



A Bisl Torah

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***In loving memory of
Dr. Solomon Gabbay***

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The Necessity of the Exodus

Theo Fraenkel, Grade 10

The basis of the holiday of פסח and the סדר is the commemoration of *Hashem* taking the Jewish people out of Egypt. As the פסוק states, וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי. “And you shall tell your child on that day, ‘Because of this the L-rd acted for me when I went out of Egypt’” (שמות י"ג:ה). While יציאת מצרים seems like a significant event in our history, it seems less shocking when given further context. *Hashem* tells אברהם during the ברת בין הבתרים that כִּי־גַר יִהְיֶה זְרָעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעֹבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי לָהֶם וְעֹבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי לָהֶם וְעֹבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: “your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterwards shall they come out with great substance” (בראשית טו:יג-יד).

This begs the question, if *Hashem* Himself decreed the slavery of אברהם's descendants at ברת בין הבתרים, why is יציאת מצרים worth commemorating, if *Hashem* saved us from a situation He initiated? In other words, a friend forces one to climb a boulder. As one climbs, one ends up stuck dangling off the precipice of a cliff. Luckily, that friend comes to the rescue. Although one would be thankful for the rescue, one would still not be thrilled as the friend caused the dangerous situation in the first place. However, in our case we celebrate a week-long festival in honor of it and are commanded to remember it every day of our lives (דברים ט"ז:ג)!

The רמב"ן gives an interesting answer to this issue of why we commemorate מצרים. He says that *Hashem* made many miracles while taking us out of Egypt. These miracles had the effect of refuting the beliefs that the Egyptians had about *Hashem*, that He is not G-d, He did not create the world, and He is not all-powerful. By performing miracles, *Hashem* proved the Egyptians wrong and showed that He is G-d. However, G-d cannot make miracles in every generation to show the skeptics that He exists, so He commanded us to commemorate the miracles He did at יציאת מצרים. We do this through wearing תפילין and putting up a מזוזה, but also with the קרבן פסח and the חמץ איסור. This explanation fits well with the מצוה of teaching our children about יציאת מצרים, mentioned above, as we want to tell them about these miracles so that they should learn about *Hashem's* strength and might.

The מהר"ל in גבורות ה' also addresses this question at length. He cites a גמרא in נדרים לב. in גמרא that asks why the descendants of אברהם are punished with slavery in Egypt. The גמרא gives three answers: that אברהם took חכמים to fight in a war against the four kings; that he asked for a sign to confirm that the promises of the ברת בין הבתרים would happen; and that he let the captives in סדום go free. The מהר"ל explains that the essence of all these answers is that אברהם had some sort of deficiency in his faith in *Hashem*, so he was punished. The מהר"ל argues that this punishment is

transformative rather than punitive; יציאת מצרים fixes this faith deficiency in בני ישראל through the miracles Hashem performed. Rather than Hashem putting us in a dangerous situation that He saves us from, the מהר"ל says He put us through this experience to fix a flaw. This explanation is similar to the רמב"ן, in that we retell these events to our children so that they too can develop faith in Hashem.

Alternatively, the מהר"ל explains that rather than a punishment, יציאת מצרים is the moment when we really became a nation. According to the מהר"ל, the Egypt experience was essential to the formation of our nation. The מהר"ל uses the metaphor of a crucible to demonstrate this. In a crucible gold is refined by fire, so too in Egypt, the Jews became unified and purified through the suffering they had to endure. For example, according to the מדרש they kept their own language and names and refused to

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assimilate into Egyptian culture, meaning they became distinct and therefore a nation. This relates well to the context of Hashem telling all of this to אברם at the ברית בין הבתרים, as this means that by describing the ordeal of Egypt, Hashem is telling אברהם that his descendants will become a nation. So according to this opinion, we commemorate the point at which Hashem took us out of Egypt, making us a people.

The Intricacies of the Exodus Story

By Raya Sims, Grade 10

A large part of the holiday of פסח is the story of how G-d brought our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, where we had been slaves for many generations. When telling over the story of פסח, we are encouraged to tell our kids that not only were our ancestors taken out of Egypt by Hashem, but we also were taken out of Egypt.

The reason for this unusual retelling of the Exodus, according to the רמב"ן, lies in the philosophical connection between the Exodus

story and the story of G-d's creation of the world. The רמב"ן believes that the Exodus story shows that G-d is an all-powerful and all-knowing creator of the universe through His mastery of all parts of our world, such as all animals and bodies of water. The story also acts as a disproof of many popular heretical opinions, such as that G-d does not consider men any more above other animals, and has no specific interest in them. The רמב"ן also says that the reason why there are so many

commandments involving the Exodus is so that the Jewish people will remember the great miracles that G-d displayed. The רמב"ן says that *Hashem* will not make signs and wonders in every generation for the eyes of some wicked man or heretic. He therefore commanded us to always make a memorial or sign which we have seen with our eyes, and through that we should transmit the greatness of the Exodus to our children.

We, as Jews, are supposed to pass on the story of the Exodus. Not only to disprove those who doubt the greatness of G-d, but also to pass

on this story of the great miracles that G-d did during the Exodus. By telling the story of Exodus, we are bringing ourselves and our children closer to *Hashem*.

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From Slavery to Wealth: Understanding the Gold of the Exodus

By Anna Szalat, Grade 10

One question that arises in the story of פסח is why the תורה emphasizes that the Jewish people were loaded with silver and gold upon leaving Egypt. In בראשית, *Hashem* tells אברהם that his nation will be slaves, but they will leave very rich. When *Hashem* spoke to משה at the burning bush, He told him that the Jews would ask the Egyptians for all of their wealth. The night before the Jews left Egypt, משה was commanded to tell the Jews to go to their Egyptian neighbors and ask for their gold and silver vessels. The language is very strange here; it almost seems as though *Hashem* must beg משה to tell the Jewish people to take the gold and silver, using the word “נָא” “please” (שמורת י”א:ב). The Jews followed *Hashem*’s command

and took everything from the Egyptians. Did they borrow or ask for it? It depends on how one translates the word “וַיִּשְׁאַלְרָ” (שמורת י”א:ב).

In this context, it is better understood as a request for a gift rather than asking for a loan. The medieval תורה commentary, דעת זקנים, explains that the Egyptians willingly gave their riches to the Jews without expecting them to be returned, particularly due to their haste and fear. The first question that commentators deal with in this part is whether the Jewish people are asking for the gold and silver as borrowed items or as gifts. The *Talmud* says that it was a *request* for gold and silver from the Egyptians. Some commentators demonstrate

that the root word לָצַו may refer to a request for an outright gift and does not only mean borrowing (as it is usually translated). Other commentators do not view the transaction as a simple request for gifts but as one of mutual exchange. In leaving Egypt, the Jewish people were forced to abandon properties, fields, vineyards, and many items too heavy to carry. According to the *Midrash*, the Egyptians took the Jewish people to court in the time of Alexander the Great and sued them for the gold and silver that they “borrowed” from them during the Exodus and never returned. An outsider named Gaviah ben Pasisa volunteered to serve as the defense attorney for the Jewish people. He responded in front of the Greek monarch, “From where do you bring proof that we took the money?” They responded, “From the *Torah*.” He countered, “Then I will bring proof from the *Torah*, where it states that the Jewish people dwelled in Egypt for 430 years. Please give us the wages of 600,000 workers for that time period, and we shall return the gold which we took.” The account (in the *Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 91b) concludes with the Egyptians requesting a three-day recess and not returning to the court thereafter. What the *Talmud* suggests is a third justification for the taking of the Egyptian wealth – that it represents unpaid wages. This is the Keli Yakar’s main argument: Although the Holy One, Blessed be He, could have simply given them great wealth, He wished them to receive it as wages for their labor, as Gaviah ben Pasisa stated in the *Talmud*. That was the only way to placate that righteous one (Avraham Avinu), for the possessions had to be those of the Egyptians in exchange for their work. That is why it is written, “Afterwards,

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they will go out with great wealth” (*Bereishit* 15:14), that is, after completing their labor.

The Seforno suggests a completely different approach regarding why the act of requesting wealth was so important. When the Jewish people were first commanded to request wealth from the Egyptians, לֹא יִפְּרוּ אֶת עַיְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל feared that if they took gold and silver from them, this would cause the Egyptians to pursue them. *Hashem* commanded them again, instead of simply asking them, and He promised them that they would have nothing to fear. Asking their former taskmasters for wealth would become a dramatic demonstration of their freedom. This approach differs from the previous ones in that it interprets the request as serving a primarily psychological purpose instead of concentrating on the technical financial legalities of the transaction (a gift, exchange, or redemption of unpaid wages). By providing the Jewish people with tremendous wealth upon their leaving, in a willing and loving manner, the Egyptians were able to tangibly express their feelings of guilt and regret for their cruel and vicious behavior over the previous years.

Why the silver and gold? The Israelites were in such a hurry to leave, and the Egyptians so hasty in urging their departure, that they did not even have time for their dough to rise. Why then was G-d so insistent that they take the time to ask for these parting gifts? What conceivable use did they have for them in the long journey across the wilderness? It was a way of drawing a line over the resentments of the past. That is why when a slave went free, his master had to give him gifts. This was not to compensate for the fact of slavery. There is no way of giving back the years spent in servitude. But there is a way of ensuring that the parting is done with goodwill, with some symbolic compensation. The gifts allow the former slave to reach emotional closure; to feel that a new chapter is beginning; to leave without anger and a sense of humiliation. One who has received gifts finds it hard to hate. That is the significance of the silver and gold taken from the Egyptians by the Israelites at the express command of G-d.

The early twentieth-century commentator Benno Jacob translated the word וְנִצְלָתָם in Ex. 3:22 as “you shall save,” not “you shall despoil” the Egyptians. The gifts they took from their neighbors were intended, Jacob argues, to persuade the Israelites that it was not the Egyptians as a whole, only Pharaoh and the leadership, who were responsible for their enslavement. The gifts were meant to save the Egyptians from any possible future revenge by Israel. There is an ambiguity about the word מִצְרַיִם. Is it Egypt or the Egyptians? The verb נִצַּל means taking everything, but in the phrase הִיפְעֵל it is לְהַצִּיל, which means to save. So the translations reflect this ambiguity. There are

many explanations for this, ranging from the Jews stole from the Egyptians to they went out with them.

So where did all this silver and gold come from? Some of this wealth was used to build the *Mishkan*, and some of it was used to make the Golden Calf. But to see the true use of it, you need to look in *Masechet Pesachim*, which states that all these riches came from יִיִּיִּי's time, when his brothers came during the famine; he collected all their gold and silver. We learn from this that this gold was from all over the world, from the people who went there during the famine. Furthermore, in *Masechet Brachot* it also states that וְנִצְלוּ means they made מִצְרַיִם into a trap, but Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch translates that they made מִצְרַיִם empty of its deepest sustenance.

