

A Brief Introduction To The Haggadah

The Seder should be viewed as a prayer service that does not require a quorum of ten men. The parallels between Tefilas Shacharis, the morning prayer service, and the Seder are easy to identify. Both begin with words of praise taken from Tanach and end with a request. The requests are similar; that G-d bring on a period when the world recognizes G-d; the Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt and we can serve G-d through the Beis Hamikdash. In the morning service the section that contains verses and chapters of praise are known as פסוקי דזמרה, verses of song. At the Seder that section is known as מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח; we begin by recalling the shameful history of the Jewish People and end by remembering how G-d rescued the Jewish People and made them into a noble nation. The section of מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח is presented in three ways; that our ancestors were slaves (עבדים היינו); that our ancestors were idol worshippers (מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה) or that our forefather Yaakov was under the control of his father-in-law Lavan (ארמי אובד אבי). Rabban Gamliel is also providing a definition of מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח but he does so by answering the original questions of מה נשתנה; that the Matzoh and the Korban Pesach represent G-d's acts that led to freedom, שבח; and the Marror which represents the shameful side of Jewish history; that we were slaves.

The גאל ישראל that is found in the הגדה appears in the closing ברכה of גאל ישראל. I have suggested that this ברכה should be read without pronouncing G-d's name at the outset so that all present understand that the Seder is a form of prayer service and they should know what they are praying for.

There is also a similarity between שמונה עשרה and the Seder. They both consist of 19 Brachot.

But the wording of the הגדה shares another important aspect of תפילה. The מצוה of קריאת שמע פרשה of תפילה is derived from the following verse found in the second פרשה of תפילה: ולעבדו בכל לבבכם; to serve G-d with all your heart. The Midrash asks: what is service of the heart? The Midrash gives two answers: לימוד תורה and תפילה. Historically, only לימוד תורה has been described as עבודה שבלב. In truth we should be describing לימוד תורה as עבודה שבלב as well.

In deciding what should be included in the fixed text of the סידור, הז"ל included both forms of עבודה שבלב. Count the number of פסוקים and the number of chapters of Tanach that are part of our daily prayers. You will see that more than half of what we say

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in תפלת שחרית are excerpts from Tanach. That is a form of לימוד תורה because as we say each word from Tanach, we are required to review its meaning. Now think about the הגדה. How many verses from Tanach are included there? A substantial portion of what we read are excerpts from Tanach; but we go a step further. The Mishna tells us to דורש; to link verses from Tanach to the verses that describe the Exodus from Egypt.

I hope you have noticed that the verses about the Exodus play a role not only in the הגדה. They play an important role in our daily prayers as well. Think of how we refer to the Exodus at the end of each section of the morning prayers. We mention it at the end of יהודו (Tehillim 81, 11) אנכי ה' א-להיך, המעלך מארץ מצרים, הרחב פיך ואמלאהו. הודו Hashem Your G-d, who raised you from the land of Egypt, open wide your mouth and I will fill it; i.e. If you follow G-d commandments, G-d will provide fully for you). For Sephardim, that represents the end of the section known as קרבנות.

We mention the Exodus at the end of פסוקי דזמרה beginning with אתה הוא ה' הא-להים, אשר בחרת באברם (Nehemia 9, 6) You are the G-d, Lord, who chose Avrom; and continuing until the end of the שירה. We mention the Exodus in the last verse of the third פרשה אני ה' א-להיכם, אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים, להיות לכם; קריאת שמע of פרשה לאלהים, אני ה' א-להיכם. I am G-d, your Lord, who brought you out of Egypt so that you can be My subjects, I am G-d, Your lord. We then continue to mention aspects of the Exodus, recite selected verses from the Shira and close with the Bracha of גאל ישראל, the same ברכה by which we close our fulfillment of the Mitzvah of סיפור יציאת מצרים at the Seder. The Bracha of גאל ישראל is recited just before we begin עשרה עשרה, based on the rule of סמיכת גאולה לתפילה; linking the Exodus to our prayers. So you can ask: why do we have to conduct a Seder when we have been relating the same story every morning, three times each morning?

In truth, what we are doing each morning is not the same as what we do at the Seder. Our recital of verses during the morning prayer service is an example of studying Torah but you must keep in mind that the מצוה of לימוד תורה has two aspects; ללמוד וללמד, to study and to teach. We place much emphasis on the ללמוד aspect of Torah study and less on the importance of וללמד. Ironically the מצוה of לימוד תורה is derived from a פסוק that is centered on teaching, more than on studying; ושננתם לבניך, ודברת בם, and You will teach your children and instill within them. The difference between our relating the story of the Exodus each morning and what occurs at the Seder is the difference between ללמוד וללמד. Each morning we are studying the verses that relate to the Exodus. At the Seder, it is our obligation to teach the story of the Exodus.

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In many ways teaching is an important learning exercise for the teacher. While preparing to teach, a teacher must try to anticipate the questions that the students may ask. To be able to answer those questions, the teacher must perform further research. During the course of teaching, the students may ask questions that the teacher did not anticipate. To answer those questions, the teacher will need to conduct additional study as well.

When we pray each morning, we concentrate on the words and on their meaning. On occasion, a question may arise. But at the Seder, proper preparation will open new avenues of study and certainly the comments and questions of those present will do the same.

That the Seder is an opportunity to study and to teach is particularly difficult this year because for many adults only a husband and wife will be present and maybe only one will be present. It will be the fulfillment of a Rabbinic saying that few have experienced:

ואם אין חכמה בבן לשאול אביו מלמדו ואם אין לו בן אשתו שואלתו ואם לאו הוא שואל את עצמו.

