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PASSOVER 2014/5774



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PASSOVER ISSUE

AFTERWORD, EXCERPTED FROM R. IRVING GREENBERG,  
*THE JEWISH WAY: LIVING THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS*  
RECENTLY REISSUED IN PAPERBACK BY TOUCHSTONE

Periodically, scholars survey historians' opinions as to what it's the most influential event of all time. In recent decades the Industrial Revolution has often appeared at the top of the list. For the politically oriented, not uncommonly the French Revolution wins, for Marxists, the Russian Revolution. Christians often point to the life and death of Jesus as the single most important event of history. For Moslems, Mohammad's revelations and his hegira have similar transcendental authority.

Yet when Jews observe Passover they are commemorating what is arguably the most important event of all time – the Exodus from Egypt. If for no other reason that the fact that the Exodus directly or indirectly generated many of the important events cited by other groups, this is the event of human history. That it was a Jewish event is an eloquent tribute to the extraordinary role

the Jewish People- so minute a fragment of the human race- have played in human history.

The Exodus transformed the Jewish people and their ethic. The Ten Commandments open with the words, "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Having no other God means giving no absolute status to other forms of divinity or to any human value that demands absolute commitment. Neither money nor power, neither economic nor political system has the right to demand absolute loyalty. All human claims are relative in the presence of God. This is the key to democracy.

Exodus morality meant giving justice to the weak and the poor. Honest weights and measures, interest-free loans to the poor, leaving part of the crops in the field for the stranger, the orphan, and the part of the crops in the field for the stranger, the orphan, and

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the widow, treating the alien stranger as a native citizen – these are all applications of the Exodus principle to living in this world. Thus, the Exodus, as articulated at Sinai, transformed the Jewish people and their religious ethical system. Inasmuch as Christianity and Islam adopted the Exodus at their core, almost half the world is profoundly shaped by the after effects of the Exodus event.

In modern times, the image of redemption has proven to be the most powerful of all. The rise of productivity and affluence has heightened expectations of the better life. Widely disseminated scientific ideas and conceptions of human freedom carry the same message: Do not accept disadvantage or suffering as your fate; rather, let the world be transformed! These factors come together in a secular concept of redemption. By now, humans are so suffused with the vision of their own right to improvement that any revolutionary spark sets off huge conflagrations. In a way, humane socialism is a secularized version of the Exodus' final triumph: The liberator is a dialectical materialism, and the slaves are the proletariat- but the model and the end goal are the same. Indeed, directly revived images of the Exodus play as powerful a role as Marxism does in the worldwide revolutionary expectations. In South America, the theology of liberation directly touches the hundreds of millions who strive to overcome their poverty.

The secret of the impact of the Exodus is that it does not present itself as ancient history, a one-time event. Since the key way to remember the Exodus is reenactment, the event offers itself as an ongoing experience in human history. As free people relive the Exodus, it turns memory into moral dynamic. The experience of slavery that breaks and crushes slaves does not destroy free

people. It evokes feelings of repulsion and determination to help others to escape that state. As participants eat the bitter herb, they remember the heartbreaking tale and the death of the children. They also remember that slavery gradually conditions people to accept servitude as the norm. The Israelites fell into that trap and were delivered, not by their own merit. The lesson is that a slave needs help to get started on liberation.

In the seder ritual, the family also acts as the transmitter of memory. The past is not excised but becomes an active part of the lives of the participants. Parents tell the story to children. At the same time, the children are not merely dependent. They ask questions and participate in the discussion. They must become involved for it is essential that they join in the unfinished work of liberation. This is why when Pharaoh offered to let the adult Jews leave Egypt to worship God if the children were left behind, Moses rejected the offer: "With our youth and our elders we will go." The seder order is deliberately designed to hold the children's attention, to fascinate them with their people's history so that they will feel impelled to take up the covenantal task. Thus, by the magic of shared values and shared story, the Exodus is not some ancient event, however important; it is the ever-recurring redemption. It is the event from ancient times that is occurring tonight; it is the past and future redemption of humanity. The Exodus is the most influential historical event of all time because it did not happen once but recurs whenever people open up and enter into the event again.



## HOW EARLY CAN I START THE SEDER?

RABBI BARRY DOLINGER

\*The *Halachik* opinions expressed here are those of the author. Readers are encouraged to consult their own rabbi to determine proper observance.

*“And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it . . . For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I am the LORD.” (Shemot 12:8, 12:12)*

*“And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.” (Shemot 13:8)*

Every year, thousands of Jews eagerly look at the calendar to see the earliest time the *seder* can begin. The motivations are often quite positive. Children can only remain awake and attentive until a certain hour, and many parents sincerely desire to pass on the central notion of God’s involvement in and redemption of the Jewish people from as early an age as possible. This sensibility among parents echoes the Divine command and later rabbinic enactments meant to foster that command. For one, the commandment of the *seder* as literally ordained in the Torah is a commandment to teach children,<sup>1</sup> from which we derive that everyone is obligated in the telling. Based on the importance of this charge, numerous customs have developed intended to capture the attention of children at the *seder*.<sup>2</sup> These include the removal of the table, the hiding/stealing of the *afikoman*, unusual dippings, candy, nuts, and more, all hoping to pique the curiosity of children at the table and perhaps cause them to speak up with questions. Sociologically, it’s also worth noting that the demanding schedules and pressures of modernity render many too tired to fully appreciate the *seder* when it is late; an earlier *seder* could mean a more attentive and meaningful experience. To what extent can these bona fide desires be accommodated?

