

PESACH COMPANION 2019-5779



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Vision

A world in which Judaism is relevant, Jewish communities are educated, and diverse leaders guide individuals to live spiritually engaged lives.

Mission

To educate, ordain and invest in passionate and committed Orthodox women who model a dynamic Judaism to inspire and support individuals and communities.

Our Name

Maharat is a Hebrew acronym which represents the core values of Maharat as an institution and of our graduates.

MANHIGUT מנהיגות LEADERSHIP
HALACHA הלכה JEWISH LAW
RUCHANIYUT רוחניות SPIRITUALITY
TORAH תורה JEWISH TEXT

History

Maharat was founded in 2009 as the first yeshiva to ordain women to serve in the Orthodox clergy, after the ordination of Rabba Sara Hurwitz by Rabbi Avi Weiss and Rabbi Daniel Sperber. By providing a credentialed pathway for women to serve as clergy, we increase the community's ability to attract the best and brightest into the ranks of its spiritual leadership. In addition, by expanding the leadership to include women, we seek to enliven the community at large with a wider array of voices, thoughts, and perspectives.

Now in its 10th year, Maharat has ordained 26 women who are serving in clergy roles in synagogues, schools, hospitals, universities and Jewish communal institutions. There are 31 more students in the pipeline, preparing to change the landscape of Orthodox Judaism and the community at large.



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Dayenu and the Anatomy of Gratitude

Rabba Sara Hurwitz

President & Co-Founder, Maharat

“Anatomy Of Gratitude.” This is Brother David Steindl-Rast, a 90 year old Benedictine monk’s formulation of a how to be grateful, a practice increasingly explored by scientists and physicians as a key to joy and wellness. I was intrigued. The phrase put into words the way I have always thought about gratitude in Judaism-- as a full bodied experience. We don’t just say thank you to God, it is embedded into every formal prayer service. And we don’t just say words, we bend our bodies at the waist as we say “*Modim anachnu lach*” “Thank you God...” I always imagined that we feel such an overwhelming sense of gratitude that it bubbles up inside us, swirling towards the surface, causing our bodies to bow, spilling out our gratitude directly to God.

This, I believe, is the intent of the song Dayenu. A highlight of my seder, Dayenu is the crowning moment of the maggid section -- a fifteen stanza song of praise to God. The first five stanzas expound on our gratitude to God for taking us out of Egypt, the next five outline the miracles bestowed on us in the *midbar* (the wilderness), and the final five are an expression of gratitude for the ritual and spiritual staples in our lives -- the Torah, Israel, the building of the Beit Hamikdash. And, as we sing each stanza of Dayenu, the song is also meant to evoke a full bodied experience. In fact, the Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on the Haggadah teaches that the fifteen stanzas of Dayenu are parallel to the fifteen steps of the Beit Hamikdash that the Leviim ascended each day as they sang the Songs of Ascents, songs of praise and gratitude to God. As we sing each stanza of Dayenu, perhaps we are meant to cultivate within ourselves a complete and utter sensation that we might not be sitting at this seder, surrounded by these particular people, were it not for God’s grace.

This message of *Hakarat Hatov*, of deep gratitude, is central to our understanding of the Pesach experience. The Midrash (Shemot Rabba 1:8) explains that when the Torah tells us that a melech chadash (a new king) arose in Egypt after Yosef’s death, it was merely the same Pharaoh, who had forgotten all that Yosef had done for him. His gratitude had dissipated, and this set off the events that led to our slavery. The Midrash teaches “One who has no gratitude is comparable to one who negates the existence of God.” And each year, we must utilize gratitude as the tool to bring a sense of Godliness into the world. How?

Brother David Steindl-Rast offers a simple methodology for this kind of full bodied gratitude: Stop, look, go. In the bustle of our busy lives, it is hard to pause and take stock of all our blessings. The seder night calls on us to hit the pause button -- to just sit and reflect. Then, we are asked to look -- to notice how the stories of our past have constructed the world we inhabit today. But stopping and looking are not enough. We cannot just sit and relish the goodness that has been bestowed on us. We must go. We must acknowledge the blessings that God has given us, and pass them on to others. We must commit to opening our doors to strangers and those who have less than us. We must go out and learn (*tze u’le’mad*) what our ancestors have written for us. And, just as we praise God, we must praise and acknowledge with gratitude all those who have helped us on our journey.



On this Pesach, I am particularly grateful to the graduates of Maharat in the field who are teaching their Torah on college campuses, in Jewish organizations, in Orthodox congregations, and as chaplains. I am grateful to my students who are sitting day in and day out in our beit midrash simply because they want to serve the Jewish people. And I am grateful to our stellar faculty whose love for Torah is palpable. And of course, more than ever, I am grateful to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for the many blessings that have brought me here today. Dayenu.

Rabba Sara Hurwitz is Co-Founder and President of Yeshivat Maharat, and also serves on the Rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. She completed Drisha's three-year Scholars Circle Program, and was ordained by Rabbi Avi Weiss and Rabbi Daniel Sperber in 2009. Rabba Hurwitz has received numerous awards, including being named as one of Jewish Week's 36 Under 36, the Forward50 most influential Jewish leaders, and Newsweek's 50 most influential rabbis. She is also a member of the inaugural class of Wexner Foundation Field Fellows.





Telling the Story: Beginning and the End Rabbi Jeffrey Fox

Rosh HaYeshiva, Maharat

The Rabbis describe the narrative arc of the seder as, “מִתְחִיל בְּגִנוּת וְיִסּוּיִם - we begin [the telling of the story] with degradation and we conclude [the telling of the story] with praises” (Mishna, Pesachim 10:4). As any good storyteller knows, your opening line, or the hook, draw in the listener. What is the beginning of the story? What is the גִּנוּת - the low point - of Jewish history?

The Talmud (Bavli, Pesachim 116a) debates this very question:

What is the shame? Rav said, “Our ancestors were idolaters (Joshua 24). Shmuel said, “We were slaves to Pharaoh (Deut 6:21).

מאי בגנות? רב אמר: מתחלה עובדי עבודת גלולים
היו אבותינו. ושמואל אמר: עבדים היינו.

This disagreement between Rav and Shmuel has practical implications for how we conduct the Seder every year. When telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, do we start from the book of Shemot or from the book of Bereishit? While this debate might be read on its surface as simply about Seder night, I would like to argue that a much deeper debate occurs at the same time. At some level, Rav and Shmuel can be understood to debate where Jewish history “really” begins. Does our story begin as a nation in Egypt or as a family in Israel?

If we start the story with Avraham leaving his idolatrous home and seeking God in the world, then the narrative we tell is about ethical monotheism. If the story begins with an oppressed people in the crucible of Egypt who were delivered by the “strong arm and the outstretched hand” of God, we frame the narrative as one of the divine redemption of an enslaved nation. Both of those stories are true. However, which version we choose to tell on Seder night and to pass down to the next generation is not a simple matter. Is Judaism ultimately about cultivating theological purity leading to refined moral behavior that was workshopped within the framework of a family - Bereishit? Or perhaps Judaism is really a call for redemption by an Omnipotent creator who gifts a nation with a complex tapestry of laws - Shemot.

