# LANGUAGE AS IDENTITY: RETELLING OUR STORY

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# CHAPTER 1: THE CULTURAL FUNCTION OF JEWISH LANGUAGE

Jews are known for expressing themselves in unique ways. The languages that they use to communicate are a reflection of their social existence both within the Jewish community and in the communities that surround them. Language is intrinsically related to identity. The language, dialect, and even accent a person uses when they speak can say more about a person or group of people than the words they use. An Ohio native could order a "pop" instead of a soda in a New York City restaurant, and they would immediately be known as an outsider. A group of avid Harry Potter fans could discuss and analyze Voldemort's use of horcruxes, and people who know nothing of Harry Potter might feel left out, while at the same time, those involved in the discussion may feel a sense of self-worth in belonging to part of a group.

In the same way, Jews have used language, among other things, to separate themselves from the other cultural groups around them in the Diaspora. At the same time, there still exists a need to assimilate to a certain degree in order to survive. This requires knowledge of the local language. When it comes to the language of the Jews throughout their dispersion, historically, most Jews are bilingual, if not multilingual. While, orally, Jews picked up elements of the languages that surrounded them, most maintained varying degrees

of Hebrew usage.[1] The struggle to assimilate, yet somehow retain the uniqueness and separateness that defines Jews is fundamental in the formation of Jewish languages.

Speaking is an "instrument of social life."[2] Bauman and Sherzer, in discussing the ways in which ethnographers do their work of studying groups of people insist that assessing language and speech of the groups they examine is of vital importance to reaching real conclusions. An ethnographer must observe a cultural group's speaking habits in addition to the other components that make up its way of life in order to properly understand it. The editors suggest that awareness and sensitivity to both culture and language allow outsiders to better understand different groups of people.[3] The rituals people perform and the languages they use reflect unique experiences. They can tell us about a group's past and sometimes, even their hopes for the future. Furthermore, any element of a group of people, particularly language, cannot be examined in a laboratory, isolated from its living location. Ethnographers have to look at language as it occurs naturally.[4] Speaking, as a behavior, "is organized in each society in culture-specific ways."[5] Jewish use of language is certainly an expression of its religion and culture.

Bernard Spolsky and Sarah Bunin Benor state that, "ethnic and religious groups use language as one means of constructing and expressing their distinctness from other groups," in their article from *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. They continue to explore language in relation to Jewish culture by defining Jewish language. Many people

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[1] Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49.

[2] Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer, *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

[3] Ibid., 12.

[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] Ibid., 8.

may be surprised to learn that there is more to it than the use of the occasional Hebrew word or incorporation of Jewish ideas and customs. Here, Jewish language is defined as "any linguistic variety spoken by Jews that differs to some extent from the non-Jewish language(s) around it." It certainly could mean a few specifically Jewish or Hebrew words have been added in, or it could mean a vastly modified structure using a different set of vocabulary and writing system, or anywhere in between. These Jewish languages are generally used for verbal communication, and less commonly but still accepted, for written communication, between Jews. Historically, when Jews have interacted with neighboring groups of non-Jews, they usually had enough knowledge of the language of the land to communicate with those non-Jews.[6] One could go a step further and suggest that music and song, particularly when it is specific to a cultural group, falls within the realm of verbal communication, and therefore, serves as a route for exploring Jewish language.

Jewish vernaculars have come into existence as Jews migrated from place to place throughout history, throughout the Diaspora. They picked and chose the pieces and parts of Hebrew and of the local, non-Jewish languages that suited their needs. Some selections were made deliberately because of their connotations, while others happened by chance. While Hebrew remained the language of the liturgy—the *Lashon Hakodesh*—Jewish vernaculars were used for speaking and writing, including compositions of literature and philosophy.[7]

The structure of a Jewish language is usually based on the language of the other local people, and modifications are made with that foundation. No matter where Jews have migrated, they have been able to learn the language of the land and make it their own.

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[6] Bernard Spolsky and Sarah Bunin Benor, *Jewish Languages*, 2nd Edition, Vol. VI (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), 120.

[7] Lowenstein, *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry*, 49.

However, Yiddish and Judeo-Spanish are two Jewish languages that have remarkably been able survive its speakers' travels to other foreign lands.[8] Additionally, modern Israeli Hebrew does not necessarily fit the definition of what linguists call a "Jewish Language" because of its purposeful creation. Jewish languages are defined in large part by the language that precedes it—the language out of which it naturally develops. Modern Israeli Hebrew differs significantly from older versions of Hebrew, but its structure is highly influenced by Yiddish and it borrows from other foreign languages of the same geographical area. It is essentially unique within the realm of Jewish language.[9]

Today, Jewish languages as we know them are much less widely known, and few people still speak them. Many efforts have been made to preserve a few of the languages, but it is a difficult task. Assimilation, modernization, technology, and the development of modern Israeli Hebrew have significantly contributed to the dissolution of Jewish vernacular languages. Today, most Jews speak either modern Hebrew or the language of the land in which they live.[10] All of these developments and changes throughout Jewish history are a testament to our existence and our journey. They serve as a testament to Judaism's ability to adapt and somehow remain true to its followers, even when up against exile, annihilation, and modernity.

[8] Spolsky and Benor, *Jewish Languages*, 121.
[9] Ibid., 122.
[10] Lowenstein, *The Jewish Cultural*, 67.

## EXAMPLES OF COMMON JEWISH LANGUAGES

### ARAMAIC

Aramaic is perhaps the first (non-Hebrew) Jewish vernacular language. It is very closely related to Hebrew and uses the same Hebrew letters. In the Aramean states in Syria, it was the official language as far back as the 11th century. The use of the language spread, reaching through the vast Persian and Assyrian empires. The sixth century BCE is the time when we see the first specifically Jewish Aramaic texts come into existence. They originated from a Jewish military outpost in Elephantine, in modern-day Egypt. Other Jewish texts written in Aramaic include prayers, bible translations, some prophetic books, and the Talmud. Through thousands of years, even when other languages prevailed as the language of the land, Aramaic remained an important part of Judaism. As many important texts were written in Aramaic, there was still a need to know it and to use it for study purposes. Even some prayers written in the Aramaic remained so.[11]

### JUDEO-SPANISH

One of the most widely known Jewish languages is Judeo-Spanish. It is commonly referred to by many names, including *Judezmo, Zargon, Ladino, Spanyolit, Judyo*, and others. *Aljamiado* was Spanish text written in Hebrew characters. The language originated

[11] Sabar, Yona. www.jewish-languages.org/jewish-aramaic.html

out of Spain and was widely used during Ottoman Empire. Even after the expulsion from Spain, many Jews still carried the language with them. A group re-settled in North Africa after the expulsion and their use of Judeo-Spanish was called *Haketia*. Judeo-Spanish was developed as a vernacular out of a Jewish separation from non-Jews: "the Jews formed a religious ethno-sociological group that was different in customs and beliefs from the non-Jewish population." The separation is evident by the fact that Judeo-Spanish maintained defining linguistic and grammatical characteristics from earlier periods of Spanish history, while Spanish lost some of those defining characteristics, developing independently.

