Preface: Why is this *Haggadah* different than all other *Haggadot*?

Jews sit around the Seder table every Passover and use a book called the *Haggadah* for guidance through the story of the Exodus. While many prefer a traditional text, Jews are increasingly adding *Haggadot* to their tables that reflect the Passover story through different lenses—from contemporary social justice activism and feminism to pop culture and humor. In that vein, my goal has long been to revamp the traditional Persian *Haggadah* through a contemporary lens and for this, my capstone project, I set out to present a prototype of what I hope a completed Progressive Persian *Haggadah*, in Hebrew, Farsi, and English might look like.

In writing this *Haggadah,* I have in mind other Persian Jews like myself, second-generation Jews in America, still very much enthralled by the older generation and its customs, but increasingly ignorant of the actual Farsi that is natural to our immigrant parents. In addition, as with most second-generation Jews, my generation is increasingly unaware also of the customs and prayers that our parents know almost by heart. My goal, then, is to provide the tradition of Persian Jewry, but also proper English translation and a selection of commentary that brings the Seder alive for these Jews. I even translate some basic terms like *mitzvah* and *Haggadah* itself.

This is, of course, only a prototype, not the entire *Haggadah,* a project that I hope to continue for many years to come. I mainly focused on what is traditionally known as the *Maggid* section of the *Haggadah,* but I was selective there too, preferring certain parts of it – those where Persian custom stands out, or where there is special interest

around my Persian Seder table. I did not limit myself to *Maggid,* however. Having in mind the goal of providing a proper prototype, I also incorporated Persian rituals of the Seder found in other sections, as well as Persian customs that are not so much part of the Seder itself, but are connected to the Seder and to Passover in some regard – such as *kashering* the utensils for the festival and the choice of foods on a Persian Seder plate. Not all sections receive the same attention, Some illustrate the final product I eventually hope to produce quite well. Others merely suggest what I might do. But all told, they provide the idea of what a modern Persian Haggadah might look like.

Here are the sections included:

1. Introduction
2. *Kashering* the Utensils for Passover
3. The Order of the Seder
4. A word about Jewish ethnic identity
5. The Symbols of the Seder Plate
6. Seder Plate Originates from Mishnah Pesachim 10:3
    1. Persian *Charoset* חֲרוֹסֶת: *Halegh* (هَلَق) or *Haleghieh* (هَلَقیه)
    2. Chazeret, חֲזֶרֶת: romaine lettuce, کاهو سبز,
7. General statement about the Passover and the meaning of the word Seder סֵדֶר
8. Seder Section: Make Kiddush קַדֵּשׁ
9. Seder Section: And Wash וּרְחַץ
    1. A word about רוחצים in Persian tradition
10. Seder Section: *Karpas,* כַּרְפַּס, کرفس

1. Why does Passover fall in the Spring?

11. Seder Section: *Yachatz,* יַחַץ

    1. The Laws of *Yachatz,* יַחַץ:

    2. A word about *matzah*

12. Section Seder: Telling מַגִּיד

    1. *Ha lachma,* הָא לַחְמָא

    2. The Four Questions, מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה

        1. A word about the importance of asking Questions

    3. Avadim Hayinu, עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ

        1. Beginning with physical "degradation" [*g'nut*]: *Avadim Hayinu* "We were slaves"

    4. Even if all of us were wise, וַאֲפִילוּ כֻּלָּנוּ חֲכָמִים

    5. Telling at Length

    6. Telling at Night time?

    7. Telling the Next Generation: The Four Children

    8. Telling at the Proper Time: the Seder itself

    9. Beginning with spiritual "degradation" [*g'nut*]: Our Ancestors Worshipped Idols

        1. The Desert of our Lives

    10. The Ten Plagues

    11. Dayyeinu

    12. Conclusion

The main resource that I used was the Persian *Haggadah* written by Rabbi Yehoshua Nataneli. I also used both volumes 1 and 2 of *My People's Prayerbook* (Hoffman and Arnow) to better understand the primary material and to translate the texts. For a better understanding of the various traditions and differences among the Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Mizrahi rites, I looked to Guggenheimer's *The Scholar's Haggadah.* The sources I used are provided fully in the concluding bibliography.

PROGRESSIVE PERSIAN HAGGADAH

הגדה פרסית פרוגרסיבית

هاگادا شِل پِسَح به طریق جدید

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Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Graduate Rabbinical Program

New York, New York

2018

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Acknowledgements

As I walked through the door for Passover Seder, my paternal grandfather said to me: چرا سبز نپوشيدي؟ مؤيد پسح سبز ميپوشند , which translates to, "*Why haven't you worn green? On Passover we wear green.*" I have always known that this comment, and many others like it, had timeworn wisdom and folklore behind it. This thesis has given me the opportunity to explore all the cultural and religious artifacts of the Persian Seder, including this charming notion that we wear green in connection with the springtime and the symbol of *karpas*. Because the Persian Jewish community has yet to document its many particular customs within English scholarship, I have felt that it is my mission to contribute what I can to ensure these rituals and traditions live on to the future generations. It has been an ongoing pleasure to learn more about my family's rituals and beliefs, and create a resource for the continuation of Persian customs in America.

I was the first American-born individual and the first grandchild on both the paternal and maternal sides of my family, all of whom hail from the same city of Shiraz, Iran. All my relatives felt that it was their duty to teach me everything they knew from their native land. I have benefited tremendously from their commitment to our heritage. I would like to thank both my paternal grandfather, Yosef Rabizadeh, of blessed memory, who was adamant that all of his grandchildren receive a Jewish education, and my paternal grandmother, Molook Rabizadeh, who taught all of her grandchildren about prayer and the importance of reciting the *Sh'ma* every night in bed. I especially want to thank my maternal side of the family including my great uncles and aunts: Yousef, Bashi, Moosa, my grandmother Monier, Fakhri, Rowhan, Nayer, Homa and Saiid Kohanim, who

each in their own way have taught me how to chant, cook, speak, read, dance, and experience a Persian Jewish life.

Above all, I would like to wholeheartedly thank my parents, Sina Rabizadeh and Azita Delrahim, who only spoke to me in Farsi as a child, assuming I would eventually learn English. As my greater family quickly Americanized, my younger cousins did not have the privilege of such immersion in Farsi. Consequently, throughout our childhood my younger cousins would jabber away in English at a separate table, or watch American television in the adjoining room, while I would spend time with the older generation—listening to their old-world conversations, music, and poetry, and getting a feel for the way culture, religion, and daily life functioned back in Shiraz. Even to this day, my family and parents continue to be my greatest teachers. I am grateful that my father and mother took time to correct parts of the Farsi translations and commentary featured in this *Haggadah* prototype.

In many ways, this thesis marks the culmination of a rabbinic journey that has been inspired and sustained by myriad Jewish leaders who deserve my sincerest thanks. Although the people who have touched my life are too numerous to name here, I have done my best to acknowledge a few: Rabbi Sharon Brous, who inspired me to become a rabbi; Rabbi Melissa Fogel Buyer Whitman, who showed me the way to Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion; Rabbi Tamara Eskenazi PhD, who continues to inspire me every day in her teaching of the biblical canon; Drs. Michael Zeldin and Rabbi Tali Zelkowitcz, who inspire me to always learn, grow, and envision what the world can be; Rabbis David Ellenson and Renni Altman, who took time in meeting with me and

supporting my acceptance to the College; my friend Leora Kadisha Neman, who was invaluable in my journey towards the rabbinate; Rabbi Gavi Ruit, who spent endless hours educating and encouraging me as a colleague and a friend; my rabbinical classmate and friend Tobias Divack Moss, who always makes the time to tirelessly edit my works and engage in deep conversations; Rabbi Nancy Hope Wiener, D. Min, whose open door policy has been indispensable in my growth as a woman, an outsider-insider, and as a student rabbi; Gilla Nissan, who continues to remind of the mission of my soul and the strength that I encompass from within and through God. Finally, I offer my deepest gratitude to Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman PhD, who saw something special in me, even when I could not. He has been willing to fight for me, cheer me on, and even listen to me cry on numerous occasions. I could not have imagined undergoing the challenges of rabbinical school without him. I thank Rabbi Hoffman for always listening and working so passionately with me on this capstone project. It was an honor.

1.Introduction

The *mitzvah* [commandment to be fulfilled] of the Passover Seder is to tell the story of our people's redemption from bondage.[1] For that reason, it makes sense that the liturgy for the Seder has become known as the *Haggadah*, which literally means, "the telling."[2] But the goal of the telling, as found in the very earliest rabbinic code of law (Mishnah Pesachim 10:4, compiled circa 200 CE) is specifically to ensure that our children participate in the Seder by asking questions.

Questions ensure that members of the Seder are participating, engaging, and reflecting on the material being presented. Originally, children asked any question whatsoever, to demonstrate their awareness of how different the night of Passover is. Eventually, a set of sample questions was provided for them, but even that sample occurs in two forms. The second corpus of Jewish legal discussion, the one following the Mishnah, is called the Talmud, and there are actually two talmuds, one from the land of Israel (c. 400 CE) and a second one from Babylonia (current day Iraq, c. 550-650). They both carry that sample, but with somewhat different questions, and with three or four questions, depending on which Talmud one uses. The Babylonian Talmud eventually became “the Talmud of record,” the one we mean when we say “The Talmud,” and it has the version we use now, in our *Haggadot*, the version with four questions (not three). The

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[1]Maimonides, Hilkhot Chametz umatzah, 7:1.based on Exodus 13:8.

[2] Hoffman, pp. 17

sample from the Babylonian Talmud has thus been codified into what we call “The Four Questions” [*Mah Nishtanah* -literally, “How is it [this night] different”)].

That line, *Mah Nishtanah*, appears first in the Mishnah, the first rabbinic law code, c. 200 CE, but only as the instructions for a father trying to give to children who do not know what to ask. In the early days, when children made up any question whatever, the Mishnah is trying to provide for a situation when no questions were forthcoming. In such a case, the father is to explain, “How different this night is!” In time, however, that statement was read as a question, not “How different this night is!” but “How is this night different?” (The Hebrew can mean both.) As such, the same line became the preamble to the set of sample questions that have now congealed into part of the *Haggadah* script itself, so that nowadays, children usually recite the sample questions with the preamble as a sort of ritualized way of relating the old sample questions as if they were making up questions themselves.

However you look at it, whether as a prompt for children to ask questions or a set of questions themselves; and whether by the father to the child or vice versa; it is clear that the *Haggadah* is a curriculum guide, with a step by step lesson plan of the choreography and prescriptions involved in the annual retelling of Israel’s formative story. Both children and adults are required to participate, and both serve as students and teachers. Thus, the *mitzvah* is not simply a one-directional telling of the tale, but rather a dialectic communication between one generation and the next. In the Persian American Jewish community, this multi-generational dialogue is inhibited by the current offerings of *Haggadot* (*Haggadah* in plural*)*, none of which allows for the kind of give and take

that the Seder was supposed to have from the beginning and that generations of young people today are craving. Therefore, I have embarked not just in replicating the Persian *Haggadah*, but in transforming, or, better "Reforming it."

Such reform was commonplace in Ashkenazi *Haggadot* emanating from Germany and from 19th and early 20th century America, as part of what became known as Reform Judaism. Reform began as a movement to make traditional medieval Judaism palatable to new generations that found it increasingly baffling at best and outmoded as well. In our own way, Persian Jews in America now find ourselves in the same situation. My *Haggadah* is, therefore, a prototype of what a new and contemporary version of "Reform Judaism" would offer America's Persian Jewish communities today.