The Haggadah requires us to recite both paragraphs but privileges Shmuel’s answer by putting it first. How we choose to tell the story of our People reflects our ideal image of the People. When we tell a story of redemption from slavery, we are offering a model to the world of what redemption might look like. A story that moves from idolatry to monotheism reflects a more inward direction about our view of the Jewish People

How we each choose to tell our own personal story also reflects how we want to be perceived in the world. When you first meet someone, do you share your family makeup before or after your professional commitments? Are you a doctor who lives with your two children or a mother of two who practices medicine? Of course our identities are always multi-faceted and which piece we choose to foreground might change in different scenarios.



The debate between Rav and Shmuel is mirrored by another, much earlier, debate between Isaiah and Ezekiel. These two prophets deeply disagree about what the end of history will look like. If the Talmud debates the beginning of the story of the Jewish People, the Navi debates the eschaton, or the end of Jewish history. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel outline visions for a time known as “אַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים - the end of days” (See Isaiah 2:2 and Ezekiel 38:16). However, these two prophecies represent the “end of days” in opposing ways.

In Isaiah’s vision, the nations of the world come up to the “Mountain of God” to encounter the Divine presence at the Temple in Jerusalem. At that moment “Torah will proceed forth from Zion.”

ישעיהו פרק ב

א הַדְּבַר אֲשֶׁר חָזָה יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ בֶן אַמּוּץ עַל יְהוּדָה וְיְרוּשָׁלַם. ב וְהָיָה בְאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים וְכֹחַ יְהוָה הָרַב בֵּית יְהוָה בְּרֵאשִׁית הַהָרִים וְנִשְׂא מַגְבְּעוֹת וְנִהְרֻ אֵלָיו כָּל הַגּוֹיִם. ג וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לְכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל הָרִים יְהוָה אֶל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִרְנוּ מַדְרָגָיו וְנִלְכָה בְּאַרְחֻתָיו כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תּוֹרָה וְדָבַר יְהוָה מִירוּשָׁלַם. ד וְשֹׁפֵט בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְהוֹכִיחַ לְעַמִּים רַבִּים וְכַתְּתוּ חֲרֻבוֹתֵם לְאַתִּים וְחַנִּיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמַזְמֵרוֹת לֹא יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חֲרָב וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.

Isaiah Chapter 2

1 The word that Isaiah the son of Amotz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2 And it shall come to pass in the **end of days**, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. 3 And many peoples shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and God will teach us of God’s ways, and we will walk in God’s paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 And God shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah’s vision is quite inspiring: something that we can all daven for in hopes that one day truly nations will no longer learn war anymore. We recount this prayer every time the Torah is taken out of the Aron in shul. Ezekiel’s vision for the end of days, however, is much less peaceful. He describes the end of days as a war of nations. That Gog from Magog will march on the Jewish People, killing many of us, only to ultimately be thwarted by Divine might.

יחזקאל פרק לח

י ד לְכֹן הִנְבֵּא בֶן אָדָם וְאָמַרְתָּ לְגוֹי כֹה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הֲלוֹא בַיּוֹם הַזֶּהוּא בְּשִׁבְתִּי עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבִטָח תִּדְעוּ. יו וּבָאתָ מִמִּקְוֵי מִיִּרְפְּתֵי צָפוֹן אֶתְּהָ וְעַמִּים רַבִּים אֶתְּךָ רִכְבֵי סוּסִים כָּלֵם קָהֵל גָּדוֹל וְחֵיל רַב. יז וְעָלִיתָ עַל עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּעֵנָן לְכַסּוֹת הָאָרֶץ בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים תִּהְיֶה וְהִבְאוּתֶיךָ עַל־אֶרֶץ לְמַעַן דַּעַת הַגּוֹיִם אֶתִּי בְהַקְדִּישִׁי בְךָ לְעֵינֵיהֶם גּוֹי... יח וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַזֶּהוּא בַיּוֹם בּוֹא גּוֹי עַל אֶדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל נָאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה תַעֲלֶה חֲמַתִּי בְּאִפִּי. יט וּבִקְנֵאתִי בְּאֵשׁ עֲבַרְתִּי דְבַרְתִּי אִם לֹא בַיּוֹם הַזֶּהוּא רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל עַל אֶדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל. כ וְרַעַשׁוּ מִפְּנֵי דְגֵי הַיָּם וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְחַיֵּי הַשָּׂדֶה וְכָל הַרְמֵשׁ הַרְמֵשׁ עַל הָאֶדְמָה וְכָל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֶדְמָה וְנִהְרְסוּ הַהָרִים וְנִפְלוּ הַמְּדַרְגּוֹת וְכָל חוֹמָה לְאֶרֶץ תִּפּוֹל. כא וְקִרְאתִי עֲלָיו לְכָל הָרִי חֲרָב נָאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה חֲרָב אִישׁ בְּאֶחָיו תִּהְיֶה. כב וְנִשְׁפָּטְתִי אֹתוֹ בְּדָבָר וּבְדָם וְגִשְׁם שׁוֹטֵף וְאֶבְנֵי אֶלְגִּבֵּישׁ אֵשׁ וְגִפְרִית אֲמַטִּיר עֲלָיו וְעַל אֶגְפָּיו וְעַל עַמִּים רַבִּים אֲשֶׁר אֹתוֹ. כג וְהִתְגַּדַּלְתִּי וְהִתְקַדַּשְׁתִּי וְנִודַעְתִּי לְעֵינֵי גּוֹיִם רַבִּים וְיָדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה.

Ezekiel Chapter 38



14 Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say unto Gog: Thus saith the Lord God: In that day when My people Israel dwells safely, shalt thou not know it? **15** And thou shall come from thy place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you, and many peoples with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company and a mighty army; **16** and thou shalt come up against My people Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the **end of days**, and I will bring thee against My land, that the nations may know Me, when I shall be sanctified through thee, O Gog, before their eyes...**18** And it shall come to pass in that day, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord God, that My fury shall arise up in My nostrils. **19** For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath have I spoken: Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; **20** so that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep upon the ground, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at My presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. **21** And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD; every man's sword shall be against his brother. **22** And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will cause to rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many peoples that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. **23** Thus will I magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord.

The two competing prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel can be understood as echoing the debate of Rav and Shmuel. If the story begins with Avraham in the idolatrous home of his father Terach (Rav), then it ends with Isaiah's vision of Torah coming forth from Jerusalem. If our collective narrative begins as an oppressed people suffering at the hands of the wicked Egyptians who must be punished for their behavior (Shmuel), then the conclusion is a war to end all wars.

The beauty of the Tanach and the Hagadda is that the answer is both/and instead of either/or. We don't often think of the Tanach as a pluralistic work, but there are occasions in which this divine work codifies multiple competing ideas. The pluralism of the Tanach and the Haggada reminds us to pray for Isaiah's vision and also prepare for Ezekiel's eventuality.