But of course, when other vernaculars are around, plenty of words and expressions make it into the language. Within the last century, we can see that Judeo-Spanish has more and more used Roman lettering rather than Hebrew lettering (Rashi script). Different dialects within Judeo-Spanish developed, as well, while the Jews were spread out. Furthermore, it is a dying language and the last native speakers are older than 60 years of age.[12]

## JUDEO-ARABIC

Author Benjamin Hary calls Judeo-Arabic, "an ethnolect (a linguistic entity with its own history and used by a distinct language community)." Judeo-Arabic is, at its most basic level, Arabic, with significant traces of Hebrew and Aramaic; it also employs the use of Hebrew letters. There is a rather large range of developments of Judeo-Arabic dialects. We see these developments come out of Iraq and Yemen, all the way to Spain and Morocco,

[12] Ora Schwarzwald, www.jewish-languages.org/judeo-spanish.html

including many other places in between. Jews from theses various lands would adopt parts of the language of the Arab groups that conquered them before the 8th century. Gradually, the Jews would incorporate those parts into their vernacular. Researchers have discovered that Judeo-Arabic was often the language into which the Jews translated non-Jewish literature.

A significant reason for the decline of the use of Judeo-Arabic has been emigration of speakers from Arab lands. Many have moved to Israel. Even those who have stayed in Morocco, for example, do not generally use Judeo-Arabic, but rather, they use French.[13]

## JUDEO-PERSIAN

Dan Shapira writes about Judeo-Persian, "there has never been a variety of spoken Judeo-Persian common to all Persian Jews."[14] The name, Judeo-Persian refers to both literary and spoken versions of Jewish Iranian language. In literature, Judeo-Persian is a type of New Persian that is particular to Jewish texts and is not commonly spoken among Jews today. The spoken Jewish language of the same geographical group of Jews is known as Judeo-Iranian. And what is spoken today amongst Persian Jews is New Persian, but the language is not distinctly Jewish.

Written with Hebrew letters, Judeo-Persian lived alongside the everyday language spoken by Iranian Jews. Judeo-Persian is a variant of New Persian, which means it was basically the same language that their fellow Muslim Persians used, but it included some

[13] Benjamin Hary, www.jewish-languages.org/judeo-arabic.html
[14] Dan Shapira, www.jewish-languages.org/judeo-persian.html

Hebrew (including lettering) or Aramaic vocabulary, with less Arabic vocabulary. Within Judeo-Persian literature, one can find poetry transcribed with Hebrew letters from its original Muslim-Persian. Judeo-Persian literature also includes original poetry and translation of the Bible and the Mishnah.[15]

## YIDDISH

The Language of the Ashkenazim (Jews of Central and Eastern Europe) is probably the most well known Jewish language all over the world. Yiddish, meaning "Jewish," is surely a major Jewish language. It is a separate language, not a dialect of German, contrary to what many believe to be true. It developed on its own out of Middle High German. A lot its of vocabulary is influenced by the Slavic languages. It uses the Hebrew alphabet, and only recently did the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research come up with a standard spelling system. Another name for Yiddish is *mame-loshn*, or "mother tongue," which contrasts with *loshyn-koydesh*, meaning, "holy language," which refers to Hebrew.

The span of Yiddish usage was incredibly widespread; its speakers were not only born in Germany, they were also born in France and Italy. There were many different dialects of Yiddish, and eventually a standard form of Yiddish developed and became more widespread in literature. The Yiddish literature that we see from before the 19th century was literature written for those Ashkenazim who were not as familiar with Hebrew. At that time,

[15] Dan Shapira, www.jewish-languages.org/judeo-persian.html

amongst Jews, Hebrew literature was held in higher esteem. Yiddish literature only gained more support in the 19th century. Yiddish was once the most widely spoken Jewish language during the time prior to Holocaust. Now, while very few people speak it, even fewer use it as their primary language. [16]

While there are countless other Jewish languages—some known and probably some unknown—these are five of the most prominent, widespread Jewish languages. Communication is vital to any cultural group. Jews, who have been spread throughout the Diaspora for thousands of years, have had to constantly rely on their ability to adapt to their locations, and therefore language. This kind of adaptation certainly does not happen overnight. A change like that takes time and effort for any group of people. This morph and the subsequent language form a significant representation of its people. It is one critical way for us to learn about the story of our people: the Jews.

[16] William F. Weigel, www.jewish-languages.org/yiddish.html

# CHAPTER 2: HAGGADAH

While each Jewish language reflects a unique Jewish story, perhaps the Jewish story that teaches us the most about the Jews is that of the Exodus from Egypt: The Passover story. This story is a defining point in the history of the Jews. It has been told and retold innumerable times—each time with the same goal: to remember. Steven M. Lowenstein posits that the Passover Seder is probably the Jewish ritual at which a vernacular language was used more than at any other ritual. He says, "this fit with the familial, folksy, and home-centered nature of the Passover ritual." The story was often translated into the vernacular and songs were sung in the same language.[17]

"Seders are meant to be lived experiences, not historical treatises," says Dr. Lawrence Hoffman.[18] He means that, while Jews have a general understanding of the parts of a Haggadah and a Seder, neither are meant to be fixed or something that is performed by rote. The whole purpose of the holiday and its associated traditions is simply an effort to remember the plight of our ancestors and to be eternally grateful for our freedom both then and now. Dr. Hoffman says:

> The Haggadah presents the foundational story of how we got here, and as its problem, it asks, implicitly, why it matters if the Jewish people continues. Each year demands its own compelling solution. That is why its script remains open and why, also, we have to reenact it year after

[17] Lowenstein, *The Jewish Cultural,* 65.

[18] Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 1*. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2008), 3.