While the command for the initial *korban Pesach* was clear that it had to be eaten at night, accompanied by *matzah* and *maror*, the subsequent commandment of a generational retelling is less explicit. The verse says, “And thou shalt tell thy son *in that day* saying . . .” The scriptural mention of “that day” immediately begs the question, “which day?,” and evokes curiosity over whether “day” is intended to include a specific date, refer to the daytime as opposed to the

nighttime, or perhaps exists as a generic reference to the date of a child’s genuine curiosity.

This ambiguity is the subject of an early discussion in the *Mechilta* of Rabbi Yishmael commenting on the verse, and was seen as so essential that it made its way into the text of our *Haggadah* as a prelude to the beginning of *maggid*, the actual telling of the story.

And thou shalt tell thy son. Perhaps I could infer that I may do so from the beginning of the new month? Therefore, the Torah specifies ‘in that day.’ If it is ‘in that day’, perhaps I could do so while it is still light out? Therefore, the Torah specifies ‘for the sake of this’ – at the time that *matzah* and *maror* are before you on your table.<sup>3</sup>

Linking the command of Chapter 12 with Chapter 13, the *Mechilta* understands that the commanded props of redemption must be physically present for the telling of the story, and it’s no accident that they are commanded to be eaten only during the night, the time when the redemption’s actualization began. In fact, it may very well be that the *Haggadah*’s interpretation of the verse is that we were taken out and fashioned into a people specifically to be able to perform the commandments (such as *matzah* and *maror*) in their divinely appointed time. With this reading, classically and paradoxically, we are free in order to be commanded, and so the symbolic telling of the story of our freedom must occur during the time of the obligation of the night’s commandments, namely the consumption of the Paschal sandwich, its bread and condiments; fulfillment of the *retzon Hashem* (Divine will) is the higher order motivation for human freedom broadly speaking and the creation of a free Jewish nation in particular. With this as our starting point, it seems that there’s little room to start the *seder* any earlier than nightfall.

Later, the *Tosafot* in their commentary to the *Talmud* in *Masechet Pesachim* raise and press the issue, reinforcing the view of the *Mechilta*. The first *Mishna* in the famous tenth chapter of *Pesachim* states:

On the eve of Passover, close to *Mincha*, a person should not eat until it becomes dark. Even the poorest among the Israelites should not eat unless he reclines, and should not consume less than four cups of wine, even if he receives food from the charity collection.<sup>4</sup>

The *Ba'alei Tosafot* are bothered by several aspects of the phraseology. For one, it seems obvious that the Rabbinic decree on the eve of the holiday (meant to increase appetite and the desire for *matzah*) should cease once it becomes dark and the time for eating *matzah* has arisen. Deepening the question, they note that the *Talmud* omits this phrase when discussing similar rabbinic bans pertaining to *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov* in general.

Quoting primarily the answer of Rabbi Yaakov from Corbeil, *Tosafot* note that, regarding *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*, one may pray, recite *kiddush*, and eat the meal while it is still light out, so long as it is after *plag hamincha*, one and one quarter proportional hours before *halachic* sunset.<sup>5</sup> On Passover, however, the foods are connected to the Paschal sacrifice which may only be eaten when it is actually dark; hence, the *Mishna* specifies nightfall to clarify the point.<sup>6</sup> Some have noted that, if one examines the words of Rabbi Yaakov from Corbeil exactly, he only specifies that *matzah* and *maror* need to be eaten at night. The Maharil, among others, reasoned that perhaps Rabbi Yaakov's interpretation left room for the notion that *kiddush*, at the very least, could potentially be recited earlier.<sup>7</sup>

Still, Rabbi Yosef Karo ruled in his authoritative *Shulchan Aruch* that *kiddush* on Passover can occur only once it is dark, but adds that all efforts should be made to prepare in advance lest the children fall asleep.<sup>8</sup> The commentaries alert us to additional lines of reasoning about why even *kiddush*, the very beginning of the *seder*, needs to occur at nightfall. Many sages quote the opinion found in the *Terumat Hadeshen*; *kiddush* is the first of the four cups, linked to freedom and the telling of the Exodus, and can therefore only occur after nightfall. Moreover, Rabbi Karo adds in his *Beit Yosef* that, since *matzah* is the bread for the meal, the *halachic* principle that "one cannot satisfy the *kiddush* obligation except in the place that they eat the meal" implies that *kiddush* cannot be recited until the time when *matzah* can be eaten; the *halachic* principle isn't only based on location but has a temporal element as well. These opinions and their varied numerous reasons are quoted as authoritative by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan in his popular magnum opus, the *Mishna Berura*, as well as by the vast majority of *halachic* legal decisors.