We find traces of these riches until Roboam, the son of Shlomo Hamelech, and they didn't touch that money until then. The story goes as follows: the Egyptian king Tchic Tchac took the money back from the Jews, then the Ethiopian king Zerach took it back. Then Asa, the king of Yehuda, took it back and sent it to a prince of Damascus in Syria named Hadrimon ben Tabrimon. Then the Ammonites took it back. Yehoshafat, king of Yehuda, then took it back, and it stayed in Israel until Achaz and Sancheriv, king of Ashur, took it back. These riches went all around Babylonia, Greece, and finally Rome.

It is וְיִהְיֶה לָהֶם, which is the second part of the pasuk, which states that *Hashem* gave a good heart to the Egyptians, and we don't know if they gave or lent the riches to the Jews. There

are interpretations: either they took by force, or they offered by force. If the Jews were forced to take, we can ask why they needed to be forced to take the Egyptians' riches. Who would reject the opportunity of getting rich? It's because it is too heavy to carry and

it would just weigh them down. In *Kabbalah*, gold and silver represent something of valor. Another interpretation is that this gold and silver correspond to the sparks of holiness – נִיצוּצוֹת הַקֹּדֶשׁ.

Why an Exodus from Egypt and Not Settling in Egypt?

By Naftali Orkaby, Grade 8

Throughout Jewish history, Egypt has been seen as a glorious utopia, but in truth, it is merely a dystopia. Why all these years later is the center for Jews in Israel and not Egypt? Everything was good there; it was even compared to *Hashem's* Garden, “כְּגַן הַיְיָ” “קְאָרְץ מְצֻרִים” “like the Garden of *Hashem* like the land of Egypt” (בראשית י"ג)! It had fertile land, water, and civilization! Why was Israel chosen?

When there was a famine in the land of Israel, אברהם went down to Egypt to live there. Similarly, when יוסף's brothers are faced with famine, also in Israel, they go down to Egypt to purchase food. This pattern continues when, after being taken out of Egypt, the Jews complain and say that they want to go back to Egypt because of the abundance of food that is there. Egypt is the breadbasket of the Middle East! Clearly from these occasions, Egypt seems like the perfect place for the Jewish home.

In Judaism, we have the idea that the land of Israel is flowing with milk and honey. Israel is the chosen land! It is perfect and was handed to us on a silver platter. When we first came to Israel, was there settlement? Nourishment? Water?! We are told that this new land has all these things, yet in reality it is a desert. This does not sound like flowing milk and honey.

Israel is special in a spiritual sense. It is where עקידת יצחק happened. Our forefathers lived and prospered there. While yes, Egypt is a utopia, if we lived in that perfect paradise, we would forget our Judaism! If we had everything perfect, there would be no need to believe in *Hashem*. There would be nothing to pray for!

In דברים י"א-י"א the comparison between Egypt and Israel is that the lands of Egypt needed to be watered by manual labor, whereas in Israel the land soaks up water from rains of heaven. While on the outside Egypt

looks great with all its fertile lands, Israel is the real paradise.

In life, we sometimes think that we can take the easy way out. The settling in Egypt way. We

can judge something and say that it is too hard. We can say that Israel has nothing to its name. But if we believe and trust in *Hashem* that everything He says is true, we have no reason to settle in an Egypt.

Why Does לקחי = פסח?

By Menshi Trachtenberg, Grade 12

There is a beautiful message hidden in the גימטריה of פסח. The גימטריה of פסח equals 148: $80=פ=60$, and $ח=8$. The גימטריה of the word לקחי also happens to be 148: $100=ח$, $30=ל=8$, and $י=10$. Where do we see the word לקחי in תנ"ך? In האזינו it says, "יִצְרָחַ כְּמָטֵר לְקַחֵי" "May my teachings come down like rain" (דברים ל"ב:ב).

רש"י explains that משה is comparing the תורה to rain - just as rain gives life to the world, תורה gives life to the Jewish people. However, the רמב"ן teaches something deeper. משה is describing a flow from heaven to earth; what he "took from heaven," the תורה, now "rains down" onto the Jewish people. It is a heavenly message descending into this world.

The רמב"ן (in the next פסוק) connects this to a stone, the spiritual foundation of the world. He explains that just like משה takes a message from heaven and brings it down to earth, there must be a way for *Hashem's* message to enter the physical world. He points out several different פסוקים through which the רמב"ן explains that the stone represents the point where the heavenly message enters the world,

the foundation that receives that divine flow.

This helps us understand the deeper meaning of פסח. The גימטריה of פסח is the same as לקחי. פסח is the moment in history when *Hashem's* revelation breaks into the lives of the Jewish people through the miracles of יציאת מצרים. It is the beginning of the process that eventually leads up to the receiving of the תורה on סניי הר סיני. In this way, פסח is the beginning of the "לקחי." The redemption from Egypt was not only physical freedom from slavery, but also the moment when the heavenly message of תורה began to descend into the world and into the lives of the Jewish people.

This idea also teaches us an important lesson. Just like rain does not drop all at once but drop

“Just like rain does not drop all at once but drop by drop, so too תורה and spiritual growth often come gradually.”

by drop, so too תורה and spiritual growth often come gradually. פסה was only the beginning. The Jewish people were freed from Egypt, but they still had to travel through the desert and prepare themselves for receiving the תורה. In

the same way, real growth in our lives also happens step by step. פסה reminds us that even a small beginning can eventually lead us to something great, just like drops of rain eventually bring life to this world.

חמץ is Evil

By Ahava Askarinam, Grade 9

One of the most well-known laws of פסה is that we do not eat חמץ for the entire holiday. At first, it can feel annoying having to watch what one eats constantly. However, the fact that we remove חמץ from our lives opens up a way for us to embrace simplicity and actually enjoy it. Stepping away from חמץ allows us to appreciate what we have and grow internally. חמץ is always rising externally for others to see; however, we can see that growth can also be simple.

As we know, this law comes from when בני ישראל were leaving Egypt in a rush; their dough did not rise long enough, so they had מצה. For the first time, they had a much simpler and flatter bread, מצה. When they baked the dough, they achieved something different: ויאפו את הבצק אשר הוציאו ממצרים עגת מצות כי לא חמץ כי גרשו ממצרים ולא יכלו להתמהמה וגם צדה לא עשו להם "and they baked the dough that they had brought out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for it was not leavened since they were driven out from Egypt and could not linger, and even provisions they had not prepared for themselves" (שמות י"ב:ט) Since בני ישראל

were in a rush, they made מצה instead of their usual bread. Our rule not to eat חמץ originates from here. There is a deeper meaning in how this small difference led to a new perspective and an opportunity for us all to grow.

מצה is also often looked down on because of its flatness and how small it is. The גמרא, in פסחים, refers to מצה as לחם עוני, which is directly translated as "bread of affliction" (poor man's bread). The מהר"ל of Prague explains that מצה's meaning is simple in a positive way, not actually poor. We can see how beautiful things can be small and not always "inflated." A common factor between all beautiful things is that they internally grow. The מצה not being inflated means that it does not have a large ego. We can directly compare this to חמץ because it rises fully and openly for all to see. The small and simple nature of the מצה shows that we can remain externally simple while continuing to grow internally.

The act of removing the חמץ simplifies our lives in many aspects. We are not just removing חמץ from our homes, but also from

within ourselves. Without the *המץ*, we will no longer be inflated; we will have plenty of room to grow in every aspect of our lives. We can use our growth to do even more *מצוות* throughout our lives. We do not have to fully puff up in

front of everyone to do so, because simplicity is also beautiful. Everyone should try to find an area in their life where they have too much *המץ* and replace it with *מצה* to build themselves up for the better.

It is Not Just Seeing Yourself Leaving Egypt, It is Leaving Egypt

By Amiel Jotkowitz, Grade 10

One of the most famous lines in the *הגדה* is “בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים” “In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he personally left Egypt.” *פסח* is not just about remembering history. It is about reliving it. The *תורה* says “וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא” “and you shall tell your child on that day” (*שמות י"ג:ה*). The *מצוה* is not just to know the story, but to pass it on in a way that feels real and alive.

What does it mean to see ourselves as if we left Egypt? The word *מצרים* comes from the root *מצר*, meaning “constraint” or “a narrow place.” The *שפת אמת* explains that the Exodus from

Egypt is not only about physical slavery; it represents breaking free from whatever holds us back spiritually. Every person has their own “Egypt”: fears, bad habits, doubts, or pressures that limit who they can become.

The *מהר”ל* of Prague teaches us that true freedom is not just doing whatever you want. Real freedom is the ability to live with purpose and serve *Hashem*. That is why right after leaving Egypt the Jewish people go to *סיני*. Freedom without direction is not redemption, it is chaos. *פסח* reminds us that we were freed for something, not just from something.

The *רמב”ן* adds another beautiful idea. He explains that the open miracles of the Exodus were meant to teach us about hidden miracles that happen every day. *פסח* strengthens our faith, not only in the big, dramatic moments, but also in regular daily life, such as praying and giving charity. When we recognize that *Hashem* runs the world, even when it is not obvious, we live with deeper trust and gratitude.

“The *שפת אמת* explains that the Exodus from Egypt is not only about physical slavery; it represents breaking free from whatever holds us back spiritually”

Maybe that is why the הגדה begins with “הא להמא עניא,” inviting anyone who is hungry to join. Freedom means caring about others. When we truly feel grateful for our own redemption, we naturally want to lift others up too.

As we sit at the סדר this year, surrounded by family, asking questions, and telling over the

If It's About Freedom, Why Talk About Slavery?

By Noah Levy, Grade 9

On פסח, we celebrate our independence; however, throughout the הגדה we talk a lot about how terrible slavery was. If our main focus on פסח and during the סדר is to celebrate our independence, then why do we need to talk about how bad it was in slavery? Mentioning it is nice, but why do we need such a strong emphasis on it? The הגדה is actually teaching us a very important lesson. In order to understand all the greatness of all the miracles of יציאת מצרים, we must first understand how bad it truly was in Egypt.

What was the worst thing that the Egyptians did to us – the Jews? A common answer is that the worst thing the Egyptians did to us was that they enslaved us and treated us horribly. However, there was something even worse than slavery that the Egyptians did to the Jews. «הקה נתחכמה לו פני-רבה והיה כיתתקראנה מלתמה ונוסף גם-הוא על-שנאינו ונלחם-בנו ועלה מרה-אריז» “Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground” (שמות א:י).

story, we should ask ourselves: What is my personal מצרים? What step can I take towards my own redemption? If we can answer that, then we are not just remembering the exodus, we are living it.

