

הגדה של פסח • מהדורת קורן  
The Koren Haggada



קורן ירושלים



הגדה של פסח  

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THE KOREN HAGGADA

COMMENTARY BY

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# The Seder

The word seder means “order,” and it is central to the Jewish concept of freedom. We become God’s “partners in the work of creation” when we create order in society – an order that honors all persons as the image of God. If God’s presence is to be found not just in rare moments of ecstasy, but in the daily transactions of society as a whole, then it must have a seder, a set of rules we all honor. Order turns individuals into a community and communities into a people. The seder night reflects the order that binds us to other Jews throughout the world and in previous generations.

At the same time, the seder leaves room for spontaneity. No two seder nights are the same. Ideally each family, each year, adds new insights as we reflect on our birth as a people and relate it to the present. “The more one tells ... the more admirable it is.” Pesah is a fine example of the Jewish counterpoint between structure and spontaneity. We all tell the same story in the same words, but we each add something uniquely ours. The rules are the same, but the commentaries and interpretations are always different. That is how an ancient story stays young.

## **THE SEDER PLATE**

In ancient times, seder participants used to recline on couches, and each had a table. Nowadays, though we still recline to drink the wine, eat the matza, and tell the story, we group the ingredients of the seder on a single plate, often made and decorated specially for the occasion.

Its elements are these:

1. *Matza* – three matzot, representing the double portion of bread always eaten on Sabbaths and festivals, together with a third to represent the special duty of eating matza tonight.

2. *Zeroa* – a roasted shankbone, recalling the Paschal offering. The bone itself symbolizes the “outstretched arm” with which God rescued the Israelites.
3. *Beitza* – a roasted egg, reminding us of the *ḥagiga*, the other festive offering eaten on Pesah.
4. *Maror* – the bitter herbs, recalling the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. Nowadays this usually takes two forms. (a) In the time of the Mishna, the food eaten as maror was usually lettuce (*ḥazeret*). Although this does not always taste bitter to our palates, lettuce begins by being sweet and ends by becoming bitter and hard. It thus epitomizes the experience of the Israelites in Egypt. Usually romaine lettuce is used. (b) The other form, horseradish, was the form of bitter herbs most readily available in Eastern Europe. Some have the custom to place both on the seder plate, eating both in combination, or using the lettuce for the first maror and the horseradish for the sandwich with matza.
5. *Ḥaroseit* – a mixture of fruit and spices in which the maror is dipped. The custom of using *ḥaroseit* on Pesah dates back to mishnaic times, but since it is a custom, not an obligation, we do not say a blessing over it. There are two reasons for the *ḥaroseit*. It recalls the mortar with which the Israelites made bricks when they were slaves. But it also recalls the verse from the Song of Songs, “Beneath the apple tree I woke you” (8:5), which the sages applied to the love between God and Israel that led to redemption. Thus the custom has developed of making *ḥaroseit* with the various fruits mentioned in the Song of Songs – apples, pomegranates, figs, nuts, and dates – together with ground spices (cinnamon and ginger are the most common), which recall the grinding of straw in those days. Wine is added to the mixture until it has the consistency of mortar.
6. *Karpas* – the vegetable we dip in salt water at the beginning of the seder to arouse the interest of a child. The original karpas was probably celery, but other vegetables have been used by different communities at various times. A common custom today is to use parsley.
7. *Salt water* – in which the karpas is dipped, recalling the tears of the Israelites in Egypt.