In spite of the vast number of authorities who rule like the *Shulchan Aruch*, there are still prominent decisors who suggested that certain parts of the *seder* could be done earlier in cases of pressing need. For one, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, may his memory be for a blessing, ruled that, though the common practice is and should be like Rabbi Yosef

Karo's ruling, in a case of pressing need one can rely on the interpretation of the Maharil, who interpreted the *Tosafot* to suggest that *kiddush* and perhaps even the beginning of the *Haggadah* need not be delayed until nightfall.<sup>9</sup> In his commentary to *Masechet Pesachim*, Rabbi Moshe Sofer, one of the great leaders of early 19<sup>th</sup> century European Jewry, explains that the *Mishna's* prohibition specifically says that a person can't **eat** until nightfall, but that *kiddush* and the beginning of the *seder* could start after sunset, so long as one engaged in telling some of the story after nightfall and the *matzah* and *maror* were eaten after dark. When the *Mishna* says "eat," it is referring to the commanded eatings of the night, and not the entire order of the *seder*. As a result, *karpas* and any other customary eatings that occur to aid in the telling of the story (but not as commandments per se) could be eaten earlier as well. The other elements of the Passover story do not need to occur during the nighttime specifically, merely once the holiday has begun. Possibly, even "sunset" is not specific in Rabbi Sofer's formulation, as the thrust of his argument suggests that it is possible to recite *kiddush* whenever it is normally possible to recite *kiddush*, which could even include *plag hamincha*. At the end of his comment, Rabbi Sofer emphatically adds that it is in fact desirable to start early for the children, that this is easy to understand, and people should not work to reject or prevent such an understanding of the *halacha*.<sup>10</sup>

To conclude, there are multiple competing values in the question presented. On the one hand, there is a tremendous biblical and rabbinic value placed on a meaningful *seder* experience, particularly for children and the next generation. Arguably, this is yet more important in an era when Judaism faces tremendous difficulties, demographically, ideologically, and otherwise. On the other hand, there is a strong and multifaceted legal history mandating the performance of the entire *seder* at night. At its core, this is based on the notion that the commandments regarding the commemoration of the Exodus are per force the very cause for which we were redeemed. As such, the *seder* in its whole must be performed at night. While the vast majority of legal decisors and codes rule in accord with this opinion, one of the greatest decisors in recent memory gave room and another strong encouragement for those who might need to begin parts of the *seder* earlier.

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## MARAH AND THE TORAH OF THE DESERT

Rabbi Jon Kelsen

The latter verses of the *piyyut* (liturgical poem) *Dayennu* proclaim:

*Had He drowned our enemies in the sea but not provided our needs in the desert for forty years, Dayennu. ...*

*Had He provided our needs in the desert for forty years, but not fed us the manna, Dayennu...*

*Had He brought us to Sinai but not given us the Torah, Dayennu...*

The *piyyut* indicates that each of these steps (along with the others mentioned in the rest of the stanzas) were of themselves sufficiently beneficial to warrant thanksgiving, independent of the subsequent (and prior) steps. The poet claims that the experience of being sustained in the desert, for example, even without receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, was significant and sufficient. While it is certainly true that gratitude for kindnesses performed need not be contingent upon receipt of further kindnesses, I would argue that the poet might also be implying something more. To wit, *Dayennu* teaches that each of these steps constitutes a sort of micro-redemption of its own, while simultaneously playing a critical role in the construction of the larger redemption of *Sefer Shemot*.

As a case in point, I would like to focus here on the narratives of *Shemot* 15:22-27, situated within the broader setting of chapters 15-17 of the book. The reader of the biblical text might have predicted that, following the splitting of the sea, the text would move immediately to the next major moment, Sinai (with perhaps brief mention of the names of various sites of encampment along the route). Instead, however, between the splitting of the sea (*Shemot* 15:21) and *Ma'amad Har Sinai* (*ibid.* 19 *et seq.*), the Torah records a series of incidents from *Bnai Yisrael's* first few weeks post-redemption. As they begin their travels through the desert, we are told, the people encounter several obstacles, most of which are centered around their need for water and food (as well as the battle with Amalek and the arrival of Yitro). The location of these narratives, and the amount of detail provided in them, signal that they play an important role, moving the grand arc of the *Shemot* narrative forward. This prompts the reader to ask, what function do these narratives play? What would we be missing if the text did not include them?

While much has and could be said about these verses, I would like to advance one particular argument. In the reading I propose, these verses function as an axis, a transition from Egypt to Har

Sinai. While that is obviously so in geographical terms, the text indicates that it is also so existentially. Marah and Elim lie between the physical-spiritual spaces of Egypt and Sinai, between exile and sacred space. They are the transition in the narrative from a focus of freedom from slavery, to freedom to Torah, Sinai, and eventually *Mishkan*.