פרעה's reason for oppressing the Jews wasn't because he hated us; alternatively, it was because he was scared of us, and scared that we would grow into a large nation that would one day help overthrow the Egyptians. פרעה tries to oppress us, “וַיְשִׂימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסֵּים לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיְבֹן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה אֶת-פִּתּוֹם וְאֶת-רַעַמְסֵס” “So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses” (שמות א:יא).

However, this doesn't work, “וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנֶוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצֹצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” “But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites” (שמות א:יב).

The more the Egyptians oppressed us the faster we reproduced.

Then פרעה tries telling the Hebrew midwives אִם-יֶבֶן הוּא וְהַמִּיתָן אֹתוֹ וְאִם-בַּת “הוא ותהיה” “If it is a boy, kill him. If it is a girl let her live” (שמות: א:טז). This doesn't work

because the midwives are G-d fearing so they disobey פרעה's command.

Then we see that פרעה has had enough. פרעה tells the Egyptians: "כִּלְיֵהֶבֶן הַיְלֹוד הַיְאֹרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ" "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live" (שמות א:כב).

פרעה is committing an act of murder, of genocide. He needs a place to hide it, and the Nile is the perfect place. The babies would be thrown into the Nile and there would never be a trace of wrongdoing. The Nile would just continue to look like itself, glistening in the sun and flowing along its regular course. When the Jews would come crying to the Egyptian authorities, the authorities could deny it, saying what's your evidence? Do you have any witnesses? Then the Jews would go home in pieces, burdened by this feeling that they know they were being lied to and there was nothing they could do about it. Then the next day they would look out and everything was normal as if nothing happened. And if the crimes of the Egyptians weren't bad enough, nature itself would help cover it up.

Then came the first plague, blood. The water turns to blood, the Nile finally revealing Egypt's darkest secrets. The Egyptians thought their crime went unnoticed, but now nature itself reveals it to the world. *Hashem* shows that He knows what they have done and that there are no more secrets. This is the beginning of justice. It wasn't enough for *Hashem* to just take us out of Egypt, He had to redeem what had been done to us. When the water of the Nile turns into blood during מכת דם, *Hashem* shows the Jews that the Egyptians are getting punished for their actions, that the Jews are finally getting redemption.

The הגדה and the story of יציאת מצרים are full of the secrets of our freedom. This is why we must also focus on our slavery in Egypt, so we are able to fully appreciate the greatness of יציאת מצרים and of our independence. This year, as you sit down at your סדר, take a look at the stories you have been hearing since you were little. You might realize that there is so much more, and these stories are so meaningful even three thousand years later.

Small Nation, Big Energy

By Tobie Ostroff, Grade 11

«אֵלֶּא שְׁבָכֶל דּוֹר וָדוֹר, עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ. וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם»
"Rather in every generation they try to destroy us, and *Hashem* saves us from their hands."

Every year during the סדר, we read these words. These words did not mean as much as they

might have until October 7th, 2023. Of course, in hearing stories about persecution (פורים, פסח, etc.) we understand that *Hashem* always pulls through. Almost every holiday's story includes the structure of: someone did not like us, they had a big army, they tried to kill us, *Hashem* saved the Jews, and the Jews

won. Still, why do nations keep trying to come after us? *Hashem* saves us time and time again, but nations still fight, believing they will prevail over us. It is fair to say that when people already feel aversion towards a group, they are more likely to believe that that group is threatening or dangerous.

With this, another question arises: why are huge nations intimidated by a small group? The Egyptians outnumbered us! Let's take a look at how the Jews were described in the beginning of the *פסח* story. *פרעה* says: "הִנֵּה עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us" (שמות א:ט). The *אור החיים* says that the word *הנה* may also be understood as "הנה עם" "this here nation." Every other nation is a mix of different people, but not the Jews. The *אור החיים* describes us as "monolithic, like a single block." He continues, saying that: "When Pharaoh added the words 'רב ועצום', he explained that the strength of the Jewish nation lay in its singlemindedness

and unity of purpose." The *אור החיים* concludes that because *עם ישראל*'s unity "represented a danger totally disproportionate to their actual numbers," our unity is intimidating. This is in part because "שְׂכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרָבִים זֶה" "the entire Jewish people are considered guarantors for one another" (שבועות לט).

Our unity sets us apart. We are known as a unified nation! This is one of the many traditions that we will always have. Jewish unity is forever. Uniting for *Hashem* is what we do. We stand up and support one another. These attributes are some of the reasons why we are still here!

“Uniting for *Hashem* is what we do. We stand up and support one another...”

A Night of Praise, Not Gloating

By Eliana Goldenholtz, Grade 12

When we reach the plagues in the story of *מגידי*, the *סדר* has us do something almost comically precise: we remove wine from a cup, drop by drop. Sixteen drops - one for each of the following: "דב, ואש, ותמרות-עשן" (three types of punishments), ten for the plagues, and three for R' Yehuda's "דצ"ך עד"ש באה"ב" (a three-word mnemonic for the 10 plagues). The volume taken from the cup is negligible,

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but the deliberateness is not. So what exactly is going on here?

One way to read the gesture is as a kind of averting of harm. We name calamities, and we symbolically push them out of the cup, as if to say that they are out of our possession, or out of our space. We are holding a "cup of salvation," and as we speak about punishments, we do

not want to take them in. So we remove a bit of wine at each mention.

This interpretation logically flows into a related idea: the spilling becomes directional in a different sense - not “away from us” in general, but “onto them.” The plagues fell upon the Egyptians drop by drop. The wine, like the Egyptians, is diminished.

This is certainly a way to view this ritual, but what is odd is the fact that often wine is the symbol of freedom and celebration. If the point were only to redirect or neutralize harm, why do we use wine?

Another interpretation is that this particular ritual is all about diminishing joy. The classic textual source for this concept is “בְּנִפְלֹא אוֹיְבֶיךָ אַל תִּשְׂמַח וּבְנִשְׁלֹוֹ אַל יִגַּל לְבָבְךָ: פֶּן יֵרָאֶה ה' וְרַע בְּעֵינָיו” “when your enemies fall, do not exult; and when they trip, do not let your heart rejoice, lest G-d see it and be displeased, and avert G-d’s anger from them” (משלי כד:יז-יח). There are two things of note here. First, the פסוק is not arguing against relief, gratitude, or justice. Its focus is about rejoicing in the enemy’s fall. It is talking about emotional “profit” from another person’s collapse.

Second, the reason given in the פסוקים is strange. It implies that gloating does not just look bad, it actively distorts one’s moral standing, and angers *Hashem*. This is a surprising view of ethics - we are instructed to think not only about what is deserved, but also of the kind of inner thinking that can corrupt us.

“Luckily, the סדר’s spilling of wine helps us differentiate: keep the cup of joy, but make it deliberately incomplete”

ל” sharpen this claim, in מגילה י: where it is discussed that the angels wanted to sing as the Egyptians drown, and *Hashem* stopped them. With *Hashem*’s creations drowning in the sea they were going to rejoice?! Conceptually, this is saying that sure, we do not deny culpability, but we also refuse outright superiority and satisfaction at someone else’s pain. Even the guilty remain *Hashem*’s handiwork. Destruction remains destruction.

At that point, a tension becomes unavoidable (and perhaps we are supposed to feel it): if there is something morally off about singing about Egyptian loss, why are we full of song at the moment of their drowning? In fact, why do we have this whole architecture of praise (ואז (ישיר, הלל)?

Here we can suggest that “song” does not belong in a single category. While singing can be a gratitude for rescue; it can also be enjoyment of someone else’s suffering. These two can, at times, look identical. Luckily, the סדר’s spilling of wine helps us differentiate: keep the cup of joy, but make it deliberately incomplete at the exact point where the narrative tempts one toward, excuse my German, *schadenfreude*.

In this new light, the ritual stops being about “less happiness and celebration” and starts

being about a subtler definition of freedom. A people leaving slavery could easily build its sense of wholeness on the humiliation of its former masters. But the סדר seems to be imparting a different message: the capacity to experience victory without needing cruelty.

This makes the “diminished joy” explanation seem to be the deepest explanation. It forces a

particular kind of moral thinking. We are asked to notice that point where necessary judgment quietly turns into emotional indulgence, where the story of liberation becomes dependent on someone else’s collapse.

In the end, פסח does not merely commemorate freedom; it offers a discipline for living with it.

An Adam 1 and an Adam 2 Walk Into a סדר...

By Ozzie Vidan, Grade 12

The streets were filled with people, and the smell of fresh food from the marketplaces floated through the city. A pure sense of joy and fulfillment filled the air. The שלש רגלים were lively times in ארץ ישראל. All the Jews would make a pilgrimage to ירושלים, gathering at the בית המקדש to serve and give thanks to their Creator. פסח especially was a time of immense happiness and unity. Much like today, families would get together to recall, retell, and relive the miraculous events our ancestors experienced in Egypt. Special food was eaten to commemorate the Exodus, such as מרור, מצה, and חרוסת. In those days, however, the night culminated with the eating of the קרבן פסח.

Interestingly, the קרבן פסח is very different from all the other sacrifices offered in the Temple. The fifth chapter of מסכת פסחים lists most of the special laws regarding this sacrifice. For example, the קרבן פסח is eaten only with a pre-designated group; it must only be roasted; it must be eaten with מצה and מרור; and it must

be eaten on the night of the fifteenth of ניסן. The list goes on and on. These restrictions and requirements are unique to the קרבן פסח, making it separate and distinct from all other קרבנות. Furthermore, the laws regarding this sacrifice seem especially structured and rigid, contrasting with the general theme of freedom on פסח.

Rav Soloveitchik z”l’s The Lonely Man of Faith describes two types of Jewish personalities: the first being the “physicist” (namely, Adam 1) who focuses on action and practical law. Adam 1 is the conqueror who seeks to develop, invent, and evolve. He asks mainly the “what” and “how” questions. For example, “What am I supposed to do?” or “How am I to do it?” On the other hand, Adam 2, the second personality suggested by the Rav, is more of a philosopher rather than a builder or a performer. He asks the “why” questions rather than the “what.” Adam 2 wonders what a Jew’s purpose in this world is and why he was assigned it. Instead of being the man of action, he is absorbed in his

own philosophical thoughts about why those actions matter.

When discussing the tension between these two characteristics, and how a Jew can apply them to his or her own life, many possible answers may arise. At first glance, one might assume that ideally one should strive to have an equal, fifty-fifty balance. However, not only is this difficult to achieve, it may not be as effective as one might think. As the גמרא in multiple places states, introspection is a very significant principle. When a bad event occurs, one should “יפשפש במעשיו,” contemplate his deeds and seek to correct them. The גמרא in (גי:) adds to this idea by saying one should also be “ימשמש במעשיו,” scrutinize one’s actions before performing them and evaluate whether they are right or wrong. All of this requires the attributes of Adam 2.

