

הגדת יונתן זקס

THE JONATHAN SACKS
HAGGADA

THE APPLBAUM EDITION

Maggid Books

*The program for the evening is announced beforehand
in the following form:*

קדש / ורחץ / כרפס / יחץ
מגיד / רחצה / מוציא מצה
מרור / כורך / שלחן עורך
צפון / ברך / הלל / נרצה

KIDDUSH

WASHING

KARPAS

SPLITTING

TELLING

WASHING

MOTZI MATZA

BITTER HERBS

WRAPPING

TABLE SETTING

HIDDEN

BLESSING

PRAISING

PARTING

קדש

The first cup of wine is poured. Lift the cup with the right hand and say the following:

On שבת add:

quietly וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר

יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי:

וַיְכַלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם:

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ

כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, לַעֲשׂוֹת:

On other evenings קידוש starts here:

When saying קידוש for others, add:

סברי מרנן

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹיָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

KADESH / KIDDUSH

We begin the seder by the formal act of sanctifying the day. The Kiddush tonight is the same as for other festivals. Nonetheless Kiddush as such has a particular connection with Pesah, since the command to establish the calendar was first given to the Israelites in Egypt prior to the Exodus: “This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you” (Ex. 12:2). This was the first command given to Israel as a people.

Rabbi Avraham Pam explained this in the following way: the difference between a slave and a free human being does not lie in how long or hard each works. Free people often work long hours doing arduous tasks. The difference lies in who controls time. A slave works until he or she is allowed to stop. A free person decides when to begin and end. Control over time is the essential difference between slavery and freedom. Control over the calendar gave the Israelites the power to determine when the New Moon occurred, and thus when the festivals occur. They were given authority over time. The first command to the Israelites was thus an essential prelude to freedom. It said: learn how to value

KADESH / KIDDUSH

The first cup of wine is poured. Lift the cup with the right hand and say the following:

On Shabbat add:

quietly: And it was evening, and it was morning –

יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי the sixth day.

Then the heavens and the earth were completed,
and all their array.

With the seventh day, God completed the work He had done.
He ceased on the seventh day from all the work He had done.
God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy,
because on it

He ceased from all His work He had created to do.

On other evenings Kiddush starts here:

When saying Kiddush for others, add:

Please pay attention, my masters.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who creates the fruit of the vine.

time and make it holy. “Teach us rightly to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:20).

WHEN PESAḤ FALLS ON SHABBAT

The two forms of holiness – Shabbat and festivals – are different. Shabbat represents creation. The festivals represent redemption. Shabbat is about the presence of God in nature. The festivals are about the presence of God in history. Accordingly Shabbat was declared holy by God Himself at the culmination of creation. God “blessed the seventh day and declared it holy” (Gen. 2:3). The festivals, by contrast, are sanctified by the Jewish people through their determination of the calendar – just as redemption takes place in history when we act in partnership with God. Thus on Shabbat we end the Kiddush by saying *Mekadesh haShabbat*, meaning that it is God who sanctifies Shabbat; but on festivals we say *Mekadesh Yisrael vehazemanim*, meaning, “God sanctifies Israel, and Israel in turn sanctifies time.” Shabbat is holiness “from above to below.” The festivals are holiness “from below to above.”

On Shabbat, add the words in parentheses.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר
 בָּנוּ מִכָּל עַם, וְרוֹמְמָנוּ מִכָּל לָשׁוֹן, וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
 וַתִּתֵּן לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה (שִׁבְתוֹת לְמְנוּחָה
 וּמוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה, חַגִּים וְזִמְנִים לְשִׂשׁוֹן, אֶת
 יוֹם (הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה וְאֶת יוֹם) חַג הַמִּצּוֹת הַזֶּה
 זִמְן חֲרוּתָנוּ (בְּאַהֲבָה) מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ
 זְכוֹר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם, כִּי בָנוּ
 בְּחֵרָתְךָ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָךְ
 מִכָּל הָעַמִּים, (וְשַׁבָּת)
 וּמוֹעֲדֵי קֹדֶשְׁךָ
 (בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרִצּוֹן)
 בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׂשׁוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ.
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מִקְדֵּשׁ (הַשַּׁבָּת וְ) יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזִּמְנִים.

When Yom Tov falls on Shabbat, Shabbat takes priority. This is because the sanctity of Shabbat is of a higher order. Its prohibitions are more extensive and the penalties for violating them are more severe. The primacy of Shabbat also exemplifies the general rule in Judaism that “When a frequent obligation coincides with a rare one, the more frequent one takes precedence” (*Berakhot* 51b). This is in itself an expression of Jewish values. In many faiths, a sense of holiness and spirituality belongs to moments that are rare, unusual, exceptional. In Judaism what is holy is the texture of everyday life itself. Judaism is not poetry but prose. It is the religious drama of daily deeds, words, and relationships. God is not distant but in the here and now – if we create space in our hearts for His presence.

On Shabbat, add the words in parentheses.

בְּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God,
 King of the Universe,
 who has chosen us from among all peoples,
 raised us above all tongues, and made us holy
 through His commandments.
 You have given us,
 LORD our God, in love
 (Sabbaths for rest),
 festivals for rejoicing,
 holy days and seasons for joy,
 (this Sabbath day and)
 this day of the festival of Matzot,
 the time of our freedom
 (with love), a holy assembly in memory
 of the Exodus from Egypt.
 For You have chosen us
 and sanctified us
 above all peoples,
 and given us as our heritage
 (Your holy Sabbath in love and favor and)
 Your holy festivals for joy and gladness.
 Blessed are you, LORD,
 who sanctifies (the Sabbath,) Israel and the festivals.

WHO HAS CHOSEN US FROM AMONG ALL PEOPLES, RAISED US ABOVE ALL TONGUES, AND MADE US HOLY THROUGH HIS COMMANDMENTS

Chosenness is not a privilege but a responsibility. Jews are different not because of what we are but because of what we are called on to be: not because of the hardware of the Jewish people, but because of the software. God chose us not because of any innate superiority but in order to “make us holy through His commandments.” When we are true to that vocation, we bring blessing not just to ourselves but to the world.

On Motza'ei Shabbat, the following Havdala is added:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל
בֵּין אֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ
בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים

בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשִׁשַּׁת יָמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה
בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁ יוֹם טוֹב הַבְּדִלָּתָהּ
וְאֵת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִשִּׁשַּׁת יָמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה קֹדֶשׁ
הַבְּדִלָּתָהּ וְקֹדֶשׁ אֶת עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקֹדֶשְׁתֶּךָ.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְקֹדֶשׁ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ
לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.

Drink while reclining to the left.

ורחץ

Water is brought to the leader.
The participants wash their hands but do not say a blessing.

URHATZ / WASHING

In the time of the Mishna, many people were careful to wash their hands before eating moist foods. Nowadays the custom is not widely observed except on

On Motza'ei Shabbat, the following Havdala is added:

בְּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God,
King of the Universe,
who creates the lights of fire.

Blessed are You, LORD our God,
King of the Universe,
who distinguishes between sacred and secular,
between light and darkness,
between Israel and the nations,
between the seventh day and the six days of work.
You have made a distinction
between the holiness of the Sabbath
and the holiness of festivals,
and have sanctified
the seventh day above the six days of work.
You have distinguished and sanctified
Your people Israel with Your holiness.
Blessed are You, LORD,
who distinguishes between sacred and sacred.

בְּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God,
King of the Universe,
who has given us life, sustained us,
and brought us to this time.

Drink while reclining to the left.

URHATZ / WASHING

Water is brought to the leader.
The participants wash their hands but do not say a blessing.

seder night, when it is done for the karpas, which is dipped in liquid. To signal the difference between this washing, which is customary, and the washing before eating bread, which is obligatory, no blessing is said.

כרפס

*A small quantity of radish, greens, or roots of parsley is dipped in salt water.
Say the following over the karpas,
with the intent to include the maror in the blessing:*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

Eat without reclining.

יחץ

The middle מצה is broken in two.

*The bigger portion is then hidden away to serve as the afikoman
with which the meal is later concluded.
The smaller portion is placed between the two whole מצות.*

KARPAS

*Dipping karpas in salt water or vinegar is one of the things we do on the seder night to arouse the curiosity of children so they will ask, “What makes this night unlike all other nights?” It is one of the two acts referred to in the question “every other night we do not dip [our food] at all, but tonight we will dip it twice.” The other, just before the meal, is the dipping of maror in *haroset*.*

There is symbolic significance in these two acts. The Exodus began and ended with acts of dipping. It began when Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery. They dipped his robe in the blood of a slaughtered goat (Gen. 37:31) and brought it to Jacob to persuade him that Joseph had been attacked and killed by a wild animal. The sale of Joseph into slavery in Egypt was the beginning of the long process through which the entire family of Jacob traveled to Egypt and eventually became slaves.

The exile ended with the Israelites’ taking bunches of hyssop, dipping them in the blood of the Paschal offering, and daubing them on the doorframes of their houses (Ex. 12:22). God “passed over” these houses during the final plague, after which they went free.

The two dippings recall these events. The karpas, itself sweet, is dipped in salt and becomes sour. The maror, itself bitter, is dipped in the sweet *haroset* and has some of the bitterness removed. These two acts remind us that freedom, which is sweet, becomes sour when we use it to mistreat others. Slavery, which

KARPAS

*A small quantity of radish, greens, or roots of parsley is dipped in salt water.
Say the following over the karpas,
with the intent to include the maror in the blessing:*

בְּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God,
King of the Universe,
who creates the fruit of the ground.

Eat without reclining.

YAḤATZ / SPLITTING

The middle matza is broken in two.

*The bigger portion is then hidden away to serve as the afikoman
with which the meal is later concluded.
The smaller portion is placed between the two whole matzot.*

is bitter, is sweetened when collective suffering becomes human solidarity and thus a prelude to freedom.