(כב) ויסע משה את ישראל מים סוף ויצאו אל מדבר שור וילכו שלשת ימים במדבר ולא מצאו מים:  
(כג) ויבאו מרתה ולא יכלו לשתת מים ממרה כי מרים הם על כן קרא שמה מרה:  
(כד) וילנו העם על משה לאמר מה נשתה:  
(כה) ויצעק אל יקוק ויורהו יקוק עץ וישלך אל המים וימתקו המים שם שם לו חק ומשפט ושם נסהו:  
(כו) ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע לקול יקוק אלהיך והישר בעיניו תעשה והאזנת למצותיו ושמרת כל חקיו כל המחלה אשר שמתו במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני יקוק רפאך: ס  
(כז) ויבאו אילמה ושם שתיים עשרה עינת מים ושבעים תמרים ויחנו שם על המים:

22 And Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. 23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying: 'What shall we drink?' 25 And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet. There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them; 26 and He said: 'If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His eyes, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon thee, which I have put upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD that healeth thee.' {S} 27 And they came to Elim, where were twelve springs of water, and three score and ten palm-trees; and they encamped there by the waters. (translation JPS: 1917)

After finally being redeemed from servitude and passing through the great waters of the Sea of Reeds, Israel enters the nearby desert of Shur<sup>1</sup> and arrives at Marah. During their first three days of travel, the Israelites cannot find any water at all; upon arriving at Marah, they are dismayed to discover that though there is water there, it is too bitter to drink.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Marah represents a continuation of *avdut Mitzrayim*, as the encounter with the bitter waters is reminiscent of the bitterness of the enslavement, as described in *Shemot* 1:14:

(יד) וימררו את חייהם בעבדה קשה בחמר ובלבנים ובכל עבדה בשדה את כל עבדתם אשר עבדו בהם בפרך:  
 “And they [i.e., the Egyptians] embittered (va-yi'mareru) their [i.e., the Israelites'] lives with harsh labor at mortars and brick...”

The experience at Marah continues that of Egypt. Thus, though the Israelites have left Egypt the place, Egypt *qua* the encounter with bitterness continues.<sup>3</sup>

This quasi-return to Egypt is especially traumatic as it comes after a three-day journey into the desert. While three-day journeys are common in the Bible (e.g., *Bereshit* 22:4, *B'midbar* 10:33),<sup>4</sup> here there is an additional, ironic overtone to the number. As R. Alex Israel points out,<sup>5</sup> earlier in *Shemot*, Moshe asks Pharaoh for the (temporary) release of the Israelites from their bondage in order to travel three days into the desert, where they will enact a holiday in service of God (*Shemot* 5:3). Given this association, how bitter indeed it is to find our travelers thirsting at Marah three days into wilderness!

While the bitterness of Marah therefore sends the Israelites and the reader back to the servitude in Egypt, it (and the next stop, Eilim) also reference the redemption from that servitude, the former of which climaxes earlier in the chapter, in the Song of the Sea. Several semantic linkages serve to establish this connection:

<i>timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.</i>	<i>wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, I will put none of the diseases (machalah) upon thee, which I have put upon the Egyptians</i>
v. 11 מי כמכה באלם יקוק מי כמכה נאדר בקדש v.15 אז נבהלו אלופי אדום אילי מואב יאחזמו רעד נמגו כל ישרי כנען: <i>Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty (ba-eilim)? ...</i> <i>Then were the chiefs of Edom affrighted; the mighty men of Moab (eilei Moav), trembling taketh hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan are melted away.</i>	v. 27 ויבאו אילמה ושם שתיים עשרה עינת מים ושבעים תמרים ויחנו שם על המים:  <i>And they came to Eilim, where were twelve springs (ayenot) of water, and three score and ten palm-trees (t'marim); and they encamped there by the waters.</i>

The semantic links between the Marah/Eilim passage and the enslavement in Egypt and redemption at the sea highlight conceptual connections between these moments. As noted above, the bitterness of the waters of Marah, reminiscent of the bitterness of the slavery, is exacerbated as an anti-climax to the redemption at the water of the sea. Yet, unlike the extended period of enslavement in Egypt, the redemption at Marah is quick to come. The waters are quickly made drinkable, and the sweetness of Eilim (via the dates/ *t'marim*) quickly supersedes the *mayim ha-marim* of Marah.

Crucially, the micro-redemption of Marah and Eilim also pivots the book as a whole forward, anticipating the next major moment in *Sefer Shemot*, Sinai:

ויאמר כי אהיה עמך וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאתך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה:  
 (שמות פרק ג:יב)

*And He (God) said, I will be with you; and this will be the sign that I have indeed sent you: when you bring the people of out Egypt, you will worship God at this mountain. (Shemot 3: 12)*

In the most overt anticipation of Sinai, there is a revelation at Marah which conveys a Divine injunction, with a promise of reward for fulfillment thereof.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, however, there are more subtle allusions to that sacred mountain here as well. As noted by Rashbam, the verb *va'yorehu* in