A second approach is to have the philosopher heavily outweigh the physicist. Still, Adam 2 should not completely overcome Adam 1, because a Jew needs to be fluent in practical law in order to be able to serve G-d in the proper way. Nevertheless, being a thinker is also a crucial factor in the service of *Hashem*. In fact, Rav Soloveitchik himself was more of a thinker than a ruler of law. He was a master of practical law and could answer any inquiry, but he emphasized the logic rooted in the laws themselves. Without a true understanding of the מצוות, one cannot attain the eudaimonic feeling described by the Rav when performing G-d’s commandments. If the scale were to be tilted any more to the Adam 1 side, then one would deprive oneself of the appreciation of *Hashem*’s beautiful, intricate, and perfectly sculpted תורה. One would lose sight of their

purpose in life, and result in rotely performing while not internalizing.

The קרבן פסח initially presents itself as an expression of Adam 1. Its strict legal framework is exacting and demanding. Like other sacrifices, it is extremely technical. It must be a male sheep or goat, less than one year old, but older than a month, and one must eat at least an olive-sized piece of meat or more. All these strict rules emulate the attributes of Adam 1, the performer and legalist.

In פרשת צו, we are introduced to the קרבן שלמים. This type of offering is generally brought to express gratitude and harmony with G-d, rather than atonement for sin. For a קרבן שלמים, parts of the animal are burned on the altar, with other portions eaten by the כהנים and its owner. In the seventh chapter of (זי:א-י”ה) ויקרא, we learn that the קרבן שלמים can be offered in two manners: as a תודה, a thanksgiving offering, which must be eaten on that day and evening along with forty types of bread; or as a standard voluntary offering, which can be eaten that day and the next, with no requirement to eat it with bread. In both cases, the meat belongs to the owner and should be eaten anywhere within the walls of ירושלים.

Even though the שלמים is generally a קרבן נדבה (voluntary offering), there are four circumstances when a person is obligated to bring a תודה. פרק קז. תהלים describes four examples of an individual’s deliverance from danger: one who crosses the desert, travels the sea, recovers from illness, or is released from prison. These are the cases when one must bring a קרבן תודה. Notably, this chapter of תהלים

is also the source for the four instances when one is required to recite ברכת הגומל, another occasion where Hashem's salvation is made clear. In comparison to the other offerings, the קרבן פסח is most similar to the תודה. For example, they both cannot be eaten the next day. One must finish eating the קרבן by dawn (or, according to some, by midnight). Furthermore, they have to be eaten together with bread; the קרבן פסח with מצה (and מרור) and the תודה with forty loaves.

Let us consider a typical case of the קרבן תודה. For instance, one crosses the ocean and decides to offer a thanksgiving offering. Following the standard תודה procedure in the Temple, the owner is left with a massive amount of meat and bread that must be eaten by the end of the day in ירושלים. Evidently, it is impossible for a single person to consume all that food in just a couple of hours. Instead, the owner is forced to share it with others. Therefore, the special laws of the קרבן תודה necessitate that the owner must invite groups of people to assist in finishing the meat and bread. Inevitably, at this meal, the owner will end up telling their story and explaining the reason for the bringing of this קרבן תודה. As a result, G-d will be praised and sanctified in public, and all the guests will learn of the miracle He performed for the owner. To properly praise Hashem, it is not sufficient to merely offer a prayer; rather, it is important to thank Him in public as well. This is the true fulfillment and purpose of the קרבן תודה.

Similarly, Rabbi Menachem Leibtag explains that the קרבן פסח functions in a similar way, but on a national level. The קרבן פסח also creates

an environment in which we can thank G-d. First, with it being offered on one of the שלש רגלים, on פסח everyone was obligated to go up to the בית המקדש and offer קרבנות while the לויים sang הלל. This itself is a national thanksgiving. Second, pre-designated groups were required. It was necessary to know ahead of time who would be eating from each specific פסח קרבן. This rule was not to limit the number of participants; on the contrary, it was to ensure that nobody got left out. Additionally, the קרבן פסח must be eaten with מצה and מרור.

Rabbi Leibtag explains that the primary reason for the requirement to eat מצה with the פסח is the same as the requirement to eat bread with the תודה: so people sit down for a meal, which naturally leads to a public thanksgiving to G-d. However, once we have bread at the פסח meal, the Torah chooses מצה to remind us of our slavery in Egypt (and the same applies to מרור as well). Notably, the reason for eating מצה with the קרבן פסח cannot be because we were rushed when we left Egypt and the bread did not have time to rise. This original מצוה was given on ראש חודש ניסן before the Exodus even occurred (שמות 12:18). Furthermore, the fact that the whole animal must be consumed with no leftovers guarantees that everyone will enjoy the meal and not think about saving any for the future.

Nonetheless, the underlying reason for this sacrifice is that we say מגיד. It is in order that we tell the wondrous and numinous story of יציאת מצרים, ending with the singing of הלל and a night full of gratitude and appreciation of G-d. This aspect is the most similar to the קרבן תודה, for in order to correctly thank Hashem

for our national redemption, we must do so publicly and in such a way that we ourselves feel as though we had been redeemed from Egypt.

תהלים קז, the source for when one is required to bring a תודה or recite ברכת הגומל, follows the same four-step pattern as יציאת מצרים. As briefly explained above, this פרק of תהלים mentions different circumstances of someone in danger, resulting in their ultimate redemption. Each case goes according to a specific structure: יצועה (the cry out to G-d), צרה (the crisis), יצועה (Hashem saving the individual), and finally הודאה (praise and thanks from the saved to the savior). This mirrors exactly the sequence of יציאת מצרים and the הגדה on seder night. At its core, פסח is 107 תהלים and, by extension, the קרבן תודה on a national scale.

As established above, the technical and numerous regulations regarding the קרבן פסח are meant to create public commemoration of the miracles that occurred to our ancestors in ניסן. Their purpose is to form some sort of “פרסומי ניסא” (publicization of the miracle) about יציאת מצרים and קריאת ים סוף. Contrary to the foregoing argument, this new lens of the קרבן פסח reflects the attributes of Adam 2. Adam 2, existential and introspective man, does not fulfill commandments perfunctorily; he sits back and ponders the lessons to be learned or the reasons behind his actions. The sanctification and exaltation of Hashem that arises from this sacrifice is only uncovered by the Adam 2 personality. It is from here that a third approach to the conflict between these two personalities emerges.

פסח uses Adam 1 to produce Adam 2. The halachic framework is strict so that philosophical experience can crystallize. The group registration forces conversation, the מצה ensures a formal meal, the מרור deepens the memory and experience, the deadline prevents casualness, and the gathering in Jerusalem creates national unity. פסח unites Adam 1 and Adam 2. The detailed performance of מצוות represents Adam 1, yet those very actions are crafted to awaken Adam 2. פסח teaches us that meticulous adherence to *halacha* is not the enemy of meaning; it is the beginning and architect of it. Seder night reinforces this balance. It allows for a healthy mixture between both dispositions.

“פסח teaches us that meticulous adherence to *halacha* is not the enemy of meaning; it is the beginning and architect of it.”

However, one must be careful with how they utilize their Adam 2. There is a profound difference between seeking understanding to enrich faith and demanding understanding as a precondition for faith. This dynamic recalls the בבא בתרא קיז. : in גמרא. The גמרא describes the unnecessarily convoluted opinion of אחרים regarding the price of land under dispute by three judges. After a lengthy discussion, the גמרא adjudicates the view of אחרים, but then Rav Ashi argues that their theory is illogical, so it should not be the final *halacha*. He says that since he does not fully understand the reasoning of אחרים, he is not in support.

From here we can learn a valuable lesson. In Judaism, there are two types of mindsets: one, someone who fulfills “בעשה ונשמע,” who blindly follows in the ways of *Hashem*. This person only asks to know the reason behind a מצווה to fully grasp how G-d operates and formulates commandments, but no matter the reason, this person will nevertheless fulfill the commandment. Second, a Jew who will only willingly perform mitzvos once he knows the basis for them. This type of person seeks reason as a precursor to obedience. If he does not understand the reason or basis for a commandment, he will likely not adhere to it, and if he does, he will. This attitude is most likely caused by a lack of אמונה, belief. Similarly, if someone’s Adam 2 is significantly outweighing their Adam 1, they need to be extremely careful about why that is. They must determine why they are becoming more of a philosopher. Is it because they desire a better understanding of *Hashem*, or is it because of their absence of faith?

The danger of imbalance between the philosopher and the legalist is real. If Adam 1 overwhelms Adam 2, the seder risks falling into hurried performance: read, eat, finish. If Adam 2 overwhelms Adam 1, the *seder* risks devolving into abstract discussion without

halachic precision. Therefore, פסח insists on a synthesis between the two. The fulfillment of all its laws with the utmost accuracy ensures that the story of the Exodus will be told, gratitude will be expressed, and ultimately, G-d will be lauded. People sometimes feel that the סדר is long and filled with many rules and procedures, but those are not meant to burden us; rather, they are precisely what transforms the evening from a simple meal into a spiritually meaningful and impactful experience.

Although this year there is the possibility that the Temple will not be rebuilt in time to offer the Temple קרבן פסח for *Pesach*, the same structure remains in the seder. We gather with family and friends, we sit formally at a meal eating symbolic foods, we recount the story of יציאת מצרים, and we conclude with הלל. פסח is not merely a commemoration of ancient events; it is the annual reconstruction of national consciousness. Through this holiday, we become a redeemed people once more, and our individual religious identities are refined. פסח is the night when the builder and the seeker coexist harmoniously. When Adam 1 and Adam 2 sit together at the *seder* table, gratitude becomes public, and the redemption becomes present.

הגדה The

Symbolism in Numbers: The Deeper Meaning of Three Matzot and Four Cups

By Dina Wagner, Grade 12

In parshat וָאֵרָא *Hashem* says “...הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם... לְקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם... גָּאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם... הִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם...” - “I shall release you... I shall save you... I shall redeem you... I shall take you.” Rebeine Bchaya says that the explanations of these four statements are as follows:

“הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם” - “I shall release you” is referring to the fact that the Jews will be free from slavery even before they leave *Mitzrayim*. “הִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם” - “I shall save you” refers to the plagues and the Jews’ liberation from *Mitzrayim*. “גָּאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם” - “I shall redeem you” alludes to the miracle of קריעת ים סוף in which *Hashem* wiped out part of Egypt, essentially getting revenge on בני ישראל’s behalf. “לְקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם” - “I shall take you” means *Hashem* is claiming the Jews as his people.