> year… If we finish the Seder knowing for certain why the age-old tale of Israel's origins informs the people we are and the lives we pledge to lead, then, and only then, can we conclude *Dayyenu*—that, and only that, is enough.[19]

Jewish practice, in general, is intended to inform our everyday lives. Through practice, or performing a prescribed set of actions, human nature allows us to have an experience and make a connection. Learning about the Exodus from Egypt by simply reading the verses in the Torah is not as meaningful and probably not as memorable as hearing someone you look up to provide you with a dramatic telling or reenactment of the story. In this way, we are able to make a special connection to the story and to each other. When the story is special to us because of this connection, it becomes our own. "*B'chol dor vador chayav adam lir'ot et atzmo k'ilu hu hatza mimitzrayim*: in every generation, it is the duty of man to consider himself as if he had come forth from Egypt." These words, specifically meant for Passover, truly teach us to embrace the Exodus story as our own. So, to fulfill our duty, we have to go through extra steps on the holiday of Passover in order to internalize its message.

Instruction plays a key role in the Haggadah. The leader has to explain all the various items on the Seder plate, as well as the Exodus story all in a prescribed, ordered fashion to all the guests in attendance. But how do we know what all of those items are, and how do we know how to tell the story? In the Torah, in both chapters 12 and 13 of the book of Exodus, Moses takes some time to explain to the people God's intentions for them to remember the story of their liberation. They are commanded to make a Passover offering, to teach their children about the offering when they ask, to abstain from leavened bread, and to

[19] Ibid., 6.

commemorate the time yearly. Various places in the book of Deuteronomy also contain God's decree for the observance of Passover, including chapter 16. Another point of interest in the Torah, also in the book of Deuteronomy, can be found in chapter 26. The text from verse five to verse 11 is often included in the text of Haggadot. It contains the recapitulation of the story of the Exodus, and is probably the most familiar version of the story in the Bible.[20] When it comes to observance, these chapters speak mainly of three things: the elimination of leavened bread for the time of the commemoration, the importance of making a Passover offering—a sacrifice—and making sure the reasons behind the practices are made known to those who ask.

The Mishnah, which contains more instructions for the observance of Passover, acts as the source for Haggadot all over the world. The Mishnah is a work of *halacha*, of laws, written around the year 200 CE. It describes the many prescribed Jewish practices for post-Temple times. Even though it became canonized after the Second Temple was destroyed, it contains specific instructions for the Paschal Sacrifice, which would have been taken and performed at the Temple. Ancient historians, Philo and Josephus both give accounts of a Passover rite during the time the Temple stood, and they describe a ritual of sacrifice. They do not mention the retelling of the story.[21]

The Mishnah gives many details for the Seder ritual, including the drinking of no fewer than four glasses of wine, reclining, the Four Questions, and the retelling of the story. One could also see remnants of Greek influence in the Mishnah when it comes to the Passover observance: a Greek symposium was a common banquet where people drank wine and made time for special conversation. The Seder contains special foods, reclining, a

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[20] Arnow, David in Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 1*, 16.
[21] Ibid., 15.

specific discussion, and praising God, all of which would remind a historian of a rich, lavish Greek banquet.[22] The Mishnah's Seder descriptions are not totally fixed and unmovable; rather, it seems to have left things open to creativity. Furthermore, as David Arnow points out, "words of Torah" are a proper substitute for times when a sacrifice cannot be made, according to the Mishnah, itself.[23]

The order of the Seder, which can also be found listed in the beginning of most Haggadot is as follows:

1. *Kadesh*—"Sanctification" A blessing over the wine to sanctify the special time.
2. *Rechatz*—"Wash" One must wash his/her hands before the following ritual.
3. *Karpas*—"Greens" We notice the green vegetable on our plates as a symbol of spring.
4. *Yachatz*—"Division" A piece of *matzah* is broken to become the *afikomen*.
5. *Magid*—"Telling" At this point, the story is recounted.
6. *Rochtzah*—"Wash" Again, we wash our hands in preparation for the meal to come.
7. *Motzi*—"Bringing forth" We say the blessing over bread.
8. *Matzah*—"Unleavened bread" We eat the *matzah*.
9. *Maror*—"Bitter herb" Next, we eat the bitter herb.
10. *Korech*—"Binding" We eat "Hillel's Sandwich:" a combination of *charoset* and *maror* between two pieces of *matzah*.
11. *Shulchan Aruch*—"Festival Meal" Participants recline and indulge.
12. *Barech*—"Blessing" After the meal is completed, participants recite a grace after meals together.
13. *Hallel*—"Praise" Participants recite psalms 115-118 to praise God for bringing us to freedom.
14. *Nirtzah*—"Acceptance" This marks the conclusion of the Seder ritual in the Haggadah.[24]

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi says of the composition of the Haggadah, it is

> A mosaic comprised of passages from the Bible, Mishnah, and Midrash, as well as blessings and prayers that already existed, all somehow blending ultimately into a felicitous and harmonious whole. The various layers

[22] Ibid., 17.
[23] Ibid., 17.
[24] This list was supplemented from: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org

> were progressively edited over the course of many centuries until the whole reached its definitive form, probably in Babylonia.[25]

All of these pieces were meticulously glued together to form a whole that takes its readers on a journey, reliving that of our ancestors: from slavery to freedom.

This mosaic, written as a tool for the celebration of Passover has existed in manuscript form for more years than we can know. Although we can assume that manuscripts of the Haggadah existed before, the first known, complete version is one assembled by Saadia Gaon in Babylonia in the tenth century.[26] Other remnants of old Haggadah manuscripts were found with the discovery of the Cairo Genizah, including those of the old Palestinian rendering—once lost with the rise in population of Babylonian Jewry above Palestinian Jewry.[27]

Naturally, the invention of the printing press in the 15th century allowed for various versions of the Haggadah to finally be printed, although the writing of manuscripts continued. The first version of the Haggadah believed to be printed originated from Guadalajara, Spain, towards the end of the 15th century. Around the same time, in Italy, a prayer book containing a Haggadah in the final pages was printed by the Soncino family.[28]

Although each of these and subsequent Haggadot may have looked different, the texts generally retain similar mosaic forms and characteristics. One exception to this rule is the Karaite Haggadah. Because the Karaites separated themselves from other Jews during Geonic times by outwardly rejecting the authority of rabbinic Judaism, they developed a Haggadah without the pieces of the mosaic that came from the Mishnah and Midrash. Their

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[25] Yerushalmi, *Haggadah and History,* 16.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 17.
[28] Ibid., 19.