The most commonly used Persian *Haggadah* is a bilingual edition with Hebrew and Farsi, entitled هَاگادا شِل پِسَح (*Haggadah shel Pesah),* with a translation by Rabbi Yehoshua Nataneli. At my family Seder, in order to encourage participation by my younger cousins, the children, we also use the *Maxwell House Haggadah*[3]. Given its old English usage of "thees" and "thous," most of us can easily get lost in its pages. Interestingly enough, it was compiled in the 1930s for an American Jewish community not all that unlike my own – a mixture of immigrants and their children. It was assumed that the immigrant adults would rattle through the Hebrew while children (the next generation) would follow along in English. It may have worked back then, because the archaic language was assumed to be the proper way to render English in sacred texts. The style had come from the 16th century *Book of Common Prayer* which was then carried

[3] Balin in Hoffman, *My People's Haggadah,* 85

forward into the King James Bible, a version prepared in 1604 for that very Anglican Church. It then passed into later biblical and prayer-book translations, the *Union Prayer Book* of 1894/95 for example, and even the official North American Jewish translation of the Bible (in 1913). The style had been regularly spoken English at the beginning. It no longer was so, by 1894/5 and 1913; it was even less so when I grew up with the *Maxwell House Haggadah* that used it.

To make matters worse, since the *Maxwell House* version is secondary to the Persian *Haggadah* in use, we are all operating at different speeds and with different *Haggadot*. As a result, I am then the one tasked as anchorwoman, spending most of the Seder with both versions in front of me, and announcing the different page numbers as I continually follow along both versions and ensure we are aligned throughout the Seder. Accordingly, if our goal is to engage the children and have the adults help us lead, the first step is to ensure that we all have the same text in front of us and that we are all comprehending the reading material in the first place. We need to be "on the same page," so to speak, and engaged enough to ask one another questions together. If the goal is telling the story in every generation, then we need to be able to communicate in the words of the next generation.[4]

Furthermore, as an educator, I understand the *Haggadah* as the oldest curriculum guide of our heritage. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman reminds us of how intimately the *Haggadah* speaks to us, "It is a book we all own, handle, store at home, and spill wine

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[4] Strassfeld, *A Passover Haggadah*, 14.

upon!"[5] Coming together to celebrate Passover is an experience where, most of us, for the first time, have the chance to study and learn with our family together. Children have a chance to observe how their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and others behave and to pattern their own behavior accordingly. Similarly, by actually conversing together, parents and grandparents have the chance to see how the younger generation is thinking, We have the chance, that is, not just to drone our way through an outmoded version of this ancient but still meaningful text; but to be in dialogue and to gain a different perspective on one another. Which members ask the serious questions, which ones joke and continually chatter on the side? Which are thoughtful and which dismissive? Which relative most likely misbehaved throughout his/her schooling while the teacher was speaking in class?

Every person has a different capacity to learn and grasp information, which is why the *Haggadah* makes room for teaching to different levels of understanding; the father instructs and relays the Passover story differently amongst the various “sons” – nowadays, daughters too, of course: the wicked, the wise, the simple and the one who does not know how to ask. As I said above, traditionally, it was the father who was supposed to impart the skill of asking questions and relaying the story of the Exodus from Egypt to his children. But the commandment to hear the story of the Exodus from Egypt rests upon all Jews, not just the actual children.

This *Haggadah* – more precisely, this prototype of a *Haggadah* -- therefore is not just for children. It is for everyone. It is a progressive reformation of the Nataneli's

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[5] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah*, Vol. 1., xiii-xiv.

Haggadah: هَاگادا شِل پِسَح for us all. It focuses on the "Telling," מַגִּיד (*Maggid*) section, a running commentary on how "this night is different."

The *Haggadah* Seder is made up of more than that, however. *Maggid* is just one of the several divisions into which the Haggadah is traditionally divided. The division into sections to which I allude (beginning, *Kadesh, Urchatz, Karpas…*) dates to the 11th century or so. It was not the only way of dividing the Haggadah, but it has come to be the accepted way, traditionally speaking, and is, in fact, often included as a preamble to the *Haggadah* and read or chanted in Ashkenazi custom, as if it were part of the *Haggadah* itself. The "Telling," מַגִּיד (*Maggid*), is thus just one of the fourteen sections, or stages that make up the whole. But it is the most important one. It occupies the bulk of the *Haggadah* text; it is the drawn-out telling of the tale which the Bible and the Rabbis demand.

In this trial version (so to speak), I will not even handle all of the "Telling," however (the מַגִּיד *Maggid*)– that would be far too much to undertake in a simple rabbinic capstone. What I provide is a paradigm for what I hope to develop into a complete whole someday. For now, I choose parts of the "Telling," מַגִּיד (*Maggid*) selectively, including in particular those units that come with Passover rituals unique to the Persian community with which I am familiar. By documenting our customs and creating an English translation, I will help preserve our traditions for generations to come.

I include specifically the traditions included in the Nataneli Persian *Haggadah:* هَاگادا شِل پِسَح , particularly as practiced in my family, focusing on specific parts of the 11th-century order of the Seder, as it appears in our *Haggadah.*

2. *Kashering* the Utensils for Passover

Haghalah—هگّالا

הגעלת כלים: טבילת כלים קודם חג הפסח

("Scouring the utensils and immersing them before the festival")

There are many traditions that my family shares about the steps they took to prepare for the Passover holiday. One of them is הגעלה *haghalah,* (in Farsi the Hebrew letter ק "kuf" is pronounced as a guttural "gh"; but in this instance the combination of the letter ג "gimmel" followed by the ע "ayin" has manifested into a guttural pronunciation in the Farsi هگّالا pronounced, "*haghalah*"), the method of making utensils suitable for use with kosher food by immersing them in boiling water. This concept is derived from a verse in Numbers 31:22-23, "Gold and silver, copper, iron, tin, and lead—any article that can withstand fire—these you shall pass through fire and they shall be clean, except that they must be cleansed with water of lustration; and anything that cannot withstand fire you must pass through water."[6]

Before the use of stoves, my dad recalls his grandmother using a huge pot, something almost as large as a cauldron, and then filling it with water and placing it on top of a fire pit. She would then place three stones at the bottom of the pot; when she was able to see the stones clearly, the water was considered clean enough for her to proceed with *haghalah,* (these terms are also partially included in the Nataneli Persian *Haggadah)*: the act of immersing the dishes into the hot water, an act that has to take

[6] Translation, sefaria.org

place for a total of three times. Today, my own paternal grandmother has reformed this tradition and runs the dishwasher three times. We are all continually reinterpreting tradition in order to create relevancy as progress in every generation.

3. The Order of the Seder (the 11th century list)

1. *Kadesh* קַדֵּשׁ – "Make *Kiddush*"

Recital of *Kiddush* blessing (the opening blessing or prayer, that declares the onset of the holiday as “holy time”) and drinking of the first cup of wine (the Seder has four of them)

2. *Urchatz* וּרְחַץ –"And wash"

The washing of the hands

3. *Karpas* כַּרְפַּס – Vegetable usually parsley or celery

The dipping of the *karpas* in salt water or vinegar

4. *Yachatz* יַחַץ – "Break"

Breaking of the middle *matzah* (there are three in all); the larger piece becomes the *afikoman* (a piece of *matzah* hidden away until the end of the meal and used as dessert, the last thing eaten that evening).

5. Maggid מַגִּיד – "Telling"

The retelling of the Passover story, including the recital of "the four questions" and drinking of the second cup of wine

6. *Rachtzah* רָחְצָה –"Washing"

The second washing of the hands

7. *Motzi Matzah* מוֹצִיא, מַצָּה –

The blessing before eating *matzah*

8. *Maror* מָרוֹר – "Bitter herbs"

The eating of the *maror:* traditionally horse radish (Ashkenazi) or Romaine Lettuce

9. *Korech* כּוֹרֵךְ –"Wrap"

The eating of a sandwich made of *matzah* and *maror*

10.*Shulchan orec*h שֻׁלְחָן עוֹרֵךְ – "Set table"—

The serving of the holiday meal

11.*Tzafun* צָפוּן – "The concealed [Matzah]"

The eating of the *afikoman* that was hidden away, but then found and consumed

12.*Barech* בָּרֵךְ – "Bless"

The grace after meals and drinking of the third cup of wine

13.*Hallel* הַלֵּל – "Song of Praise"

The recital of the *Hallel*, traditionally recited on festivals, and drinking of the fourth cup of wine. (In practice, two of the six psalms constituting the *Hallel* are said at the end of the *Maggid* section, above – before the meal, that is. The other four psalms are recited now.)

14.*Nirtzah* נִרְצָה "Accepted"

The Haggadah concludes here with a request that our Seder prayers be accepted on high. It then ends with a final prayer — "Next Year in Jerusalem!"

4. A word about Jewish Ethnic Identity:

The Ashkenazi (Central and Eastern European) identity is the tradition of most American Jews. Persian Jews are Mizrahi. Mizrahi Jews are descendants of Babylonian Jews and Mountain Jews from modern Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Dagestan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Uzbekistan, the Caucasus, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Yemenite Jews are sometimes also included, but their history is separate from Babylonian Jewry.[7]

The use of the term *Mizrahi* is somewhat controversial and is often applied to descendants of Sephardi Jews, who had lived in North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco), the Sephardi-proper communities of Turkey and the mixed Levantine communities of Lebanon, Israel and Syria.

My family often asks me if we are Mizrahi or Sephardi Jews. The truth is that before the establishment of the state of Israel, Mizrahi Jews did not identify themselves as a separate Jewish subgroup. Instead, Mizrahi Jews generally characterized themselves as Sephardi, as they follow the traditions of Sephardi Judaism (but with some differences among the *minhag* "customs" of particular communities). That has resulted in a conflation of terms, particularly in Israel and in religious usage, with "Sephardi" being used in a broad sense and including Mizrahi Jews and North African Jews as well as Sephardim proper. From the point of view of the official Israeli rabbinate, any rabbis of Mizrahi origin in Israel are under the jurisdiction of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel.

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[7] wikipedia.org

But overall, although some Persians hail from current-day Spain and Portugal, most however, are not just Sephardi, but a particular stream of Sephardi Jews, not those who left Spain for Holland and then England and the new world, but those who traversed the Mediterranean and found themselves in areas of the Ottoman Empire, including Persia, now Iran. The beginnings of Jewish history in the area of present-day Iran date back to late biblical times, (mentioned in the books of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Esther contain references to the life and experiences of Jews in Persia). Since in the book of Ezra, the Persian kings are credited with permitting and enabling the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple; its reconstruction was affected "according to the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia" (Ezra 6:14), many Persians attest that they have been living in the region for many years, not tracing their lineage back to Spain and Portugal, and perhaps should be considered as part of a unique ethnicity as a result, and not *Sephardi* and the like.

For the purposes of this *Haggadah*,however, the difference is, therefore, not just Sephardi versus Ashkenazi, but Europe versus the Eastern end of the Mediterranean. For example, rice is a staple in Iran. While Ashkenazi tradition doesn’t include rice among permitted foods, Persians do eat rice on the holiday.

5. The Symbols of the Seder Plate

It is customary to put three *matzot*, the vegetables, two cooked foods, *charoset* and *karpas* on a large plate or tray. There are different customs as to the proper arrangement of these foods.[8] To be more precise, we have altogether nowadays either five or six items on the Seder plate:

1. Maror, מָרוֹר *or Chazeret,* חֲזֶרֶת

1. These are the most confusing of the items, because some traditions combine them as one item while other traditions separate them as two. Both are instances of the biblical commandment to eat bitter herbs. Originally, romaine lettuce was used as these herbs, but over time, in some places, romaine became associated with *chazeret* alone while *maror* came to be seen as horseradish root. Since either one is bitter, either one may be eaten in fulfillment of the mitzvah of eating bitter herbs during the Seder. Whichever one is used, the bitter herbs symbolize the bitterness and harshness of the slavery which the Jews endured in Ancient Egypt. Nowadays, however, in Ashkenazi custom, romaine lettuce has disappeared. *Maror,* מָרוֹר is usually the actual horseradish root, while *chazeret* is some form of grated horseradish. Persian custom, by contrast, uses just *chazeret* חֲזֶרֶת: for which it provides romaine lettuce, سبزي تلخ, whose roots are bitter-tasting.