What are the implications for our Sedarim? One of the most effective tools for the transmission of values from one generation to the next is the family dinner table. The Rabbis understood the power of sharing the family's story while sitting around a table that has been set in advance and has snacks and enough food for everyone. The core Mitzvah on Seder night is "וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ" - and you shall teach your children."

The Hagadda, like the Tanach, codifies both starting points of the story. We are never really forced to make a decision between Rav and Shmuel, Bereshit and Shemot, or Slaves and Idolaters. Instead, the Rabbis stitched the two stories together to force us to grapple with both narratives. If you are blessed to have two, three or even four generations at your Seder this year, I encourage you to ask the following question to each generation: How would you tell your own Jewish story?

Rabbi Jeffrey S. Fox, Rosh HaYeshiva of Maharat, has served as a congregational rabbi and faculty member of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Florence Melton Adult Education School, Drisha Institute, and Hadar. Rabbi Fox is a Senior Rabbinic Fellow of the Shalom Hartman Institute. Visit www.roshyeshivatmaharat.org to read his latest shiurim.





Get Up and Go: Avraham and Pesach Dr. Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz

Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Track
Class of 2021

Pesach is above all a celebration of a journey-- in particular, the beginning of a journey. Not only that, but the journey itself seems far more important in many ways than its end: the description of the journey covers four books of the Torah, while the end – the arrival in the land of Israel – isn't even recorded in the Torah itself, which leaves the people of Israel in the plains of Moav.

In contrast to the journey, the arrival is described in much more muted terms in Sefer Yehoshua. There's a small-scale replay of the highlights of the Exodus – the crossing of the Red Sea is paralleled by the crossing of the Jordan; Moshe's encounter at the burning bush is mirrored by Yehoshua's brief meeting with the leader of the heavenly army; and finally three brief verses record that Pesach is celebrated for the first time in the new land, followed by the cessation of the manna, the quintessential travel food. End of journey in five chapters, rather than four books – and in some ways, end of story.

But the 40-year journey was the exciting part – that's where we coalesce as a nation, encounter God at Mount Sinai, receive the Torah, make drastic mistakes with drastic consequences. In the limbo of the desert, the empty landscape through which we travel, there are no distractions from the people's central task: learning how to live as God's people, digesting the rules and testing the rules, becoming a holy people rather than a rabble of runaway slaves. It's also a time of intense relationship with God – when the prophet Jeremiah [2: 2] speaks of this journey, he tells us that God remembers it as a love story: 'I remember your youthful devotion, the love of your bridal days, how you followed Me through the wilderness through a land unsown'— a metaphor that was taken up and woven into an exquisite sequence in the midrash on both Shemot and Shir Hashirim.

Journeys isolate you from the mundane, take you away from what is familiar, stimulate you with new experiences, confront you with unexpected challenges, and, inevitably, throw you together with your travelling companions, deepening and strengthening your relationship. The Exodus is such a journey, but it's not the only foundational journey in the Torah. In the only book that doesn't deal directly with *yetziat mitsrayim* – Bereshit – we have the traveller *par excellence* of the Torah: Avraham.

Avraham is described as an *ivri*, someone who is *over* – crossing over (dare I say 'passing over'?) from one place to another; in other words, journeying. He never comes to rest: even when he reaches the promised land, he continues to travel – all the way to Egypt and back again to the land of Canaan. What is more, he starts the journey himself: for reasons that the Torah does not record, he leaves his native city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia with his family and travels to Haran, now in Turkey – a distance of about 1,000 miles. It's only after he gets to Haran that God speaks to him, to tell him above all to continue the journey: *lekh lekha*

The Torah notes that Avraham was 75 when he started travelling again at God's command, inspiring the midrashic rabbis to speculate on his earlier life: Why on earth would God choose to speak to this



particular man, with no apparent credentials or spectacular exploits? Why did Avraham move from Ur to Haran in the first place? Why does God tell him to move again? A rich tapestry of midrashic traditions charts a parallel, spiritual journey that matches Avraham's physical travels: the Yemenite midrashic tradition imagines him moving through various philosophical positions until he discovers the one true God by the light of his intellect; *Bereshit Rabba* imagines him having to leave Ur in a hurry after revealing the emptiness and immorality of King Nimrod's cynical idolatry.

In all the accounts, Avraham is characterized by a deep *emunah*, an absolute trust in God, even though he has not yet experienced a direct encounter with God. Once he has proved himself, God spurs him on to the next stage, the journey that will perfect him and lead him to achieve his true potential. Rashi comments on the words *lekh lekha*: 'Go for your benefit and your good: there I will make you into a great nation, but here you will not merit to have children. And also so that I can make your nature known in the world.' Avraham's journey will benefit both him and the rest of the world, bringing universal blessing. And of course his story ends with another *lekh lekha* command from God, this time to travel to yet another unknown destination, a mountain in the land of Moriah, with his son Yitshak.

There are several points of similarity between Avraham's career and the Pesach story, as indeed the Hagadah notes: we start the story twice, first with our life as slaves in Egypt (at *avadim hayinu*), and then reaching back to Avraham at *mitechilah ovdei avodah zarah hayu avotenu*. *Bereshit Rabba* notes that Avraham's journey to Egypt, impelled by a famine in Canaan, parallels the migration of Jacob and his sons to Egypt, also spurred by famine, and that Avraham's return, enriched by gifts from Pharaoh to compensate for taking Sarah, parallels the triumphal exit of the Israelites in *yetziat mitzrayim*, when they depart laden with gold and silver from the Egyptians.

The link is at its most intense in the episode of the *berit bein habetarim*, the covenant between the pieces: not only does God tell Avraham of the future sufferings and deliverance of his descendants from Egypt, but the strange vision of a burning light passing between the matched pieces of the offerings is reminiscent both of the crossing of the Red Sea and the pillar of fire that leads the Israelites on their journey. Avraham is the pioneer, the model traveller whose journeys are replicated and echoed in the Exodus.

Time to turn back to Pesach, and to think how we can integrate the example of Avraham in our own Pesach journeys. I think that we need many of his qualities if we are to make a true crossing over of our own at Pesach, escaping from the slavery of familiar routine into a new stage in our self-transformation, from complacent slaves to free people who serve God. Avraham was prepared to leave all familiarities behind and venture into the unknown in order to walk before God; he was quick to rescue those in trouble, like his kidnapped nephew Lot, or to stand up and argue with God on behalf of complete strangers, like the people of Sodom. He didn't ignore the people among whom he travelled but showed them hospitality, even though he was the traveller, foreshadowing the blessing that God told him would come to the world through him and his descendants. Do we really take that part of the journey as seriously as we might? Do we tend to see Pesach as a commemoration of the past rather than as a challenge to move onwards and change things?

In this context, we might also remember that Nisan, the month of Pesach, is a serious contender for New Year. In the Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah 10b*), Rabbi Eliezer argues for Tishrei, but Rabbi Yehoshua favours Nisan. The two new years have different flavours: while Tishrei is a time for



spiritual introspection and inner striving for improvement, Nisan is a time of action and making a difference in the world around us. Perhaps this Pesach we can keep Avraham's qualities in mind, and resolve to start this new year, this new journey, by daring to move into unfamiliar territory, striving to bring justice, hope, and freedom to all those who need them, and building on our own national experience to spread blessing in its most concrete form to the entire world.