During the פסח *seder*, we drink four cups of wine, each corresponding to one of *Hashem*’s promises. This raises a question: since the reason for eating matzot is because our ancestors were freed from מצרים, shouldn’t that mean we eat four מצות, just as we drink four cups of wine? Evidently, there must be a difference in the two aspects we are commemorating. One that must be remembered with the number four and one with the number three. What are these two

aspects? The gift of physical redemption and the aspect of spiritual redemption. The three מצות remind us that *Hashem* redeemed us out of pure compassion, even before we were spiritually ready. Wine reminds us that true freedom came when we grew into that redemption and became worthy of being *Hashem*’s nation.

When the Jews left מצרים, they were not spiritually worthy of redemption. They were nowhere near pure enough to earn redemption, as they hadn’t spiritually improved enough. *Hashem* redeemed them out of pure kindness as a gift from above, the gift of redemption. Even though they physically left Egypt, they were still spiritually influenced by Egyptian culture and impurity. True freedom didn’t happen on the night of יציאת מצרים or at קריעת ים סוף. Complete freedom happened at הר סיני, when they received the *Torah* and became a holy nation. Between פסח and שבועת (during Sefirat HaOmer), they spiritually refined themselves step by step until they were worthy of *Hashem*’s fourth statement “לְקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם” - “I shall take you.” This last part could only be achieved when *Bnei Yisroel* wanted it, because it required their participation. With this in mind, we can now consider the symbolism

behind the amount of *matzah* we eat versus the amount of wine we drink.

מצה represents the gift of redemption and highlights *Hashem's* kindness. The first three expressions — “I will release you,” “I will save you,” and “I will redeem you” — happened immediately when the Jewish people left Egypt. They came as a gift from *Hashem*, even though the Jewish people were not yet spiritually worthy. The three מצות correspond to these three expressions, symbolizing the

unearned redemption *Hashem* granted us. The fourth expression — “I will take you unto Me as a Nation” — was different. That stage of redemption depended on the Jewish people becoming worthy through spiritual growth, which was accomplished at Har Sinai when they received the *Torah*. The four cups of wine, therefore, represent the complete redemption — not just being taken out of Egypt, but becoming *Hashem's* nation through our own spiritual journey and refinement.

Freedom vs. Slavery

By Amalya Fischer, Grade 12

“מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?” “What makes this night different from all other nights?” This question prompts four answers describing the unconventional, luxurious rituals practiced by Jews worldwide during the סדר. However, as the אברבנאל points out in his commentary on the הגדה, these practices create apparent contradictions in the סדר. On the one hand, we do things that make us look like wealthy nobles: for example, instead of dipping our food once, we dip twice, making us look like free noblemen who pair their food with a wide variety of fine dips; and instead of sitting straight at the dinner table, we recline on pillows. On the other hand, we carry out practices that accomplish the complete opposite: during the סדר, for example, we only eat מצה - the “bread of affliction” - making us look like poor slaves; and while on other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, during the

סדר we eat only bitter herbs, or מרור, another sign of slavery and suffering. In short, in this simple text we have two things symbolizing freedom - dipping and reclining - and two things symbolizing slavery - מצה and מרור. Such a contradiction makes us wonder which value we are trying to emphasize during the סדר. Are we trying to lament over the suffering and slavery of our ancestors? Or are we celebrating the miracles carried out by G-d who redeemed us and made us His nation? In other words, during the סדר, are we slaves or are we free?

The אברבנאל explains that the duality of our exodus from Egypt is exactly what we are trying to emphasize. We are giving testimony to both the slavery endured and the freedom enjoyed by בני ישראל. Thus, we must bring two examples of each theme, since by Jewish

law, testimony must be based on two or more witnesses. From this dual emphasis, one can see that G-d did not take us out of מצרים to be completely free. It is true, we left מצרים, we left behind the suffering and fear in which we lived; however, our freedom is also a reminder of our eternal servitude. Even during the סדר, a time when we happily recount the story of our redemption, we sadden ourselves with the reminder of the years we spent serving פרעה.

So if we continue to be subservient, who are we serving today? In שמות 13:17, G-d says that He will take the Jews out of Egypt in order to make בני ישראל as “לי לְעָם” “My nation.” In other words, G-d did not take us out of Egypt to recline on pillows or eat luxurious food, but to serve Him and keep His מצוות. The way one can see it, G-d’s view of freedom does not depend only on the absence of oppression and the opportunity to self-indulge, but rather also on

“G-d’s view of freedom does not depend only on the absence of oppression and the opportunity to self-indulge, but rather also on the ability to choose.”

the ability to choose. In Egypt, we were forced into subjugation under פרעה’s rule. Now, we experience the rare and valuable right to choice - not only to serve G-d out of our own will and put ourselves into his servitude, but to do so publicly and in a secular environment. Perhaps the whole point of the הגדה’s dual emphasis of freedom and slavery is to make us stop, look around, and acknowledge that we are not completely free and we are still privileged in our ability to serve G-d.

אפיקומן: A Toast to the Unsung Heroes of מגיד?

By Yochanan Cramer, Grade 12

Through a strange name familiar to Jewish culture, the אפיקומן has become a staple for Jews everywhere observing the *Pesach seder*. Early on, at the stage of יהיך, the leader of the service splits the middle מצה in order to leave a remainder for צפון: the hidden “dessert” of the *Pesach* meal (*Shulchan Orech*). This piece, called the אפיקומן, is set aside until after the meal, at which point the children go search for its hiding spot, and once found,

the seder participants may indulge in it. For context, אפיקומן is etymologically traced to the Byzantine Greek epikōmion (ἐπικόμιον), meaning “festivity” or “celebrator.” Such a translation is befitting for the general purpose of יום טוב. As we learn from *Parshat Rאה* regarding the three annual pilgrimage festivals: וְשִׂמְחֶתָּהּ בְּתַגָּדָהּ ... וְהִיִּיתָ אֶתְּ אֶתְּ שִׂמְחָה: “You shall rejoice in your festival ... and you shall have nothing but joy” (*Devarim* 16:14-15). But what

exactly inspired our rabbinical ancestors to introduce this specific custom to our *Pesach* observance? There are multiple explanations, but as will be explained, the latter seems to stand out from the rest.

At an initial glance in the works of רז"ל, we often see them quote the *Mishnah* (*Pesachim* 119b) that this is a remembrance of the קרבן פסח consumption as we await the third and final Temple so that we may perform this as in days of old. As it says at the end, in *Nirtzah's* introduction: כְּאֲשֶׁר זָכִינוּ לְסַדֵּר אוֹתוֹ כֵּן נִזְכָּה לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ "Just as we have been privileged to lay out its order, so may we be privileged to perform it [in the Temple]." Others point towards this act as one that seeks the divine essence within us; perhaps it's a מהדרין (a beautifying stringency in Judaism) emanating from the initial benediction of מוצי מצה, ultimately hoping to swiftly usher in the Messianic era. These ideas are similar and powerful in their own right, both passing the eye test for why *Chazal* would instate this tradition. However, there is a lesser-given explanation for the אפיקומן's incorporation into our seder, and in order to derive this, we will need to flip to the earlier part of the הגדה—more specifically, מגיד, the telling of the *Pesach* story.

The sages of the Tannaic and Amoraic period, when setting the stage for *Pesach's* standardized nighttime liturgy, composed the text as an exegesis of the *Pesach* storytelling in the *Torah*; hence, we call this section מגיד. As the story goes (Devarim 26:8), we were taken out of Egypt through divine intervention and miracles: וַיּוֹצֵאנוּ יְיָ מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה, וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה, "And G-d brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an

outstretched arm, with awe-inspiring deeds, signs, and wonders." The הגדה—of dubious credit in terms of authorship (although here, a defensible source is מִסְכְּתָא דְפִסְחָא 7:6 in the third century Israeli work *Mekhilta D'Rabbi Yishmael*)—interpret *Devarim* 26:8, quoting *Shemot* 12:29 as a supporting proof for how to come to its conclusion: וַיּוֹצֵאנוּ יְיָ מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא עַל־יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ, וְלֹא עַל־יְדֵי שְׂרָף, וְלֹא עַל־יְדֵי שְׁלִיחַ, אֲלֵא הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכַבּוּדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ. שְׁנֵאמַר: וְעַבְרַתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם בְּלִלְהָ הָהָה, וְהַיְתִי כְל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאֲדָם וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה, וּבְכָל־אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה "And G-d brought us out of Egypt" – Not through an angel, not through a seraph, not through any emissary. Rather, it was the Holy One, His glory, and His own presence. As it is said: "I shall pass through the land of Egypt on that night; I shall kill every firstborn son in the land of Egypt, man and beast, and I shall pass judgment on all the gods of Egypt: I am the L-rd." Lastly, the text explains how the verse from *Shemot* supports the verse from *Devarim*. It explains: וְעַבְרַתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם בְּלִלְהָ הָהָה – אֲנִי וְלֹא מַלְאָךְ; וְהַיְתִי כְל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם. אֲנִי וְלֹא שְׂרָף; וּבְכָל־אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים. אֲנִי "I shall pass through the land of Egypt on that night" – I and no angel. "I shall kill every firstborn son in the land of Egypt" – I and no seraph. "And I shall pass judgment on all the G-ds of Egypt" – I and no emissary. "I am the L-rd" – It is I and no other.

Reading in between the lines of the two verses taught the Haggadaic authors a concept that is central to our faith: that the great events of יציאת מצרים were solely of G-d's doing. While heretics may claim that the events transpiring on *Pesach* were only possible due to the angel who saved the Jewish households from מכת

בכורות (see Shemot 12:13), or that the compliant seraph took the Jews out of Egypt (another type of angel, see also *Shemot* 14:19), or that an emissary (or perhaps good fortune) was the true victor against the pursuing Egyptians and not purely G-d's might—this section of the הגדה seeks to refute that all. Instead, all of this is attributed to G-d.

At this point, one may ask: how is this in any way relevant to the discussion of צפון and the אפיקומן? Although it is not explicit, considering this fragment in the context of the פסח story beautifully explicates the addition of צפון, while revealing a profound connection between the two. Consider this: at the beginning of the story, in שמות זב, Hashem makes משה and אהרן the speakers from the Jewish to פרעה, in order to free the nation from bondage. As we learned earlier, the הגדה is adamant that there was no redeemer from Egypt other than G-d, though we are well aware that someone had to lead the people on foot. The focus of the הגדה is to, instead, understand that while משה and אהרן helped lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, this was done solely from Hashem. However, in order to lift up His servants, Hashem still gives credit to them as “נְהִיטָה כְּצֹאן עֶמֶד בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה” “You led Your people like a flock, in the care of משה and אהרן (תהלים ע"ז:כ"א).”