YAḤATZ / SPLITTING THE MIDDLE MATZA

*Of the three matzot, the upper and lower represent the *lehem mishneh*, the double portion of manna that fell before Sabbaths and festivals in the wilderness so the Israelites would not have to gather food on the holy day itself. The third – the middle matza – represents the special duty to eat unleavened bread on Pesah.*

There are two reasons we break it in half. The first is that it is described as “the bread of oppression” or, as the sages interpreted it, “the bread of a poor person.” One who is so poor that he does not know where his next meal is coming from does not eat all his food at once. He divides it into two, saving half for later.

The second is that, with the destruction of the Temple, matza takes the place of the Paschal offering. Just as that lamb was eaten at the end of the meal – so as to be experienced as holy food, not just food eaten to satisfy hunger – so we reserve half the matza (the *afikoman*) to be eaten at the end of the meal. The custom that children hide the *afikoman* is part of the spirit of the seder service, which contains many elements designed to attract and sustain the interest of a child.

However, there is also a third significance to breaking the middle matza. Matza represents two apparently contradictory ideas. At the beginning of the

מגיד

*During the recital of this paragraph
the קערה (seder plate) is held up
and the middle מצה is displayed to the company.*

הַאֲלֵנוּ
לְחֶמֶת עֲנִיָּא
דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבֹהֵתָנָא בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
כֹּל דְּכָפִין יִיתִי וְיִכֹּל, כֹּל דְּצָרוּךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח

seder we describe it as “the bread of oppression our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.” Ibn Ezra explains that slaves were given unleavened bread because, being hard, it takes longer to digest. It removes hunger for longer than ordinary bread. Later in the seder, we describe it as the bread the Israelites ate as they were leaving Egypt, in too much of a hurry to allow the dough to rise. We divide the matza, therefore, to show that it has two symbolisms. Now, at the beginning of the seder, it is the bread of oppression. Later, once we have relived the Exodus, it becomes the bread of freedom. The difference between freedom and slavery lies not in the quality of bread we eat, but in the state of mind in which we eat it.

MAGGID / TELLING

This is the beginning of the seder narrative, known as Maggid, from the word haggada, “relate,” “recount,” “declare,” “proclaim.” The story of the Exodus is known as the Haggada because of the verse “You shall tell (vehigadeta) your child on that day, [I do this] because of what the LORD did for me when I went out of

MAGGID / TELLING

*During the recital of this paragraph
the seder plate is held up
and the middle matza is displayed to the company.*

הַאֲלֵנוּ
לְחֶמֶת עֲנִיָּא

THIS

IS THE BREAD OF OPPRESSION

our fathers ate
in the land of Egypt.
Let all who are hungry
come in and eat;
let all who are in need
come and join us for the Pesah.

Egypt” (Ex. 13:8). However, the word *haggada* derives from a verb that also means “bind,” “join,” “connect.” The story of the Exodus is more than a recounting (*sipur*) of things that happened long ago. It binds the present to the past and future. It connects one generation to the next. It joins us to our children. Jewish continuity means that each successive generation commits itself to continuing the story. Our past lives on in us.

THIS IS THE BREAD OF OPPRESSION

This is a strange invitation: “This is the bread of oppression our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come in and eat.” What hospitality is it to offer the hungry the taste of suffering? In fact, though, this is a profound insight into the nature of slavery and freedom. As noted, matza represents two things: it is the food of slaves, and also the bread eaten by the Israelites as they left Egypt in liberty. What transforms the bread of oppression into the bread of freedom is the willingness to share it with others.

Primo Levi survived Auschwitz. In his book, *If This Is a Man*, he describes

הִשְׁתָּא הִכָּא
 לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּאֶרֶץ דִּישְׂרָאֵל
 הִשְׁתָּא עֲבָדֵי
 לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

his experiences there. According to Levi, the worst time of all was when the Nazis left in January 1945, fearing the Russian advance. All prisoners who could walk were taken on the brutal “death marches.” The only people left in the camp were those too ill to move. For ten days they were left alone with only scraps of food and fuel. Levi describes how he worked to light a fire and bring some warmth to his fellow prisoners, many of them dying. He then writes:

When the broken window was repaired and the stove began to spread its heat, something seemed to relax in everyone, and at that moment Towarowski (a Franco-Pole of twenty-three, typhus) proposed to the others that each of them offer a slice of bread to us three who had been working. And so it was agreed.

Only a day before a similar event would have been inconceivable. The law of the Lager [concentration camps] said: “eat your own bread, and if you can, that of your neighbor,” and left no room for gratitude. It really meant that the law of the Lager was dead.

It was the first human gesture that occurred among us. I believe that that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from *Haftlinge* [prisoners] to men again.