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Mortal “Pair-il”: Zugot on the Seder Night

Dr. Liz Shayne

Class of 2021

Passover is a night of questions; a night for doing strange things and then asking ourselves why. The tractate of the Talmud, Pesachim, that deals with our holiday is filled with both questions and answers that explain the actions we take during the Seder. And on page 100a, the rabbis of the Mishnah inform us as follows:

“One may not drink fewer than four cups of wine, even if one needs to use the communal charity funds to afford it.”

“ולא יפחתו לו מארבע כוסות של יין ואפילו מן התמחוי”

Clearly, the rabbis take these four cups very seriously and the Gemara, understandably, is perplexed as to why. We, who have been at sedarim before, might think we know what the Gemara’s question is and what the answer will be. The question I anticipated was: Why do we need four cups? And at least in my haggadot — and we have many in my house — I read that the four cups represent the four languages of redemption: ולקחתי, וגאלתי, והצילתי, והוצאתי -- I will take you out, I will save you, I will redeem you, and I will take you.

That’s not the conversation that follows. On page 109b, the Gemara asks:

“How could the rabbis establish a mitzvah that commands a person to put themselves in danger? After all, we have a braita that says ‘A person should not eat in pairs or drink in pairs...’”

“היכי מתקני רבנן מידי דאתי בה לידי סכנה? והתניא לא יאכל אדם תרי ולא ישתה תרי...”

The Gemara is referring to the deep-seated belief among the Jews of late antiquity, especially those living in Babylon, that doing things in pairs opens a person up to malevolent influence and bad luck. This folk practice carries on through today, and there are still communities where avoiding זוגות — zugot or zugos — is consistently done.

And, if you are like me, you suddenly want to know why. What is so bad about pairs? According to the Gemara, we are careful about pairs because it is a הלכה משה מסיני, a principle given to Moses at Sinai and thus one that neither has nor needs a prooftext. Which does provide an answer, albeit not a very satisfying one. Recent scholarship offers another possibility.

Living, as they were, in the Persian Empire during late antiquity, the rabbis were surrounded by practicing Zoroastrians. One of the tenets of Zoroastrianism is that there are two great deities who are struggling in the world, one good and one evil. As Jews, we reject the idea of more than one God; and the dualism that is so central to Zoroastrianism is anathema to us. It makes sense, then, to avoid things that come in twos. There is, unfortunately, no way to prove or disprove this assertion, but it



makes for a good story. No wonder the rabbis would warn against the dangers of dualism and ask us — the singular nation — to live in a world that appreciates the singleness of God and avoids the balance of forces implied by pairs.

In any event, we can appreciate the danger that the rabbis of the Gemara believed they could be put in. The Gemara goes on to provide two very different answers as to why we can drink in pairs on the Seder night.

Rav Nachman focuses on the nature of the seder night.

Rav Nachman says that the pasuk calls Passover a “night of guarding”, which means a night when one is guarded from evil influence and demons.

"אמר רב נחמן אמר קרא ליל שמורים ליל המשומר
ובא מן המזיקין"

According to Rav Nachman, there is something inherently special about Passover night that protects one from those out to do us harm. The commandment to drink four cups can stand because God is watching over us and will protect us from any harm.

Other rabbis disagree and provide a different explanation of how we are protected even when drinking in zugot.

"רבא אמר כוס של ברכה מצטרף לטובה ואינו מצטרף לרעה. רבינא אמר ארבעה כסי תקינו רבנן דרך
חירות כל חד וחד מצוה באפי נפשה הוא."

Rava says that the third cup, the cup said after birkat hamazon, only combines with the others “for good” and not “for ill”. That is, because it is used as part of fulfilling a different mitzvah, it can be counted as a cup of wine for good things — like reaching the correct count for the four languages of redemption — but not for bad things. So it’s *really* three cups and one cup and that’s not pairs. Ravina takes that argument even further and says that because each cup represents a single expression of redemption, each is an individual mitzvah, and so they do not combine at all. So it’s as if we are only drinking one cup, just four times.

All of these explanations solve the problem raised by the Gemara: there is no need to fear drinking zugot on Passover night and the rabbis did not establish a mitzvah that puts us in danger. And yet there is a fundamental distinction in the way that Rav Nachman understands the source of our safety differently than Rava and Ravina. In the latter case, we who drink four cups are protected through a loophole. These four cups are not really four, they are three and one. Or they are one and one and one and one. They are designed so as not to attract any danger. Nothing has changed about the world, but the rabbis have carefully constructed ritual so that it operates in a safe manner.

Rav Nachman’s approach is completely different. According to him, the world is changed on Passover. That which is usually threatening is held at bay. That which ordinarily requires caution can be done without fear. If Passover truly is a ליל שמורים, a night when we are protected, then it is not just the effects of zugot that we are protected from, but from all sorts of mischief. The practical distinction, what students of the Gemara call the נפקא מינה, between the two interpretations is that Rava and Ravina’s answer provides an exception only for the four cups, while Rav Nachman’s applies more broadly and creates a zone of safety around Passover itself. Not a loophole, but a suit of armor.



Maybe on most nights we are afraid that being the minority in a dominant culture of polytheists will seep into our worldview, but not on Passover. On Passover, we are protected from the implications of pairs and we can let our guard down. Passover is our night, our triumph, our time to shine. It's a time to be brave and say that normally we are afraid, but on this night and for this mitzvah, we can take the good from this set of four and leave the chaff. There is value in caution, which is why we exercise it, but excessive caution can cut us off from the path forward. It is no coincidence that the purpose of drinking these pairs is to evoke the four languages of redemption, the ultimate expression of movement and progression.

So although this is an interpretive debate that the Gemara doesn't settle one way or another, Rav Nachman's explanation of ליל שמורים is one we can take to heart. Caution has its place, but not here and not now. Passover is a time for bravery, a time to step further than we might otherwise. And for those concerned about the end of Passover when the malevolent influence of pairs reigns again, let us also take to heart the words of the Gemara:

The Principle is as follows: All who care about pairs, the malevolence of pairs care about them. But those who do not care, the malevolence does not care about them either.

כללא דמילתא כל דקפיד קפדי בהדיה ודלא קפיד לא קפדי בהדיה

There is no better time to begin being brave and and trust that, as we seek to do mitzvot and fulfill God's will in the world, we can do so without fear.

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4 Sons, 4 Rabbis, 4 Paradigms Rabba Dr. Erin Leib Smokler

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The Haggadah contains two sets of four questions: the classic Four Questions, the Mah Nishtana, that gets maggid underway, and the four questions posed by the four sons, each of whom has a different orientation to the seder.

The Torah refers to 4 children: one wise; one wicked; one simple; and one who does not know how to ask.

כִּנְגַד אַרְבַּעַה בְּנִים דְּבִרְהַ תּוֹרָה: אֶחָד חָכָם, וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע, וְאֶחָד תָּם, וְאֶחָד שָׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשַׁאֲוֹל.

Between these two sets of questions lay a few stories involving rabbis engaged in the mitzvah of the evening, *sipur yetziat mitzrayim* (the telling of the Exodus).