Our sages' institution of the אפיקומן reflects a deep sensitivity to the essence of the night: the emphasis is on the מצה—hence the *Torah's* designation of the festival as הג המצות—while simultaneously conveying that wholeness emerges only from carefully ordered parts. The מצה itself is broken and concealed, and yet it is precisely this hidden fragment that ultimately completes the meal and frames

“Redemption, then, is not presented as the triumph of a single moment or heroic figure, but as the deliberate integration of distinct elements into a unified whole.”

the structure of the seder. Redemption, then, is not presented as the triumph of a single moment or heroic figure, but as the deliberate integration of distinct elements into a unified whole. It is therefore fitting that משה and אהרן recede from the foreground of the הגדה. Just as the אפיקומן teaches that completion lies not in exalting one visible piece but in assembling the fragments with intention, so too the seder directs attention away from individual leaders and toward the collective process through which *Hashem* redeems the Jewish people. In the careful ordering of parts, wholeness emerges.

The Three הלל's

By Becca Gold, Grade 12

Each year, as we sit at the סדר, we take many steps to immerse ourselves in the story and to truly understand and experience it. This, of course, manifests itself in the celebration and joy of *Hashem* taking us out of Egypt. When we are overcome with gratitude and praise to *Hashem*, this is הלל. Yet, as many things during the סדר, this הלל is different: part during מגיד, and part long after, once we have finished the meal and said ברכת המזון. Additionally, we say it while seated, and without a ברכה. But going back a few hours, while saying מעריב, there is also a strange change - while normally one would conclude the עמידה and move to עלינו, we pause for הלל then. So now, going back to the סדר, we are saying הלל once again? This begs the question not of why are there two הלל's - rather, why are there three הלל's? Why do we say הלל during מעריב if it is never said then, rather only in the morning? Why do we say it again at the סדר? Is one of these הלל's not valid; if so, why do we still say it?

First, the dual הלל within the סדר - the שולחן ערוך specifically says (אורה היים תכבד) that one must not have a pause or interruption in the middle of הלל and everything must be said. During the סדר not only is there a break, but we have an entire meal in between! In fact, the importance of saying everything all together, and with a ברכה, is stressed in many places! First, we must look at the context of the parts of הלל where we say them during the סדר. The first part of הלל during the סדר is said during מגיד, where we say immediately preceding

it the paragraph of “...בכל דור ודור...” “in every generation” and then, if one looks carefully at the parts of הלל we say, those are the parts that specifically mention יציאת מצרים and help us visualize ourselves there and experience those moments. This is supported by both the רמב”ם and ספר החינוך, who emphasize the importance of experiencing the moments, and write about using הלל to retell the story.

So now it seems to make sense why we would have those parts of הלל there, but why not just say the rest of it then? Or, why not only say that half and not say the rest at all during the סדר, considering the interruption?

The גמרא in פסחים discusses how it is possible that the split is connected to the cups that follow the parts of הלל. The first part of הלל precedes the second cup, where the ברכה relates specifically to the ideas of redemption and being saved from Egypt, focusing specifically on the פסח story. Because of this extremely specific nature and the nature of the ברכה, we would not want to cause a break between the topic and the ברכה, where we sing praises to *Hashem* for more general topics. Instead, we need to dedicate this portion of the סדר specifically to experiencing the miracle of the redemption from Egypt, and not take away from that in any sense.

When we get to the point in the סדר after the meal and ברכת המזון, when we say the second part of הלל, we must also look at what precedes

and follows it. This part of הלל comes right after “שפך חמתך” “pour your anger,” which, contrary to popular belief, is not about אליהו (as that is not the current topic), but instead is about asking Hashem to protect us from the nations who want to do us harm. We then add הודו and הלל after נשמת, and conclude with ישתבח, which is the ברכה right before the fourth cup. So it would seem that this part of הלל is thanking Hashem more generally for His protection, praising Him for all He has done in the past for us, not just in Egypt. Possibly we are even praising Him for the future salvation that we trust and know He will do.

There is also a large discussion about “reading” הלל, “completing” הלל, or “singing” it. Whether or not we have fulfilled the first two through this split הלל is unclear, and certainly the subject of debate. However, it seems that if this הלל is here to be a song and expression of our gratitude to Hashem that we could not possibly fully express, this may be an explanation for why we have the second half separate. After all, as mentioned before, the structure of the סדר tries hard to ensure we can experience as much as possible leaving Egypt, so singing praise to Hashem as בני ישראל did during the splitting of the sea seems as if it would fit right in.

Yet even after all of this, we have not clearly discussed what is going on with the possible הלל during מעריב before the סדר. It is discussed throughout the תלמוד as well as many ראשונים and אחרונים, and is even still a debate today. תוספות says that this הלל would have counted since it meets all the requirements, if not for the separation, but due to that it cannot count. The separation is stressed in many places as

being extremely important, so does this mean it is enough to cancel out the worth of all of the הלל that we say at the סדר? The answer to this is clear from everything discussed above; no, it is not “worthless,” so to speak. Instead, it has much worth to each part of the סדר the respective parts are in and contributes as a whole - however, it cannot count to fill the requirement of saying הלל. This begs the question of whether we even have a requirement to fulfill הלל with a ברכה and all of the other requirements on סדר nights.

מסכת סופרים includes a list of when we say הלל, and includes the סדר night on the list. It continues to say that in exile one should sing הלל with a ברכה at shul and then there is no need to say a ברכה at the סדר, since it has been fulfilled already. However, the alternative view is that הלל is only supposed to be said during the day, with the basis in the פסוק from תהלים “מִמְזֶרַח שָׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבֹאֵי מָהָלֵל יְשֵׁם ה'” :קייג: “from the rise until the setting of the sun G-d is praised.” At the end of the day, the אורח חיים (שולחן ערוך) (תפוז: מעריב) says that one should say הלל beforehand with a ברכה at the beginning and end in מעריב, whereas the רמ”א says that since we never say הלל at night we cannot do this. At first, in many אשכנז communities, it was not the custom to say הלל at מעריב, which would be in accordance with the רמ”א; however, it is now the custom in the majority of אשכנז communities to say it, and many authorities even say that everyone should be sure to say it after the stars come out, but before the סדר. This is still an ongoing debate, and one should follow their family’s customs.

To lay it out nicely, the explanation for the “three הלל’s” seems to be as follows:

The reason to say הלל at shul before the סדר would be due to a possible requirement to fulfill the obligation of הלל on סדר night, and not being able to do so during the סדר because of the separation (which is also why we do not say a ברכה).

The first section of הלל during the סדר corresponds to מגיד, has the parts that directly relate to פסח specifically, and fits the themes of redemption.

The second part of הלל fits in with the theme of general praise of Hashem and hopes for the future, which makes sense following our request for protection from other nations and then being followed by the ברכה of praising Hashem.

In truth, there are not three הלל's at all; there is one beforehand that fulfills הלל, and then portions of הלל to further their parts of the סדר.

פסח on הלכה

The Five Grains... or Six

By Joshua Jaffe, Grade 9

The five grains are wheat, spelt wheat, two-eared barley, four-eared barley¹, and rye. What do all these grains have in common? Well, they are all grains. More importantly, these grains have something that other grains do not - gluten. Believe it or not, these five grains are unique - no other grains in the world contain gluten, yet these five do. Gluten gives dough structure and allows it to rise well. So if one wants to make bread, one will use these five grains.

Is one liable if one makes corn flour rise on פסח? No, because corn flour does not rise.

Without gluten, there is nothing to trap the air created by the yeast in the dough. It is the five grains, the ones containing gluten, that the laws of חמץ applies to. מצה is parallel to חמץ - because one can only make מצה out of something that has the potential to be חמץ. Thus, one can make מצה only out of wheat, spelt wheat, two-eared barley, four-eared barley, and rye.

However, according to ר' יוחנן בן נורי (ברכות), one can indeed make מצה out of rice, and if one lets rice rise (rice does not rise in the traditional sense, but if one adds additives it

¹ Nowadays, oats is the more popular opinion than four-eared barley. While one says על המחיה and מזונות on oats, I did not count it as one of the five grains. Some people do. That is a story for its own תורה דבר.

can) on פסח, one is doing an עבירה. Given how the five grains are defined above, this view is strange, but clearly נורי בן נורי thinks that המזן has nothing to do with gluten, and any major grains can be used to make מצה.

According to the mainstream opinion that rice is not one of the five (or six) grains, what ברכה would one make on rice bread? The generally accepted ברכה for rice is מזונות. But why? Is מזונות not a ברכה reserved for the five grains? Well, clearly not. מזונות is a ברכה that one says on any filling grains, such as wheat, barley, and rice.

The only problem is, grains like corn and teff are also filling. Do they not deserve a מזונות? One could answer that indeed a מזונות should be made on all grains, and the only reason the גמרא does not mention them as requiring a מזונות is because the authors of the גמרא did not know that these other grains existed. This answer works theoretically, but then why do we not say מזונות on other grains?

The two grains, אורז and דוחן, are popularly translated as rice and millet, respectively. It should be noted that רש"י says that אורז is also a type of millet. There is a debate in

understanding between the גמרא and the ריף, against רבינו אשר, on whether the ברכה on millet should be מזונות or not. Most people follow the view that we say מזונות on rice but not on other grains like millet, and the ברכה is reserved for the six grains (the five and rice). This view does not make so much sense, because how is rice any different than millet? Perhaps rice is a more common grain than all other non gluten-containing grains, and so it gets a מזונות.

One should keep in mind that corn is not really a grain. It grows more like a fruit, and fresh corn is considered more of a vegetable than a grain. And even today, when the variety of produce is so much greater than it was in the era of the תלמוד, only grains like wheat, barley, rye, and rice are used commonly, so it is easy to say that other grains are not significant enough to deserve a מזונות, but these grains do. Furthermore, one does not make an על-על המחיה on rice, as it is not from the five grains; however, there is an opinion in the משנה that one should.

May we all be זוכה to meet אליהו הנביא who will resolve all our questions about הלכה, and may the Messiah come speedily in our days.

Making Pesach “Ours:” The Significance of מים שלנו

By Adina Cheses, Grade 10

In the process of baking *matza* it is very important that the water used is as cold as possible, since warm water would speed up the fermentation process and cause the dough to rise more quickly. This requirement is explained in *Masechet Psachim* on *daf* מב: “אמר רב יהודה אשה לא תלוש אלא במים שלנו” a woman can only make *matza* using מים שלנו. This phrase means “water that has rested,” meaning that the water used to make *matza* must be drawn from a spring or well before sunset and left to cool completely in a sealed container overnight. This extra step in the *matza*-making process was instituted to ensure that there was no chance of warm water causing the dough to begin rising within the 18 minutes.