2. *Charoset,* חֲרוֹסֶת, هَلَق

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[8] Kasher, *The Passover Haggadah,* 33.

- A sticky paste-like substance representing the mortar used by the Jewish slaves to build the storehouses of Egypt. I return below to explain what Persian Jews use here.

3. *Karpas*, כַּרְפַּס, کرفس

- We saw above how bitter herbs could be romaine lettuce or something else. In addition, however, over time, it became customary to add other greens as well, celery, perhaps, or parsley. Any form of greens would do. But Ashkenazi Jews, who lived in northern Europe, frequently did not have greens available when Passover time came; in cold norther climates, it was still too early to harvest any vegetables at all. Where possible, they used any green vegetable they had, of course, but when they had none at all, they replaced the greens with potatoes. The reason for the choice of potatoes was the fact that the blessing over greens, harvested from the earth, thanks God for "fruit of the earth." Potatoes, which Jews in Northern Europe actually did have, grew from the earth as well, so could be used without having to change the blessing in question. In America, where potatoes and greens are available, Ashkenazi custom usually uses parsley or celery (as greens) but also potatoes -- dipped into salt water, to represent the salty tears of slavery. The Middle Eastern custom of my family from Persia dips celery (as the greens) in red wine vinegar, but adds the sweet *charoset* (Yemenite Jews do the same) to cut the bitter taste. The idea actually goes back to the Talmud which records the original use of *maror* eaten ritually on a piece of matzah, but provides for the addition of *charoset* as well.

4. *Zeroa*, זרוֹע, دست کباب شده گوسفند

   - A roasted lamb, symbolizing the *korban Pesach* (Passover sacrifice), which was a lamb offered in the Temple in Jerusalem and was then roasted and eaten as part of the meal on Seder night.

5. *Beitzah*, בֵּיצָה, تخم مرغ

   - A hard-boiled egg, symbolizing the *korban chagigah* (festival sacrifice) that was offered in the Temple in Jerusalem and was then eaten as part of the meal on Seder night. The Passover offering was offered only on the holiday after which it is named. The *Chagigah*, or festival offering, was made on all three pilgrim festivals (Passover, Sukkot and Shavuot). After the Temple was destroyed by Rome, these substitute foods (a bone and an egg, both roasted) came into use. Unlike the other substances on the Seder tray, the two cooked foods (the bone and the egg) are not actually eaten, however. They were to remain uneaten specifically to demonstrate the lack of a Temple and a sacrificial cult and their replacement by symbolic substances only. Of course today, Persians eat hard boiled eggs as this part of the *Haggadah* section.

6. Lettuce کاهو

   In some families, lettuce is also used (in place of the ground-up horseradish). This "extra" item makes up the sixth place on the Seder plate, for those who use six, not five, foods for it. Its inclusion has to do with the confusion between *maror* and *chazeret* that we discussed above. Sometimes the bitter herb of *maror* was separated from the bitter herb of *chazeret* and *chazeret* was given its own place on the plate. *Chazeret* was often a piece of lettuce, like the original romaine lettuce that was used.

People using six items thus had one place on the tray for *maror* (horseradish, either the root or the ground up sort) and another place for *chazeret* (lettuce). Alternatively, some people use lettuce for the *karpas*, and reserve horseradish for the *chazeret*, as above.

5. Seder Plate Originates from Mishnah Pesachim 10:3

הֵבִיאוּ לְפָנָיו, מְטַבֵּל בַּחֲזֶרֶת, עַד שֶׁמַּגִּיעַ לְפַרְפֶּרֶת הַפַּת. הֵבִיאוּ לְפָנָיו **מַצָּה וַחֲזֶרֶת** וַ**חֲרֹסֶת** וּ**שְׁנֵי תַּבְשִׁילִין**, אַף עַל פִּי שֶׁאֵין חֲרֹסֶת מִצְוָה. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בְּרַבִּי צָדוֹק אוֹמֵר, מִצְוָה. וּבַמִּקְדָּשׁ הָיוּ מְבִיאִים לְפָנָיו גּוּפוֹ שֶׁל פָּסַח:

[Then] they [servants, in those days] set [food] before him [each individual at the Seder table] . He [each person served] dips the lettuce before he reaches the course following: the [unleavened] bread. [Then] they set before him unleavened bread, *chazeret*, and *charoset* and two cooked dishes, although the *charoset* is not compulsory. Rabbi Eliezer bar Tzadok says: It is compulsory. And in the Temple they used to bring before him the body of the Passover-offering.[9]

From this we know that we have *matzah*, *chazeret*, *charoset*, and two cooked dishes which (nowadays) are the egg and the shank bone. *Maror* is not mentioned, but it is required biblically, so it must have been eaten. No doubt, the *chazeret*, then romaine lettuce was the *maror*. As we said above, *karpas* as a separate entity was added later.

As we saw also, *chazere*t posed a question. Do we have lettuce as part of *maror* or is it something separate? Is it 5 or 6? However you resolve it, most people today have 6 symbols on their Seder plate – a choice that has to do with Kabbalah and the movement we call Chasidism.[10]

The medieval Kabbalists had devised a mystical system in which they imagined various emanations of God at the very beginning of time, something like the big bang.

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[9] Translation, sefaria.org

[10] Philosophy having to do with the Chasidic movement from the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov.

These emanations eventually became the universe. The first three emanations represented the initial planning of the universe, so to speak. The last seven represented stages of that planning as they became the actual universe itself. Seven thus became a favored number of the Kabbalists,

Of the seven, the last, the seventh, constituted the actual birthing of the physical universe. The prior six emanations were something like the gestation stages of the universe but pre-utero, the uterus of God, actually – God was imaged as both masculine and feminine. The seventh emanation was the uterus itself, into which the prior six emanations emptied, only to be birthed into a universe as we know it.

Kabbalists therefore preferred six items on the plate. The plate which held them was considered the seventh one, the “uterus” holding the upper six.

Hasidism was born in eighteenth century Poland and Ukraine. The Hasidic masters inherited kabbalistic thinking and emphasized it, thus mandating the six-food Seder plate.

Eventually, six items became the norm, not because all Jews are now Kabbalists – far from it – but because six items could also be arranged as the six points of the six-pointed star of David, a design that Seder-plate manufacturers marketed to Jews as symbolically Jewish.

1. Persian *Charoset* חֲרוֹסֶת: *Halegh* (هَلَق) or *Haleghieh* (هَلَقیه)

Another point of pride for the Persian cook is the *charoset* (חֲרוֹסֶת), the mixture that recalls the mortar the Jews used in their bondage. For Iranian Jews *charoset*, referred to as *halagh* or *haleghieh*,[11] takes the form of a paste, made differently, depending on the region of origin in Iran. Ashkenazi *charoset* is usually made from red wine, apples, and nuts. Early on, Sephardi Jews around the Mediterranean preferred various forms of fruit available to them, especially those that they saw mentioned in Song of Songs.

In Tehran, nowadays, *charoset* combines pomegranate juice, walnuts, pistachios, grape juice and wine. Jews of Kurdistan use sesame seed paste and those in southern Iran, incorporate date nectar, paste or juice, which is also used in Iraqi *charoset*. Even in my own Shirazi family, different family units hold different recipes for the *halagh*.

[11] The origin of *halegh* is not clear. Rav Saadia Gaon (tenth century) uses the word and attributes it to a kind of walnut that was a mandatory ingredient in the preparation of the *halegh*. Parts of the Jewish Diaspora in Iran have a tradition of including forty different ingredients in the *halegh*. The number forty signifies the forty years of wandering in the desert.

2. Chazeret, חֲזֶרֶת : romaine lettuce, کاهو سبز,

There is a saying in Farsi, “Life is like a cucumber, it's a little bitter towards the end.” Although the Sages state that the commandment to eat *maror,* bitter herbs, can be fulfilled by many vegetables, they favored *chazeret,*"a variety of lettuce that initially produces tender leaves but eventually develops a tough, woody stalk. The Talmud compares the Egyptians to *chazeret* because they were soft in the beginning and hard in the end (Pes. 39a): initially they paid the Israelites for their labor, but later they forced them to work without pay."[12]

Arnow, commentary in Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah*, Vol. 1., 150.

7. General Statement about the Passover and the Meaning of the Word Seder סֵדֶר:

It is evident that the order of the Seder is actually no order at all. That is to say, it does not follow logic. To be specific, the word Seder, סֵדֶר, means "order." However, if we compare Passover to Shabbat, we quickly gather that most of rituals of the evening are in disorder. For example, per usual, we begin with sanctifying the wine, *kiddush* קִדּוּשׁ, but then we wash our hands without a blessing. Additionally, instead of following the washing by the eating of bread, we dip vegetables first and then break bread— without eating it! There are also three matzot, instead of the usual two.[13] Then again later on, when we invite the hungry to join us in eating, we remove the Seder plate that is the symbol of the Seder meal. This is all in anticipation of the Four Questions, מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה, the section of the telling (מַגִּיד) of the story of Passover.[14]

We also learn that Rabbi Akiva, at this point, used to hand out treats to the children, both to retain their interest, and to make them wonder why they were getting dessert before the meal.[15]

What we make of this “disorder” depends on how we study it, and tradition can be studied in many ways. One of them is historical – a reiteration of the history behind a custom. The other is symbolic: asking what a given custom or tradition can teach us.

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[13] Kasher, *The Passover Haggadah*, 31.

[14] Strassfeld, *A Passover Haggadah*, 21.

[15] ibid, 21.

Historically, we know why this strange “disorder” came about. Originally, the meal was eaten first. The Seder followed the order customary in Greco-Roman festive banquet – complete with hors d’oeuvres and a full dinner following. The *Haggadah*, the telling of the tale, came after all the food had been consumed. It was a true order: eat first according to the usual way of eating a meal and then spend the night talking.

The problem with that arrangement was that people tended to “eat and run,” never even getting to the “telling” which is the whole point of the Seder. When that happened, the natural order of things was thrown off course, so that nowadays, we have a different and illogical “order” to the night’s proceedings.

All of that is historical. But what about the symbolic meaning of the Seder as we now have it? Can we learn anything from even the order of events that is not what we would have expected it to be? Indeed we can.

You cannot control life. We all know this truth and yet we go ahead and try and control it anyway. With blood, sweat, and tears, most of us work hard at attaining our dreams. But more often than not, life takes us on a different journey than we had planned. With the *Haggadah* as our guide, the Passover Seder reminds us of this very principle.

In other words, sometimes the greatest lessons in life are learned when everything is turned upside down. Usually, it is when we hit rock bottom or when everything is in disarray that we are forced to stop and reflect back on our life choices. Our tradition is aware of this truth and gives us a taste of this reality during the Passover Seder. By jumbling up our usual ways, we are induced to ponder our decisions to always operate in

a certain way. But life, our tradition is teaching us, is not about finding the right answers; it is about asking the right questions.

8. Seder Section: Make Kiddush קִדֵּשׁ

9. Seder Section: And Wash וְרָחַץ

Before filling the second cup of wine, we are asked to wash – the first of two required washings. But the Hebrew just says “wash and pour the wine.” (Literally, the word for “pour” is “mix,” because in antiquity, wine was preserved in a very thick and potent form, and then mixed with water before serving.) The two washings originally corresponded to the two stages of the meal: the hors d’oeuvres, and then (again) the main meal following. Nowadays, the meal has been moved to the end. The first washing is still followed by at least a hint at the hors d’oeuvres (*karpas*, eating greens) and the second washing introduces the meal at the end.