It happened that R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, R. Eleazar b. Azaryah, R. Akiva, and R. Tarfon were reclining in Bnei Brak and were discussing the Exodus throughout the night...

מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־עֲזַרְיָה וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן שֶׁהָיוּ מְסֻבִּין בְּבֵנֵי־בְרַק וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל־אוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה,

This is followed by a statement from R. Eleazar b. Azaryah:

Behold I am about seventy years old, and I had never convinced anyone that the Exodus should be mentioned at night until Ben Zoma expounded it from a verse, as it says: "So that you will remember the day of your going out from Egypt all the days of your life" (Deut. 16:3). "The days of your life"—daytimes. "All the days of your life"—nighttimes...

הֲרִי אֲנִי כְּבֵן שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְלֹא זָכִיתִי שֶׁתֵּאֲמַר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם בַּלַּיְלוֹת עַד שֶׁדַּרְשָׁה בֶן זוֹמָא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, לִמְעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ. יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַיּוֹמִים. כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַלַּיְלוֹת.

Then, immediately preceding the four questions of the four sons, the Haggadah reads:

Blessed is the Omnipresent, blessed is He. Blessed is the One who gave the Torah to his people, Israel, blessed is He.

בְּרוּךְ הַמְּקוֹם, בְּרוּךְ הוּא, בְּרוּךְ שֶׁנָּתַן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

A grand theological declaration is made. This whole bridge leading up to the four sons is intriguing. What is the meaning of this theological prelude? In what way, if any, does it serve as an introduction



to the kinds of wise, wicked, simple, and inarticulate questions that follow? Might the rabbinic stories or characters introduced beforehand shape our read of these enigmatic inquiries?

I'd like to suggest that we investigate these four questions by way of another set of four -- four rabbis who famously enter the *pardes*, two of whom, Rabbi Akiva and Ben Zoma, are mentioned in the opening paragraphs of the haggadah. The relationship between these two sets of four has been suggested by the 15th century posek the Rashbatz, R. Shimon b. Tzemach Duran (1361-1444), among others. Much more recently, Yehudah Kurtzer, in his book *Shuva: The Future of the Jewish Past*, indicated a similar connection.

Let us turn to the story of the four rabbis. Tosefta Chagigah 2:3 reads:

Four entered into the *pardes* [orchard] – Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher [Elisha b. Abuyah] and R. Akiva. One looked and died. One looked and was stricken. One looked and trampled the shoots. And one [R. Akiva] went up in peace and came down in peace. Ben Azzai looked and died – regarding him the verse says *Grievous in God's eyes are the death of his faithful ones* (Psalms 116:15). Ben Zoma looked and was stricken – regarding him the verse says *If you have found honey, eat what you need, [lest, surfeiting yourself, you throw it up]* (Mishlei 25:16). Elisha looked and trampled the shoots – regarding him the verse says *Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin ...* (Kohelet 5:5).

ארבעה נכנסו לפרדס: בן עזאי ובן זומא אחר ורבי עקיבה. אחד הציץ ומת, אחד הציץ ונפגע, אחד הציץ וקיציץ בנטיעות, ואחד עלה בשלום וירד בשלום. בן עזאי הציץ ומת - עליו הכתוב אומר (תהילים קטו) יקר בעיני ה' המותה לחסידי. בן זומא הציץ ונפגע - עליו הכתוב אומר (משלי כה:טז) דבש מצאת אכול דיך [פן תשבענו, והקאתו]. אלישע הציץ וקיציץ בנטיעות - עליו הכתוב אומר (קוהלת ה:ה) אל תתן את פיך לחטאי את בשרך וגו'

The *pardes* is most frequently interpreted as a place of esoteric, mystical vision. Four great rabbis ascend toward a world in which divine secrets are revealed. The results of this encounter with mystery are decidedly not good. Three out of four "look" (הציץ) upon the grandeur and are scarred. Ben Azzai dies. Ben Zoma goes mad. Elisha b. Abuyah, soon to be named Acher (the Other), "tramples the shoots." He leaves behind his commitment to the ways of the Torah. Only R. Akiva, who does not look, emerges unharmed. Questions abound: What happened in the *pardes*? What went wrong? What could have caused such extreme reactions? Why would Acher leave, and why would the others (excluding Rabbi Akiva) have lost it, in one way or another?

Many stories developed, in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, to offer color and cause for such disturbance, particularly Elisha's. Perhaps the challenge of theodicy gripped him, suggests the Jerusalem Talmud. Witnessing a man ascend a ladder to perform the life-extending *mitzvah* of sending away a mother bird only to die upon his descent. Perhaps that injustice overwhelmed Elisha. Or perhaps he watched as the tongue of R. Yehudah the baker, a tongue which had spoken much Torah, got paraded around in the mouth of a dog. "This is the Torah and this is its reward?!" he exclaimed in horror. "זו תורה וזו שכרה?" (Jerusalem Talmud Chagiga 2:1). Moshe himself recites these



very same words of outrage and confusion when he envisions another injustice, the ultimate torture of R. Akiva (see BT Menachot 29b). (Though he exited the pardes in peace, R. Akiva did not exit the world peacefully.) It seems that the concerns of Acher are perhaps not so “other” after all. And yet he is doomed for life on account of his unwillingness to abide a Torah that did not account for the discordant realities of the world.

The tradition from the Babylonian Talmud is a lot more esoteric and complicated.

Acher trampled the shoots. Regarding him Scripture says: *Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin.* (Kohelet 5:5) What does it refer to? — He saw that permission was granted to Metatron to sit and write down the merits of Israel. He said: It is taught as a tradition that on high there is no sitting and no competition, and no back, and no weariness. Perhaps, — God forbend! — there are two divinities! [Thereupon] they led Metatron forth, and punished him with sixty fiery lashes, saying to him: Why didn't you stand up when you saw him? Permission was [then] given to him to strike out the merits of *Acher*. A voice from Heaven went forth and said: *Return, backsliding children* (Jeremiah 3:22)— except *Acher*. [Thereupon] he said: Since I have been driven forth from that world, let me go forth and enjoy this world. So *Acher* went off in a bad way. He went and found a prostitute and propositioned her. She said to him: Are you not Elisha ben Abuyah? He tore a radish out of its bed on the Sabbath and gave it to her. She said: It is another [*Acher*]. (Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 15a)

אחר קיצץ בנטיעות עליו הכתוב אומר (קוהלת ה:ה) אל תתן את פיך לחטיא את בשרך. מאי היא? חזא מיטטרון דאתיהבא ליה רשותא למיתב למיכתב זכוותא דישראל, אמר: גמירא דלמעלה לא הוי לא ישיבה ולא תחרות ולא עורף ולא עיפוי. שמא חס ושלום שתי רשויות הן. אפקוהו למיטטרון ומחיוהו שיתין פולסי דנורא. א"ל מאי טעמא כי חזיתיה לא קמת מקמיה? איתיהבא ליה רשותא למימחק זכוותא דאחר. יצתה בת קול ואמרה (ירמיהו ג) שובו בנים שובבים - חוץ מאחר. אמר הואיל ואיטריד ההוא גברא מההוא עלמא ליפוק ליתנהי בהאי עלמא. נפק אחר לתרבות רעה. נפק אשכח זונה, תבעה. אמרה ליה: ולאן אלישע בן אבויה את? עקר פוגלא ממישרא בשבת ויהב לה. אמרה אחר הוא. (בבלי חגיגה טו.)