The next line of the same *Gemara* tells a story of this phrase being misinterpreted: “דרשה רב מתנה בפפוניא למחר אייתו כולי עלמא הצבייהו ואתו לגביה ואמרו ליהא הב לן מיא אמר להו אנא במיא דביתו אמרי” Rav Matana taught this (the law about מים שלנו) to the public at Papunia, and the next day, everyone took their pitchers and came to his house and asked for water, to which he responded by explaining the confusion; he meant “מים שלנו” as “water that rested,” while they had understood it to mean “our water” and assumed there was something special about Rav Matana’s water and that they all needed to use it to make their *matza*.

While amusing at first glance, this story seems insignificant. The *Rishonim* focus only on the importance of using cooled water, without commenting on the story that follows, proving that the translation of the phrase as “water that rested” was already obvious. So why would this short anecdote be included in the *Gemara*? Perhaps the alternate translation of “our water” actually contains some meaning and relevance. Maybe this extra step in the process is not necessary only to cool the water, but also to “make it ours.” By preparing the water in advance, we take on a responsibility. Even if we were to ensure that it was freezing cold, we decide that simply taking water from the tap is not enough; we choose to put in the work to prepare it in advance.

This idea of putting in our own work and spending time in preparation is a crucial element of the *Pesach* spirit. Cooking, cleaning, kashering, traveling, and all of the other ways that we prepare for *Pesach* are incredibly important. It’s not just about participating in the holiday, it’s about putting in the effort to prepare for it. Spending time getting ready for *Pesach* solidifies its significance in our year. While *Pesach* celebrates our freedom from the burden of work under slavery, it is important that we do not forget the importance of doing things ourselves. The hours spent in preparation in the days before *Pesach* are what create the significance of the seder once

it finally arrives. The perseverance of our traditions is a direct result of thousands of hours of work put in by the generations before us. Just as the seder and observance of the eight days are crucial to the passing down of our mesora, so too erev *Pesach* is crucial to the passing down of the value of hard work and preparation.

Perhaps this is the true significance of מים שלנו. The requirement to prepare the water in advance symbolizes the importance of us putting in time and energy preparing for *Pesach*. What makes each *Pesach* special and meaningful is our unique effort, our commitment, and our time. By doing preparations ourselves, we demonstrate how

important *Pesach* is to us. Maybe we should try to look at scrubbing dishes, sweeping floors, and cooking meals not as a burden, but as an opportunity to show how important the observance of *Pesach* is to us, and to participate in the continuation of Jewish tradition.

“What makes each *Pesach* special and meaningful is our unique effort, our commitment, and our time.”

ערב פסח on מלאכה

By Ariel Jeselsohn, Grade 12

מקור האיסור

The אורה חיים סימן תסה סעיף א in שולחן ערוך writes that it is forbidden to do work on ערב פסח from midday on, and if one does do work, that person gets excommunicated. (The משנה ברורה adds that they also won't see any סימן ברכה from that work.) This rule is learned from the משנה in ע"א דף נ. There the משנה says that if on ערב פסח one is in a place where the custom is to do work before הצות, then that person is allowed to do work. But if one is in a place where the custom is not to do work before הצות, then that person cannot do work then. We see from here that after הצות on ערב פסח everyone agrees that it is forbidden to work; only before הצות does the מלאכה

depend on the custom of the place. By other ימים טובים as well, the גמרא in פסחים says that one is not allowed to do work on טוב. ערב יום טוב. The גמרא there says that what separates ערב פסח from the other ימים טובים is that on ערב פסח the prohibition is only after הצות, whereas by other ימים טובים the prohibition is all day. Another difference is that if one does work on ערב פסח they get excommunicated, whereas if one does work on any other יום טוב they do not get excommunicated.

טעם האיסור

What is the reason for this odd prohibition? The *Torah* only tells us not to do work on פסח itself, so why would the rabbis also prohibit

to do work on פסח? Moreover, why does this prohibition only apply after הצות, whereas before הצות there are different customs (as seen from the משנה)? After all, by other ימים there is also a prohibition to do מלאכה on ערב יו"ט, and this prohibition applies all day, not just after הצות like we said above.

One reason is brought down by תוספות and many פוסקים including משנה ברורה. תוספות explain based off a ירושלמי that the reason it is forbidden to do work on ערב פסח after הצות is because during this time the קרבן פסח was brought, and the day a קרבן is brought is like יום טוב. Therefore, the rabbis instituted a rabbinic prohibition on ערב פסח during the time that the קרבן פסח was brought. However, according to this reason, why would the prohibition of work on ערב פסח apply nowadays when the קרבן פסח is no longer brought, and therefore after הצות on ערב פסח should no longer be considered a יום טוב? The משנה ברורה answers that even though there is no more קרבן פסח, the prohibition to do work on ערב פסח still applies. This rule is known as "בטלה הטעם לא בטלה הגזירה." Even though the reason for the decree no longer exists, the decree remains binding.

The מגן אברהם expands on this, and explains that the איסור מלאכה on days when a קרבן was brought was instituted by a group of rabbis who gathered together and decided upon it, and the rule is that if a group of rabbis instituted a decree, that decree can only be uplifted by another group of rabbis who are greater in wisdom and number, even if the reason for the original decree no longer applies ("כל דבר שבמנין צריך מנין אחר להתירו");

(. רמב"ם הלכות ממרים פרק ב הלכה ב see). Since there has not been a group of rabbis who are wiser and more numerous than the group who instituted the איסור מלאכה on ערב פסח, the prohibition still applies despite there no longer being a קרבן פסח.

A similar yet slightly different reason is that it is not right for you to be busy with מלאכה while your קרבן פסח is being brought. This is also an important life lesson in general. When you are doing a מצוה and serving Hashem, that should be your sole focus, and you shouldn't focus on anything else. Whereas the first reason is a more technical/halachic reason, this reason is a more moral/rational one, and we may be more likely to be a little lenient with the איסור מלאכה according to it, since according to this reason the איסור מלאכה is not a formal decree.

A third reason for this prohibition is given by רש"י who says that it is forbidden to do work on ערב פסח after הצות so that one won't be too focused on work, and then they will forget to get rid of their חמץ, slaughter their קרבן פסח, and prepare מצה for the seder night.

A potential problem with this reason is according to it, why does the איסור מלאכה only apply after הצות? If we are concerned that you will forget to get rid of your חמץ and bake מצה, then shouldn't the prohibition apply all day, so that you will have enough time to prepare everything for פסח? An answer to this question can be found in the words of the לחם משנה, who says that when רש"י said that we are concerned you will forget to bake matzas, he was referring to מצה שמורה ("guarded matza"), and for that the מצוה is to prepare them after

איסור on פסח, ערב פסח on הצות, so it makes sense that the איסור on מלאכה only applies after midday according to reason #3.

Another answer to this question can be found in the שולחן ערוך, חק יעקב, a commentary on the שולחן ערוך. חק יעקב explains that really רש"י's reason and reason #1 aren't arguing. When רש"י gives his reason he is coming to explain the מנהג to not do מלאכה even before הצות on פסח, ערב פסח, but רש"י would still agree to reason #1, which only explains why you can't do מלאכה after הצות. Therefore, it comes out that according to reason #3, the איסור on מלאכה would apply even before הצות, and the primary purpose of reason #3 actually was to explain why the prohibition would apply before הצות. According to the explanation of the חק יעקב, our question is not actually a question.

Another problem with reason #3, which is asked by the מגיד משנה, is why there is no special ערב סוכות on איסור מלאכה lest one forgets to build their סוכה. Granted that there is an איסור on מלאכה, סוכות ערב, just like there is one by all ערבי ימים טובים, but why is it the entire day and not only after הצות, and why one doesn't get excommunicated if they do work on סוכות ערב according to reason #3? Shouldn't מלאכה on ערב סוכות be prohibited for the same reason that it is prohibited on פסח, ערב פסח, and therefore have the same rules? According to the explanation from the חק יעקב we can answer why the איסור on מלאכה is the whole day, for according to the חק יעקב reason #3 is coming to explain exactly why there is a custom to not do מלאכה on all of פסח, ערב פסח, so the same would apply to ערב סוכות. However, the question why one does not get excommunicated if they do

ערב סוכות still stands. The פני יהושע answers that building a סוכה is different than getting rid of חמץ and baking מצה because one already starts building their סוכה after יום כיפור, so we're not worried that one will forget to build his סוכה if we allow work to be done on ערב סוכות. However, one gets rid of חמץ and bakes מצה specifically on פסח, ערב פסח, so for them we are worried that one will forget to do these things if we allow work to be done on ערב פסח.

A fourth reason for this איסור on מלאכה is given by the פני יהושע, who suggests that the תורה calls ויקרא כג: אלה מועדי ה' מקראי קדש אשר תקראו: "אתם במועדם בחדש הראשון בארבעה עשר." The תורה says: "להחדש בין הערבים פסח הוא לה' מועד אחר הצות ערב פסח." The פני יהושע says that the תורה calls ערב פסח after הצות to teach us that you are not allowed to do work on ערב פסח during the time when you offer the קרבן פסח, namely after הצות, just like you can't do מלאכה on חול המועד. The rabbis noticed this so they decreed that מלאכה is prohibited after ערב פסח on הצות.

It is noteworthy to take a look at what the הלכות יום טוב פרק ח הלכה יז-יח רמב"ם writes in because there the רמב"ם says that the איסור on מלאכה is halachically different from the איסור on מלאכה other טובים due to the fact that ערב פסח is unique since it has the קרבן פסח. From this it seems like the רמב"ם is following the first or second reason for the איסור on מלאכה. However, right afterwards the רמב"ם writes that you can't do work on ערב פסח, just like you can't do work on חול המועד, so therefore whatever work you're allowed to do on חול המועד, you're also allowed to do after

צות. From this it seems that the ערב פסח on רמב"ם is going according to the fourth reason.

נפקא מינות בין הטעמים השונים

With all of these different reasons for the נפקא מינות, there must be some practical ramifications, between them. One possible נפקא מינה between the different reasons is whether this איסור is דאורייתא or איסור דרבנן. פוסחים דף נ. ד"ה מקום שנהגו in תוספות one say that according to the first reason the איסור is מדאורייתא. According to the fourth reason the איסור also might be דאורייתא, or at least an אסמכתא (a rabbinic decree with biblical support), because the תורה itself calls ערב מועד a פסח. However, according to the third reason, it is quite clear that the איסור is only דרבנן because it is a decree lest one forgets to perform the required pre-*Pesach* actions. And according to the second reason, it is likely that the איסור is also דרבנן because the תורה doesn't say anywhere that it isn't okay to do מלאכה when your קרבן is being brought; it just isn't the right thing to do.

Another possible נפקא מינה between these different reasons, which is brought down by the ביאור הלכה, is what if ערב פסח falls on שבת. Can you do work on Friday after הצות? According to the first, second, and fourth reasons you probably would be allowed to do work because the קרבן פסח is not brought on Friday, rather on שבת, so Friday is not considered a איסור מלאכה. However, according to the second reason the prohibition might still apply because since the next day is שבת, and therefore you have to get rid of your המץ and bake מצה on Friday, if we allow you to do work on Friday after הצות, you may

forget to do those things, and then you won't get the chance to do them before פסח starts. Nevertheless, the ביאור הלכה says that most of the פוסקים follow the first reason, so there is no reason to prohibit work after הצות on Friday.