1. A word about רוחצים (washing) in Persian tradition:

In the Yemenite as well as in the Persian custom, the wine cups are rinsed, and only *then* filled[16]. The process of rinsing is referred to as "*riseh*" which is Judeo-Persian for "wash," as in the Hebrew, r.ch.tz , *rochatzim* ,רוחצים as written in my title above. Among many Persians, it is a custom to have the women of the family alternate in the "*mitzvah*" of rinsing and pouring one round of the four cups; I place the word *mitzvah* in quotes because I could not find any proof for this as a commandment. It does say in the Mishnah (Pes. 10) that "they [the servants] mixed[17] wine for him [each Seder participant]" מָזְגוּ לוֹ כוֹס רִאשׁוֹן. We know they had servants and, as my translation indicates, the "they" here was probably referring to them. It is also plausible, however, that it was the women who poured the wine and brought the food around, and not the servants. Many of our rituals have been formed out of a patriarchal culture, and the work of the women may have gone unmentioned. For example, the next step of the Seder is וּרְחַץ , which is the washing of the hands; in many traditional households, the women bring around the wash basin for the men to partake in this *mitzvah.* At any rate, Persian custom may have considered the ritual practice of *riseh (*washing*)* a *mitzvah* and transferred it to the cups used for wine.

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[16] The Talmud (b. Berakhot 51a; y. Berakhot VII, 6 11cd) lists a number of requirements for a cup of blessings. Some are that the cup needs to be "washed" inside and out and "dried" before being used; it must be "fresh" and "full." The Sephardic interpretation is that the "fresh" refers to the wine and that "full" is to fill the cup with wine (2/3rds or more), Guggenheimer, *The Scholar's Haggadah*, 239. I add, that perhaps because they had to mix the wine (מזג) that the tradition to add water has mainly continued to *riseh.*

[17] They mix the wine because it was strong. So "mix" (מזג), essentially means pour the wine.

In the previous section on the food items, we saw that the six symbols on the Seder plate were linked to the seventh one, the feminine aspect of God, according to Kabbalah and, later, Chasidism. Perhaps that is why all trays at my family Seder happened to be the *mitzvah* of the women to carry.

In the *riseh* ritual, it is customary to have a woman who is not married perform *riseh*, in the hopes of her finding a husband. At times, women pray in their hearts as they rinse and then pour the next cup of wine to then pass on to the attendees at the Seder table.

It should be stated that many Persians who now have migrated to the United States since the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s, have generally adopted more egalitarian approaches to many of the traditions; while the women are not invited to also participate in the washing of hands (it is seen as a *mitzvah* for men alone) they are no longer usually seen bringing around the bowl for the men to use while washing (although in more traditional households this still may be the case). Additionally, because of the large number of Passover attendees, many Persian families use disposable cups instead of glass ones, and forego the rinsing step. But it is a tradition very much alive and well in the Jewish Shirazi customs of Iran, from which I come.

10. Seder Section: *Karpas*, כַּרְפַּס, كرفس

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

Why does Passover fall in the Spring?

Though Passover is mentioned in the Torah, as a sacrifice that needs to be made for God on the first month of the year, and on the fourteenth day of that month, as stated in Leviticus 23:5, it does not specify the name of the month. All we know is that traditionally, Passover is the first holiday of the year, which began with the Hebrew month of Nisan. But the Rabbis had more than one new year, much as we today have several (a school year, a fiscal year, a calendrical year, and so on). One of them was the beginning of the month of Tishrei, considered the new year on which we all appear before God for judgement. Over time, that became our generally accepted “real” new year, even though biblical Jews dated their calendar from Nisan, the month the Jews were released from slavery to become the people they were intended by God to be.

But the new year of Nisan also corresponded to the Spring, the rebirth of nature itself. This was an agricultural society, after all. The calendar reflected the climate and agricultural world in which Jews lived. In other words, how did they now it was time for Passover? They looked outside and saw that the world was becoming green and therefore it was time for the holiday of the spring, *Aviv* (אָבִיב), because things were blossoming.

In addition, the Jewish calendar is both lunar and solar. We count months strictly by the moon. But we retain a year that follows the sun. Passover must fall in the spring when the warm sun returns and brings life renewed.

But twelve lunar months (as an average length of 29.5 days each), adds up to, roughly, eleven days short of the solar year. Were we to go by a 12-month cycle only, sometimes Chanukah would end up in the summer or the spring, and Passover would fall in the winter. Yet Leviticus 23:5 is clear: the month of Nisan , the first month of the biblical year, with Passover in it, must fall in the Spring.

In order to make sure Nisan did not fall steadily back into winter (eleven days at a time, year by year), the rabbis added a thirteenth month a second Adar, אֲדָר ב׳, every seven of nineteen months.

Passover, as aforementioned, falls on the 15th of the month of Nisan. In Israel it is celebrated for 7 days and in the diaspora for 8 days. Because the central meaning of Passover is about liberation from slavery, it is also called, *z'man heiruteinu* (זְמַן חֵרוּתֵינוּ), the season of our liberation. Another name for Passover is *chag he-aviv* (חַג הָאָבִיב), the holiday of spring, since as mentioned above, it falls in said season.

Once again, we can explain things – in this case, Passover as a spring season -- in two ways: historical and symbolic. Historically speaking, long before Passover was said to be about the Exodus, it was simply a harvest season – falling when the barley harvest ripens, which is to say, in the Spring. The Bible knows it as a harvest (and pilgrimage) festival on one hand; and as the celebration of the Exodus on the other. Symbolically, however, we can say that the reason Passover is celebrated in the spring is by design.

"Following the bleakness of winter when everything is covered with the shrouds of snow, spring marks the rebirth of the earth with the bursting forth of green life."[18] Likewise, a people oppressed in slavery are freed from Egypt and eventually make it to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, spring and Passover are both about hope and rebirth. Accordingly, the symbol of the *karpas* is connected to springtime.

The *karpas* is some kind of green vegetable, (reminiscent in Roman times of victor's laurels[19]), connected to the green of spring. The other is celery; in fact, the English word "parsley," which comes from Greek, actually means 'rock celery.' (There are two, presumably unrelated, Hebrew words *karpas.* We see one here. The other, appearing only once in the Bible, in the Book of Esther, denotes a kind of linen. It probably comes from the Greek word *karkasos,* a kind of woven flux).[20]

In Farsi, the word for כַּרְפַּס is کرفس, pronounced *karafs,* which audibly is very similar to the Hebrew. The meaning in modern Farsi is "celery," which is what Persians use to dip in wine vinegar.

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[18] Strassfeld, *A Passover Haggadah,* 5-6

[19] Landes commentary, in Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 139

[20] J. Hoffman, commentary in Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 130.

11. Seder Section: *Yachatz*, יחץ

1. The Laws of *Yachatz*, יחץ:

1. The larger broken part is put aside as *afikoman.*
2. While hiding and seeking the *afikoman,* one should be careful not to break it further.
3. It should not be so well hidden that it cannot be found.
4. According to the *Gra*, Rabbi Elijah Gaon of Vilna (18th century), and one of the most revered rabbis in Ashkenazi lore, only two pieces of matzah are used. After *yachatz,* one has only one and half pieces left.[21] In fact, two was probably the original number, since some of the geonim (rabbis in Babylonia after the Talmudic era) mention having only two.

[21] Landes, commentary, in Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 140

2. A word about *matzah*

Another name for Passover is *chag Ha-matzot* (חַג הַמַּצּוֹת), the holiday of *matzot* (unleavened bread). The "holiday of *matzot*" is probably the original name of the holiday, the name arising from its agricultural significance; "Holiday of Passover" is the later name, the one arising from its being seen as the anniversary of the Exodus.

Naming it after *matzot* may have a further symbolic meaning, derived from, Philo, a Greek-Jewish Philosopher from 1st century Egypt,[22] who used allegory as a means to find "hidden" meanings in biblical law and lore. Philo notes that bread is essentially the same thing as *matzah,* except that *matzah* is not puffed up. For the rest of the year, we can eat the extras of life, but on Passover we remember what is essential for survival. In others word, what would you pack if you had to leave everything behind?

For recently immigrant Persian Jews, this question is reminiscent of a question that loomed over their heads not so long ago. As many escaped the Iranian Revolution of the late 1970s, they had to make these very decisions. I can't help but wonder as I sit around them at the Seder table, how often my parents' generation must reflect on what they left behind, what they wish they had taken with them had they only known they would never be going back. Similarly, the Haggadah tells us that the reason for *matzah* was that there was insufficient time for our ancestors' dough to become leavened. As one rabbi points out, "It takes approximately 18 minutes for dough to rise. They were in such

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[22] Strassfeld, *A Passover Haggadah, 9*

a rush they didn't have 18 minutes."[23] At any rate, the look and taste of the *matzah* itself is supposed to trigger within us the very story of Passover, so that we ask questions.

Although we are *allowed* to eat *matzah* during all of the holiday of Passover, we are *commanded* to eat it only during the Seder.[24]

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[23] Tom Meyer, "Immediate Changes," http://www.aish.com/h/pes/h/Matzah_Explained.html, (April 2, 2003).

[24] Strassfeld, *A Passover Haggadah, 9*

12. Section Seder: Telling מגיד

1. *Ha lachma*, הָא לַחְמָא

Directions: We uncover the matzah, lift up the plate for all to see. We begin the recital of the Haggadah with the words:

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהָתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרָיִם. כָּל דִכְפִין יֵיתֵי וְיֵיכֹל, כָּל דִצְרִיךְ יֵיתֵי וְיִפְסַח הָשַׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל. הָשַׁתָּא עַבְדֵי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין

“This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry should come and eat, all who are needy should come and partake of the Passover sacrifice. Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people."

Farsi in Persian Haggadah:

این نان فقیرابه ای است که پدران مادر کشوره مصر (هنگا می که برای مصر یان بیگاری نموده به گل کاری و خشت زنی وسا ختمان کردن مشغول بوند) می خوردند. هرکسی که گر سنه است بیا ید وازان بخورد (تا تصدیق کندکه باوجودگرسته بودن بازهم خوردن این سخت است). هرکسی که حتیاج داردبیایدوشح را نگهدارد. امسال دراینجا هستیم وسال آینده درسزمین ایسرائاخواهیمبود. امسال اینجا بنده وزیردست هستیم وسال آینده درسرزمین ایسرائل آزادوسرباند خواهیم بود.

Translation of Farsi:

This bread that is like poor people's bread that our fathers brought from Egypt (when they worked like slaves and were building the buildings they ate of these breads). Anyone who is hungry come and eat this bread (then they realized even when you are hungry you still can't eat it). Anyone who needs to keep Passover come and do it. This year we are here and next year we are at the land of Israel. This year we are enslaved and shameful next year in the land of Israel we will be free and proud.

هاگاداکه شرح وقایح خروج از مصر است با خوشحالی و با صداي بلند مي خوانيم.

نضفه مصايي راکه بين دو مصا ی درست گذاشته شده است دردست گرفته و

הָא לַחְמָא را میخوانیم

Translation of Farsi:

The Haggadah explains the detailed events of the Exodus from Egypt, that, with joy and loud voices we sing. We place in our hands the half matzah that is in between the two whole matzot and we recite the הָא לַחְמָא.

Background on *Ha lachma*:

This passage is first found in Seder Rav Amram Gaon (our first prayerbook; c. 860 CE), and is dated by some scholars as very late, therefore, not until the 9th century. Other scholars think it came earlier, all the way in the 1st or 2nd century when the Haggadah was just being formed.