Song of the Sea	Marah/Eilim
v. 21 ותען להם מרים שירו ליקוק כי גאה גאה סוס ורכבו רמה בים. <i>And Miriam sang unto (va-ta'an) them: Sing ye to the LORD, for He is highly exalted...</i>	v. 23 ויבאו מרתה ולא יכלו לשתת מים ממרה כי מרים הם על כן קרא שמה מרה: <i>And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter "Marim Hem."</i>
v. 4 מרכבת פרעה וחילו ירה בים ומבחר שלשיו טבעו בים סוף: <sup>6</sup> <i>Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast (yarah) into the sea, and his chosen captains are sunk in the Red Sea.</i>	v. 25 ויצעק אל יקוק ויורהו יקוק עץ וישלך אל המים ... <i>and the LORD showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters (va-yorehu), and the waters were made sweet</i>
v. 20 ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן את התף בידה ותצאן כל הנשים אחריה בתפים ובמחלת <i>And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a</i>	v. 26 ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע לקול יקוק אלהיך והישר בעיניו תעשה והאזנת למצותיו ושמרת כל חקיו כל המחלה אשר שמתני במצרים לא אשים עליך כי אני יקוק רפאך:  <i>and He said: 'If thou</i>

v. 25 (which above we connected with 15:4) derives from the root י.ר.ה, meaning 'to instruct,' the same root as in the word 'Torah.' While Rashbam might intend that God is instructing Moshe as to how to use the 'etz in sweetening the water,<sup>8</sup> it is also possible that the text is deliberately framing that instruction as a type of *Matan Torah*.<sup>9</sup> Eilim is marked here as a place of revelation, a proto-Sinaitic site.<sup>10</sup> Its name, meaning "the mighty" or "the strong," contrasts with the bitterness of Marah both in terms of the abundance of food and water, and metaphorically as a site of spiritual strength on the part of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, v.27 depicts Israel camping at the twelve springs and seventy date-palms of Eilim.

**ויבאו אילמה ושם שתיים עשרה עינת מים ושבעים תמרים  
ויחננו שם על המים**

The convergence of a campsite with the numbers twelve and seventy foreshadows a later site in *Shemot*, chapter 24: 1,4:

**(א) ואל משה אמר עלה אל יקוק אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא  
ושבעים מזקני ישראל והשתחוויתם מרחק:**

**(ד) ויכתב משה את כל דברי יקוק וישכם בבקר ויבן מזבח  
תחת ההר ושתיים עשרה מצבה לשנים עשר שבטי ישראל:**

*And to Moshe He said, Come up to God—you...and the seventy elders of Israel...*

*And Moshe wrote all the words of God, and arose early and built an altar at the foot on the mount, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.*

This connection is already made by Rashi on v. 27:

**שתיים עשרה עינות מים - כנגד י"ב שבטים נדמנו להם:  
ושבעים תמרים - כנגד שבעים זקנים:**

*Twelve springs of water—they appeared in proportion to the twelve tribes*

*And three score and ten palm-trees—in proportion to the seventy elders*

According to Rashi, the oasis of Eilim foreshadows the future encampment of the twelve tribes and seventy elders<sup>12</sup> at the foot of Sinai.

Thus, while indeed Marah functions as a sequel to the enslavement, the second encounter with Egypt, it and Eilim simultaneously function as prequels to *Matan Torah*. They constitute, in short, the Sinai before Sinai.

What is the Torah given at this pre-Sinaitic site? While the answer is the subject of an instructive interpretive debate, in this context I find the analysis of Nachmanides to be the most compelling:

**רמב"ן שמות פרק טו פסוק כה**

על דרך הפשט, כאשר החלו לבא במדבר הגדול והנורא וצמאון אשר אין מים שם להם במחיתם וצרכיהם מנהגים אשר ינהגו בהם עד בואם אל ארץ נושבת, כי המנהג יקרא "חק" או שייסרו בחקי המדבר, לסבול הרעב והצמא, לקרוא בהם אל ה',

לא דרך תלונה. ומשפטים, שיחיו בהם, לאהוב איש את רעהו, ולהתנהג בעצת הזקנים, והצנע לכת באהליהם בענין הנשים והילדים, ושינהגו שלום עם הבאים במחנה למכור להם דבר, ותוכחות מוסר שלא יהיו כמחנות השוללים אשר יעשו כל תועבה ולא יתבוששו...

*In line with the plain meaning of Scripture, when the Israelites began coming into the great and dreadful wilderness... 'thirsty ground where there was no water' (Dev. 8:15), Moses established customs for them concerning how to regulate their lives and affairs until they come to a land inhabited (Ibid. 16:35). A custom is called a chok... Custom is also called mishpat... It may mean that Moses instructed them in the ways of the wilderness, namely, to be ready to suffer hunger and thirst and to pray to G-d, and not to murmur. He taught them ordinances whereby they should live, to love one another, to follow the counsel of the elders, to be discreet in their tents with regards to women and children, to deal in a peaceful manner with the strangers that come into the camp to sell them various objects. He also imparted moral instructions... (translation by Charles Chavel, Ramban Commentary on the Torah: *Shemot* [Shilo:1973], pg. 209-210).*

