves in Egypt! This passage also explains that the mitzvah of telling the story of Exodus is for everybody, (even the old and wise) and the story should be told at length to make it impactful.



DEEP DIVE

One of the rules of telling the story on Pesach is that each person must feel as if they had personally left Egypt. History becomes memory. The past becomes the present. At this stage, therefore, we speak of the continuing consequences of the past. Had the Exodus not happened, and the Israelites stayed in

Egypt, none of the subsequent events of Jewish history would have occurred. What and where we are now is the result of what happened then.

There is a fundamental difference between *knowing* and *telling* the story. We do not tell the narrative of the Exodus to know what happened in the past. We do so because each telling engraves that event more thoroughly in our memories, and because each year adds its own insights and interpretations. Judaism is a constant dialogue between past and present, and since the present always changes, there is always a new juxtaposition, a new facet of the story. The Sages said, “There is no house of study without *chiddush*, some new interpretation.’ The story of Pesach never grows old, because the struggle for freedom never ends, and therefore each generation adds its own commentary to the old-new story.

Commentary on Avadim Hayinu,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

What new aspect of the story, or the Haggadah, have you discovered this year? Share it with everyone at your Seder.



FURTHER THOUGHTS

To be a Jew is to know that over and above history is the task of memory. As Jacob Neusner eloquently wrote: “Civilisation hangs suspended, from generation to generation, by the gossamer strand of memory. If only one cohort of mothers and fathers fails to convey to its children what it has learnt from its parents, then the great chain of learning and wisdom snaps. If the guardians of human knowledge stumble only one time, in their fall collapses the whole edifice of knowledge and understanding” (Neusner on Judaism: Religion and Theology). More than any other faith,

Judaism made this a matter of religious obligation. Pesach is where the past does not die, but lives in the chapter we write in our own lives, and in the story we tell our children.

History and Memory,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Why do you think education has become so important in Judaism, and what impact has that had on Jewish history?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Why does the Haggadah say, “We were slaves in Egypt”? Were you a slave in Egypt?
2. Do you like long stories? Why do you think the Haggadah tells us that the longer we make this story, the better?
3. Why does the Haggadah have to point out that old and wise people still have to do this mitzvah?



EXPERIENCING THE SEDER

On Seder night we try to feel as if we ourselves are being freed from slavery in Egypt. During a point in the evening when the younger people seem less engaged (perhaps after we read of the Four Children, until it’s time for the Ten Plagues) send them away from the table to find costumes and prepare their own play of the Exodus from Egypt.

They’ll have to work quickly! To make it more challenging, you could ask the adults to choose a new genre for the play, such as adventure, science-fiction, or fantasy. The play can then be performed later on, during the meal.



THE FOUR CHILDREN



IN A NUTSHELL

The section of the Four Children in the Haggadah is based on the four different verses in the Torah which describe children asking their parents about the story of the Exodus. Rather than seeing these as just four examples of asking the same question, the Rabbis noticed four distinctive personalities from the different ways the verses are phrased – and this inspired the idea for four kinds of children.



DEEP DIVE

The four children are a vignette of the Jewish people. One asks because he wants to hear the answer. A second asks because he does *not* want to hear the answer. A third asks because he does not understand. The fourth does not ask because he doesn't understand that

he doesn't understand. Ours has never been a monolithic people.

Yet there is a message of hope in this family portrait. Though they disagree, they sit around the same table, telling the same story. Though they differ, they stay together. They are part of a single family. Even the rebel is there, although part of him does not want to be. This, too, is who we are.

The Jewish people is an extended family. We argue, we differ, there are times when we are deeply divided. Yet we are part of the same story. We share the same memories. At difficult times we can count on one another. We feel one another's pain. Out of this multiplicity of voices comes something none of us could achieve alone. Sitting next to the wise child, the rebel is not fated to remain a rebel. Sitting next to the rebel, the wise child may share his wisdom rather than keep it to himself. The one who cannot ask will, in time, learn how. The simple child will learn complexity.

The wise child will learn simplicity. Each draws strength from the others, as we all draw strength from belonging to a people.

Commentary on The Four Children,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Why do you think Jews argue so much with each other? Is this a strength or a weakness?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

Through the Haggadah, more than a hundred generations of Jews have handed on their story to their children. The word “*haggadah*” means “relate,” “tell,” “expound.” But it comes from another Hebrew root, [a-g-d] that means “bind,” “join,” “connect”. By reciting the Haggadah, Jews give their children a sense of connectedness to Jews throughout the world and to the Jewish people through time. It joins them to a past and



future, a history and destiny, and makes them characters in its drama. Every other nation known to humankind has been united because its members lived in the same place, spoke the same language, were part of the same culture. Jews alone, dispersed across continents, speaking different languages and participating in different cultures, have been bound together by a narrative, the Pesach narrative, which they tell in the same way on the same night. More than the Haggadah is the story of a people, Jews are the people of a story.