Persian Ritual *Ha lachma*:

Ashkenazi Jews (and many Sephardi Jews also) simply recite these lines. Frequently only the leader says them. In Persian custom, by contrast, not just the leader, but everyone at the table must have a chance to hold the plate and recite the הָא לַחְמָא. Because there are always many attendees at the Seder, we begin at one end of the table and watch the tray eventually make its way to the other end, with one leader reading the הָא לַחְמָא aloud initially and the rest of the members—as many people who can place their hands under the plate, repeating it.

Language of *Ha lachma*:

Most of Jewish prayer is in Hebrew, but the language of *Ha lachma* is Aramaic, the lingua franca of much of the Middle East is late biblical times, and the language also, for Jew much later as well. The use of Aramaic here has received many interpretations. For one, it has been noted that the obligation to hear the telling of the Exodus includes women and children[25], who did not know how to read and understand Hebrew, so that the beginning of the "telling," *Ha Lachma*, is in the vernacular Aramaic. Various halachic authorities (the *Ritba*, for example, 14th century Spain) explained in the name of the noted French authority (11th century) *Rash6* – namely, that it is in Aramaic so that demons wouldn't understand it, particularly the invitation for כָּל דִכְפִין, "let all who are hungry enter the house.[26] *Ritba* also suggests that this passage is in "Aramaic so that angels too

[25] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 144.

[26]Gray, commentary, in Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 126-127.

will not understand it and then seize upon the occasion to argue in heaven that our sins make us unworthy of redemption."[27] Finally, the last words of the passage are in Hebrew, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין, "next year free", so that the non-Jews among whom the Babylonian Jews lived, would not think that the Jews hoped to one day leave them and return to Israel.[28]

If, however, the *Ha lachma* actually does go back to the 1st and 2nd centuries, then it may have arisen because of historical conditions at the time. Originally, when a lamb was offered as the Passover sacrifice, "for financial reasons, and because an entire lamb is so large, families would band together in a fellowship—or, better, a 'tableship'—group called a *chavurah* to consume a single sacrifice. But to count as a valid sacrifice, it had to be legally owned by all the participants." They were expected to put their hand on it or in some other way to indicate its joint ownership by one and all. Once the Temple had been destroyed, so that actual sacrifices were impossible, a piece of *mat4zah* replaced the lamb, at which time, *Ha lachma* was used as a legal formula to indicate joint ownership of the *matzah*, at the beginning of the Seder meal. Because it is a legal formula, the vernacular was used – Aramaic is generally the language of Jewish legal documents (the wedding document, or *k'tubah* , for example). [29]

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[27] ibid, 127

[28] ibid, 127

[29] L. Hoffman, in ibid, 135

Background on *Ha lachma* – in Persian lore

My family explains that for the majority in Iran, back in the day, meat was eaten on Shabbat alone, because it was too expensive to use daily. Similarly, the *Ha lachma* is believed to be a remnant of the days when a real Passover sacrifice (real meat, that is) was possible. Perhaps this is why everyone puts their hands under the Seder plate during the *Ha lachma*, in Persian custom: *matzah* eventually took the place of the Passover sacrifice, and is reminiscent of actual meat eaten once upon a time.

2. The Four Questions, מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה

Directions in Farsi state: The second cup of wine is filled, and the plate is put down, the matzah is covered, and the youngest asks the Four Questions in a loud voice, singing.

پیاله های یایین را برای باردوم پر نموده جلوی هر یک از ا هل مجلس مگذاریم سیب پسح را ازروی میزبرداشته و کنار میگذاریم وکوچکترین فردذکور خا نواده که باداست מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה رابه صدای بلندمی خواند

Ashkenazi Custom:

מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלֵּילוֹת?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חָמֵץ וּמַצָּה, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה - כֻּלּוֹ מַצָּה

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׁאָר יְרָקוֹת - הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה (כֻּלּוֹ) מָרוֹר

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מַטְבִּילִין אֲפִילוּ פַּעַם אֶחָת - הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְעָמִים

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין - הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כֻּלָּנוּ מְסֻבִּין

Sefardi and Persian Custom:

מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלֵּילוֹת ?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מַטְבִּילִין אֲפִילוּ פַּעַם אֶחָת

וְהַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְעָמִים

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חָמֵץ וּמַצָּה, **וְהַלַּיְלָה** הַזֶּה כֻּלּוֹ מַצָּה

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׁאָר יְרָקוֹת, **וְהַלַּיְלָה** הַזֶּה (כֻּלּוֹ) מָרוֹר

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין **וְשׁוֹתִין** בֵּין יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין, **וְהַלַּיְלָה** הַזֶּה כֻּלָּנוּ מְסֻבִּין[30]

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[30] Guggenheimer, *The Scholar's Haggadah*, 25.

In the Persian Haggadah, אָנוּ is replaced with the variant form אֲנַחְנוּ and it does not include the word כֻּלּוֹ in parentheses or otherwise, before the word מָרוֹר.[31] The Farsi translation of the Hebrew (see above in **bold** font) further includes specifications that "in other nights we dip **vegetables** and **lettuce**, not even once in **vinegar** or ***charoset***," and that "in other nights we eat either while sitting or while leaning on our **left elbow** as we **drink** and eat."

In Mishnah Pesachim 10:4, the order of the foods set the standard for what became the Ashkenazi tradition. But the part about reclining was added after the Mishnah, not in the Land of Israel, that is, but in Babylonia. Jews in the Roman would have followed Roman custom, according to which everyone reclined as part of normal dinners. It was not something different that they did only on Passover. But in Babylonia this custom of reclining, which was otherwise not the norm at all, was borrowed as one of the Seder traditions, so that Babylonian Jews reclined only at the Seder. In Babylonia, then, it was not customary to recline and therefore, reclining could be cited in the Four Questions as an aspect that we partake in because it is something out of the ordinary.

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[31] Nataneli, הגדה של פסח — هَاگادا شِل پِسَح,12.

1.A word about the importance of asking Questions:

In Russian, the word for occupation is робо́та"robota" (which also means slave) because so often we act like robots in the workplace, going through our daily tasks as if on autopilot. But our tradition teaches that to expand the mind, we have to ask questions. After all, the pages of the Talmud are filled with Rabbis arguing back and forth, asking many questions and often ending without a conclusive answer. At times, the argument would end with תיקו, *teiku,* which is Aramaic for: it's a draw, or let's agree to disagree. These Rabbis of the Talmud knew that life was not about finding the right answers, but about honing the skills of asking the right questions.

Accordingly, in the Talmud (Pes. 115b-116a) there is discussion over whether any question posed is sufficient to exempt the asking of the *Mah Nishtanah* and to then skip directly to the section that begins telling the tale of the years of slavery, *Avadim hayyinu.* After all, in the Mishnah, the *Mah Nishtanah* was originally no question at all but rather instructions for the father to pose questions to the son. However, as we saw above, in the event that the son might lack understanding, the father is supposed to note “How different this night is from all other nights,” an exclamation that was eventually seen as a question, "How is this night different than all other nights?” Questions were always the norm, as we saw, but any question would do! As Rabbi Hoffman writes, "Before written texts, the Haggadah, 'the telling,' was improvised on the spot, but it had to follow this threefold formula: from degradation to praise and redemption. By the talmudic era (200-c.

550/650) a set of standard questions had been determined. But nonetheless, asking an unusual question cancelled the need to recite them."[32]

However, eventually, most authorities held that the actual *Mah Nishtanah* set of questions was necessary, even if other questions were asked. According to Rabbi Daniel Landes, "The child asks her or his own question because its genuineness is prized. The leader then reads the formal questions teaching this child the type of queries she or he may decide to ask one day…Eliciting from children a genuine questions and teaching them how to probe further are two educational tasks of the parent."[33]

In other words, our tradition emphasizes, from a young age, the importance of imparting a sense of curiosity for life, by remaining alert and observing of the goings on around us. Life is about questioning the status quo and assuring that we never again succumb to a robot or slave mentality.

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[32] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 154.

[33] Landes, commentary, in Hoffman, ibid, 155.

3. *Avvadim Hayyienu*, עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ

Directions: We continue with the following in the *Haggadah*

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרָיִם, וַיּוֹצִיאֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה. וְאִלּוּ לֹא הוֹצִיא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם, הֲרֵי אָנוּ וּבָנֵינוּ וּבְנֵי בָנֵינוּ מְשֻׁעְבָּדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרָיִם.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord, our God, took us out from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm. If the Holy One blessed be He had not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children, and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.[34]

1. Beginning with physical "degradation" [*g'nut*]: *Avadim Hayinu* "We were slaves"

After instructing the pouring of the second cup of wine, setting out *mah nishtanah,* and pointing out that a father must instruct his son at a level appropriate for him, the Mishnah (Pes. 10:4) says that the father (the Seder leader) is to "begin with disgrace [*g'nut*] and conclude with praise [*shevach*]." The Talmud naturally asks what it means to "begin with disgrace."…One view is that we should begin with "At first our ancestors engaged in false service [idolatry]", while the other view is that we should begin "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" (Pes. 116a).[35] We follow both views in the *Haggadah*. First we read "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" and then later we read the

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[34] ibid, 155.

[35] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 166.

section "At first our ancestors engaged in false service."[36] We begin, that is, with the possibility that degradation is indeed physical slavery; we later add the possibility that it is also spiritual idolatry.

[36] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 166-67.

2. Even if all of us were wise, וַאֲפִילוּ כֻּלָּנוּ חֲכָמִים

Directions: We continue with the following in the *Haggadah*

וַאֲפִילוּ כֻּלָּנוּ חֲכָמִים כֻּלָּנוּ נְבוֹנִים כֻּלָּנוּ זְקֵנִים כֻּלָּנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִצְוָה עָלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. וְכָל הַמַּרְבֶּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם הֲרֵי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח

Translation:

Even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all elders, and versed in the knowledge of the Torah, we would still be obligated to discuss the Exodus from Egypt; and everyone who discussed the Exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.[37]

Even if all of us were wise…

Nechama Leibowitz explains this Maggid section of the Haggadah as being designed to fulfill the commandment of telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt; it is found in Exodus 10:2—

וּלְמַעַן **תְּסַפֵּר** בְּאָזְנֵי בִנְךָ וּבֶן־בִּנְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלַּלְתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־אֹתֹתַי אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי בָם **וִידַעְתֶּם** כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה:

In order that you (**תְּסַפֵּר** singular) will tell in the ear of your sons and your son's sons what I did in Egypt and the signs that which I placed among them and that you (**וִידַעְתֶּם** plural) know that I am Adonai.

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[37] ibid, 167.

Leibowitz notes the verb change from the second person singular form (תְּסַפֵּר) as regards the one telling the tale, to the second person plural form (וְיֵדַעְתֶּם) as regards those hearing it. But properly, the hearers should be described in the third person. Instead of "you," we ought to have "they". Leibowitz explains the second person throughout to mean that in a true educational dialogue, the one who is transmitting knowledge also learns and grows.[38] In other words, because the verb remains in the second person ("you will know") rather than the third person ("they will know") to show that all parties present are participating. The group as a whole is the leader. In that sense, the learning experience is not only about gathering information for the first time, as in the case of the child, but about gaining a fuller experience of what we already know.

The message of this section is that God saved us "with a strong hand" which is found in Exodus 9:3, and "an outstretched arm" which is derived from 1 Chronicles 21:16. There are times in our lives where suffering can cause us to learn and become stronger souls. But it is understood that the Israelites suffered *too much* under the hands of the Egyptians, so much so that they had a slave mentality. Accordingly, we read in Numbers 11:4-5 and 14:4 that even after the Israelites were freed from Egypt they longed to return to the life of slavery, because that is the only life they ever knew. The Torah also teaches in Exodus 21:5 that even when a slave is freed from bondage, he or she may nevertheless chose not to leave, saying "I love my master….I will not go free."[39] In other words, for most of us, what we have been taught is what we have come to know as a way

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[38] Leibowitz, *Studies on the Haggadah from the teachings of Nechama Leibowitz,* 31.