Upon entering the pardes, Elisha encountered Metatron, one of the highest angels in God's divine court, doing something an angel should not do—sitting! In so doing, Metatron violated the tradition that Elisha had inherited, one that stated that angels only stand. Elisha's Torah, so to speak, bumped up against the Truth, and he was left to mediate that impossible gap. In the conflict between tradition and reality, between what he learned and what he saw, *Acher* sided with what was before his eyes.

Recognizing the way that *Acher*'s struggles might presage our own, Yehudah Kurtzer writes:



Akiva's warning [in BT Chagigah 14b] demands dissonance, and asks Elisha to simultaneously hold onto his learning—his previously held knowledge—and to stand facing this jarring reality, and to hold the two together in perilous silence. I would suggest that this is both a virtually impossible task as well as an extremely common and contemporary challenge...But the more dramatic dissonance is a hallmark of the Jewish experience of modernity, the inevitable and unresolved conflict between those things we learn and those things we see, the systems of Jewish belief and the experiences of modern reality. The notion that we would hold, freeze, stand in suspended dissonance seems both impossible and highly desirable—and reflects perhaps the exact "failure" at the core of Elisha's experience in the *pardes*. The disappointment of this text lies in finding that Elisha is human, but not superhuman. (Y. Kurtzer, *Shuva*, p. 123-124)

Those of us privileged to inherit tradition will often be confronted by its implausibility. We are frequently asked to stand in the gaps between truths we receive and truths we perceive; to sit with cognitive dissonances that threaten our sense of coherence. We are then left with choices.

Like Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, we might feel compelled to give up on the world, exiting it entirely (Ben Azzai) or unable to see it clearly (Ben Zoma). Like *Acher*, we might feel compelled to give up on Torah. Or like Rabbi Akiva, who does not gaze at the *pardes*, we might either choose to look away from the conflict or to step into it, with balance and confidence, finding comfort in the discomfort.

Returning to the *Haggadah*, recall that we meet some of these characters again on Seder night. Elisha has been ostracized and Ben Azzai is dead, but Rabbi Akiva is up late learning and Ben Zoma (as quoted by Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria) is teaching about the night. (See above.) He seems to live in the fog of darkness, not quite seeing. They bring us to the four sons, who themselves are introduced with that enigmatic theological statement:

Blessed is the Omnipresent, blessed is	בְּרוּךְ הַמְּקוֹם, בְּרוּךְ הוּא,
He. Blessed is the One who gave the	יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרוּךְ הוּא.
Torah to his people, Israel, blessed is He.	

What is the place of theology here? I believe it is the grand Truth that the four children are contending with. Like the four rabbis before them, they each offer a challenge to—or an orientation toward—the world they are inheriting and the ways that it rubs up against the world as they see it. Metatron is sitting, so to speak, and they must each navigate that difficulty.

The wise child, the *chacham*, is like Rabbi Akiva, pious, focused, and in this world. He is interested in mitzvot, invested in the ways that this-worldly actions can be brought into conversation with the upper realms. He stays firmly within his inherited frame as he manages his internal instability.

The evil child, the *rasha*, is like Elisha, willing to exclude himself from a community whose relationship to Truth he can no longer trust. One who is unwilling to abide any cognitive dissonance cannot stay in community, these stories suggest, and so we say to the *rasha*, as was said to *Acher*, stay out. Yet, harsh as this judgement is, I believe that it also subtly winks at us. Like *Acher* of the Talmud who, despite the heavenly decree against him, is not completely out of the community (he is still R. Meir's



teacher and is also saved after death), so the *rasha*, for all of his wickedness, is still at the table. The Haggadah is haunted by the all-too-familiar character.

The last two categories are a bit murkier. The Rashbatz suggests that Ben Azzai is like the simple one, the *tam*, overwhelmed by his naivete or his single-mindedness. Yaacov was an "*ish tam*," after all, and hardly simple. Ben Azzai was known to be obsessed with learning Torah, so much so that he could not marry. He could not put down roots (see BT Yevamot 63b); he could not fully be in this world. And Ben Zoma is like the one who cannot question, *she'eino yodea lish'ol*. So damaged was he that he could no longer formulate a question. He was muted into silence.

My aim here is not to map the four sons onto the four rabbis perfectly but to raise the possibility that the four children do not only offer four different approaches to the practice of Pesach, but four different approaches to one of the deepest challenges of the modern world: how to square truths with Truth; how to live with or in the gaps between all that we are taught and all that we cannot help but see. The time of "*vehigadta l'bincha*" is not only a chance to tell our collective story. It is a chance to reflect on the cognitive, existential, and spiritual challenges that emerge when we tell our story that way.

In the words of Kurtzer:

How we tell our stories is the process by which we own the past and, in turn, the means by which we chart the future with confidence and authenticity. The rabbis not only end their story with a saved Elisha, they implicitly tell us that their story and our story are best routed through him. Ben Zoma and ben Azzai are gone, Rabbi Akiva is inaccessible, but Elisha is most closely us—occupying a place of dissonance, struggling with his choices, making those around him struggle with their choices, and ultimately departing and making us feel conflicted as to whether his struggles were his own or ours, whether he failed us, we failed him, or whether no one failed at all. The story becomes one of a loss of commandment, seeing and its consequences, of love and its sacrifices, and ultimately of return and restoration: not in Elisha's lifetime, but in how we narrate his story. (Y. Kurtzer, *Shuva*, p. 132-133)

May we all ask questions and find our ways in the stories that we tell in response.

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The Metzora and Pesach: A Spiritual Connection

Marianne Novak

Class of 2019

This year as in many others, the weekly Torah readings leading up to Pesach contain the details of the spiritual skin affliction of *tzara'at*, often mistranslated as leprosy, specifically in the *parshiyot Tazria and Metzora*. What is the connection between *tzara'at* and Pesach and *yitziyat mitzrayim*, the exodus from Egypt?

In parshat *Metzora* in *Sefer Vayikra*, the Torah explains the purification process for one who has contracted *tzara'at*:

1 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְיָ, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.

2 This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: he shall be brought unto the priest.

ב זֹאת תְּהִיָּה תוֹרַת הַמְצַרֵּעַ,
בְּיוֹם טְהֻרָתוֹ: וְהוּבֵא,
אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן.

3 And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper;

ג וַיֵּצֵא, הַכֹּהֵן, אֶל-מַחֻצֵי,
לְמַחֲנֶה; וְרָאָה, הַכֹּהֵן, וְהִנֵּה
נִרְפָּא נֶגַע-הַצִּרְעָת, מִן-הַצְּרוּעַ.

4 then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two living clean birds, and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop.