The Story of Stories,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

How can a story link us to Jews across generations and across geography?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Which of the four children are you most like (you can answer more than one)?

2. What do you see as the message of including four different children in the Haggadah? What advice would you give to a teacher or parent who has many different types of children to teach?
3. Why do you think that children are the central focus of such an important event as Seder night?



A STORY FOR THE NIGHT OF STORIES

When I was a baby I wouldn't talk. I was the youngest of five children, so I was surrounded by people who doted on me and gave me whatever I wanted. All I had to do was make a noise and point to get what I wanted. So it took me much longer to learn to talk. It worried my parents, and they took me to specialist doctors to make sure there was no deeper cause behind my late development.

When I started going to school, I couldn't sit still and focus for a minute. My mind would wander and then my

body would wander, and next thing I knew I was being told off, or worse, I would be sent to the Headteacher's office. I wasn't trying to be mischievous or rude. I just couldn't sit in one place for long.

When I was a teenager I got angry. Angry about all the injustices in the world, about the way the government didn't care enough about the environment, and angry that the school administration didn't do enough to make everyone feel valued and included in our school. I organised all sorts of demonstrations and one day I even led the students in a strike. The school didn't like that one bit, and I almost got expelled for it!

Then I went to university, and I took my passion for making a difference in the world and channelled it into my studies. Today I am a lawyer who represents the under-privileged and disadvantaged in society, and my dream is to one day become a judge.

Do you see any of the four children in my story? Do you see any of them in your own story?



THE TEN PLAGUES



IN A NUTSHELL

One of the most exciting and colourful parts of the story of the Exodus is the Ten Plagues. There is a custom to spill a drop of wine as we say the name of each plague. There are many reasons given for this, but the most beautiful is that of Abudraham, (a 14th century Rabbi from Spain who is best known for his commentary on the siddur), who interprets it in accordance with the verse, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls” (Proverbs 24:17). We give thanks for the miraculous plagues which brought our ancestors out of Egypt and granted them freedom, but at the same time, we also shed a symbolic tear for those who suffered.



DEEP DIVE

The plagues occupy the borderline, so common to the Torah, between the natural and the supernatural. Commentators have been divided between those who emphasise their miraculous character and others who have sought to provide a scientific account of the disasters in terms of a series of chain reactions to an initial ecological disaster, possibly the appearance of algae in the Nile, which turned the water red and caused the fish to die. Which view speaks more compellingly to us will depend on whether we understand the word “miracle” as a suspension of the laws of nature, or an event that occurs within nature but that, by happening when and to whom it does, reveals a providential pattern in history.

Commentary to The Ten Plagues,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Do you think the plagues were from natural causes or supernatural intervention? Do you think they are any less impressive if God performed them through nature?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

The plague of lice is a sardonic comment on the monumental scale of Egyptian architecture. The Egyptians believed the gods were to be found in things that are big. God shows them His Presence in something so small as to be almost invisible. The irony recurs in the division of the Red Sea, where Pharaoh's greatest military asset, the chariots, prove to be his undoing, as their wheels sink into the mud. The key to the plagues – as in God's covenant with Noah – is the principle of reciprocity: ‘As you do, so shall you be done to.’ Those who harm others will themselves be harmed. Nations that begin by depriving others of their liberty in the end destroy themselves. Historically, this was so. Egypt never again recovered the greatness it had enjoyed in the earlier part of Ramses II's rule.

Commentary on The Ten Plagues,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

What is the message behind the plague of lice? How can we apply this lesson to our own lives?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Why do you think God chose these particular plagues?
2. Which do you think was the worst of the Ten Plagues?
3. Who were the plagues really for?



EXPERIENCING THE SEDER

How many of the plagues can you simulate at your Seder night?

Here are a few ideas (some may require preparation in the days before Seder night):

1. Blood: Spill a little blood onto everyone's plate, and /or (temporarily) confiscate all the bottles/ jugs of water from the table.
2. Frogs: Get the children to jump around the table making “ribbit” frog noises.
3. Lice: Ask the children to check everyone's hair for lice. (If you plan this ahead of time, you could even plant some fake lice to find).
4. Wild animals: Collect all the stuffed animals in the house and place them around the table.
5. Pestilence: Throw all of the stuffed animals on the floor and then bury them under the table.
6. Boils: Using forks, give all your guests boils (be gentle!).
7. Hail: Have a snowball/hail fight with cotton balls, pillows, pre-prepared hail made from paper, or other soft materials.
8. Locusts: Have the children lead everyone in making a humming, buzzing noise, and then grow louder, like a swarm of locusts about to descend.
9. Darkness: Blindfold your guests (using scarves) and then try to play a game or continue with a section of the Haggadah.
10. The striking down of the firstborn: Gather all the firstborn children together and take them away.