Haggadah is based entirely on biblical text, and it therefore lacks many of the texts that most Jews find to be a very familiar part of the Haggadah.[29]

For the rubric listed previously—to which we ascribe today—each of those sections has a Hebrew name. However, since the times of the Temple and the Mishnah, the Haggadah has evolved and developed in many different ways, as Yerushalmi suggests. In many Haggadot that include any language other than Hebrew, it is usually to give directions or to provide translations. They generally do not replace any of the set Hebrew pieces of the Haggadah. As groups of Jews migrated across the world and assimilated into different cultures, they not only became influenced by other peoples, they also advanced and changed independently. The beginning of this dispersion brought Jews to Babylonia, where the language of the other people there was a form of Aramaic. In order to interact with these people, the Israelites had to adapt and adopt Aramaic as their secular vernacular language—their everyday tongue. They did adopt it, and they made it their own.

## HA LACHMA ANYA

At the Passover Seder, after we have prepared the table, listed and explained the various items that are laid out, we begin the *magid*, or the telling of the Passover story. We open the story with four sentences composed in Aramaic. While displaying the *matzah*, the leader recites the following:

[29] Ibid., 58.

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא דִי 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, let them enter and eat, all who are in need, let them come observe Passover. Now we are here, next year in the land of Israel. Now we are enslaved, next year we will be free.[30]

The first appearance this text makes is in our first prayer book: *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, from the 9th Century. It is not one of the ritual elements found in the Mishnah. Written in Aramaic, and not Hebrew, it is one of the unique pieces of the Haggadah. There are various reasons for the use of Aramaic. Perhaps when this text was first developed, Aramaic was the vernacular of the Jewish people in Babylonia. So, it makes sense, when trying to teach and explain what the *matzah* is and why it is part of our Passover celebration, that the leader would want everyone—including women and children who were not privileged enough to learn the Holy Tongue of Hebrew—to comprehend the message.[31] In most Haggadot, the *Ha lachma anya* always appears in the traditional Aramaic. Often, though, and particularly in more recent times, one sees an accompanying translation in the vernacular, simply for better understanding.

After the destruction of the first Temple and the consequent exile of the Israelites into Babylonia, the people were once again (referring to the time they were slaves in Egypt) given less than full rights in a foreign land. Recalling Passover hit very close to home and brought

[30] Translation from *Passover Haggadah: The Fest of Freedom*. The Rabbinical Assembly, 1982.

[31] Dr. Alyssa Gray, in *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 1,* 126.

on new meaning. One story tells of Kish, a leader of the people and the grandfather of Mordechai (of the Purim story). While he was eating *matzah*, he decided to open his tent so that the people would see him. He hoped it would raise their spirits. Now speaking Aramaic, the people reacted to this sight by saying, "*Ha lachma anya…*" By pointing out the connection between their historical, communal memory of being slaves in Egypt and their current situation, the *matzah* offered them a sense of hope for redemption and freedom once more. Furthermore, the granting of freedom from slavery in Egypt could be seen as a gift that could never be taken back. It was permanently theirs because it was granted by God.[32]

If we look at the specific words and phrases, we will find some interesting things. Specifically, "let them observe Passover" probably refers to the Passover sacrifice that was offered at the Temple. In the final sentence, "now we are enslaved" certainly reminds us to be thankful that we are no longer slaves.[33] However, when it concludes, "next year we will be free," it might make one wonder why we still say it if we are free. Rabbi Arthur Green suggests that it is our natural human way to be in a continual state of seeking our own personal and/or communal freedom. We may no longer literally be slaves to a pharaoh in Egypt, but there are things in our world that hold us back and keep us from true liberation.[34]

In a world of personal "slavery" or uncertainty, the rituals of Passover give us structure, stability, and explanation to help us continue to move forward year after year. It requires us to learn and teach each other about the significance behind the symbols. In a text in the Haggadah taken from the Mishnah, Rabban Gamliel is quoted as having said, "Anyone who doesn't explain these three things on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation: Passover,

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[32] Levine, private communication, "Celebration and Commemoration," 2002-2003.
[33] Dr. Alyssa Gray, in *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 1*, 127.
[34] Rabbi Arthur Green, PhD, in *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 1*.,129.

*matzah*, and bitter herbs."[35] By pointing out the importance of explaining these things—particularly, *matzah*—Rabban Gamliel is thus highlighting the need to understand these items. With this understanding comes a connection to one's ancestors and to each other. By connecting, people often feel a sense of wholeness and appreciation: of freedom. Consequently, it makes sense that an explanation of the significance of *matzah* would be in a vernacular that all people, not just learned men would understand. Furthermore, when the text states in the vernacular language that all who are hungry should come in and eat, it makes it not just a ritual recitation, but a real invitation. It is an invitation that is meant to be taken seriously.

Dr. Alyssa Gray gives us some other suggestions as to why the vernacular would be used instead of the Hebrew in this instance. She cites *Ritba*, also known as Rabbi Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili, from the 13th and 14th centuries in Spain, saying that people who subscribe to superstitions would be grateful for the use of the vernacular in *Ha lachma anya*. Demons and angels, who all understand Hebrew, would not be able to understand the words in these sentences. If the demons understood the part about letting all who are hungry in, they might actually take people up on their invitations and invade the home. If the angels understood, they might "seize upon the occasion to argue in heaven that our sins make us unworthy of redemption." More interesting still, the final words of this text are not in Aramaic, but in Hebrew. By wishing out loud to be back in Israel, they were clearly stating that they remained in Exile not by their own choice. In an effort to avoid tension between

[35] Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2.*, 72.

themselves and the non-Jewish groups nearby, they said those words in Hebrew so those groups would not understand.[36]

So how is this text a part of our modern, 21st century, Jewish life? Rabbi Daniel Landes suggests the following:

> The Seder is thus a covenantal experience that binds Jews together through commemoration of freedom in service to God. Not only does *Ha lachma anya* allow us to fulfill the great mitzvot of welcoming guests (in this case, those especially needy) and sharing with them the joy of the holiday. It also assures that all Jews have an opportunity to share in this crucial ritual, thereby creating identity as it binds us together in a covenantal ceremony.[37]

If the text's original intention was for all Jewish people to understand the significance of the matzah for us after having been liberated from slavery in Egypt, then it is a principal factor in bringing us together and building community, excluding no one. Dr. Wendy I. Zierler writes, "*Ha lachma anya* thus impels us to consider the need in every generation to create means of education and communication…" We must take the nod from our tradition and history of using the vernacular here in order to allow for understanding and inclusivity amongst our modern Jewish community.