For Ramban, the Torah of Marah is different from the Torah of Sinai proper. The former is a Torah specific to life in the desert, an instruction on how to live in that space, with its primal challenges. Only by being in the desert, by experiencing scarcity, lack of rootedness and the consequent temptations for despair, strife, pettiness, and abuse, can Israel cultivate a sense of dependence on God and develop the traits of moderation, mutual respect, and modesty.<sup>13</sup>

Further thirst for water, hunger for food, and struggle with weariness and with Amalek all await *Bnai Yisrael* as they proceed on their desert journey from Eilim to Sinai. Though chapters 15 through 17 of *Shemot* seem to be mere digressions from the core moments of the book of redemption, they are in reality a segue, the path Israel must travel to get from their past and to meet their future. Between Egypt and Sinai, one must travel the desert, starting with Marah and, it is always hoped, Eilim.

Had He brought us to the desert, and not to Sinai—*Dayennu*.

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## V'HIGADETA LEVINCHA – THE PESACH HAGGADAH RE-EXAMINED

Rabbi Menashe East

One of the key positive *mitzvot* during the holiday of Pesach is the obligation to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Rambam notes that the Torah uses the verb *Zachor* (“remember”) both in the context of Shabbat and in the context of Pesach, and he derives that in both cases we are being commanded to lift our voices and vocalize something (*Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah*, 7:1). The charge to “remember to sanctify the Shabbat” (*Shemot* 20:8) means that we must sanctify the Shabbat through use of the spoken word (*kiddush*), and the charge to “Remember this day, when you left Egypt and the house of servitude” means that we are to recall the miraculous event of Exodus through speech. An internal, mental process of remembering would not suffice. The spoken word is necessary for the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*, recounting the Exodus.

It is strange, then, that the *Haggadah*, which serves as the instrument of our Pesach storytelling, contains only fragments of the Exodus story. The bulk of the *Haggadah's* narrative section (*Maggid*) is comprised of the verses from *Devarim* which were traditionally recited by farmers who were offering their first fruits (*Bikkurim*). The *Haggadah* offers Exodus-related *midrashic* exposition of these verses, but the story of the Exodus as it unfolds in “real time” in the book of *Shemot* is never systematically presented. The notable absence in the *Haggadah* of the character of Moshe – God’s agent of the Israelite deliverance – further deepens the mystery. Given the primacy of talking about the Exodus story, we must wonder if we are succeeding in performing this *mitzvah* when we share only sparse details of the story we are meant to recall.

It is necessary, then, to redefine the pedagogic goal of the Pesach *seder* and, in doing so, appreciate the function of the *Haggadah* as a tool in the achievement of this goal. Briefly stated, the *seder* is not an exercise in recalling the content of the Exodus story per se. It is rather an instruction in how to tell a story. Accordingly, the *Haggadah* is to be understood as a text that will help students – both young and old – learn how to convey ideas in a particular way.

What, then, is the method of instruction that the *seder* aims to encourage? And how does the *Haggadah* support that aim? The answer lies in the many *different and disparate approaches* to storytelling that the *Haggadah* incorporates!

One approach to storytelling appears in a *Mishna* in the middle of the tenth chapter of tractate *Pesachim*:

“We pour the 2<sup>nd</sup> cup of wine and here the son asks his father. If he does not know how to ask, his father teaches him: *Mah Nishtana* – how is this night different?... And according to the child’s ability, his father teaches him. Begin with the shameful events and conclude with the praise. And interpret from ‘my father was a wandering Aramean,’ until finishing the section. (*Mishna* 4)

Conveying the story of Pesach must begin with an invitation, the four questions. And then the *Mishna* proceeds to direct the leader of the *seder* how to instruct: Begin with shameful events and conclude with praise. There is pedagogic value, to be sure, in opening the story with a message of contrast. We can best appreciate our freedom when we recall our servitude and suffering (see Maharal, *Gevurot Hashem*, Ch 1.).

But what is the ‘shameful event’? The *Talmud* debates this point. Rav argues that the shameful event was the fact that “we were slaves.” Shmuel disagrees. The shameful event we recall is that “originally we were idolaters” (*Talmud Bavli Pesachim*, 116a). In practice, our *Haggadah* incorporates both of these views into the liturgy. The first text we recite after *Mah Nishtana* is *Avadim Hayinu*, “we were slaves.” And then, after an interlude with the four students, we recall Shmuel’s shameful event – our ancestral history as idolaters.

As we continue to the next *Mishna* of *Pesachim*, we see an altogether different approach to storytelling. Rabban Gamliel makes his famous declaration:

“Whoever does not say three things on Pesach does not fulfill his obligation: They are Pesach, *matzah* and *maror*. Pesach because God passed over our father’s homes in Egypt; *matzah* because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt; *maror* because our fathers lives were embittered by the Egyptians.” (*ibid.* 5)

What *mitzvah* does one fail to fulfill if s/he neglects to mention Pesach, *matzah* and *maror*? The *mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*, telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Without referencing these key symbols of redemption, we cannot adequately communicate the event of Exodus. Rabban Gamliel is not only proposing a new piece of recitation, he is disagreeing with the previous anonymous *Mishna*.