A second נפקא מינה is which מלאכות are אסור. According to reason #1, that ערב פסח after הצות is like a יום טוב, maybe only מלאכות which are prohibited on יום טוב are not allowed, but מלאכות that are אסור like cooking might be מותר. And according to the fourth reason, that ערב פסח after הצות is like חול המועד, the prohibition of work might be even less restrictive because on חול המועד there are exceptions that do not apply on יום טוב, such as מעשה הדיוט and דבר האבד, which cause more work to be permitted on חול המועד than on יום טוב. However, according to the third reason, it might be that every מלאכה is prohibited, or at least time-consuming מלאכות that may lead you to forget to perform the required pre-*Pesach* actions.

As quoted above, the ביאור הלכה said that most פוסקים follow the first reason, that ערב פסח after הצות is like a יום טוב because the קרבן פסח was brought then. Based on this, it is reasonable to assume that after הצות on פסח all מלאכות except for ones that are אסור should be prohibited; however, this is not the case, and we also already saw this in the words of the רמב"ם cited above, where the מחצית השקל derives from his words that any מלאכה that is permitted on חול המועד is also permitted on ערב פסח after הצות. Moreover, the סימן שולחן ערוך writes that it is only prohibited to do work after הצות on פסח for money, but if you are just doing work for yourself, like to fix

your clothing for the upcoming holiday, or to write notes when learning *Torah*, as long as it is not a "מלאכה גמורה", intense work, then that is allowed. From here, it seems that the שולחן ערוך is following the fourth reason for the איסור מלאכה, that ערב פסח after הצות is like חול המועד, and that is why he allows certain מלאכות during this time. In fact, the משנה ברורה there in סעיף קטן ז writes explicitly that anything that you're allowed to do on חול המועד, like if it is a דבר האבד, or a מעשה הדיוט and it is also required for the holiday, you're allowed to do after הצות on ערב פסח. Here the משנה ברורה explicitly equates ערב פסח after הצות to חול המועד, clearly following reason #4.

I think to answer this question, and also resolve the contradiction in the words of the רמב"ם as laid out above, we must say that there is no difference between reason #1, that ערב פסח after הצות is like יום טוב, and reason #4, that חול המועד after הצות is like ערב פסח. According to reason #1, when the rabbis decreed that the day a person's קרבן is being brought is a יום טוב for them, they didn't mean that the day is a literal יום טוב, which would mean every מלאכה is אסור except for אוכל נפש. Rather,

they meant that the day is like a יום טוב, but not literally so, in that regarding the איסור מלאכה the day is like חול המועד. This would mean that on ערב פסח after הצות it is like a יום טוב, but everything that you're allowed to do on ערב פסח, you're also allowed to do on חול המועד after הצות, which is in fact what the רמב"ם and all the פוסקים quoted above say.

So להלכה, on ערב פסח after הצות the amount of things that you are not allowed to do are pretty limited. Obviously you are not allowed to plant or harvest and the like, because those things are also not allowed on חול המועד. However, you are allowed to cook for פסח, take a shower, etc. In short, you are allowed to pretty much do anything as long as it serves a purpose for the holiday, and it is not a מעשה אומן, something only a professional does that requires a lot of work.

However, the הלכה surrounding מלאכה on ערב פסח is more complicated than just this, and there are many more important details. Therefore, it is best to consult one's rabbi for any questions one might have regarding this topic.

ורחץ on ברכה Making

By Eitan Orkaby, Grade 11

The purpose of many actions done at the סדר is to elicit questions from the children. While most of these actions don't necessarily have backgrounds in הלכה, there is one that stems entirely from הלכה. The second item in the list

of the סדר is ורחץ, washing, where everyone at the סדר table gets up to go wash their hands, just like for bread. The children are reminded, however, to make sure not to make a ברכה on this washing, as one does not wash for כרפס. However, it is the Yeminite custom to wash

with a ברכה. The question arises over the nature of washing one's hands in the first place.

In order to understand the nature of the action, one must first look at the origins of such an action. The גמרא says (פסחים קטו-): regarding foods dipped in a liquid, that one is required to wash one's hands. This comes in the context of eating כרפס where, unlike in most homes, the כרפס is not dipped in salt water, rather into הרוסה that has been drenched in wine. רש"י on this גמרא explains this rather strange law being in relation to the laws of impurity. Impurity has levels, the highest being a corpse, and only certain levels of impurity can transfer impurity to another object or person. Generally this impurity can only emanate from its source and cannot grow itself, with the exception of liquids. Hands, which the rabbis decreed would always have a second degree of impurity when not just cleaned, which touch a liquid will make the liquid have a first degree of impurity. Thus, the washing purifies the hands so as not to impurify the כרפס via the impure liquid.

This being the case, there would seem to be no reason to wash one's hands nowadays whatsoever, as every person in the world is already at the highest level of impurity, and everyone eats their food in impurity. Using this logic, תוס' completely goes against making a ברכה here, but says one still must wash their hands. However, if this were the case, then there would be no reason to wash one's hands before eating bread, and certainly not say a ברכה! Washing before eating bread was instituted (חולין קו) in order to avoid

impurifying תרומה, which can become impure even from second degree impurity. Some say that this washing is still done nowadays so that when משיה comes and people become pure, when one has to worry about impurity again, this washing will set purity into daily habits. This answer works with washing before eating dipped foods as well, so why no ברכה?

This would be a question for the ראשונים, as in the times of the גמרא it would seem that there would be a ברכה. The רמב"ם, in laying out the steps of the סדר (חמץ ומצה ה:א) has one washing with a ברכה before washing for כרפס. On the other hand, the שולחן ערוך (אורח חיים) רמ"א does not require a ברכה, with the רמ"א not commenting on the statement and hence agreeing. For the רמב"ם the reason for making a ברכה makes sense; however, what seems to be the reason behind the שולחן ערוך's?

One possible reason would be ספק ברכות להקל, in a doubt in ברכות we are lenient. The מהר"ם of Rothenberg, as quoted by the טור (אורח חיים תעג), holds that there is no ברכה as the establishment of the ברכה was in Israel, where they were careful about impurity. However, outside of Israel where people are not careful, there is no ברכה. The מהר"ם of Rothenberg is the only (ר"ן פסחים קט"ו) source to say this, everybody else being on the side of making a ברכה. Thus there is a doubt as to whether or not one makes a ברכה. And when there is a doubt regarding a ברכה, the outcome is no ברכה. Hence why the שולחן ערוך would bring down as הלכה to not make a ברכה. The משנה ברורה acknowledges this heavy leniency of not making a ברכה, even though most opinions say that you should, and responds with another

potential proof, the custom of world Jewry. The משנה ברורה looked at what the Jews of his time did before eating food dipped in a liquid, and Jews would wash but not make a ברכה. Because of this, one is further warned to not make a ברכה for washing for foods dipped in a liquid.

The גר"א, however (שולחן ערוך א"ה קנח:ד), strongly enforces making a ברכה. All of the טור and most authorities, including the מהר"ם, were on the side of making a ברכה, and since only the מהר"ם of Rothenberg says otherwise, one should make a ברכה. This logic is classic for the גר"א, ignoring any customs and going with his reasoning. The גר"א felt that one should be making a ברכה just as one makes a ברכה on washing for bread, even though it also has to do with impurity, and thus disagrees with the ruling of the שולחן ערוך. This would explain why those who follow the גר"א would make a ברכה, but what about others who make a ברכה, like the Yemenites?

The זית רענן, one of the major Yemenite authorities, who writes on the שולחן ערוך, explains the Yemenite custom to wash with a ברכה (שם תעגו:). Regarding those who do not make a ברכה, it would seem that since this washing is only related to impurity, it does not have to be practiced nowadays (as explained earlier). Washing before having bread, however, is also a decree made for cleanliness. Since cleanliness applies today, a washing for bread would be required. However, in all of the various סידורים leading up to the times of the שולחן ערוך, including ש"פ's ש"רש"י, the instruction is to wash with a ברכה on dipping כרפס in salt water. Furthermore, in many

different שו"ת's, questions, and answers from rabbis before the שולחן ערוך, one can find rabbis bringing for the law itself that one should wash with a ברכה. After the שולחן ערוך is written, the majority opinion turns towards not making a ברכה. But does the שולחן ערוך actually disagree with almost every Jewish authority of his time?

The זית רענן points out something strange in the שולחן ערוך's phrasing of not making a ברכה. He says that one should be careful not to eat a full כזית, olive's worth. The משנה ברורה jumps on this and explains that there is a doubt as to whether one should make a ברכה after eating a כזית of כרפס, and thus, one should avoid eating a כזית. However, the רמב"ם in his הגדה clearly writes that one has to eat a כזית, as anything less than that is considered as though one did not eat at all!

Once again it seems that everyone is against the שולחן ערוך, and that one should eat at least a כזית, including, once again, רש"י in his סידור and even the מהר"ם of Rothenberg with his opinion on making a ברכה (as explained earlier). Therefore, one cannot claim that this debate is an אשכנזי and ספרדי one, as both agree that one has to eat a כזית of כרפס. What, then, is the logic for the שולחן ערוך's ruling on the measurement for eating כרפס?

While it seems that the שולחן ערוך is disagreed upon by almost all authorities, the זית רענן gives a reason for how he actually is agreeing with them. The שולחן ערוך brings down the הלכה that if one is going to eat bread, one only is required by everyone to wash if one is going to eat a כזית. Therefore, the שולחן ערוך

did hold that one has to wash when washing for dipping something in a liquid, except with a minimum of a כזית being dipped. By eating כרפס, if one is planning on eating less than a כזית one should not make a ברכה on the washing. If one looks at the Yemenite and גר"א customs, one is instructed to eat at least a כזית of כרפס, and thus one is obligated to wash with a ברכה.

At the end of the day, most הגדות will instruct

one to wash with no ברכה for כרפס and eat less than a כזית of it, and then wash with a ברכה before eating מצה. While before the time of the שולחן ערוך this would be unheard of, nowadays it has become common practice and is practiced by the majority of world Jewry. Depending on the סדר, one will encounter various customs. In order to determine which practices one should or should not adopt, one should discuss with one's rabbi the practical implications of doing so.

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A still life composition on a rustic, light-colored wooden surface. A dark wine bottle with a red foil-wrapped neck is tilted from the left. In the foreground, there are several white flowers with yellow centers and green leaves. To the right, two ornate silver chalices with intricate designs are visible. The background shows a wooden plank wall with some water stains.

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