*Ha lachma anya* speaks volumes about the Jewish people. Its text reflects our collective journey and memory just as its use of language does the same. We are a people that place high importance on remembering what came before us, appreciating what we now have, and always looking to the future. The text is explanatory, teaching both history and morals, while the use of Aramaic signifies constant adaptation and still a desire to maintain memory of the past. Eliyahu Shoot submitted a paper for the Harvard Judaica Collection in

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[36] Dr. Alyssa Gray, in *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 1*, 127.
[37] Rabbi Daniel Landes, in *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 1*., 142.

which he states, “Of all Jewish holidays, Passover with its family oriented Seder is most indicative of the social and cultural distinctions between various Jewish communities, both within Israel and in Diaspora.”[38]

[38] “And Thou Shalt Tell Thy Son” from *Studies in Jewish Musical Traditions* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 153.

## CHAPTER 3: SONGS AND SYMBOLS

Many translations of the Haggadah have been produced, but only since the 16th century. Before then, it seems that it was the duty of the head of the household to "translate" by telling the story of the Exodus in the vernacular language to those attending the Seder. Thomas Murner, a Christian scholar, produced the first written translation of the Haggadah into Latin. Amsterdam and Venice—more than a century after Murner's work was printed—were the locations for the first printed productions of the Haggadah translated by Jews in a standard European language: Spanish.[39] The world has seen many different translations of the Haggadah since then. They each often embraced varying ratios of Hebrew and the vernacular, but a gradual increase in the amount of translations added in has generally been seen.

Different groups of Jews developed extra customs that were associated with Passover, but not necessarily included in the Haggadah that made use of their vernacular language, often while the rest of the Haggadah remained in Hebrew. For example, there is a Syrian custom of wrapping up the afikomen, putting it over your shoulder and reciting a verse from Torah in Hebrew: "So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders." Essentially, this person is acting out this part of the Exodus. The people at the Seder see this sight and ask in Arabic, "Where do

[39] Yerushalmi, *Haggadah and History*, 61-62.

you come from?" The individual replies, "Egypt! The group asks another question, "Where are you going?" And the individual happily responds, "Jerusalem!"[40] In Morocco, there is a Passover tradition of the family singing a song together in Arabic when the *matzah* is broken. Here is the song in English translation:

> So too did the Almighty split the Red Sea into 12 paths when our ancestors left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, the son of Amram, may he rest in peace. Just as God redeemed them from their hard work to freedom, so too will the Almighty, blessed be He, redeem us from this dispersion for His own awesome name's sake.

Similar to the Syrian tradition, this song may be the only ritual that is performed in Arabic—the vernacular—while the rest of the Seder is in Hebrew.[41] In both of these examples, the scenarios described are key points of the Seder ritual. The actions performed and words sung reveal the major headlines for the Passover story. If a father had to choose which pieces of the Seder were the most meaningful and memorable, one would think it would be the reason behind the celebration: the joy of freedom and the acknowledgement of how we got there. So, it makes perfect sense that these customs—as part of an interactive holiday celebration—would be performed in a language that everyone, especially those not learned in Torah and Rabbinic texts, would have the ability to understand and appreciate it.

The part of the Seder that most notably changes from Haggadah to Haggadah is the *Nirtzah*, or concluding section. This part is comprised of various songs or hymns, including *Echad Mi Yodea* and *Chad Gadya*. These songs were only added to the Seder service in the Middle Ages. There is no clear, single reason for their appearance in the Haggadah, except perhaps to keep the children awake and engaged towards the end of the evening, or simply to

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[40] Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs* (Yeshiva University Press, New York, NY, 1986), 256.

[41] Ibid., 261-262.

continue the joyous celebration. They each have a unique story. Although they seem lighthearted, playing with numbers and animals, they both are highly symbolic in their prose.

# ECHAD MI YODEA—WHO KNOWS ONE?

## אֶחָד מִי יוֹדֵעַ?

אֶחָד מִי יוֹדֵעַ? אֶחָד אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.
שְׁנַיִם מִי יוֹדֵעַ? שְׁנַיִם אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

שְׁלֹשָׁה מִי יוֹדֵעַ? שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

אַרְבַּע מִי יוֹדֵעַ? אַרְבַּע אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

חֲמִשָּׁה מִי יוֹדֵעַ? חֲמִשָּׁה אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

שִׁשָּׁה מִי יוֹדֵעַ? שִׁשָּׁה אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

שִׁבְעָה מִי יוֹדֵעַ? שִׁבְעָה אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: שִׁבְעָה יְמֵי שַׁבַּתָּא, שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

שְׁמוֹנָה מִי יוֹדֵעַ? שְׁמוֹנָה אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: שְׁמוֹנָה יְמֵי מִילָה, שִׁבְעָה יְמֵי שַׁבַּתָּא, שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

תִּשְׁעָה מִי יוֹדֵעַ? תִּשְׁעָה אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: תִּשְׁעָה יַרְחֵי לֵדָה, שְׁמוֹנָה יְמֵי מִילָה, שִׁבְעָה יְמֵי שַׁבַּתָּא, שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

עֲשָׂרָה מִי יוֹדֵעַ? עֲשָׂרָה אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: עֲשָׂרָה דִבְּרַיָּא, תִּשְׁעָה יַרְחֵי לֵדָה, שְׁמוֹנָה יְמֵי מִילָה, שִׁבְעָה יְמֵי שַׁבַּתָּא, שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

אַחַד עָשָׂר מִי יוֹדֵעַ? אַחַד עָשָׂר אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: אַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכְבַיָּא, עֲשָׂרָה דִבְּרַיָּא, תִּשְׁעָה יַרְחֵי לֵדָה, שְׁמוֹנָה יְמֵי מִילָה, שִׁבְעָה יְמֵי שַׁבַּתָּא, שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר מִי יוֹדֵעַ? שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר שִׁבְטַיָּא, אַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכְבַיָּא, עֲשָׂרָה דִבְּרַיָּא, תִּשְׁעָה יַרְחֵי לֵדָה, שְׁמוֹנָה יְמֵי מִילָה, שִׁבְעָה יְמֵי שַׁבַּתָּא, שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר מִי יוֹדֵעַ ? שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ: שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר מִדַּיָּא, שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר שִׁבְטַיָּא, אַחַד עָשָׂר כּוֹכְבַיָּא, עֲשָׂרָה דִבְּרַיָּא, תִּשְׁעָה יַרְחֵי לֵדָה, שְׁמוֹנָה יְמֵי מִילָה, שִׁבְעָה יְמֵי שַׁבַּתָּא, שִׁשָּׁה סִדְרֵי מִשְׁנָה, חֲמִשָּׁה חוּמְשֵׁי תוֹרָה, אַרְבַּע אִמָּהוֹת, שְׁלֹשָׁה אָבוֹת, שְׁנֵי לֻחוֹת הַבְּרִית, אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