In the previous *Mishna*, the telling must proceed from negative to positive followed by an act of *doresh*; we engage in the act of study, where we extract meaning through exegesis of the

aforementioned verses in *Devarim*. The telling must occur through analysis and innovation. A *seder*, in this view, would look a lot like a *bet midrash*, a house of study. We can easily understand the five sages in Bnei Brak learning throughout the night. The Pesach *seder* was meant to be a night of intense study.

Rabban Gamliel forcefully rejects this notion. It is possible to study a whole night and still miss the whole point of the night, namely, to recall the Exodus from slavery. The mental exertion devoted to the analytics may be too abstract. Rabban Gamliel says we must identify tangible objects. The *Talmud* even recommends lifting the *matzah* and *maror*, which we do in practice, as a physical demonstration of recalling the Exodus story (116b).

Returning to the major point, the anonymous *Mishna* and Rabban Gamliel respectively represent differing approaches to communicating the story of the Exodus from Egypt. In practice, which view does the *Haggadah* adopt? Both views.

Finally, later in the same *Mishna*, the text records a debate about how much of the *Hallel*, the songs of praise and thanks to God, is to be recited as part of *Maggid*:

"*Beit Shammai* says until: 'He raises the poor man out of the dust and lifts the needy one out of the trash, to seat them with nobles. He turns the barren wife into a happy mother of children. Halleluyah'" [Psalm 113]. *Beit Hillel* says until: 'When Israel went out of Egypt...O earth, tremble at the Lord's presence, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pond of water, the flint into a flowing fountain.'" [Psalm 114] (*Mishna* 5)

The Song at the Sea serves as an archetypal response of song at the experience of a redemptive event. So *Hallel* seems an appropriate reaction to redemption. But what kind of praise expression would be most fitting? *Beit Shammai* argues that a general acknowledgement of God's intervention in human affairs, uplifting the downtrodden, captures the essence of the Pesach spirit. *Beit Hillel* goes a chapter and a step further. It is not enough to express the generalized feeling of redemption that one might naturally utter when there is a particular event in Jewish history in which God intervened! For *Beit Hillel*, the expression of praise to God for a miracle uniquely experienced by the Jewish people is essential as we conclude our recounting of the Exodus.

And, as demonstrated in the earlier examples, here too our *Haggadah* incorporates both *Beit Shammai's* and *Beit Hillel's* views in its *Hallel* of *Maggid*.

The consistent practice of taking variant views as part of the conversation highlights the function of the *Haggadah* as a tool for the *seder* and what our *seder* experience ought to be about. The *Haggadah* does not retell the story of the Israelite Exodus, but it does teach us how to talk with each other; the *Haggadah* demonstrates respectful and engaged dialogue. Perhaps, an even more essential message that we may take from the Pesach *seder* than the story of the Exodus is that without another person to talk with our stories will be forgotten.

To return to the fifth *Mishna* one last time, we are charged to imagine that we ourselves left Egypt. Freedom empowered our voice and our many voices. The *Haggadah* celebrates the many voices in our tradition and, in this way, models freedom.

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### Notes to: *How Early Can One Start The Seder*

<sup>1</sup> *Shemot* 13:8. This is repeated and referenced several other times throughout the Torah.

<sup>2</sup> See *Mishne Torah* of Maimonides, *Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah*, Chapter 7 *Halachot* 1-3. See also *Talmud Bavli*, *Pesachim* 108b-109a

<sup>3</sup> *Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael*, *Parshat Bo*. *Masechta D'Pischa Parsha* 17. הגדת לבנך. שומע אני מראש חדש. ת"ל ביום ההוא אי ביום ההוא יכול מבעוד יום ת"ל בעבור זה בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך על שולחןך

<sup>4</sup> See *Talmud Bavli*, *Pesachim* 99b. The intention of the Rabbinic decree stated in the *Mishna* is to ensure that the *matzah* is eaten *b'teavon* (with appetite) on the night of Passover itself.

<sup>5</sup> See *Talmud Bavli*, *Berachot* 27b. "A person may pray the prayer of *Shabbat* on *Erev Shabbat* and recite *kiddush* while it is still daylight."

<sup>6</sup> See *Tosafot* s.v. "Ad *shetechshach*," *Pesachim* 99b.

<sup>7</sup> See Maharil; see also *Chazon Ovadiah* of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef which cites the Maharil's interpretation.

<sup>8</sup> *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim* 472:1.

<sup>9</sup> See *Hazon Ovadiah*, pg. 1 (first edition).

<sup>10</sup> See *Chatam Sofer*, *Pesachim* 99b, s.v. "*shetechshach*." Apparently, he rejects the understanding of the *Ba'alei Tosafot* and the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* in favor of what he feels to be the simplest reading of the *Mishna*, with historical precedent in the interpretation of the Maharil.