If the child is not wise enough to ask, his father teaches him; if he has no child, his wife asks him; and if he lives alone, he asks himself.

It is important to understand why the Seder became a question and answer session between a parent and his children. That formula is found in the various verses in the Torah that deal with Pesach and the questions that a child might ask his parent. Notice each of the following sets of verses include a version of the word **בן**, son:

שמות פרק יב

(כו) והיה כִּי־יאמרו אליכם בניכם מה העבדה הזאת לכם:

(כז) ואמרתם זבח־פסח הוא לה' אשר פסח על־בתי בני־ישראל במצרים בנגפו את־מצרים ואת־בתינו הציל ויקד העם וישתחוו:

26. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say to you, What do you mean by this service?

27. Then you shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when He struck the Egyptians, and saved our houses. And the people bowed their heads and worshipped.

שמות פרק יג פסוק ח'—והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים:

8. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying: this is done because of that which the Lord did to me when I came forth out of Egypt.

שמות פרק יג'—(יד) והיה כִּי־ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר מה־זאת ואמרת אליו בחזק יד הוציאנו ה' ממצרים מבית עבדים:

14. And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, What is this? then you shall say to him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of slavery;

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דברים פרק ו

(כ) כִּי־יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מָה הָעֵדוּת וְהַחֲקִים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ' א-לֵהֵינוּ אֲתֶכֶם:

(כא) וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבְנֶךָ עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפָרְעָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצִיאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה:

20. And when your son asks you in time to come, saying, What do the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, mean, which the Lord our God has commanded you?

21. Then you shall say to your son, We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand;

That the Seder was meant to arouse questions from a child to his parents can be seen by the rules that the Torah prescribes for the קרבן פסח. The way the קרבן פסח was sacrificed and then eaten was so different from other sacrifices that were brought during the year that questions naturally arose. Each morning we are reminded of those differences when we refer to the uniqueness of the קרבן פסח at the end of קרבנות:

הַפֶּסַח אֵינוֹ נֹאכַל אֶלֶּא בַּלַּיְלָה, וְאֵינוֹ נֹאכַל אֶלֶּא עַד הַצּוֹת, וְאֵינוֹ נֹאכַל אֶלֶּא לַמְּנוּיָהוּ, וְאֵינוֹ נֹאכַל אֶלֶּא עָלַי.

Translation: The Korban Pesach is eaten for only one night; and only until mid-night; and can only be eaten by those who subscribed to that animal and can only be prepared grilled.

There are more differences. The קרבן פסח is eaten as dessert; not as the main meal; in the same manner in which we eat the אפיקומן. You were not allowed to break a bone while preparing or eating it. All of those differences presented opportunities for the question מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה, why is this קרבן different, to be asked.

You should also know the original מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה questions. They are presented in the Jerusalem Talmud:

תַּלְמוּד יְרוּשְׁלַמִי (וִילְנָא) מִסַּכְת פֶּסַחִים פֶּרֶק י, הַלְכָה ד'—מִתְנִי' מִזְנוּ לֹו כּוּס שְׁנַי וְכֹאן בֶּן שׁוֹאֵל אִם אֵינ דַּעַת בְּבֶן לְשׁוֹאֵל. אֲבִיו מִלְמַדוֹ: מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֲנוּ מִטְּבִילִין פַּעַם אַחַת וְהַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פַעַמִּים; שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֲנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֲמִץ וּמִצָּה וְהַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כּוֹלוּ מִצָּה; שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אוֹכְלִין בֶּשֶׂר עָלֵי שְׁלוֹק וּמִבּוּשֵׁל וְהַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כּוֹלוּ עָלֵי. וְלִפִּי דַעַתִּיהָ שֶׁל בֶּן אֲבִיו מִלְמַדוֹ מִתְחִיל בְּגִנּוֹת וּמִסִּיִּים בִּשְׁבַח וְדוֹרֵשׁ מֵאַרְמֵי אוֹבֵד אֲבֵי עַד שֶׁהוּא גּוֹמֵר כָּל הַפְּרָשָׁה.

Mishnah. They filled a second cup for him. At this stage the son questions his father; if the son is unintelligent, his father instructs him to ask: 'why is this night different from all other nights. For on all other nights we dip once, but on this night we dip twice.' On all other nights we eat leavened and unleavened bread, whereas on this night we eat only leavened bread; on all other nights we eat meat roast, grilled, stewed or boiled, on this night, grilled only. And according to the son's intelligence his father instructs him. The father commences with the shameful aspect of Jewish history and concludes with praise of G-d who rescued the Jewish People from their shameful circumstances; and expounds from 'a wandering aramean was my father' until he completes the whole section.

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Here are the differences. There were three questions; not four. There is no question about Marror and no question about reclining. There is a question about eating only grilled meat that we do not ask. The question about dipping is different. We say that normally we do not dip at all; on this night we dip twice. Same for the question on reclining which appeared later in Jewish history. That question does not appear in the Babylonian Talmud as well.

There is no question about marror because it is part of the dipping question since we dip Marror in Charoset. Concerning the question about eating only grilled meat, many make the mistake of saying that it was a question that was asked only during the time when the קרבן פסח was brought. In truth the question continued to be asked by Jews in Rome and in Egypt by those who followed the customs of the Jews of Eretz Yisroel as opposed to the Jews of Babylonia. They continued to eat only grilled meat at the Seder. This practice stopped when the Jewish community in Egypt died out at around 1200 CE. If you pay close attention, you see that Rabban Gamliel gives the answers to the three questions found in the Jerusalem Talmud not the questions found in the Babylonian Talmud..

חג כשר ושמח!