### THE ORDER

We owe to French Tosafist (sage of the school of Rashi, twelfth to thirteenth centuries) Rabbi Shmuel of Falaise the fifteen-word summary of the seder service:

1. *Kadesh* – the recitation of Kiddush
2. *Urhatz* – washing before karpas
3. *Karpas* – eating a vegetable dipped in salt water
4. *Yahatz* – splitting the middle matza
5. *Maggid* – telling the story of the Exodus, set in motion by questions asked by a child
6. *Rahatza* – washing the hands before the meal
7. *Motzi* – the blessing over food
8. *Matza* – the special blessing over matza
9. *Maror* – eating the bitter herbs
10. *Korekh* – (lit., wrapping) the sandwich of matza and maror
11. *Shulhan Orekh* – the “set table,” the meal
12. *Tzafun* – the “hidden” matza, or *afikoman*, the last food to be eaten
13. *Barekh* – grace after the meal
14. *Hallel* – concluding Hallel along with other songs of praise
15. *Nirtza* – parting prayer that our seder be accepted by God and become a prelude to future redemption

These fifteen stages echo other “fifteens” – the fifteen Psalms headed “A Song of Degrees,” the fifteen steps between the Women’s Court and the Court of the Israelites on which, in Temple times, the Levites would stand and sing praises, and the fifteen occasions of God’s kindness to the Jewish people recounted in the song *Dayeinu*.

### PESAḤ AND THE HOME

It is no coincidence that this, the oldest of Jewish rituals, takes place, as it did in Egypt, in the home. Judaism attaches immense significance to the family. The Book of Genesis is entirely devoted to families: Adam and Eve, Noah and his family, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel and Leah, and their children. The family is the birthplace of a free society. It is where we learn the reciprocity on which the moral life depends. It is where, sharing our vulnerabilities, we discover strength.

Through the bonds it creates, we learn *hesed*, the duty that flows from love. Above all it is where we learn *who we are*, where we came from, and what our story is.

Significantly, in the only place where the Torah explains why Abraham was chosen to carry the promise of the covenant, the reason is given in terms of parenthood: “For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD, doing what is right and just” (Gen. 18:19). Abraham was chosen *in order to be a parent*. He was also chosen to be an educator. The two concepts, so different in many societies, including our own, are in Judaism inseparable.

Fatherhood and motherhood are two distinct phenomena, and Judaism attaches equal importance to both. A child derives its biological identity as part of the Jewish people from its mother. The Hebrew word for compassion, *rahamim*, derives from *rehem*, “womb.” A mother, more than a father, is bound to a child through unconditional love.

Fatherhood, by contrast, is a social construct. It belongs to culture rather than nature. There are animals – including primates, genetically close to human beings – in which fathers do not even recognize their children after a few months. Fatherhood, like fidelity, is not a constant across cultures. The supreme challenge of any civilization, said the anthropologist Margaret Mead, is to socialize males and persuade them to invest their energies in the home, the family, and children.

This was one of Judaism’s greatest achievements through the ages. The Hebrew word for male, *zakhar*, is closely related to the word for memory, *zakhor*. It is the task of fathers to hand on to their children the memories of the past. For we are related to the past not just biologically but also culturally, through the stories we tell and the history we relate. That is what we do on Pesah. Thus Pesah, the festival of Jewish memory, is celebrated in the home, the birthplace of memory.

Families are a source of immense strength, but they can also be the source of narrowness, nepotism, and indifference to the world outside. There is a potential conflict between the family and the wider concerns that are needed to build a society of justice and compassion. For that reason a Jewish home must always be open – to the hungry, the lonely, and visitors. Abraham and Sarah, waiting at their tent to provide food and shelter to passersby, are an enduring symbol of this



Jewish value. “Greater is hospitality,” said the sages, “than welcoming the Divine Presence” (Shabbat 127a). The Hebrew letter *beit*, whose name also means “house,” is open at one side, to show that a Jewish home must always be open to the needy. Thus the seder night begins with an invitation, “Let all who are hungry come in and eat.” In fact, in all ages, Jews celebrating Pesah sought guests long before the meal began. The invitation, at this point, is simply to remind us that a free society exists only where families share their warmth with others.



# הגדה של פסח

## THE PESAH HAGGADA



*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

## 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 – Gen. 1

יִוֵם הַשֵּׁשִׁי the sixth day.

Then the heavens and the earth were completed, Gen. 2  
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.”