ד וְצִוָּה, הַכֹּהֵן, וּלְקַח לְמַטְהַר
שְׁתֵּי-צִפְרִים חַיִּים, טְהוֹרִים;
וְעֵץ אַרְז, וְשָׁנִי תוֹלַעַת וְאַזְב.

5 And the priest shall command to kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running water.

ה וְצִוָּה, הַכֹּהֵן, וְשָׁחַט,
אֶת-הַצִּפּוֹר
הָאֶחָת--אֶל-כְּלִי-חֶרֶשׁ, עַל-מַיִם
חַיִּים.

6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar-wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water.

ו אֶת-הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה יִקַּח אֹתָהּ,
וְאֶת-עֵץ הָאֶרֶז וְאֶת-שָׁנִי
וְהַתּוֹלַעַת וְאֶת-הָאֶזְב; וְטָבַל
אוֹתָם וְאֶת הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה, בְּדָם
הַצִּפּוֹר הַשָּׁחֻטָה, עַל, הַמַּיִם
הַחַיִּים.

7 And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let go the living bird into the open field.

ז וְהִזָּה, עַל הַמַּטְהַר
מִן-הַצִּרְעָת--שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים;
וְטָהַרוּ, וְשָׁלַח אֶת-הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה
עַל-פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה.



8 And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean; and after that he may come into the camp, but shall dwell outside his tent seven days.

ח וְכִבֶּסֶתְּ אֶת-הַמְטֵהָר אֶת-בְּגָדָיו וְגִלַּח אֶת-כָּל-שְׁעָרוֹ, וְרָחַץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָהַר, וְאַחֵר, יָבֹא אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה; וַיֵּשֶׁב מִחוּץ לְאֹהֶלוֹ, שִׁבְעַת יָמִים.

9 And it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off; and he shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and he shall be clean.

ט וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִגְלַח אֶת-כָּל-שְׁעָרוֹ, אֶת-רֹאשׁוֹ וְאֶת-זָקְנוֹ וְאֶת גְּבַת עֵינָיו, וְאֶת-כָּל-שְׁעָרוֹ, יִגְלַח; וְכִבֶּסֶתְּ אֶת-בְּגָדָיו, וְרָחַץ אֶת-בְּשָׁרוֹ בַּמַּיִם--וְטָהַר.

10 And on the eighth day he shall take two he-lambs without blemish, and one ewe-lamb of the first year without blemish, and three tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour for a meal-offering, mingled with oil, and one log of oil.

י וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי, יִקַּח שְׁנֵי-כִבְשִׁים תְּמִימִם, וְכִבְשָׂה אַחַת בֶּת-שָׁנָתָהּ, תְּמִימָה; וְשִׁלְשָׁה עֶשְׂרִינִים, סֹלֶת מִנְחָה בְּלוּלָה בַשֶּׁמֶן, וְלֹג אֶחָד, שֶׁמֶן.

11 And the priest that cleanseth him shall set the man that is to be cleansed, and those things, before the LORD, at the door of the tent of meeting.

יא וְהַעֲמִיד הַכֹּהֵן הַמְטֵהָר, אֶת הָאִישׁ הַמְטֵהָר--וְאֵתָם: לְפָנֵי יְ-וָה, פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד.

This narrative has many literary allusions to the Pesach Mitzrayim story. There is the blood of the birds coloring the clean water-- allusions to Makat Dam, the first plague of blood coloring the water of the Nile. There is also hyssop being dipped into the blood and then spread over a piece of cedar wood-- allusions to the painting of the doorposts, the *mashkof*, with blood by the Jews in Egypt to keep the *malakh ha-mavet*, the angel of death, at bay. Similarly, after a period of seven days, the Metzora is allowed to re-enter the camp and rejoin the community. This echoes the seven days of the Pesach holiday when we re-enact our National narrative--the seven days in which we celebrate the birth of our people.

The Ramban quoting the Ibn Ezra noticed these parallels as well. On the pasuk (Vayikra 14:4):

The priest shall order two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop to be brought for him who is to be cleansed

וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וְלָקַח לְמִטְהָר שְׁתֵּי-צִפְרִים חַיִּים וְטָהוֹרִים וְעֵץ אֶרֶז וְשֵׁנִי תוֹלַעַת וְאַזְבִּיב:

the Ramban, quoting Ibn Ezra, states:



Thus the law of the metzora, and the law/teaching of the house stricken with tzara'at and the law of the Tuma'ah of a dead corpse are closely related and they are like Pesach mitzrayim.

והנה המצורע ותורת הבית המנוגע וטומאת המת
קרובים והנה הם כדמות פסח מצרים...

What Ramban (via Ibn Ezra) is saying is that in the same way that the Jews in Egypt used the Hyssop plant as the brush to paint the blood on the doorposts (which theoretically could have been cedar—a strong wood used for structures) to keep death from their homes, so too the metzora does the same thing to keep death at bay.

That of course begs the question- what death is the metzora being purified or redeemed from? There is somewhat of a consensus among the Sages that the metzora suffers a kind of spiritual death in that he becomes *ta'meh* (spiritually impure) and needs to leave the community. But, as Rabbi David Fohrman of Aleph Beta notes, after a period of seven days, the metzora experiences a rebirth and can rejoin the community. The Passover holiday lasts seven days as well, and with it we commemorate the time when we emerged as a community, as a nation.

The Haggadah also has the idea of spiritual death, separation, and rejoining the community as one of its themes. When we worshipped idols, it was as if we were spiritually dead. At the moment of Pesach Mitzrayim we have a national rebirth— along with extensive birth imagery, including blood, and moving from a dark place into the open.(It is no accident that Parashat Tazria, starts with a discussion of *tuma* and *tahara* regarding birth and immediately after that talks about *tuma* and *tahara* regarding the metzora.

At our Pesach Seders we traditionally celebrate our physical and historical redemption from Egypt. But when we say—

'In every generation one is obligated to see oneself as if he had left Mitzrayim...'

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ
הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם,

perhaps we should think about the times when we have experienced a spiritual death—the times we have done those things that have caused a part of our souls to die- whether it is speaking *Lashon Ha'Rah* or anything that takes us away from our best self, or simply anything that impedes our relationship to God. .

Pesach gives us a time therefore to not only remember our physical redemption from Egypt but also gives us the opportunity each year to experience a spiritual rebirth-- a rebirth that connects us with our people but strengthens our bounds with God as well. With every Pesach, God gives us the tools, as alluded to in the *tzara'at* narrative, to redeem ourselves spiritually and join our community to pray for the ultimate redemption.

Marianne Novak received her BA in Political Science from Barnard College and her JD from Washington University School of Law in St. Louis. She has served as the Endowment Director at the Jewish Federation of St. Louis and also helped start the Women's Tefillah Group at Bais Abraham. Marianne then moved to Skokie, Illinois, became a Gabbait for



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Pesach - A Love Story

Michal Kohane

Class of 2020

The Hebrew word “*ba'aviv*” (in the spring) is almost identical to “*be'ahava*” (with love), and identical in its gematria -- the letter *yud* (equal to 10) of “*aviv*” is split into two *heh*'s (equal to 5 plus 5) in the word “*ahava*” so that באביב = באהבה. A coincidence?