Sharing food is the first act through which slaves become free human beings. One who fears tomorrow does not offer his bread to others. But one who is willing to divide his food with a stranger has already shown himself capable of fellowship and faith, the two things from which hope is born. That is why we begin the seder by inviting others to join us. Bread shared is no longer the bread of oppression. Reaching out to others, giving help to the needy and companionship to those who are alone, we bring freedom into the world, and with freedom, God.

Now we are here;
 next year in the land of Israel.
 Now – slaves;
 next year we shall be free.

NOW WE ARE HERE; NEXT YEAR IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

At the very moment that we gather to remember the past, we speak about the future. The seder brings together the three dimensions of time. Before the meal we tell the story of redemption in the past. During the meal we experience it in the present. After the meal, as we conclude Hallel and say, “Next year in Jerusalem rebuilt,” we look forward to redemption in the future.

What is distinctive about Jewish time is that we experience the present not as an isolated moment, but as a link in a chain connecting past and future. The very fact that they had been liberated in the days of Moses gave our ancestors confidence that they would be liberated again. The Jewish people would return to the land of Israel. Here we see one of the most profound instincts of the Jewish mind: *memory is the guardian of hope*. Those who forget the past become prisoners of the present. Those who remember the past have faith in the future. We can face it without fear, because we have been there before.

NOW – SLAVES; NEXT YEAR WE SHALL BE FREE

*There are two words for freedom in Hebrew, ḥofesh and ḥerut. Ḥofesh is “freedom from.” Ḥerut is “freedom to.” Ḥofesh is what a slave acquires when released from slavery. He or she is free from being subject to someone else’s will. But this kind of liberty is not enough to create a free society. A world in which everyone is free to do what he or she likes begins in anarchy and ends in tyranny. That is why ḥofesh is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination. Ḥerut is collective freedom, a society in which my freedom respects yours. A free society is always a moral achievement. It rests on self-restraint and regard for others. The ultimate aim of the Torah is to fashion a society on the foundations of justice and compassion, both of which depend on recognizing the sovereignty of God and the integrity of creation. Thus we say, “Next year we shall be *benei ḥorin*,” invoking ḥerut, not ḥofesh. This statement is an aspiration; “May we be free in a way that honors the freedom of all.”*

The seder plate and the matzah are now covered and the second cup of wine is poured.
The youngest child asks the following questions:

מה נשתנה
הלילה הזה מכל הלילות
שפכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה
הלילה הזה פלו מצה
שפכל הלילות אנו אוכלין שאר ירקות
הלילה הזה מרור
שפכל הלילות אין אנו מטבילין אפלו פעם אחת
הלילה הזה שתי פעמים
שפכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בין יושבין ובין מסבין
הלילה הזה פלנו מסבין

WHAT MAKES THIS NIGHT UNLIKE ALL OTHER NIGHTS?

The Torah speaks of children asking questions on Pesah. “And if your children should ask you, ‘What is this service to you?’ you shall say...” (Ex. 12:26). From this, tradition inferred that the story of the Exodus from Egypt must be told, wherever possible, in response to the questions asked by a child.

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

The seder plate and the matzah are now covered and the second cup of wine is poured.
The youngest child asks the following questions:

מה נשתנה

WHAT MAKES

THIS NIGHT UNLIKE ALL OTHER NIGHTS,

so that every other night we eat either bread or matza,
but tonight there is only matza?

And that every other night we eat many different greens,
but tonight we will eat bitter herbs?

And that every other night we do not dip [our food] at all,
but tonight we will dip it twice?

And that every other night some sit to eat and some recline,
but tonight we are all reclining?

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

WHAT MAKES THIS NIGHT UNLIKE ALL OTHER NIGHTS?

The history of *Ma Nishtana* is fascinating. The text itself goes back some two thousand years. It is recorded in the Mishna and was almost certainly the form of words used in Second Temple times. Everything else about it, though, was different. It was said not before the meal but afterward. It was said not by the child but by the parent. And it was not a set of questions but a set of statements. How so?

In Temple times the meal was eaten first. The sanctity of the moment was palpable. Families had traveled from all parts of Israel to bring their sacrifice to the Temple and eat their meal in the precincts of Jerusalem. The questions of the child arose naturally from acts done that night that were done at no other point in the year. If the child was too young to ask, the father would prompt him by saying, *Ma nishtana halayla hazeh*, meaning not “What makes this night different?” but “See how different this night is from all other nights.” He would then enumerate the differences, encouraging the child to ask, “Why?”

One of the most remarkable achievements of the sages was to preserve the continuity of Jewish life through a series of tragedies – the destruction of the

The קערה and the מצות are uncovered.

עבדים היינו
 לַפְּרֵעָה בְּמִצְרַיִם
 וַיּוֹצֵיאֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה.

Temple, the end of the Paschal sacrifice, and the loss of the entire atmosphere of collective celebration in Jerusalem. The narrative was moved from after the meal to before it, so that words would do the work of place: the Jewish people no longer had Jerusalem, but we still had the story. And instead of children asking spontaneously, each in his or her own words (the “four sons” of the Haggada), the *Ma Nishtana* became a standard formula that every child could learn. Old words took on a new function. A ritual once celebrated in the vicinity of the Temple became a ceremony that could be observed throughout the world without losing its original character. Everywhere Jews gathered to celebrate Pesah became a fragment of Jerusalem. The city, the land, and the sacrificial order lay in ruins, but the words remained.