IN A NUTSHELL

Dayeinu is a song which explores the kindnesses of God to His people on the long journey from slavery to freedom. There are fifteen stages described between leaving Egypt, reaching the Promised Land, and building the Temple in Jerusalem. This song is a *tikkun*, a “putting-right”, for the ingratitude of the Israelites in the Wilderness. At almost every stage of their journey they complained: about the water, the food, the difficulties of travelling, the challenge of conquering the land. It is as if we are saying where they complained, let us give thanks. Each stage was a miracle. And each miracle would have been enough to convince us that Hashem is behind all the events in our history.



DEEP DIVE

Why is Shabbat specifically mentioned in *Dayeinu*?

Shabbat is the ultimate expression of a free society, the antithesis of slavery in Egypt. On this day, all relationships of dominance and subordination are suspended. We may not work, or command others to work, “so that your manservant and maidservant may rest as you do” (Devarim 5:15). At many times in history, people have dreamed of an ideal world. The name given to such visions is “utopia” meaning “no place”, because at no time or place have these dreams been realised on a society-wide basis. Shabbat is the sole successful utopian experiment in history. It is based on the simple idea that utopia (in Judaism, the messianic age) is not solely in the future. It is something we can experience in the midst of time, one day in seven. Shabbat became the weekly rehearsal of an ideal world, one not yet reached but still lived

as a goal, of a world at peace with itself, recognising the createdness, and thus the integrity, of all people and all forms of life. If Egypt meant slavery, Shabbat is collective freedom, a “foretaste of the World to Come.”

Commentary on *Dayeinu*,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Seder night is when we experience the Exodus, and Shabbat is when we experience freedom and utopia. Why do you think we need regular reminders of what freedom and utopia feel like?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

The Exodus was more than an event in the past. It was a precursor of redemption in the future. Israel, as Moses warned, would not dwell securely in its land. It would forget its moral and spiritual vocation. It would be attracted to the pagan culture of its neighbours. By so doing it would lose its reason for existence and find itself unable, at times of crisis, to summon the shared vision and collective energy needed to prevail against neighbouring imperial



ILLUSTRATION BY RINAT GILBOA, TAKEN FROM THE KOREN YOUTH HAGGADA
(USED WITH PERMISSION OF KOREN PUBLISHERS JERUSALEM LTD.)

powers. It would suffer defeat and exile. But despair would never prevail. In the past, God had brought His people from slavery to freedom and from exile to the land, and therefore He would do so again. The Jewish people never completely lost faith in God, because its Prophets knew that God would never completely lose faith in His people. History intimated destiny. What happened once would happen again. That is what lies behind the words with which the Haggadah begins: “Now we are here; next year in the land of Israel. Now – slaves; next year we shall be free.” The Jewish people kept the vision alive. It is not too much to say that the vision kept the Jewish people alive ...

That is what Pesach was during more than eighteen centuries of exile and dispersion: a seed planted in Jewish memory, waiting to be activated, to grow. Without it, Jews would certainly have disappeared. Lacking hope of return – hope tempered by faith into a certainty-like steel – they would have made their peace with their condition, merged into their surrounding societies and ambient cultures, and vanished, like every other culture deprived of a home. Pesach, like a seed frozen in suspended animation, contained the latent energy that led Jews in the twentieth century to create the single most remarkable accomplishment in the modern world, the

rebirth of Israel, the land, the state, the nation, and the people. Micah’s vision, and Ezekiel’s, and Moses’, came true.

Pesach and the Rebirth of Israel,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Rabbi Sacks connects the Exodus to the modern return to Zion. How is this also connected to the poem *Dayeinu*?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Would it really have been “enough” if God had stopped at any of these stages?
2. What do you see as the message behind listing the 15 stages in *Dayeinu*?
3. Where do you think the story of the Exodus actually ends?



A STORY FOR THE NIGHT OF STORIES

Natan Sharansky is a hero of the Jewish people. Growing up in the Soviet Union, when it was almost impossible to live a Jewish life, he knew the term

“Jew” only as something to hide. But then in 1967, following Israel’s dramatic victory in the Six-Day War, Jews began to reconnect to their ancestral faith with pride. Many began to dream of returning to their homeland but were prevented by the Soviet authorities. They became known as *refuseniks*. Sharansky, who was arrested at the age of 29 for his Zionist activities, was arguably the most famous *refusenik*, with thousands of people campaigning for his release from the Soviet Gulag prison system in Siberia. He gained his freedom in 1986 and realised his lifelong dream to immigrate to the State of Israel.