Indeed, it's up to us to choose and decide. That too, is what Pesach is about, and that too is love. It is therefore no wonder that Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs, has become Pesach's megillah (scroll). The Song of Songs is unique: it shows no interest in Law or Covenant or the God of Israel, nor does it teach or explore wisdom. Instead, it celebrates the sexual, passionate relationship between two lovers, who praise each other and yearn for each other. The two are in harmony, each desiring the other and rejoicing in sexual intimacy; the women of Jerusalem form a chorus to the lovers, functioning as an audience whose participation in the lovers' erotic encounters facilitates the participation of the reader.

Initially, the Sages debated if a book without God's name and with so much physical passion is suitable to this holiday, but then Rabbi Akiva taught (Mishna Yadayim 3:5):

Rabbi Akiva said, "Mercy forbid! No one in Israel ever disputed that The Song of Songs renders the hands impure, since nothing in the entire world is worthy but for that day on which The Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but The Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies!

אָמַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא, חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם, לֹא נַחֲלַק
אָדָם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל עַל שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים שְׁלֹא
תִּטְמָא אֶת הַיָּדַיִם, שְׂאִין כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ
כְּדָאֵי כַּיּוֹם שְׁנַתָּן בּוֹ שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל,
שְׁכַל הַכְּתוּבִים קִדְּשׁ, וְשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים קִדְּשׁ
קִדְּשִׁים.

Holy of holies? Some of the descriptions can leave anyone blushing. Take, for example, these descriptions of the male lover (in chapter 5):

13 His cheeks are as a bed of spices,
as banks of sweet herbs; his lips are
as lilies, dropping with flowing myrrh.
14 His hands are as rods of gold set
with beryl; his body is as polished
ivory overlaid with sapphires.
15 His legs are as pillars of marble,
set upon sockets of fine gold; his
aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as
the cedars.

יֵג לְחַיּוֹ כְּעֶרְוַת הַבֶּשֶׂם, מְגִדְלוֹת מְרֻקָּחִים;
שִׁפְתוֹתָיו, שׁוֹשְׁנִים-נֹטְפוֹת, מִזֶּר עֵבֶר
יָדָיו גְּלִילֵי זָהָב, מְמַלְאִים בְּתַרְשִׁישׁ; מְעִי עֶשֶׂת
שָׁן, מְעַלְפֵת סְפִירִים.
טו שׁוֹקֵיו עַמּוּדֵי שֵׁשׁ, מִיִּסְדִּים עַל-אֲדָנֵי-פָז;
מְרֹאֵהוּ, כְּלִבְנוֹן-בְּחֹר, כְּאַרְזִים.



And these descriptions of the female lover (in Chapter 7):

2 How beautiful are thy steps in sandals, O prince's daughter! The roundings of thy thighs are like the links of a chain, the work of the hands of a skilled workman.

3 Thy navel is like a round goblet, wherein no mingled wine is wanting; thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies.

4 Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a gazelle.

5 Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes as the pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim; thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus....

בִּמְהֵרָה יִפּוּ פְעָמַיךָ בְּנַעֲלִים, בֵּת-נְדִיב; חֲמוּקֵי
יֶרְכִיךָ-כְּמוֹ חֲלָאִים, מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אִמּוֹ.
ג שְׁרָרְךָ אֲגֹן הַסֶּהַר, אֶל-יַחְסֹר הַמְּזָג; בְּטֶנֶךָ עֲרַמַת
חֲטִים, סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשְׁנִים
ד שְׁנֵי שְׁדֵיךָ כְּשְׁנֵי עֶפְרַיִם, תְּאֵמִי צְבִיָּה.
ה צִוְאַרְךָ, כְּמַגְדֵּל הַשֵּׁן; עֵינֶיךָ בְּרִכּוֹת בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן,
עַל-שַׁעַר בֵּת-רַבִּים-אֶפְרַיִם כְּמַגְדֵּל הַלְּבָנוֹן, צוֹפֶה פְּנֵי
דַּמָּשְׁקָה.

Once we get over the imagery (a belly like a “heap of wheat”?), what is most striking is the level of detail. There are no generalizations like “he’s a good guy”; “she’s a lovely person”, but a great attention to every little feature: “you know, the exact way in which he smiles...”, “the way she tilts her head just so when she listens...”, and the queries: “I wonder what he meant by....”, “what was she thinking when...” When you love somebody, everything matters. Small things are not small, for good or bad. Even a tiny gesture leaves much to contemplate. A smile lights up one’s day, while one stupid word can ruin it. Everything is important. Everything has significance. Similarly, just before Pesach, this is what we’re looking for: every little spec of chametz, every crumb, it all must be burned, for between lovers it is crucial that there is no room for “little things”.

But then comes Pesach eve, and what do we celebrate? That God “passed-over” our homes, that God spared us, that we were taken to freedom and liberation, that we were given another chance. Our sages tell us that there are 50 gates of “*tum’a*” (טומאה, “spiritual impurity”) and that we dropped all the way down to gate 49. But nevertheless, God “passed-over” us. God knew we had sunk deep. But God saw the “big picture”, and overlooked the details. Rashi says that the word “*u-fasacht*” - וּפְסַחְתִּי - “and I have passed-over” means “*vechamalti*” - וַחֲמַלְתִּי - “and I have shown compassion”. And that too is love.

But the same root – פ.ס.ח. – also means lame; someone who is limping is a “*pise’ach*” (פִּיסַח), therefore, describing a situation that is incomplete.

So which way is it?

The preparation has to be meticulous and every detail matters. Such is winter: we count rain days, precipitation, temperatures, clothing, supplies. Everything we have in our storage for the cold days matters, and can be the difference between life and death. We worry, we shiver, we live in the small details. But then spring comes, and that’s all gone. The windows are open wide; the heater is off, and we are incredibly joyful to see just the smallest blossom. There is no way to “measure” that. We say thank you not because the tiny flower is physically greater than however many months of darkness



and cold we had, but because it's here; because it exists! We “forgive” all the hardship. And our joy and appreciation “skips over” all the previous days. Chametz also shares its root from “to miss out” (*lehachmitz*- להחמיץ), while matza shares its root with fulfillment (*lematzot* – למצות). Focusing on tiny details alone doesn't make for a happy life.

This is also what the Song of Songs says (2:8):

Behold! my beloved! behold, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

קול דודי, הנה-זה בא; מדלג, על-ההרים-מקפץ,
על-הגבעות.

Love is about both attention to details, and about skipping over; about daily hard work, and about the big picture and greater joy, and the art and challenge is to know when to apply which. Perhaps figuring that out is also the journey of the exodus from slavery to freedom.

Michal Kohane was born and raised in Israel and is currently the Rosh Kehila of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn. She has been a leader and educator in the Jewish Community of Northern California for over twenty five years, serving as acting rabbi to a 120 family congregation, a day-school educator, federation executive director and more. Michal holds a BA in Studies of Israel and Education, an M.S. in Jewish Studies, an MA in Clinical Psychology, and is pursuing a PsyD in organizational psychology.



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