One thing achieved by turning *Ma Nishtana* into a formula was that now there was no division of children into the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the child unable to ask. In a beautiful and deeply characteristic gesture, custom ordained that every child should ask in the same way, using the same words, so as not to put any child to shame. All Jewish children are precious and we do not distinguish between them.

WHAT MAKES THIS NIGHT UNLIKE ALL OTHER NIGHTS?

The four questions correspond to the “four sons” of the Haggada. The wise child turns immediately to the central symbol of Pesah, the matza. His question is profound. Matza is the “bread of oppression” but Pesah is the “festival of freedom.” Why, then, do we eat only matza? The “wicked son” asks about the maror because, being bitter toward Judaism, he tastes only the bitterness of Jewish life, not the sweetness. The simple-natured child asks about the dipping, the act done precisely to provoke a question on the part of a child. The one who does not know how to ask asks why people are reclining. His attention is not on the seder service at all but on the people gathered around the table.

WE WERE SLAVES TO PHARAOH IN EGYPT

The Mishna states that in telling the story of the Exodus we must “Begin with the

The seder plate and the matzot are uncovered.

עבדים היינו

WE WERE SLAVES

to Pharaoh in Egypt,
 and the LORD our God brought us out of there
 with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.

shame and end with the praise” (Mishna *Pesahim* 10:4). A Jewish story begins in sadness and ends in joy.

What, specifically, does this mean on Pesah? The Talmud records two views, those of Rav and Shmuel, two sages of the third century. According to Shmuel it means saying, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD our God brought us out.” According to Rav it means saying, “In the beginning, our ancestors were idol worshippers. But now the Omnipresent has drawn us close in His service.” Out of respect for these two views, we say them both, beginning with the answer according to Shmuel.

The two opinions reflect different approaches to the Exodus. According to Shmuel the central fact is physical redemption. Our ancestors were slaves who were liberated by God. According to Rav the essential theme is spiritual redemption. Our ancestors were idolators who found, and were found by, God.

There is a difference, too, in their approach to history. Shmuel focuses on the immediate event of Egypt, slavery and redemption. Rav places the event in a wider context – the whole history of the Jewish people from Abraham to Joshua and the conquest of the land. For Rav, Pesah is part of a larger drama, from founding father to the birth of a nation in its own land.

Maimonides draws a third distinction. There are two elements to the seder service: there is the story we tell our children, and the story we tell ourselves. Shmuel focuses on the story as told to a child. Rav speaks of the story as an adult reflection. Children can understand the drama of slavery and freedom together with the many miracles that were involved. It takes an adult to understand the journey from polytheism to monotheism, from myth to faith.

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

In the Kovno ghetto in the early 1940s an extraordinary scene took place one morning in the makeshift synagogue. The Jews in the ghetto had begun to realize the fate that lay in store for them. They knew that none of them would escape, that the work camps to which they would be transported were in fact factories of death. And at the morning service, the leader of prayer, an old and pious Jew,

וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ לֹא הוֹצִיא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם
הֵרִי אֲנִי וּבְנֵינוּ וּבְנֵי בְנֵינוּ מִשְׁעַבְדִּים הֵיְיָנוּ לְפָרְעָה בְּמִצְרַיִם.
וְאִפְּלוּ
כָּלֵנוּ חֲכָמִים, כָּלֵנוּ נְבוֹנִים, כָּלֵנוּ זְקֵנִים
כָּלֵנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה
מִצְוָה עָלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם
וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם
הֵרִי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח.

could finally say the words no longer. He had come to the blessing in which we thank God for not making us slaves. He turned to the congregation and said: “I cannot say this prayer. How can I thank God for my freedom when I am now a prisoner facing death? Only a madman could say this prayer now.”

Some members of the congregation turned to the rabbi for advice. Could a Jew in the Kovno ghetto pronounce the blessing thanking God for not having made him a slave? The rabbi replied very simply. “Heaven forbid that we should abolish the blessing now. Our enemies wish to make us their slaves. But though they control our bodies they do not own our souls. By saying this blessing we show that even here we still see ourselves as free men, temporarily in captivity, awaiting God’s redemption.”

The hardest question for faith today is: Where was God in Auschwitz? Where was God when His faithful servants were being turned to ashes and dying as martyrs in their millions? Where was redemption when the Jews of Europe were gassed and burned and God was silent? That question haunts us on the night of Pesah, because on this night we remember that slavery in Egypt was not the only, or even the worst, chapter of Jewish suffering. There have been pharaohs in every generation. And not only Jews have been their victims. There are peoples today who live under the threat of genocide. If God redeems – not in heaven but here on earth – where is His redemption?