At the beginning of the coronavirus global pandemic, when many Jews around the world were facing the notion of a Pesach Seder without their family around the table for the first time, he was interviewed about his experience of Pesach in the Gulag. The Soviet authorities knew the importance of Seder night, and cruelly ensured that Sharansky was in solitary confinement, where he was served nothing but three pieces of dry bread and three cups of water per day.

“I decided my three cups of water would be my wine and my three pieces of dry bread would be my matzah,” Sharansky recalled. “And my salt would be my maror. I found out that this is the great place to feel the unique struggle of the Jewish people – to be connected with every Jew in the world, and to enjoy thinking that this year we are slaves and next year we [will be] free people in Jerusalem.”

Sharansky concluded his interview by emphasising that even if we are not with our family on Seder night, we are still connected, for we are one big family, a people with a shared history, a shared future and a very special role in this world.

Will it be easier or harder for you to relate to the themes of Pesach during this year’s Seder, compared to other years?

Prime Minister Shimon Peres welcomes Natan Sharansky at Ben-Gurion Airport following his release in 1986

(PHOTO: NATI HARNIK, GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE)



CHAD GADYA



IN A NUTSHELL

This strange and haunting song seems simple on the surface but has hidden depths. Concluding one of Judaism's most important evenings of the year with a children's song tells us a lot about how important children are, especially on this night. The Jewish love of, and focus on, children means that we look forward to the future even more than we look back to the past. Just as we began the Seder with the questions of a child, so we end it with a nursery rhyme, reminding ourselves that what sustains a faith is not strength or power, but its ability to inspire successive generations of children to add their voices to their people's song.



DEEP DIVE

The theme of *Chad Gadya* is the destructive cycle of vengeance and retaliation. In one interpretation, the young goat represents Israel. The "father" who bought it for two coins is God, who redeemed Israel from Egypt through His two representatives, Moses and Aaron. The cat is Assyria, which conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. The dog is Babylonia, which defeated the southern kingdom of Judah. The stick is Persia, which replaced Babylonia as the imperial power in the sixth century BCE. The fire is the Greeks, who defeated the Persians in the days of Alexander the Great. The water is Rome, which superseded ancient Greece. The ox is Islam, which defeated the Romans in Palestine in the seventh century. The slaughterer is Christianity – specifically the Crusaders, who fought Islam in Palestine and elsewhere, murdering Jews on the way. The Angel of Death is the Ottoman Empire, which controlled Palestine until the First World War. The song

concludes with an expression of faith that "this too shall pass" and the Jewish people will return to their land. So it has been in our days.

One Little Goat,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

The song, disarming in its simplicity, teaches the great truth of Jewish hope: that though many nations (symbolised by the cat, the dog, and so on) attacked Israel (the goat), each in turn has vanished into oblivion. At the end of days God will vanquish the Angel of Death and inaugurate a world of life and peace, the two great Jewish loves. *Chad Gadya* expresses the Jewish refusal to give up hope. Though history is full of man's inhumanity to man – dog bites cat, stick hits dog – that is not the final verse. The Haggadah ends with the death of death in eternal life, a fitting end for the story of a people dedicated to Moses' great command, "Choose life" (Devarim 30:19).

Commentary on Chad Gadya,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Living at the turn of the 21st century, do you feel this song and the message behind it is still relevant to Jewish history?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

So, having earlier expressed the Jewish hope, "Next year in Jerusalem," we end our Seder night with the *universal* hope that the Angel of Death will one day be defeated by the long-overdue realisation that God is life; that worshipping God means sanctifying life; that God's greatest command is "Choose life" (Devarim 30:19); that we bring God into the world by reciting a blessing over life.

I find it almost unbearably moving that a people that has known so much suffering can summon the moral courage to

end this evening of Jewish history on a supreme note of hope, and write it into the hearts of its children in the form of a nursery rhyme, a song. For what we give our children on this night of nights is something more and greater than the bread of oppression and the taste of Jewish tears. It is a faith that in this world, with all its violence and cruelty, we can create moments of redemption, signals of transcendence, acts of transfiguring grace. No people has risked and suffered more for a more slender hope, but no hope has lifted a people higher and led it, time and again, to greatness. So we end the night with a prayer and a conviction. The prayer: "God of life, help us win a victory over the forces of death." And the conviction? That by refusing to accept the world that is, together we can start to make the world that ought to be."

One Little Goat,
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

What is the main focus at the end of the Haggadah, and how is it different from the beginning of the Haggadah?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Why do you think we end the Seder with a song for children?
2. How do you think the message of the song is connected to the Seder night?
3. How does this song connect to our lives today?