◀ When Yom Tov

## קדש

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

*On שבת add:*

בראשית א

*quietly*: וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר

יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי:

בראשית ב

וַיִּכְלוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם:  
 וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה  
 וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְכַל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:  
 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ  
 כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבֹת מְכַל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר־בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים, לַעֲשׂוֹת:

*On other evenings קידוש starts here:*

*When saying קידוש for others, add:*

סברי מרנן

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹהוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי 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

*On Shabbat, add the words in parentheses.*

בָּרוּךְ 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.

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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 שבת, add the words in parentheses.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר  
 בָּנוּ מִכָּל עַם, וְרוֹמְמָנוּ מִכָּל לְשׁוֹן, וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
 וַתִּתֵּן לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה (שַׁבָּתוֹת לְמִנוּחָה  
 וּמוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה, חַגִּים וְזִמְנִים לְשִׂשׁוֹן, אֵת  
 יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה וְאֵת יוֹם) חַג הַמִּצּוֹת הַזֶּה  
 זְמַן חֵירוּתֵנוּ (בְּאַהֲבָה) מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ  
 זָכָר לְיִצְיַאת מִצְרַיִם, כִּי בָנוּ  
 בְּחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ  
 מִכָּל הָעַמִּים, (וְשַׁבָּת)  
 וּמוֹעֲדֵי קֹדֶשְׁךָ  
 (בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרִצּוֹן)  
 בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׂשׁוֹן הַנִּחְלָתָנוּ.  
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְקַדֵּשׁ (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 Motza'ei Shabbat, the following Havdala is added:*

ברוך 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.

ברוך 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.*

#### URḤATZ / WASHING

*Water is brought to the leader.*

*The participants wash their hands but do not say a blessing.*

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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.

On the b'dלה, the following is added:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
בוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל  
בֵּין אֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ  
בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים  
בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשֵׁשֶׁת יָמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה  
בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּת לְקֹדֶשׁ יוֹם טוֹב הַבְּדִלָּת  
וְאֵת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִשֵּׁשֶׁת יָמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה קֹדֶשׁ  
הַבְּדִלָּת וְקֹדֶשׁ אֶת עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקֹדֶשְׁתְּךָ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְקֹדֶשׁ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
שֶׁהַחֵינּוּ 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*

**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.*

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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 *leḥem 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 seder we

◀ seder

## 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 הָאָדָמָה.

*Eat without reclining.*

## יחץ

*The middle מצה is broken in two.  
The bigger portion is then hidden away to serve as the אפיקומן  
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

## MAGGID / TELLING

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

הָא לְחֶמְתָּא עֲנִיאָא

# 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.

---

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 his experiences there. According to Levi, the worst time of all was when the

◀ his experiences

## מגיד

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

הַמָּתָה  
לְחֶמֶת עֲנִיָּה  
דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבֹהֵתָנָא בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
כָּל דְּכַפֵּין יְיָתִי וְיִכֹּל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יְיָתִי וְיִפְסַח

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 Egypt’” (Ex. 13:8). However, the word haggada derives from a verb that also*

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, *hofesh* and *herut*. *Hofesh* is “freedom from.” *Herut* is “freedom to.” *Hofesh* 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 *hofesh* is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination. *Herut* 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 horin*,” invoking *herut*, not *hofesh*. This statement is an aspiration; “May we be free in a way that honors the freedom of all.”*



הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא  
 לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל  
 הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי  
 לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרֵין.

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.

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

מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה

## 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

◀ Temple

The *keria* and the *matot* are now covered and the second cup of wine is poured.  
The youngest child asks the following questions:

**מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה**  
**הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת**  
 שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנּוּ אוֹכְלִין חֶמֶץ וּמֶצֶה  
 הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ מֶצֶה  
 שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנּוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֹר יְרֻקוֹת  
 הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מְרוֹר  
 שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אָנּוּ מְטַבְּלִין אֶפְלוּ פֶּעַם אַחַת  
 הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְעָמִים  
 שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנּוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבֵין וּבֵין מְסַבֵּין  
 הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלָנוּ מְסַבֵּין

#### 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