The greatest prophets asked this question and received no answer. Nonetheless there is a fragment of an answer, and it was given by the rabbi in the Kovno ghetto. God has chosen only one dwelling place in this finite, physical universe and that is the human heart. Whenever we banish God from the heart, tragic things happen. When rulers set themselves in place of God, they begin by taking other people’s freedom and end by taking other people’s lives. There

And if the Holy One, blessed be He,
had not brought our fathers out of Egypt –
then we, and our children, and the children of our children,
would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.
And even were we all wise, all intelligent,
all aged and all knowledgeable in the Torah,
still the command would be upon us
to tell of the coming out of Egypt;
and the more one tells of the coming out of Egypt,
the more admirable it is.

is a direct line from tyranny to idolatry to bloodshed. Our greatest defense is the knowledge that above all earthly powers is the supreme King of kings, God Himself, who has endowed all human beings with His image. No absolute ruler has ever succeeded in extinguishing that spark in the souls of a people, which expresses itself in a passion for freedom. That is why all tyrannies have failed and always will.

Where was God in the Kovno ghetto? In the hearts of those who, though they were prisoners in the valley of the shadow of death, insisted on pronouncing a blessing as free human beings. Their story has no simple happy ending, but they left us an immortal legacy: the knowledge that the human spirit cannot be killed, and that therefore freedom will always win the final battle.

AND IF THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE, HAD NOT BROUGHT
OUR FATHERS OUT OF EGYPT

One rule of telling the story on Pesah is that each person must see himself or herself as if he or she had personally left Egypt. History becomes memory. The past becomes the present. At this stage, therefore, we speak of the continuing consequences of the past. Had the Exodus not happened and the Israelites stayed in Egypt, none of the subsequent events of Jewish history would have occurred. What and where we are now is the result of what happened then.

EVEN WERE WE ALL WISE

There is a fundamental difference between knowing and telling the story. We do not tell the narrative of the Exodus to know what happened in the past. We do so because each telling engraves that event more thoroughly in the memory, and because each year adds its own insights and interpretations. Judaism is a constant dialogue between past and present, and since the present always

מַעֲשֵׂה

בְּרַבֵּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה
 וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן
 שֶׁהָיוּ מְסַבִּין בְּבֵנֵי בְרַק
 וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל אוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה
 עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ תַלְמִידֵיהֶם וְאָמְרוּ לָהֶם
 רְבוֹתֵינוּ
 הֲגִיעַ זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית.

ברכות יב:

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה
 הֲרִי אֲנִי כְּבֵן שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה
 וְלֹא זָכִיתִי שֶׁתֵּאָמֵר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם בַּלַּיְלֹת
 עַד שֶׁדִּרְשָׁה בֶּן זֹמָא
 שְׁנַאֲמַר
 לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
 כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

דברים טו:

יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַיָּמִים
 כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַלַּיְלֹת.
 וַחֲכָמִים אוֹמְרִים
 יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה
 כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ לְהַבְיֵא לִיְמוֹת הַמְּשִׁיחַ.

changes, there is always a new juxtaposition, a new facet of the story. The sages said, “There is no house of study without *hiddush* [some new interpretation]”

מַעֲשֵׂה

ONCE,

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria and Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon reclined [for the seder] in Benei Brak. And they told of the Exodus from Egypt all that night; until their students came in and said, “Teachers – the time for saying the *Shema* of the morning has come.”

Berakhot 12b

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria said:
 I am almost seventy years old,
 and never have I merited to find the command
 to speak of the Exodus from Egypt at night –
 until Ben Zoma interpreted:
 It is written,
 “SO THAT YOU REMEMBER
 THE DAY OF YOUR EXODUS FROM EGYPT
 ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE.”

Deut. 16

“The days of your life” would mean in the days;
 “all the days of your life” includes the nights.

But the sages say,

“The days of your life” would mean only in this world;
 “all the days of your life” brings in the time of the Messiah.

(*Hagiga* 3a). The story of Pesah never grows old, because the struggle for freedom never ends, and therefore each generation adds its own commentary to the old-new story.

RABBI ELAZAR BEN AZARIA SAID

See Essays on Pesah, “*The Sages in Benei Brak*.”

See Essays on Pesah, “*Ben Zoma and the Sages*.”

בְּרוּךְ הַמְּקוֹם
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא
 בְּרוּךְ שֶׁנָּתַן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא

בְּנֵי אַרְבַּעַה בְּנִים דְּבָרָה תּוֹרָה
 אֶחָד חָכָם
 וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע
 וְאֶחָד פֶּתִי
 וְאֶחָד שְׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשַׁאֵל

 THE FOUR SONS

This famous passage is based on the fact that the Torah speaks in four places about the dialogue between parents and children:

1. And if your children should ask you, “What is this rite you perform?” you shall say, “It is a Pesah offering for the LORD, for He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt while He struck the Egyptians, but saved those in our houses” (Ex. 12:26–27).
2. And you shall tell your child on that day, “It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went out of Egypt” (ibid. 13:8).
3. If in that time your child should ask you, “What is this?” you shall say to him, “With a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the grip of slavery” (ibid. 13:14).
4. When, in time to come, your children ask you, “What are the testimonies, statutes, and laws that the LORD our God commanded you?” You shall say to your child, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand” (Deut. 6:20–21).