[39] Miller,*The Slager Edition Haggadah —The Kol Menachem Haggadah,* 37.

of life. But what is familiar is not always what is right for us. Often we need to let go of who we are in order to become who we can be. Accordingly, the Sages explain the inclusion of:

וַאֲפִילוּ כֻּלָּנוּ חֲכָמִים כֻּלָּנוּ נְבוֹנִים כֻּלָּנוּ זְקֵנִים כֻּלָּנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִצְוָה עָלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם

Even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all elders, and versed in the knowledge of the Torah, we would still be obligated to discuss the Exodus from Egypt.

It is taken to mean that even the wisest person, like a scholar, is not exempt from discussing the Exodus from Egypt because *knowing* what the moral and upright thing is and *doing* it are two different stories. In Hebrew, Egypt is called מִצְרַיִם, *Mitzrayim*, which includes the words צַר, *tzar*, meaning narrow and מַצַר, *maytzar*, meaning distress or blockage. Accordingly for the Sages, Egypt represents a "blockage between the mind (what we ought to do) and the heart (what we are excited and motivated to do)."[40]

Perhaps, it is for this reason that we are reminded of the Exodus story in our daily and Shabbat liturgy, and even have the entire holiday dedicated to it as well. The very crux of our story is the Exodus from Egypt because the fear of repeating enslavement is a reality. It is for this reason that we get the following :

"If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt…then we would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt"

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[40] ibid, 39.

The Exodus from slavery to freedom is an *ongoing event.* We were slaves in Egypt and it can happen to any of us, wise or otherwise, again -- anywhere. Furthermore, the enslavement is not only physical, but could also be a psychological state.

5. Telling at Length

Directions: We continue with the following in the *Haggadah*

מַעֲשֶׂה **בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-עֲזַרְיָה וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן** שֶׁהָיוּ מְסֻבִּין בִּבְנֵי-בְרַק וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל-אוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה, עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ תַלְמִידֵיהֶם וְאָמְרוּ לָהֶם רַבּוֹתֵינוּ הִגִּיעַ זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית

Translation:

It once happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining at a Seder in Bnei Brak. They were discussing the Exodus from Egypt that entire night, until their students came and said to them: 'Teachers! The time has come for reciting the morning *Shema!'*[41]

Telling at Length: Explanation

In point of fact, we have two versions of this story, each of them with different Rabbis and each with a different emphasis, but both of them tales of Rabbis who stay up all night speaking of the Exodus. Both versions of the tale reflect the idea that the *mitzvah* of relating the Exodus is so central that “all who dwell on it at length are to be praised.” The two accounts exemplify dwelling on it all the way until morning!

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[41] ibid, 41.

According to one interpretation of this version of the tale, the order of the rabbis shows their rank. Rabbis Eliezer and Yehoshua are Rabbi Akiva's teachers. Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah has the status of *nasi* (leader of the supreme court) and therefore higher in status than Rabbis Akiva and Tarfon. Although Rabbi Tarfon was also Rabbi Akiva's teacher, he later became his colleague. Since Rabbi Akiva was the Rabbi of Bnei Brak and the Seder took place in his town, he is mentioned first.[42]

According to Portuguese Bible commentator and philosopher Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (1437-1508), this incident appears at this juncture in the Haggadah to affirm the aforementioned point that all men regardless of wisdom are obligated to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.[43] Furthermore, the incident further emphasizes the importance of the student and teacher's role during the Passover Seder; both serve as teachers and students at the same time.

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[42] ibid, 41.

[43] ibid, 40.

6. Telling at Night time? קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שֶׁל עַרְבִית

Directions: We read the following in the *Haggadah*

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-עֲזַרְיָה: הֲרֵי אֲנִי **כְּבֶן שִׁבְעִים** שָׁנָה וְלֹא זָכִיתִי שֶׁתֵּאָמֵר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם בַּלֵּילוֹת עַד שֶׁדְּרָשָׁהּ בֶּן זוֹמָא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם **כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ**. יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַיָּמִים. כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הַלֵּילוֹת. וַחֲכָמִים אוֹמְרִים יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ לְהָבִיא לִימוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ

Translation:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said, 'I am like a man of seventy, and I never really got to hear [the meaning of] the discussion of the Exodus from Egypt at night until Ben Zoma explained it, quoting, 'in order that you remember the day you left the Land of Egypt all the days of your life.' 'The days of your life' refers to the days. 'All the days of your life' includes nights." But the Sages say, "The days of your life' includes the days of the messiah."[44]

Midrashic Explanation

I am a man of seventy: According to one tradition, when Elazar ben Azariah was asked to become head of the Academy, he consulted his wife who objected and said, "You have no white hair." He was eighteen years old at the time and a miracle occurred that eighteen

[44] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah*, Vol. 1., 174.

rows of hair on his beard turned white overnight. For this reason he states that he is *like* a man of seventy although he was only eighteen years of age at the time.[45]

Telling at Night time? קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע שֶׁל עַרְבִית Explained

In the Persian Haggadah, this discussion of Rabbi Elazar the son of Azariah and Ben Zoma, from Mishnah Berakhot 1:5, is explained at length, with special focus on the meaning of "all the days of your life", **כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ.** For Ben Zoma, the redundant "all" implies that your leaving Egypt should be mentioned during the day as well as at night. The passage is borrowed, however, from its original context, the laws about reciting the *Sh'ma*. The Mishnah prescribes it morning and evening. The issue under discussion is its recitation in the evening.

Most people think of the *Sh'ma* as a single line of prayer, but actually, it contains three paragraphs from different parts of the Torah. The third section of the *Sh'ma*, which references the Exodus from Egypt, also includes the *mitzvah* of wearing צִיצִת, *tsitsit* (the tassels of a prayer shawl). Since we are not allowed to wear *tsitsit* in the evening, it might be imagined that we recite this section of the *Sh'ma* in the morning but omit it in the from the evening recitation. We learn here that "we must recite the third paragraph of the *Sh'ma* at night as well as during the day, notwithstanding its focus on the daytime-only mitzvah of *tsitsit*."[46]

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[45] ibid, 177.

[46] ibid, 188.

The discussion had nothing to do with Passover, then. It was purely about reciting the evening *Sh'ma*. But because it references reciting the story of the Exodus at night, it was carried over into the Haggadah – another instance of reciting that very same story, and at a nighttime meal.

So much for the historical explanation. Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl gives a symbolic explanation by building on the meaning of "day and night." He explains that during the day, the mind functions with clarity. But at night, understanding evades us. Furthermore, if we can recall the Exodus during times of darkness,—calling ourselves to mindfulness (*da'at)*— we can thereby transform darkness into light in our own awareness. Therefore, "Ben Zoma's insistence that we mention the Exodus at night may allude to the need to maintain hope for redemption amidst dark times."[47]

Rabbi Arthur Green[48] offers the following on "Telling at night," the section that teaches the Exodus from Egypt has to be mentioned at night as well as during the day, (the final paragraph of the Sh'ma prayer):

> We need to ask ourselves every day, "To what am I enslaved?" We have neither Pharaoh nor Czar restricting our lives, but let's try on a few other

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[47] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 203.

[48] Rabbi Arthur Green is rector of the Hebrew College Rabbinical School and Irving Brudnick Professor of Jewish philosophy and religion. He is also professor emeritus of Jewish thought at Brandeis University. He is former president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. He is a rabbi, a historian of Jewish mysticism, and a theologian. (Biography from *My People's Passover Haggadah*, Vol 1, 264.)

categories to see where the shoe might fit. My need for a big monthly paycheck? Is that an "enslavement"? My vision of success, the constant push to higher and higher achievement? Am I enslaved to that? Or worse —am I enslaving my children to it? A life of affluence? Do I suffer from the "affluenza" disease that marks too many Americans?…How about addictions? entertainment? the computer screen?…"In order that you remember means that we need to ask ourselves these questions every day. Remember each morning and night what it is like to wake up to newly won freedom, and ask yourself how you can get there again, back to that moment of singing at the shore of the sea.[49]

[49] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 191-2.

7. Telling the Next Generation: The Four Children

Directions: We continue with the following in the *Haggadah*

בָּרוּךְ הַמָּקוֹם, בָּרוּךְ הוּא, בָּרוּךְ שֶׁנָּתַן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל, בָּרוּךְ הוּא. כְּנֶגֶד אַרְבָּעָה בָנִים **דִּבְּרָה תוֹרָה**: אֶחָד חָכָם, וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע, וְאֶחָד תָּם, וְאֶחָד שֶׁאֵינוֹ יוֹדֵעַ לִשְׁאוֹל

Translation:

Blessed is God. Blessed is He. Blessed is the One who gave Torah to His people Israel. Blessed is He. The Torah alludes to four children: one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who doesn't know how to ask.[50]

חָכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֵדוֹת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶתְכֶם. וְאַף אַתָּה אֱמוֹר לוֹ כְּהִלְכוֹת הַפֶּסַח: אֵין מַפְטִירִין אַחַר הַפֶּסַח אֲפִיקוֹמָן

Translation:

What does the wise child ask? "What are the precepts, statutes, and laws that Adonai our God commanded you?" You should respond by answering that according to Halakhah it is forbidden to conclude the *afikomon* after the Passover offering.

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[50] ibid, 170.

רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֲבוֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם. לָכֶם - וְלֹא לוֹ. וּלְפִי שֶׁהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכְּלָל כָּפַר בְּעִקָּר. וְאַף אַתָּה הַקְהֵה אֶת שִׁנָּיו וֶאֱמוֹר לוֹ: "בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם". לִי וְלֹא-לוֹ. אִלּוּ הָיָה שָׁם, לֹא הָיָה נִגְאָל

Translation:

What does the wicked child ask? "What is this service to you?" —"you" and not himself. By removing himself from the group, he misses the whole point. You should respond by chastising him and telling him, "This is what Adonai did for me when I left Egypt"— "for me" and not "for him," for had he been there he would not have been redeemed.

תָּם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מַה זֹּאת? וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו "בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים"

Translation:

What does the simple child ask? "What is this?" Answer him, "With a strong hand Adonai brought us out of the house of slaves."

וְשֶׁאֵינוֹ **יוֹדֵעַ לִשְׁאוֹל** - אַתְּ פְּתַח לוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם

Translation:

And the one who doesn't know how to ask? You should start, for it says, "Tell your child on that very day. 'This is what Adonai did for me when I left Egypt.'"

The “four sons” narrative is one of the most famous in the entire Haggadah. It has been traced by tradition to the four times that the Bible references a child “asking” about the Exodus. But actually, we have five such references. One of them is conveniently passed over in this explanation. Why, then, do we have four, not five?

Actually, historically speaking, we know that it follows the rules of rhetoric common to Roman times, and not just among Jews, but among debaters generally. It was commonplace back then to divide things into threes and fours. Indeed, our current text may be a conflation of two others, each one with three sons, not four. But in this final conflated version, we get four.