### Notes to: *Marah and the Torah of the Desert*

<sup>1</sup> The reader here is reminded of the first mention of this place in the *Chumash*, in *Bereshit* 16:7:

וימצאה מלאך יקוק על עין המים במדבר על העין בדרך שור:

Here Hagar, fleeing from Sarah, is found at a spring of water in the desert, 'on the way to Shur.' In that context, the term *ma'ayan* (spring) reflects the *innui* (suffering) Hagar (originally from Egypt) experiences at the hand of her mistress Sarah. Similarly, the *ma'ayanot* in Eilim refer back to the *innui* the Israelite slaves (or *gerim*) experience at the hands of their Egyptian masters (*Shemot* 1:11). Though there is no water shortage in this passage from *Bereshit* 15, in its sequel (*ibid.* 21:1-21) the protagonists do encounter a dire lack of water before they are miraculously shown a well. Cf. *Bereshit* 20:1.

Shur is mentioned again in I Shmuel 15:7, in the context of Shaul's routing of Amalek ("and Saul smote Amalek, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is close to Egypt"), recalling Moses' battle against Amalek in *Shemot* 17. Perhaps there is to be found an additional reference to the *Shemot* narratives in Shmuel's rebuke of Shaul: "Does God desire 'olot and zevachim (forms of sacrifice) as much as obeying God? Behold, obeying is better than a sacrifice, and heeding (God) better than fats of eilim (rams)." (I Shmuel 15:22).

<sup>2</sup> Inter alia, one wonders whether Naomi's self-renaming as "מרא/Mara" (*Rut* 1:20) might play off the Marah of *Shemot*. If, as some have suggested, the name of her daughter-in-law ר.ו.ת./Rut derives from the root ר.ו.ה., meaning overflowing or abundantly watered (compare Ps. 23:5), then the change from Naomi (from the root נ.ע.ם., meaning pleasant) to her new name Mara might connote the contrasting sense of 'lack of water.' As Naomi continues in verse 21, "I went full, but God has returned me empty."

<sup>3</sup> This is not the only time Egypt appears in the desert narratives. Note for example *Shemot* 32:25:

וירא משה את העם כי פרע הוא כי פרעה אהרן לשמצה בקמיהם

In the midst of the construction of the golden calf, Pharaoh (פרעה) rises again!

<sup>4</sup> Umberto Cassuto. *A Commentary on the Book of Shemot* (Magnes:1967), pg 183. See there for more references to three-day journeys, drawn from both biblical and extra-biblical sources.

<sup>5</sup> See his *The Slave Mentality*, accessible at <http://www.vbm-torah.org/pesach/ai-slave.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> The semantic connection between v. 4 and v.15 was noted by Bernard P. Robinson, *Symbolism in Exod. 15:22-27*, published in *Revue Biblique* No. 3 (July 1987), pg. 383. In researching this piece I discovered that Robinson preceded me in noting most of the other semantic connections in the chart as well.

<sup>7</sup> This promise is expressed in the common formula of "If you heed My voice, then..." anticipating the usage of this formula again in *Shemot* 19. In our context, the 'reward' is that the Israelites will not be afflicted with the "*machalah* of Egypt." In other words, Israel can either proceed to Sinai, or revert back to Egypt. I thank Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot for this insight.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Robinson, pg. 383, where he notes three additional accounts where God's salvation of Israel is effected by the throwing of something (*II Melachim* 2:19-22; 4:38-41; 6:1-7). Interestingly, none of these other passages utilizes the root ה.ר.ה.; in fact, the latter passage from *II Melachim* provides an instructive contrast:

מלכים ב פרק ו

(ו) ויאמר איש האלהים אנה נפל ויראהו את המקום ויקצב עץ וישלך שמה ויצף הברזל:

Here we find the *hiphi'l* conjunction of the root ה.ר.ה., meaning to show, rather than ה.ר.ה. The contrast highlights our claim that the usage of the latter root in *Shemot* 15 is deliberate.

<sup>9</sup> Several commentators see the '*etz*' as a reference to Torah, as in *Mishlei* 3:18, "It (wisdom, Torah) is an '*etz chayyim*, a tree of life, to all who grasp it..." See, for example, Maharsha, *Chidushei Aggadot, Bava Kamma* 79a.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Talmud Bavli, Bava Kamma* 82a, which sees in this passage the source for the practice of publicly reading from the Torah every three days.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson references *Yeshayahu* 11:16-12:3, where reference to the exodus from Egypt as well as a parallel to *Shemot* 15:2 ("*ki ozi v'zimrat Kah*") are followed by a call to draw from the "springs of salvation." In his reading, this provides support for the contention that the springs of Eilim have metaphorical connotations of salvation in addition to the literal salvation from the water shortages in Marah.

<sup>12</sup> See Rashi here. R. David Silber also points out that twelve children and seventy souls descended into Egypt in *Bereshit* 46:27. Perhaps this represents again a full circle, with all who have descended into Egypt emerging again.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the comments of Ramban on *Shemot* 16:4 and *Devarim* 8:2.