Rather than seeing them as restatements of the same idea, the sages detected, in the different ways the verses are phrased, four distinctive personalities – thus, four kinds of children.

בְּרוּךְ הַמְּקוֹם

Blessed is the Omnipresent –
 blessed is He.
 Blessed is the One
 who gave His people Israel, the Torah –
 blessed is He.

בְּנֵי אַרְבַּעַה בְּנִים

The Torah relates
 to four types of sons –
 one who is wise,
 one who is wicked,
 one with a simple nature,
 and one who does not know how to ask.

 THE FOUR SONS

*It may be that the “four sons” are not different people but successive stages in the development of a child. We begin by being unable to ask. We accept the world as given. The next stage in intellectual growth is curiosity (the child “with a simple nature”). We ask questions with no ulterior motive. We simply want to learn. This is often followed by a period of testing and challenging the values we have received (the “wicked” child, or the adolescent). The Hebrew word for adolescent, *na’ar*, also means “shake off.” The teenage years are ones where we develop our own identity by putting received values to the test. This can sometimes lead to rebellion as a form of self-exploration. The culmination of cognitive growth is “wisdom,” the point at which we have internalized the values of our heritage and are sufficiently mature to see their objective merits. Although the Haggada uses the word “wise,” rabbinic tradition preferred the phrase *talmid hakham*, a “wise disciple.” Wisdom, in Judaism, is not a state, but a process of constant learning. That is why it lies as much in the questions one asks as in the answers. Every answer is itself the prelude to a deeper question, and thus there is constant growth as we move to new levels of understanding.*

 THE FOUR SONS

The four sons are a vignette of the Jewish people. One asks because he wants to hear the answer. A second asks because he does not want to hear the answer. A

חכם

מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר

מָה הָעֵדוּת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים

אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶתְכֶם:

וְאֵף אֶתָּה אָמַר לוֹ בְּהִלְכוֹת הַפֶּסַח

אֵין מִפְּטוּרֵיךְ אַחַר הַפֶּסַח אֶפְיָקוּמָן.

דברים

third asks because he does not understand. The fourth does not ask because he doesn't understand that he doesn't understand. Ours has never been a monolithic people.

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

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

THE WISE SON

The three other children appear in the Book of Exodus, at the time of the going out of Egypt itself. The question of the wise son appears in the Book of Deuteronomy, forty years later. Historical understanding takes time. In the midst of events we are too close to see their significance, even to ask the right questions. As a hasidic sage said: "It took one day to take the Israelites out of Egypt. It took forty years to take Egypt out of the Israelites."

THE WISE SON

The wise son shows his wisdom by distinguishing three kinds of commandment,

The WISE SON

what does he say?

"What are the testimonies, the statutes and laws, that the LORD our God commanded you?"

And you must tell him the laws of Pesah:

"After eating the Pesah offering one does not eat anything more."

Deut. 6

understanding that Judaism is a complex system in which not every law has the same purpose.

Edot, testimonies, are commands like those of Shabbat and the festivals, which remind us of the presence of God in nature and history.

Hukkim, statutes, are commands like the prohibition of mixing milk and meat, which have no obvious reason. Some Jewish thinkers believed that *hukkim* were commands without a reason. Sa'adia Gaon said they were commanded to confer on us a reward for pure obedience. Maimonides, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, argued that each of the *hukkim* had a reason, though it became clear only after long investigation. Nahmanides and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch held that *hukkim* were ecological commands, rules respecting the integrity of nature and the distinctness of different species and forms of life.

Mishpatim are laws of social justice. Biblical Hebrew has two words for justice, *tzedek* and *mishpat*.

Mishpat refers to the principles of the rule of law, impartiality, and retributive justice ("measure for measure"). *Tzedek* refers to equity and distributive justice. The word *tzedaka* does not mean, as it is usually translated, "charity." Instead it means justice in this broader sense. It comes from the idea, fundamental to Judaism, that what we possess we do not ultimately own. We hold it in trust from God, and one condition of that trust is that we share part of what we have with others in need.

One way of expressing the difference between the three types of command is that through *edot* we fulfill our duty to the past, through *mishpatim* our duty to others, and through *hukkim* our duty to the natural world.

Alternatively: though each essentially involves action, in the case of *mishpatim* it is the act itself that is the purpose of the command. It creates justice. In *edot*, the point of the action is the belief or attitude to which it gives rise. On Shabbat we focus on creation, on Pesah on redemption, on Shavuot on

רָשָׁע

מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר

מָה הָעֶבְדָּה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם:

לָכֶם וְלֹא לּוֹ

וְלִפִּי שֶׁהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכֶּלֶל

כִּפּוּר בְּעֵקֶר

וְאִךְ אֵתָהּ הִקְהֵה אֶת שְׁנֵי, וְאָמַר לוֹ

בְּעֵבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם:

לִי וְלֹא לּוֹ

אֵלּוֹ הָיָה שָׂם, לֹא הָיָה נִגָּאֵל.