EXPERIENCING THE SEDER

Ask every person at your Seder table in turn to share what their hopes for the next year are: hopes for themselves, for the Jewish people, and for the world.

EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

MA NISHTANAH

1. Learning through questions makes the educational process engaging and empowering for the learner.
2. Any question asked from a desire for knowledge without secondary agenda is a good question. There are no bad questions in this case.
3. Not all questions have answers, or at least answers that we as finite humans can find or understand. Some questions only the infinite God can answer. But we don't stop asking the questions. The questions are more important than the answers.

AVADIM HAYINU

1. As a nation, we have a national memory and identity. So when the Haggadah speaks of our experience in Egypt as slaves, while this refers to a specific generation and historical time period, as a nation we have that experience implanted in our memory and identity. The Haggadah encourages us to re-experience this every year on Seder night, and *Avadim Hayinu* reminds us that the experience does impact us directly, for if God had not redeemed us, we would be slaves ourselves to this day.
2. A good story told well can have a big impact. A powerful story is experiential, in that the listener can imagine they are living the story, or at least empathise and identify with the characters. The longer and more detailed the story is, the more chance this will happen. So the Haggadah encourages us to tell the story at length, and engage with it, so we can experience the story as fully as possible.
3. Because Seder night is not about "learning" or "reading" or "understanding" but rather about experiencing and living the story, the Haggadah tells us that even wise and experienced people who have done this many times before still have to tell the story. Because each year it is a new experience.

THE FOUR CHILDREN

1. Obviously all answers are legitimate, but in the ensuing discussion it is worth encouraging everyone to realise that each of us is all of the four children at different times in our lives (or even at different times of the day!)
2. All children are different and have different educational needs. Insightful parents and teachers realise this and try their hardest to cater to those individual needs.
3. Children are the main focus of the evening because this night more than any other is when we pass on our national heritage to the next generation. Even though the process of learning about and re-experiencing the Exodus is a task which takes a lifetime, it begins when we are children, laying the foundation of our Jewish identity and allowing the national narrative to become part of our very core. We take our cue from the Torah itself, which focuses on the questions children will ask about the Exodus.

THE TEN PLAGUES

1. Each plague attacked a different aspect of the Egyptian society's physical and spiritual needs. The Egyptians could probably have managed without one or two or even more of the elements that were attacked, but this was a systematic destruction of their way of life.
2. Every plague was terrible and designed to attack a different aspect of Egyptian society and cause problems. If you have to choose one... it doesn't get more terrible than the final plague.
3. God could have taken the Israelites out of Egypt without any miracles or fuss. But He chose to take the Egyptians on an educational journey, because the process was important. And even more important than the direct impact on the Egyptians was the impact on the world who was watching (or at least heard reports) and effect on the Israelites themselves. The plagues were as much for these other groups as they were for Pharaoh and the Egyptians, if not more so.

DAYEINU

1. Full redemption from Egypt was the establishing of a sovereign nation in the Promised Land, with the Temple at the centre of its religious life. If God had stopped short of this at any of the previous stages, then it would not have been complete redemption.
2. The message behind *Dayeinu* is that each individual stage was miraculous and magnificent, and worthy of praise and gratitude.
3. While the physical redemption ended with the liberation from slavery and leaving the geographical boundaries of Egypt, and the spiritual redemption took place at the Giving of the Torah on Sinai, the full religio-social redemption was only achieved once the Jews entered the Land of Israel and built a society there based on the Torah.

CHAD GADYA

1. The whole of the Seder is focused on children, and on transmitting our heritage to the next generation. This song (and the others at the conclusion of the Seder) are fun to sing, and also contain a strong educational message. A great way to end the Seder night journey.
2. The message of *Chad Gadya* is that while it may seem during our history that there are powerful forces who will dominate and even destroy us, these forces come and go, and only God decides who survives in the long term. And if you consider Jewish history, it is clear that He has decided that the Jewish people have a destiny to fulfil, and therefore we have outlasted all these powerful nations who have tried to destroy us.
3. Modern Jewish history reflects this same message. In the 20th century, an enemy of the Jewish people came closer than ever before to wiping them out, yet not only did the Jewish people survive, but in fact just three years later returned to their ancestral homeland, and re-established sovereignty there, and are now thriving like never before. We are part of a generation that is living the fulfilment of the message of this song.

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Additional educational content provided by Dr. Daniel Rose together with The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust • Designed by Jonny Lipczer

Why Is No One Ensuring That Hasidic Kids Get A Real Education?

Byline:

Naftuli Moster



Why Is No One Ensuring That Hasidic Kids Get A Real Education?

Hasidic Jewish teenage boys spend about 12 hours each day learning at religious high schools (known as yeshivas.) And yet, many young men leave Yeshiva with barely any math or science skills, or even the ability to read English beyond an elementary school level. This lack of basic education makes them especially vulnerable to poverty. In fact, about 43% of Hasidic families in New York are poor and another 16% are near poor.