The final version then entered two other classical Jewish texts: a midrash collection from the second century, called *Mekhilta* and the Palestinian Talmud compiled some 200 years later. The version that we have in the Haggadah is a combination of both. It must have been added to the *Maggid* section sometime after the Talmud, a good example of the fact that the “telling” of the Passover tale at the Seder is no simple narrative, no simple story with a clear beginning, middle and end. It is, rather, a compilation of many passages, to the point that it is easy to read them all and still get no easily recognizable story of going from slavery to freedom. Every page is something of a commentary on the outline of that story which is more or less taken for granted. Here, the commentary discusses how the story should be told, the many versions of it from which a Seder leader might choose, depending on the nature of the child asking for it

We get a symbolic reading from *David Arnow.*[51]

> The Torah alludes to four children" but unlike the Haggadah, it passes no judgments on them. No question is more worthy than another: all are words of Torah. Despite Haggadah's very different approach, however, it still gives each child a seat at the table. In doing so, the Haggadah embodies a profound insight articulated by *Numbers Rabbah* (8:4): 'If you estrange those who are distant, you will ultimately estrange those who are near![52]

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[51] David Arnow, PhD, a psychologist by training, has been writing about the Passover Seder for twenty years. He is widely recognized for his innovative work to make the Seder a truly exciting encounter each year with Judaism's central ideas. (Biography taken from *My People's Passover Haggadah,*Vol. 1, 263).

[52] ibid, 178.

8. Telling at the Proper Time: the Seder itself

יָכוֹל מֵרֹאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ? תַּלְמוּד לוֹמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא. אִי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יָכוֹל מִבְּעוֹד יוֹם? תַּלְמוּד לוֹמַר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה - בַּעֲבוּר זֶה לֹא אָמַרְתִּי, אֶלָּא בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁיֵּשׁ מַצָּה וּמָרוֹר מֻנָּחִים לְפָנֶיךָ

Translation:[53]

It might mean on Rosh Chodesh. That's why it says, "on that very day." With just "on that very day," it might mean while it is still day. That's why it says, "this is what …." I say that "this is what…." can only mean the time when *matzah* and *maror* are put before you.

Commentary on the Whole

This is a final paragraph of several. We began with the four Rabbis who stay awake all night discussing the Exodus: an example of *how* one recites it – at length, that is, and all together. That is followed by the discussion about the propriety of reciting the tale at night: a response to the implicit question of *when* we say it. The four-sons narrative that follows discusses the various *ways in which we say it, depending on the ability of the hearers to understand it.* And finally, we get the link between saying it generally at night and specifically *here* at the *Seder*.

All four units arose separately but were strung together sometime after the Talmud by a final editor. They serve as an introduction to the story itself, the core of the larger *Maggid* section. Tradition uses the term *Maggid* (telling) for the bulk of the *Haggadah*, everything from (roughly) the four questions to the eating of food at dinner.

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[53] ibid, 175.

But in point of fact, this large body of text ought to be broken down into discrete sections. The questions launch us into telling the tale to begin with. Since the tale is about going from degradation to glory, and because the Talmud discusses what we mean by degradation, the questions are followed by a preliminary commentary on what is to follow: what we will mean as we discuss the story, whether degradation is just physical slavery or whether it is, perhaps, the spiritual and self-inflicted slavery of idolatry as well.

In addition, we have this late collection of text explaining such questions of how we tell the story, where we say it, and so on. They arose after the Talmud and could easily have followed the entire discussion of what degradation is – physical slavery or spiritual idolatry. But because they deal with the former (with slavery in Egypt) they were inserted after the first part of that discussion, after degradation as slavery, that is, after *avadim hayinu* – "we were slaves to Pharaoh…." We will now get to the second half of the opening debate of degradation, the idea that degradation is spiritual; it is idolatry. But the section on spiritual degradation (slavery) ends, as it happens, with an account of degradation as slavery. It therefore not only completes the opening philosophical discussion of degradation. It also actually begins the *Maggid*, the real story of slavery for which we actually assemble at the Seder.

9. Beginning with "disgrace" [*g'nut*]: Our Ancestors Worshipped Idols

Directions: We continue with the following in the *Haggadah*

מִתְּחִלָּה עוֹבְדֵי **עֲבוֹדָה** זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וְעַכְשָׁיו קֵרְבָנוּ הַמָּקוֹם לַעֲבֹדָתוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל-כָּל-הָעָם, כֹּה אָמַר ה

אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: בְּעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר יָשְׁבוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵעוֹלָם, תֶּרַח אֲבִי אַבְרָהָם וַאֲבִי נָחוֹר, וַיַּעַבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים

וָאֶקַּח אֶת-אֲבִיכֶם אֶת-**אַבְרָהָם** מֵעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר וָאוֹלֵךְ אוֹתוֹ בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וָאַרְבֶּה אֶת-זַרְעוֹ וָאֶתֵּן לוֹ אֶת-יִצְחָק,

וָאֶתֵּן לְיִצְחָק אֶת-יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת-עֵשָׂו. וָאֶתֵּן לְעֵשָׂו אֶת-הַר שֵׂעִיר לָרֶשֶׁת אֹתוֹ, וְיַעֲקֹב וּבָנָיו יָרְדוּ מִצְרָיִם

Translation:

At first our ancestors engaged in false service, and now God has brought us to His service, as it says, "Joshua told the entire nation, 'This is what Adonai, the God of Israel, says: In the past, your ancestors—Terach, Abraham's father and Nachor's father—lived across the river and served other gods. And I took your father, Abraham, from across the river and I led him throughout the entire Land of Canaan and I multiplied his descendants by giving him Isaac, and by giving Isaac Jacob and Esau, and by giving Esau the hill of country of Seir as his inheritance while Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.[54]

[54] ibid, 216.

1. The Desert of our Lives

The significance of the Passover story is that at some point in our lives, each of us finds ourselves in Egypt, and each of us must struggle to find our way out."[55] Thus far in the *Haggadah* we understand two ways of being enslaved: physical and mental. As aforementioned, these two views manifest themselves in separate explanations for the meaning of "degradation." Rabbi David Abudarham[56] (14th century Spain) explains that since the entire point of Passover is to recall the Exodus from Egypt, the only "degradation" we should recall is that of slavery. But the other view is that we need to mention the "historically earlier degradation that our ancestors worshipped idols."[57] As also previously mentioned we do not choose just one over the other, but follow both, first reading about the miraculous event of the liberation from Egypt and then work our way backwards in time to the disgrace of idolatry, and at the end of the idolatry statement, return to the main topic, “going down to Egypt” where slavery occurs. .

But according to Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman[58] the two are not idle alternatives. Hoffman explains:

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[55] ibid, 216.

[56] 14th century Rishon from Spain

[57] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah*, Vol. 1., 166.

[58] Lawrence A. Hoffman, Ph.D., was ordained and received his doctorate from Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion. He has served in its New York campus for more than three decades, most recently as the Barbara and Stephen Friedman Professor of Liturgy, Worship and Ritual. (Biography taken from My People's Passover Haggadah, pp. 265)

> Slavery is physical; idolatry is spiritual. The former can be forced upon us; the latter is our own choosing. When I was a rabbinic student, a hospital chaplain once explained that being relegated to bed, wearing only a hospital gown, and scarred from surgery is likely to be experienced by patients as degrading. Identifying degradation as idolatry teaches us that true degradation arises only from within, so that no matter what disease does to our outer appearance, we should not abandon our sense of inner dignity. But under the truly adverse conditions of illness, we are often unable to see that. Hospital visitors need to appreciate how patients are likely to feel, as their independence, even their ability to dress and groom themselves, is taken from them.[59]

In both versions we need the help of God to reach emancipation. This is the reason why Moses is never mentioned in the *Haggadah*, even though he is the one—arguably—who led us out of Egypt: we are to affirm God, not Moses, as the one who is is ultimately responsible for our redemption.

Additionally, part of the issue is failing to realize that at one point or another, we are all oppressed, degraded and disgraced, whether physically or mentally. Perhaps this is why Abraham and his father Terach are named in this section of the *Haggadah*: to explain the challenge of Abraham himself, and, by extension, of us all in redeeming ourselves from both physical and mental slavery.

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[59] ibid, 219.

The rabbis relate the following story about Abraham, in a midrash found in Genesis Rabbah by R. Hiyya:

> Abraham's father, Terach, was an idol maker. One night before going to sleep he left young Abraham in charge of the store. When Terach came back in the morning, he saw that the statues were strewn all over the floor, in bits and pieces. He was enraged, "What happened here?" he screamed at Abraham. His son just shrugged and replied: "The idols had a fight." Terach was furious. "They can't fight," he said. "Why, they can't even see or think!" Abraham said calmly, "Then, Father, why do you worship them?"[60]

This midrash explains the world in which Abraham had to free himself. Later in the chronology of the biblical narrative of events, in Genesis 12:1, God asks Abraham to "leave his land, his father's house and to go to a land that [God] will show him." The difficulty of leaving one's home is demonstrated in the naming of each item he would be leaving behind, land, home, etc. Additionally, God's command to go forth is translated from the Hebrew doubling of the word "go" לֶךְ־לְךָ, pronounced *lech-lecha.* For Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, this word doubling merely implies that Abraham should "go by [himself]" and that this is a journey that must be made alone[61]. But the Chasidic

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[60] David J. Wolpe, *Teaching Your Children About God: A Modern Jewish Approach* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 55.

[61] *JPS Tanakh: the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2008)., 112.

interpretation is that it actually means there is also an internal journey that Abraham must make, "go to *yourself"*[62] that is, go to your roots to find yourself.

In other words, the journey to true emancipation begins with the finding of our own potential in this world. The extra "*lech"* connotes Abraham's need to find himself, to not only *go* forth, but *go into himself.* Abraham lived in a town of idol worship and before he could even think of becoming a father of monotheism, he had to leave this context and leave this way of thinking behind him, in order to begin something new.

Sometimes we have to let go of who we are in order to become who can be. It's a difficult lesson to comprehend but the Passover story urges us to reflect each year on what we have been taught to think in our education from family, schooling, community, country, context and so forth; and to realize that we are the ones who are in charge of awakening ourselves from the slumber of our lives; that we alone hold the key to our own freedom in life. Or as Bob Marley put it so beautifully in his "Redemption Song,"—"Emancipate yourself from slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds."

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[62] ibid, 112.

Directions: We continue with the following in the *Haggadah*

בָּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַבְטָחָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, בָּרוּךְ הוּא. שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא חִשַּׁב אֶת-הַקֵּץ, לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ בִּבְרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם, יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע כִּי-גֵר יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם, וַעֲבָדוּם וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה

וְגַם אֶת-הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָּן אָנֹכִי וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן יֵצְאוּ בִּרְכֻשׁ גָּדוֹל

Translation:

Blessed is the One who keeps His promise to Israel. Blessed is He. After all, the Holy One of Blessing foresaw the end, when He would do what He said to Abraham our father during the splitting covenant, as it says, "He told Abram, '**Know that your descendants** will be strangers in a land that is not theirs; they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will judge the nation they serve, and then they will leave with great wealth.'[63]

[63] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 222.

Raise the cups of wine and say:

וְהִיא שֶׁעָמְדָה לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שֶׁלֹּא אֶחָד בִּלְבָד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, אֶלָּא שֶׁבְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ,וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מַצִּילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם

Translation:

This kept our ancestors and us going. Not just one group has risen up against us to destroy us, but rather in every generation they rise up against us to destroy us. And the Holy One of Blessing saves us from their hand.

Neil Gillman[64] offers the following on "Know that your descendants"

> The major question about our ancestors' enslavement in Egypt, the question that lurks implicitly throughout the Haggadah but is never explicitly addressed, is alluded to in this passage. Abram is told that his descendants will be oppressed before departing with great wealth (Gen. 15:13-14).
>
> Nowhere does the Torah address the burning question, why did God allow our ancestors to be enslaved? … In its crudest form, the issue is this: how can an

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[64] Neil Gillman, rabbi and PhD, is professor of Jewish philosophy at The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, where has served as chair of the department of Jewish philosophy and dean of the Rabbinical School. (Biography taken from *My People's Passover Haggadah,* 264)

omnipotent, just, and loving God allow innocent people and righteous human beings to undergo implacable suffering? That there are innocent people who do suffer terribly is obvious for all of us. This awareness poses the greatest challenge to people of faith in all religious traditions, and much of theology is expended trying to deal with it…That the Haggadah provides no answers to this question is only one problem; no theologian has ever come up with a satisfactory answer to why bad things happen to innocent people. The more serious problem is why the questions is never raised in the Haggadah itself. It should be raised around the Seder table. Now it is up to us to raise it.[65]

[65] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 222, 226-227.