שמות יב

שמות יג

revelation. In the case of *hukkim* the ultimate purpose is to shape character, train dispositions and emotions, and create “habits of the heart.”

THE WICKED SON

There are many explanations given by the commentators as to why this particular question should be seen as a sign of rebellion. The simplest answer is that, whereas other children are spoken of as *asking*, in this case the verse speaks of children *saying*. This is a child who does not seek an answer; he seeks only to make a statement.

Another possibility is his use of the word *avoda*, service. The Torah uses the same word *avoda* to describe both slavery to Pharaoh and service to God. The wicked son is in effect asking: what did our people gain by leaving Egypt? They merely exchanged one *avoda* for another. Then they were servants to Pharaoh, now they have become servants to God. But in both cases they had a master; in neither case were they free. The rebellious child understands freedom to mean having no master at all. He has not yet understood that freedom is not the ability to do what you like; it is the ability to do what you ought. A society in which “each person did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25) does not have freedom, but anarchy. Without the sovereignty of God and law (the Torah and its commands), the strong rule the weak, and the powerful take advantage of the

The WICKED SON

what does he say?

“What is this service to you?”

“To you,” he says, not to him.

When he sets himself apart from the community,
he denies the very core of our beliefs.

And you must set his teeth on edge and tell him,

“Because of this

the LORD acted for me when I came out of Egypt.”

“For *me*,” and not for *him*;

had he been there he would not have been redeemed.

Ex. 12

Ex. 13

powerless. The difference between serving Pharaoh and serving God makes all the difference in the world: between injustice and justice, slavery and freedom, a society where people are used as means and one where they are respected as ends in themselves.

WHEN HE SETS HIMSELF APART FROM THE COMMUNITY,
HE DENIES THE VERY CORE OF OUR BELIEFS

What principle is the wicked son denying? The answer is that though the rebellious child denies none of the thirteen principles of faith enumerated by Maimonides, he does deny something else. Maimonides explains: “One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but only holds aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfill religious precepts in common with his people, shows himself indifferent when they are in distress, does not observe their fasts, but goes his own way as if he were one of the nations and did not belong to the Jewish people – such a person has no share in the World to Come” (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 3:11).

The mere fact that an individual fails to identify with the collective fate of the Jewish people – even though he observes the commandments – is a denial of one of the principles of Judaism, namely that ours is a *collective* faith. Martin Buber was wrong when he called his great work on faith *I and Thou*. In Judaism the primary relationship is *We and Thou*. Despite its insistence on individual responsibility (“If I am not for myself, who will be for me?”), Judaism is equally insistent on collective responsibility (“And if I am only for myself, what am I?”).

תָּם

מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר
מָה־זֹאת

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו

בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצֵאתָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם
מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

שמורת יג

שם

וְשֵׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשַׂאֵל

אֵת פֶּתַח לוֹ
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר

בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי

בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם:

שמורת יג

Long before Moses encountered God, he “went out to his own people and watched them at their hard labor” (Ex. 2:11). This was the birth of his active identity as a Jew. Though many Jews in the modern age found it difficult to believe, they identified with the Jewish people, fought its cause, and gave it their support. *Belonging is the first step to believing.* What makes the wicked son wicked, according to the Haggada, is not that he fails to believe, but that he fails to identify with the people of whom he is a part.

AND THE ONE WHO DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK
YOU MUST OPEN FOR HIM

What is the significance of the phrase “You must open for him”? It is said that

The
SIMPLE-NATURED SON

what does he say?

“What is this?”

Ex. 13

And you must tell him,

“With a strong hand the LORD

ibid.

brought us out of Egypt,

from the grip of slavery.”

And the

ONE WHO DOES NOT KNOW
HOW TO ASK

you must open [the story] for him,

as it is said:

“And you shall tell your child

Ex. 13

on that day,

‘Because of this the LORD acted for me

when I came out of Egypt.’”

Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk once asked his disciples, “Where does God live?” The disciples were perplexed. “What does the rebbe mean: Where does God live? Where does God not live? Surely we have been taught that no place is devoid of His presence? He fills the heavens and the earth.” The rebbe replied, “You have not understood. God lives *where we let Him in.*”

On another occasion he asked, “Why does it say in the *Shema*: ‘These words shall be on your heart’? Why ‘on’ and not ‘in’?” He answered: “The heart is not always open. Therefore the Torah says: Lay these words *on* your heart, so that when your heart opens, they will be there, ready to fall in.” In Judaism, spirituality means openness. To one who is open, God is closer than we are to ourselves. To one who is closed, He is farther away than the most distant galaxies. The task of education is to teach a child to be open – to the voice of God and the miracle of existence. A question, asked with sincerity, is an opening in the soul.