And the situation keeps getting worse. The last decade has seen rapid population growth in ultra-Orthodox communities without any improvements in education, drastically increasing the number of Hasidic Jews who need to rely on public assistance.

These numbers are especially significant because, by 2030 between 23-37% of Brooklyn school age children will be Hasidic. If the issue isn't resolved soon, these children will enter into adulthood with no English, math, science, or social studies knowledge, resulting in catastrophic consequences for the economic and social well being of this city.

Why is no one addressing this problem?

The reluctance for the public to get involved in issues involving Orthodox children's education is largely based on misconceptions such as the following:

The misconception: Religious schools are exempt from government regulations

The truth: Private schools, including religious institutions, are required by law to meet specific educational standards

The misconception: Private schools don't receive public funding.

The truth: Hasidic yeshivas receive tens of millions in both federal and state dollars every year.

The misconception: Ultra-Orthodox Jews are financially successful.

The truth: In the largely Hasidic area of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the median household income in 2011 was \$21,502, compared to the overall Brooklyn median of \$46,958 and the New York city median of \$52,737. The average number of children in a Hasidic family is 8... meaning... the

majority of Hasidic families are poor.

The misconception: It's not our community, not our problem:

The truth: Just as it would be our responsibility to report if a neighbor's child were being neglected, it is all of our responsibility to make sure that Hasidic children are receiving a quality education. Not only is allowing these young people to go into the world with no marketable skills neglectful, but the repercussions also ripple out into the rest of society. For instance, without basic science knowledge, ultra- Orthodox communities are more likely to ignore Covid safety regulations, increasing everyone's risk of transmission.

Why doesn't the government step in?

Unfortunately, the government is often the biggest obstacle to regulating education in ultra-Orthodox schools. While New York State laws require that non-public schools provide an education that is "substantially equivalent" to that provided in the public schools, it's been an "open secret" that yeshivas are largely ignoring the secular requirements.

As far back as the 1990's, officials were aware that education in religious schools was not being adequately regulated. In 2000, New York Education Commissioner Richard Mills recommended adopting a proposal for increased accountability for student success in private schools. Yet, over 20 years later, little has been done to regulate religious schools.

Instead, elected officials continue to pander to communities who are blatantly ignoring the law. For instance, New York's Mayor de Blasio openly praised Oholei Torah, a yeshiva that provides no secular instruction even to its elementary school students, for its "excellence" and its contribution to "well-rounded education."

Why would the government knowingly allow yeshivas to use public money without following education guidelines?

The most likely answer is that the state officials are playing politics with children's education. The Hasidic community openly encourages community members to vote in large numbers as a "bloc." In order to get this substantial "bloc vote" politicians often turn a blind eye when communities break the rules, especially in education.

Unfortunately, the government's refusal to address the situation combined with the public's reluctance to get involved has meant that no one has been looking out for these kids.

That's where Yaffed comes in...

In 2012, frustrated with his own Yeshiva experience, Naftuli Moster reached out to Civil Rights attorney, Michael Sussman. Sussman suggested that Naftuli organize a meeting of 20 yeshiva graduates from different schools to compare notes on their education.

While the schools were different, their experiences were the same. Hours and hours of religious study with little to no time spent on math, English, science, or social studies. None of the young men had the skills or education for anything more than a low paying factory job. Their yeshiva education was not even equivalent to a GED, so, for most, college was out of the question.

From that initial meeting, Young Advocates for Fair Education (YAFFED) was born. For almost a decade, Naftuli and his colleagues have been fighting tirelessly to make sure Hasidic kids get the education that they are entitled to under state and federal law.



Through community grass roots activism, Yaffed has been pressuring government officials to regulate yeshivas and enforce the laws in place. Their efforts have been met with great opposition, both from the government and within the ultra-Orthodox community.

But, beneath the wall of resistance, tendrils of hope are beginning to emerge. Hasidic parents are quietly reaching out for support, former Yeshiva students are volunteering time and resources, and, most importantly, there's been a growing awareness of the far-reaching repercussions of denying Hasidic kids an access to basic education.

We know that organized public pressure is the best catalyst for legislative change. In 2017, The New York State Education Department pledged to revise their guidelines to enforce "substantial equivalency" laws in private schools. With enough public support, Yaffed can hold the Education Department to their promise, ensuring that the next generation of Hasidic kids gets the education they deserve.

Byline:

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Pesach – The Wisdom To Appreciate

The four sons, their questions and the scripted responses take a place of prominence in the Haggadah. Before we even begin discussing the details of the story, we are instructed that the Seder night is for each and every Jew. We are guided on how to best respond to each Jew according to their individual needs and how best to connect them with the message of the evening.