The Ten Plagues:

The *Haggadah* continues with the actual story, but in a complex form that provides more commentary than it does story. It is, in form, a midrash to the barebone story as given in Deuteronomy 26. It deserves more attention that I am able to provide in this capstone – which is, recall, just a prototype. Rather than rush inadequately through it, I omit it, and turn to its ending, a recitation of the ten plagues – something I will include here, at least briefly, because of a custom connected to it.

The plagues are actually the end of the midrash. And they are not just listed. They come also with their own midrash, which provides the possibility that there were not just ten but a whole lot more. And they are preceded by a mnemonic, the initial letters of each plague that can be pronounced so as to remember what the plagues actually were. The reason for the mnemonic may be the fact that the Bible lists the plagues in several places, not all of them with the same listing. The mnemonic provides the ten plagues as listed in the Exodus account of them.

It is not my intention to replicate the list of plagues and their accompanying midrash and mnemonic here. I do, however, want to mention the custom that Persian Jews connect with the plagues.

As the plagues are recited, the Seder table is customarily covered with a lace table cloth. Although the origins of the custom are unclear, many suggest that it was considered a way to ward off bad luck or the evil eye that might be released by reciting this part of the *Haggadah*. Since Persians are somewhat superstitious and believe fervently in the power of words uttered, this makes sense.

The midrash on the plagues expands the notion of just how terrible God's judgement was on Egypt. Ten plagues might seem bad enough. But according to the midrash, there may well have been up to 250 of them! This flight of fancy is followed by a similar elaboration of just the opposite: a lengthy statement of just how many were God's miracles bestowed upon Israel. The list of miracles is given in two forms, a prose paragraph and a poem, known as *Dayeinu*. Both the midrash on the plagues and the elaboration of God's goodness to Israel are probably late additions to the Haggadah. Saadiah Gaon who wrote a prayer book with a Haggadah as part of it in 920 considers them both still optional.

Dayeinu:

Most Persian Jews might contend that the Seder's high point comes directly after the plagues, when the Jews are finally free and sing *Dayeinu*, praising the things God has done for the Jewish people. At this moment, everybody starts to hit one another with spring onions and proclaiming, "*Dayeinu*!" The spring onion pummeling might symbolize the whippings Jews received as slaves in Egypt. Or it could be a reminder to humble oneself before God. Whatever its meaning, it is a ritual that is executed with much laughter and energy. When wielded by an expert, a scallion can leave a wicked sting. Some families freeze the scallions in advance and leave members bruised.

The Farsi is chanted *separately.*

כַּמָּה מַעֲלוֹת טוֹבוֹת לַמָּקוֹם עָלֵינוּ

How many degrees of good did the Place [of all bestow] upon us!

אִלּוּ הוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא עָשָׂה בָהֶם שְׁפָטִים, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had taken us out of Egypt and not made judgements on them; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ עָשָׂה בָהֶם שְׁפָטִים, וְלֹא עָשָׂה בֵאלֹהֵיהֶם, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had made judgments on them and had not made [them] on their gods; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ עָשָׂה בֵאלֹהֵיהֶם, וְלֹא הָרַג אֶת-בְּכוֹרֵיהֶם, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had made [them] on their gods and had not killed their firstborn; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ הָרַג אֶת-בְּכוֹרֵיהֶם וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת-מָמוֹנָם, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had killed their firstborn and had not given us their money; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת-מָמוֹנָם וְלֹא קָרַע לָנוּ אֶת-הַיָּם, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had given us their money and had not split the Sea for us; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ קָרַע לָנוּ אֶת-הַיָּם וְלֹא הֶעֱבִירָנוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ בֶּחָרָבָה, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had split the Sea for us and had not taken us through it on dry land; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ הֶעֱבִירָנוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ בֶּחָרָבָה וְלֹא שִׁקַּע צָרֵנוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had taken us through it on dry land and had not pushed down our enemies in [the Sea]; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ שִׁקַּע צָרֵנוּ בְּתוֹכוֹ וְלֹא סִפֵּק צָרְכֵּנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had pushed down our enemies in [the Sea] and had not supplied our needs in the wilderness for forty years; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ סִפֵּק צָרְכֵּנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וְלֹא הֶאֱכִילָנוּ אֶת-הַמָּן דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had supplied our needs in the wilderness for forty years and had not fed us the manna; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ הֶאֱכִילָנוּ אֶת-הַמָּן וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had fed us the manna and had not given us the Shabbat; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת-הַשַּׁבָּת, וְלֹא קֵרְבָנוּ לִפְנֵי הַר סִינַי, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had given us the Shabbat and had not brought us close to Mount Sinai; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ קֵרְבָנוּ לִפְנֵי הַר סִינַי, וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה. דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had brought us close to Mount Sinai and had not given us the Torah; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה וְלֹא הִכְנִיסָנוּ לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had given us the Torah and had not brought us into the land of Israel; [it would have been] enough for us.

אִלּוּ הִכְנִיסָנוּ לְאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא בָנָה לָנוּ אֶת-בֵּית הַבְּחִירָה דַּיֵּנוּ

If He had brought us into the land of Israel and had not built us the 'Chosen House' [the Temple; it would have been] enough for us.

12. Conclusion:

The fact that Passover is in the Spring time is very important. The concept of time is also something to ponder. After all, it is an arbitrary concept, a set of humanly created categories. Today isn't Passover in the natural world, the way days and nights are because they follow the natural phenomena of the sun and moon. It is Passover only for Jews and only because we say it is. Even the natural cycles in the world are divided culturally into weeks, months and years that do not altogether follow the movement of the heavenly spheres that give them their essence. In addition, we name each seventh day Shabbat, and provide arbitrary divisions of days and weeks into festivals. But all of that is our doing. We make up these boundaries in time.

All of that is ongoing time as human beings live it day after day, month after month, year after year. In addition. However, there is time writ large, cosmic time, the time we call history. For the rabbis this larger scope of time is bookmarked with a beginning and an eventual ending. According to the Jewish narrative, history began with divine creation, seven days in which everything came into being, including the first human beings who enjoyed time in all its perfection, while living in Paradise (بهشت), in the Garden of Eden (גַּן עֵדֶן). We forever long to return to that place and believe that we will eventually do so in what we name the world to come, (הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא). In other words, the Rabbis took the best elements from the beginning of time and projected them onto what

they hoped would happen at the end of time.[66] Perhaps this is one reason why so many of us hold on to our traditions, believing that keeping things as close as possible to how they might have always been, can somehow connect us to the beginning of our biblical narrative. At any rate, "ancient Israel adopted an historical perspective, conceived of time in a linear, not cyclical fashion, and believed that God acted in history. As a result, biblical Israel historicized the festivals and made them commemorations of historical events, and not a re-enactment of cosmogony."[67] And at the same time, this ongoing movement of time reminds us of the ultimate goal of escaping it altogether, and returning to perfection.

Akin to this second concept of time, the idea that time always reminds us of a future that we await, alludes to another understanding of time which we can call mythic,[68] and which does relate to the time of origins. In this sense of time, festivals allow us to re-enact the events of our past, thereby repeating acts of our ancestors. This is a cyclical view of time, demonstrating that each year the same forces of chaos threaten anew and must be defeated again in order for the world to continue.[69] Though Judaism does not work exactly and solely in these terms, it does so in part, and to the extent that it does, one can say that the Exodus from Egypt is a lesson that we not only commemorate

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[66] Pilz, Sonja. “Jewish Time.” New York City, January 18, 2017.

[67] Rubenstein, Jeffrey I. "Mythic Time and Festival Cycle." *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997): 157.

[68] ibid, 159.

[69] ibid, 159.

annually on Passover—but that it is a recognition of something larger, something that comes up again and again in our lives. Kabbalah believes in the understanding of cyclical time. In terms of the Exodus, this would mean that we always go through narrowness at some points in our lives—such as feeling enslaved or lost in the desert—and we find ourselves needing to push through towards redemption.

What is interesting is that the rituals of Passover are not unique to Jews and were common amongst the ancient Near East festivals: "they fell near the vernal equinox, banned leaven, featured animal sacrifices, and often involved various blood rites."[70] For example the Babylonians "celebrated Akitu, an eleven day festival held in early Nissannu (whence the Hebrew Nisan). Similarly, the Persian New Year, Noruz (نوروز), shares many of the same themes as Passover.

The term Noruz is a Persian compound word, consisting of the word no + ruz, meaning a new + day. It is an ancient festival that marks the beginning of spring and celebrates the rebirth of nature. Just as Passover is a reminder for us that no matter how terrible our situation, we must not lose hope, and that the possibility of renewal is as "intrinsic to human nature as are blossoming trees to the natural world."[71] So too, Noruz has a lot to do with fresh, green foods just beginning to poke out of the ground that remind us winter is not, in fact, eternal. The seven symbols that are customarily placed on the Haft-seen (هفت‌سین) table, seven items that start with the Farsi letter "seen", are symbols of renewal and spring. Although the symbols of the Haft-seen do not all coincide

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[70] Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah,* Vol. 1., 13.

[71] Strassfeld, *A Passover Haggadah,* 5-6.

with the symbols on the Seder plate, the holidays are so closely related that as one writer stated, "If it happened in America, Jews would be calling it the March Dilemma."[72] In other words, just like Hanukah is amplified in America because it takes place at the same season of the year as Christmas, so too Passover is highlighted for Iranian Jews, because it is so closely timed with Noruz. The only difference is that Noruz, though originally a Zoroastrian holiday, has now come to have a secular meaning (although some may argue that Christmas in America has become secularized as well for many Jews that justify celebrating it). In my experience, the holidays come together harmoniously, one serving as reinforcement for the other. And as befits the spring, Noruz is a time of spring cleaning in Iran, khooneh takouni (خونه تکونی) which literally translates to "shaking the house" and is no ordinary dust and polish; but a floor to ceiling, basement to attic, under the rug, behind the forgotten piles in the closet kind of affair. For Iranian Jews, this is taken to a higher extreme with the cleaning of chametz (חָמֵץ) for the Passover.

Like this Zoroastrian custom, our rabbis made sure that the calendar marked the beginning of spring. Because they knew that after the darkness of winter, we need to mark the holiday of hope with Passover. The goal of Passover is not merely to celebrate our freedom or the coming of spring, but to use the time for reflection. By studying and learning about our biblical narrative, we grow and ask questions, and teach our children by example and instruction, what it means to traverse this sometimes difficult journey of life. The reason that our Torah spends the majority discussing the story of our travels

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[72] Holzel, "Persian Passover", http://washingtonjewishweek.com/1107/persian-passover/special-focuses/holiday-calendar/, (May 24, 2013).

through the desert, is because our entire lives are always in movement. That is, whether we are currently experiencing a moment of joy, sadness, or something in between—the moment itself is fleeting, so that the only constant in our life— is change. The story of Passover reminds us that in order to grow and live a life of true freedom, we need to name and "tell", *Maggid*, aloud of all modes of oppression. And that it is *how* we act as we a traverse the desert of our lives, by asking questions, holding on to the lessons of our past and symbols of hope for our future, that we will be able to one day—hopefully, לשנה הבאה, "next year"— reach our promised land. And as we say in Farsi with the help of God, انشاءالله (*inshallah*!)

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