There are many nuances to their questions and the responses, and many lessons to be learned. One point of much discussion is the inference in the question of the wicked son. He asks “What is this service to you?” The author of the Haggadah tells us that since he has worded his question in the second person, he has excluded himself from the service of the Seder. He is clearly stating that the service is “for you” and not for him. If we consider the question of the wise son he appears to be guilty of the same error. He asks “What are these testimonies, statutes and laws that Hashem, our G-d, has commanded you?” He too states clearly that the commandments were directed to you. Why don’t we say that he too is excluding himself from the Seder?

The Kli Yakar, in his commentary on the Chumash (Shemos 13:14), offers an answer to this question, which I believe defines for us the essence of the message of the Pesach Seder, and what we can take away from the evening. The Kli Yakar notes that the Torah introduces the wise son’s question differently from the wicked son’s. The Torah introduces the wise son’s question by saying “And it will be when your son will ask you tomorrow” (Devarim 6:20). This phrase is absent when discussing the wicked son.

The Kli Yakar explains that herein lies the difference between the two questioners. The wicked son is not wrong in recognizing that his parents understand the meaning of the Seder in a way that he does not. He is correct in asking his parents what meaning they find in the service. However, his timing shows that his intent is evil. He is sitting there at the Seder, while everyone is preparing to engage in the mitzvos of the evening, and he stops. Right then and there he turns to his parents and says, why is this important to you? His wording as he is sitting at the Seder clearly states that despite knowing how important this evening is to his family and to Hashem, it is of no importance to him. He cannot accept to do something because it is important to someone else. The action must be inherently important to him, or he wants no part of it. He cannot act for the sake of the relationship – neither with G-d nor with his parents. For this selfish, short-sighted attitude we tell him that he is on the wrong track in life. So much so, that had he been in Egypt, he would not have been redeemed.

The wise son, however, asks his question tomorrow. At the Seder, he was ready to engage in the experience of the evening because he knows that it is important to Hashem. However, once he has experienced it and still does not understand it, he wisely seeks to understand. With humility and faith, he comes to his parents and asks to understand why this is important to G-d. He wants to better understand his relationship with G-d and how to connect with G-d.

I heard said in the name of the Dubno Maggid that we see this distinction from the phrasing of their questions, as well. The wicked son asks “What is this service to you?” The wise son, however, asks “What are these testimonies, statutes and laws that Hashem our G-d has commanded you?” The wise son understands what the service is to his parents. It is the service that G- has commanded. His question is a deeper one – he seeks to understand what meaning it has that G-d should command it.

I believe this message is the core of the Pesach Seder. We gather every year, reviewing the story of our slavery and redemption, to understand that we have a relationship with G-d. This is the initial answer we give to the four questions. We respond saying that we were slaves in Egypt, and had G-d not redeemed us, then we

today would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore, we are gathering here tonight and doing things differently from other nights. No matter how well we know the story, we need to stop and review every year, to recognize that we ourselves were destined to be slaves, and we ourselves were redeemed with the Exodus.

After the four sons, as we resume the story of our history going back now to the very beginning with Avrohom, we state this message clearly with “והיא שעמדה” - “And this is that which stood”. We have been persecuted and challenged in every generation. Yet, this message of the Pesach Seder is what has stood by us and given us strength throughout each and every generation. The purpose of redemption from Egypt was not only that we should leave Egyptian bondage. G-d was displaying his commitment to our physical and spiritual salvation. He ensured that we survived and thrived, becoming a vast and mighty people even while enslaved in Egypt, and then freed us, carried us, raised us and taught us to become His nation. G-d did this for us then, and He does it for us in every generation. “In every generation they stand upon us to annihilate us, and the Holy One, Blessed is He, saves us from their hands.”

The message is clear. G-d loves us and cares about us. Even before we accepted the Torah, G-d is showing His love, care and concern for us, and committing Himself to a relationship with us. The message of the Seder is to recognize and appreciate that love and commitment. A love and commitment which is not only for our ancestors, but is for us, as well. The importance of our mitzvos is far beyond what they accomplish. The importance of our mitzvos is, as the wise son understands, that they fulfill G-d's purpose in His world. How and why they are important to G-d are details. The accomplishment for me is not what my actions achieve, but that I displayed my love and respect for G-d, as He has done for us.

This idea is further illustrated in the verses we expound upon detailing the story of the Exodus. The verses are from the service of the Bikkurim – the first fruits of the harvest which a farmer brings to the Temple. When the farmer arrives and presents his produce, he is instructed to recite these verses. Each year, after harvesting his crop, he brings the first to the Temple and declares aloud how his ancestors were slaves, G-d redeemed them and now he instead finds himself a landowner working his own field. He concludes his declaration saying “And now behold I have brought the first fruits of the land that You have given me, G-d.” These verses we are reading at the Seder are verses intended to describe an individual's understanding of G-d's involvement in their personal life and that any and all successes are direct gifts from G-d. An understanding stemming from the recognition that we would be slaves, if not for the fact that G-d wants us to be here.

We express this again with “Dayeinu”. We begin with the Exodus and culminate with the Temple, recognizing that each step was a gift which was already enough for us to recognize G-d's love for us and kindness to us. We then reiterate and repeat how much more we need to recognize G-d's kindness and love now that G-d has indeed done all of these for us.

After explaining the messages of the mitzvos of the evening we then conclude the Maggid section of the Haggadah by stating this principle explicitly. The Seder is not a commemoration of national history. Rather, in each and every generation, no matter how far removed that generation may be from the original event, every Jew is obligated to see themselves as if they left Egypt. Each and every one of us must recognize and appreciate that G-d saved our ancestors from Egyptian slavery in order that we should be free from Egypt today. This is the essence of the Seder -to recognize G-d's relationship with us today.

As the Kli Yakar says of the wise son, our entire understanding of and commitment to Torah and mitzvos is built upon this foundation. We are Jews, committed to G-d and His Torah, because G-d loves us and we love Him and care about what's important to Him - simply because we know it is important to Him. May we all merit to learn the message of the Seder, and thereby merit to bring joy and *nachas* to our Father in Heaven.

Parshas Tzav – Matzah's Untold Holiness

When we think of matzoh, we immediately think of Pesach. Yet, there is another place where chometz is forbidden and only matzoh is allowed – on the altar in the Temple. In fact, in this week's parsha we are taught that this prohibition goes beyond the altar. When a meal offering was brought to the Temple, only a portion of it was burnt on the altar. The rest of the meal offering was given to the Kohanim, the priests serving in the Temple. The Torah tells us that this portion was considered as though G-d were sharing His meal with the servants of His household, the workers in the Temple. This meal offering in its entirety is considered holy of holies like a sin offering and a guilt offering must therefore be eaten as matzoh and not allowed to become chometz. (Vayikra 6:7-11) What is the reason for this prohibition and can this help us to understand our Pesach observance?

The Kli Yakar (ibid.) explains that the key to understanding this prohibition is the specific offerings which are mentioned. A sin offering and a guilt offering are both brought by one who is repenting for a sin. Repentance is extremely precious to G-d, as it displays that even after indulging in the pleasures of life one has decided that G-d is more important to him than those pleasures. He has therefore abandoned those pleasures and repented in order to reconnect with G-d. When one reaches this level of recognition and commitment to G-d, it is said that they have reached levels which even a perfectly righteous person could never attain. Since the act of repentance forges a deep bond with G-d, the sacrifices which are brought as part of repentance are considered holy of holies. The Torah is telling us, says the Kli Yakar, that Matzoh is compared to these two sacrifices. By carefully avoiding leaven and thereby creating matzoh, one has created something akin to repentance, something holier than a perfectly righteous person.

The Kli Yakar offers two reasons for this vast holiness in avoiding leaven and eating matzoh, both of which can add great meaning and significance to our Pesach. His first explanation is based on the fact that the leavening of the bread represents the draw of the evil inclination and our passions and desires. These forces lead us to imagine pleasures as leavened – fluffed up and bigger than they truly are. Hashem created each and every one of us with a clear understanding of right and wrong and a deeply seated desire to connect with Him and lead a G-dly and noble life. Yet, we are also created with an evil inclination and with passions and desires which cloud our vision and confuse us, making it hard to live up to who we truly want to be. When one recognizes this great gift within themselves and seeks to push aside their passions and desires and to find what is truly good and meaningful in life, one is doing an act similar to repentance. One is actively seeking to choose G-d over earthly joys and pleasures. This concept of pushing aside the passions is represented by the matzoh. Choosing a relationship with G-d over our passions is so great that even its representation is holy of holies.

His second explanation is based on that fact that the leavening represents haughtiness. The greatest impediment to any relationship, and certainly to a relationship with G-d is haughtiness. When one's mind is focused on one's own achievements and one's own significance, they cannot truly focus on appreciating another. Without appreciating the value and the good of another, there can be no relationship. When one works to change one's mindset and to learn to focus on and appreciate relationships over outward achievements, one is working to pave the way for a true and deep relationship with G-d. This effort is also so significant that the matzoh which represents it becomes holy of holies.

Our matzoh on Pesach can springboard us to great holiness. Whether we learn to choose G-d over passions or working to develop humility, we are seeking a relationship with G-d. This makes us holy of holies.