Who knows one?
I know one:
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows two?
I know two.
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows three?
I know three:
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows four?
I know four:
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows five?
I know five:
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows six?
I know six:
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows seven?
I know seven:
Seven days of the week;
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows eight?
I know eight:
Eight days before the foreskin's cut;
Seven days of the week;
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows nine?
I know nine:
Nine months to make a human child;
Eight days before the foreskin's cut;
Seven days of the week;
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows ten?
I know ten:
Ten, the Ten Commandments;
Nine months to make a human child;
Eight days before the foreskin's cut;
Seven days of the week;
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows eleven?
I know eleven:
Eleven stars in Joseph's dream;
Ten, the Ten Commandments;
Nine months to make a human child;
Eight days before the foreskin's cut;
Seven days of the week;
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows twelve?
I know twelve:
Twelve tribes of Israel;
Eleven stars in Joseph's dream;
Ten, the Ten Commandments;
Nine months to make a human child;
Eight days before the foreskin's cut;
Seven days of the week;
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

Who knows thirteen?
I know thirteen:
Thirteen attributes of God;
Twelve tribes of Israel;
Eleven stars in Joseph's dream;
Ten, the Ten Commandments;
Nine months to make a human child;
Eight days before the foreskin's cut;
Seven days of the week;
Six sections of Mishnah;
Five the Books of Moses;
Four fruitful Matriarchs;
Three believing Patriarchs;
Two stone tablets of the Law;
One is God of heaven and earth.

This particular song has its roots sometime in the 15th or 16th centuries, and is believed to be based on a German song called "*Guter Freund Ich Frage Dich*" (Good Friend, I Ask You). "*Eins ist unser Gott, der da lebt, der da schwebt im Himmel*," which means, "One is our God who lives in and hovers over heaven," is the first verse of the German folk song. In a Yiddish version of *Echad Mi Yodea*, one will find this same German first verse.[42] While it is simple and common for a Jewish song to develop from a non-Jewish folk song, this song manages to find deeper meaning. David Arnow, an expert on the Passover Seder, says about the text of *Echad Mi Yodea*, "this song encourages us to count—to count what matters, not the size of our armies, but the objects of our faith."[43]

*Echad Mi Yodea* exists in multiple languages, many of which are translations, as in the English above. Other versions are more liberal interpretations of the song. For example, for the United States' 200th anniversary of existence, the American Jewish Historical Society created "The Bicentennial Passover Haggadah." In it, they wrote a patriotic version in English that highlights the successes of those who fought for our American freedom.[44] It numbers the settlers, wars, Supreme Court Justices, exceptional American Jewish women, and the American colonies, among other things that have lead to the greatness of America and of American Jewry.[45] Based on the extensive listings for each number, it is highly improbable that this version of the song was meant to be sung. Rather, it was intended to teach American Jews to better appreciate the 18th century American fight for freedom by comparing it to the Israelites' ancient road to freedom from Egypt. The struggles and sentiments behind both events evoke similar emotions. When we recall either of them, as

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[42] L. Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2.*, 222.
[43] Arnow, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2.*, 215.
[44] Balin, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2.*, 206.
[45] The full text can be found in appendix 1.

Jews and as Americans, we are grateful that our ancestors made sacrifices and persevered so that we would be able to live the free lives that we do. The use of English in this interpretive version is a clear representation of American identity.

Rabbi Shelton J. Donnel recently compiled a Haggadah based on the Sephardic rite. He includes the Ladino version of *Echad Mi Yodea*, which is a very close translation of the Hebrew listed previously:

> Kien su piense y entendiense alavar al Dio kriense,
> Kualo son los treje?
> **Treje** son los Ikarim,
> **doje** hermanos kon Yosef,
> **onze** hermanos sin Yosef,
> **diez** mandamientos de la Ley,
> **nueve** mezes de la prenyada,
> **ocho** dias de la millah,
> **siete** dias kon el Shabbat,
> **sesh** dias de la semana,
> **cinko** livros de la Ley,
> **kuatro** madres de Yisrael,
> **tres** muestros padres son,
> **dos** Moshe y Aharon,
> **uno** es el Kriador, baruch Hu uvaruch shemo![46]

The elements of this Ladino version of *Echad Mi Yodea* that stand out are the use of both Hebrew and Ladino. Words like *Ikarim* and *millah* uniquely Jewish, Hebrew words: they do not exist in secular Spanish. A simple translation in Spanish does not exist for these words without extra explanation of the meaning and origin. Consequently, it makes sense that those words would simply remain in Hebrew and that their meaning would be common knowledge amongst Ladino-speaking communities. Furthermore, the idea that the concepts of Maimonides' 13 principles of faith and ritual circumcision were common knowledge tells outsiders that they were important parts of their everyday lives. While scholars a fairly

[46] Rabbi Shelton J. Donnell, *A Passover Haggadah* (Santa Ana, 2001), 62-65.

certain this song came out of Germany in the 15th century, it is unclear exactly when it first appeared in a Ladino translation.

The Yiddish version of *Echad Mi Yodea* is known as *Mu Asapru*. Here is the Yiddish, followed by English translation:

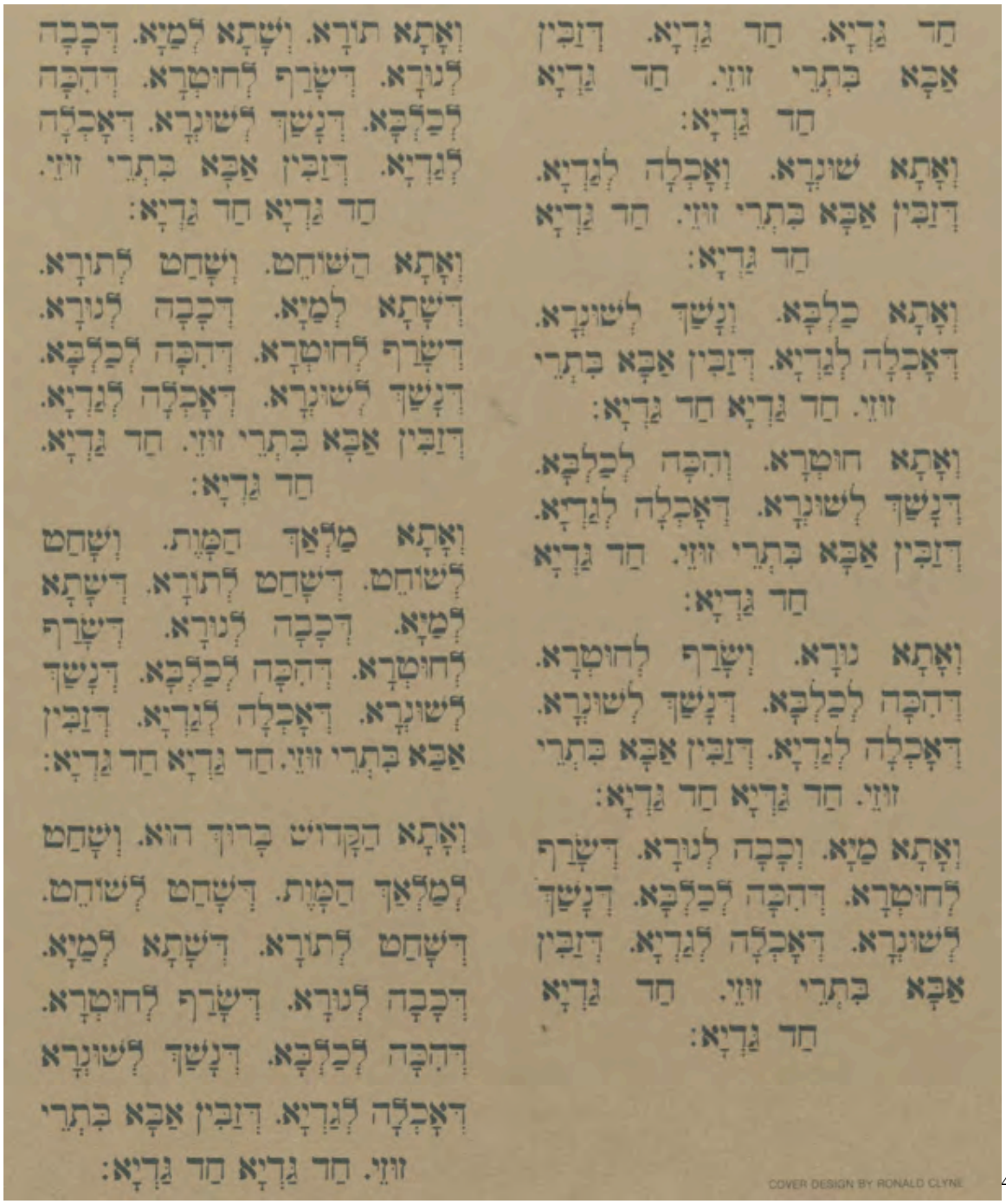
Mu asapru mu adabru oyscho, oyscho, yam-ti-di-day-dam?
Ver ken zogn, ver ken redn
Vos di eyns batayt?
Eyner iz Got, un Got iz eyner
Un vayter keyner.
....vos di tsvey batayt?
Tsvey zenen di liches,
Un eyner iz doch Got,Un Got is eyner...
....vos di dray batayt?
Dray zenen di oves,
Tsvey zenen...
....vos di fir batayt?
Fir zenen di imes.
Dray zenen...
....vos di finef bayayt?
Finef zenen di chamushim.
Fir zenen...
....vos di zeks batayt?
Zeks zenen di mishnayes.
Finef zenen...
....vos di zibn batayt?
Zibn zenen di vochenteyg.
Zeks zenen...

How shall I tell, how shall I say,
Who can know, who can tell the meaning of One--
One is God, He is One, and none else
.....the meaning of two--
Two are the Tablets of the Law,
One is God.....
.....the meaning of three--
Three are our Patriarchs,
Two the Tablets.....
.....the meaning of four--
Four were the Matriarchs,
Three are our Patriarchs.....

.....the meaning of five--
Five are the five books of Moses,
Four were the Matriarchs.....
.....the meaning of six--
Six are the six books of Mishna,
Five are the five.....
.....the meaning of seven--
Seven are the days of the week,
Six are the six books of Mishna,
Five are the five books of Moses,
Four were the Matriarchs,
Three are our Patriarchs,
Two are the Tablets of the Law,
One is God, He is One, and none else[47]

This Yiddish version of *Echad Mi Yodea* has been made well known by the famous Yiddish musician, Theodore Bikel. It is slightly different than the English or the Ladino, but uses the same structure and numbered objects. As we learned earlier from Rabbi Hoffman, other Yiddish versions of this song begin with words from the German song believed to be its origin. It is clear that taking liberties with this song and this part of the Haggadah is a regular occurrence throughout the Jewish Diaspora. It is not part of a fixed or prescribed liturgy. Therefore, any group has the right to take ownership of it and make it their own.

[47] Yiddish and English from www.zemerl.com



חַד גַּדְיָא. חַד גַּדְיָא. דְּזַבִּין
אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא
חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא שׁוּנְרָא. וְאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא.
דְּזַבִּין אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא
חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא כַלְבָּא. וְנָשַׁךְ לְשׁוּנְרָא.
דְּאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא. דְּזַבִּין אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי
זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא חוּטְרָא. וְהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא.
דְּנָשַׁךְ לְשׁוּנְרָא. דְּאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא.
דְּזַבִּין אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא
חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא נוּרָא. וְשָׂרַף לְחוּטְרָא.
דְּהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא. דְּנָשַׁךְ לְשׁוּנְרָא.
דְּאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא. דְּזַבִּין אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי
זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא מַיָּא. וְכָבָה לְנוּרָא. דְּשָׂרַף
לְחוּטְרָא. דְּהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא. דְּנָשַׁךְ
לְשׁוּנְרָא. דְּאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא. דְּזַבִּין
אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא
חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא תוֹרָא. וְשָׁתָא לְמַיָּא. דְּכָבָה
לְנוּרָא. דְּשָׂרַף לְחוּטְרָא. דְּהִכָּה
לְכַלְבָּא. דְּנָשַׁךְ לְשׁוּנְרָא. דְּאָכְלָה
לְגַדְיָא. דְּזַבִּין אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי זוּזֵי.
חַד גַּדְיָא חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא הַשּׁוֹחֵט. וְשָׁחַט לְתוֹרָא.
דְּשָׁתָא לְמַיָּא. דְּכָבָה לְנוּרָא.
דְּשָׂרַף לְחוּטְרָא. דְּהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא.
דְּנָשַׁךְ לְשׁוּנְרָא. דְּאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא.
דְּזַבִּין אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא.
חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא מַלְאַךְ הַמָּוֶת. וְשָׁחַט
לְשׁוֹחֵט. דְּשָׁחַט לְתוֹרָא. דְּשָׁתָא
לְמַיָּא. דְּכָבָה לְנוּרָא. דְּשָׂרַף
לְחוּטְרָא. דְּהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא. דְּנָשַׁךְ
לְשׁוּנְרָא. דְּאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא. דְּזַבִּין
אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא חַד גַּדְיָא:

וְאָתָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא. וְשָׁחַט
לְמַלְאַךְ הַמָּוֶת. דְּשָׁחַט לְשׁוֹחֵט.
דְּשָׁחַט לְתוֹרָא. דְּשָׁתָא לְמַיָּא.
דְּכָבָה לְנוּרָא. דְּשָׂרַף לְחוּטְרָא.
דְּהִכָּה לְכַלְבָּא. דְּנָשַׁךְ לְשׁוּנְרָא
דְּאָכְלָה לְגַדְיָא. דְּזַבִּין אַבָּא בִּתְרֵי
זוּזֵי. חַד גַּדְיָא חַד גַּדְיָא:

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

[48]

[48] Abraham A. Schwadron, Folkways Records FR 8920, *Chad Gadya*.

One little goat, one little goat.
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came a cat
and ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came a dog
and bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came a stick
and beat the dog,
that bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came fire
and burnt the stick,
that beat the dog,
that bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came water
and quenched the fire,
that burnt the stick,
that beat the dog,
that bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came the ox
and drank the water,
that quenched the fire,
that burnt the stick,
that beat the dog,
that bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came the slaughterer
and slaughtered the ox,
that drank the water,
that quenched the fire,
that burnt the stick,
that beat the dog,
that bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came the Angel of Death
and killed the slaughterer,
that slaughtered the ox,
that drank the water,
that quenched the fire,
that burnt the stick,
that beat the dog,
that bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

Then came the Holy One, Blessed be He
and slew the Angel of Death,
that killed the slaughterer,
that slaughtered the ox,
that drank the water,
that quenched the fire,
that burnt the stick,
that beat the dog,
that bit the cat,
that ate the goat,
That Father bought for two zuzim,
one little goat, one little goat.

*Chad Gadya* was probably written in Yiddish originally, and was eventually translated into Aramaic, which is the version above.[49] This fact is very interesting, since it was not actually written until about the 15th century in Central Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Aramaic was long past being used as a vernacular. The first time this song appeared in print was in a Prague Haggadah in the year 1590. F. A. Christian is credited with the first musical publication of *Chad Gadya* in Leipzig in 1677. The last sung poem to be added to the Haggadah, it is didactic and contains symbolic and figurative language that playfully hint at the history of the Jewish people.[50]

This structure and its imagery have certainly appeared in other similar poems and songs from other, non-Jewish cultures, including European, Persian, and Indian groups, among others. One that very closely resembles *Chad Gadya* is a German folk song called, "Der Herr der Schickt den Jokel aus." The title means, "The Master who Sent the Pheasant out."[51] As one could easily assume, there is no single fixed text or melody for this *Chad Gadya* tradition. The melody, itself, is much less important than the text. The purpose of the musical aspect is simply a functional one. The text, for optimal comprehension, exists in many different vernacular languages, including Aramaic, Yiddish, Arabic, and Ladino. Even more interesting is that it exists in some places, composed of more than one language.

While the words are seemingly playful and meaningless, the symbolism of the song stands as a parable reflecting Jewish history. The "kid" is a metaphor for the Jewish people that "my father," or God, bought for "two zuzim," or tablets of commandments. The following elements and animals represent various nations that had intentions to annihilate the

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[49] L. Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2*, 223.
[50] Levine, private communication, "Celebration and Commemoration"
[51] Ibid.

Jewish people throughout their history.[52] The overwhelming triumph is the living continuation of Judaism, in that Jews somehow survive and find a way to thrive. The very first example of our survival under the threat of another nation was the Exodus from Egypt, so it is very fitting for this song to be a part of the Passover celebration. In Pirkei Avot, Hillel goes a step further, by explaining a secondary underlying message that exemplifies the idea divine retribution—those who destroy will inevitably and as a result be destroyed.[53]

Here is the *Chad Gadya* song in Yiddish (*Khad Gadyo*):

> Kh'ob far aykh a maysele, a maysele gor sheyn.
> Der tate hot a tsigele gekoyft far tsvey gildeyn.
> A tsigele, a vaysinke, a sheyninke vi gold,
> Un tsvey gildeyn mezumene hot er far ir batsolt
> Khad gadyo!
>
> Iz dokh in hoyf a kats faran, a mazik, vi bavust;
> Hot ketslen zikh fartsukn gor dos tsigele farglust.
> Derzen hot es hintele, fardrist es im gants shtark,
> Er varft zikh oyf der beyzer kats un bayst ir ayn in kark.
> Khad gadyo!
>
> Kumt shtekele in kas arayn un trakht gor nit keyn sakh,
> Un shpalt dos kepl hintelen -- du, hunt, s'iz nit dayn zakh!
> Tseflakert hot zikh fayerl far kas tsunter royt:
> Du shtekele, du flekele, ikh makh dir bald a toyt.
> Khad gadyo!
>
> Kumt tsu flisn vaserl un lesht dos fayer oys;
> Kumt tsu geyn dos eksele un trinkt dos vaser oys.
> Nu, hobn mir a shoykhetl mit a khalefl vos glantst,
> Makht er tsum oks – khik, khik, khik, un s'iz oys bald undzer tants.
> Khad gadyo![54]

Perhaps the reason it was translated from Yiddish to the Aramaic one often sees in Haggadot was to align it with the *Ha Lachma Anya*. After the Jews were liberated from

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[52] Kushner & Polen, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2*., 224.
[53] Levine, private communication, "Celebration and Commemoration"
[54] *The Workmen's Circle Haggadah*, 1991, 75.

slavery in the Passover story, the next time the people would be pushed into the Diaspora, they would speak Aramaic in Babylonia. By that thinking, it is a hearkening back to our ancestral history and memory. In more recent times, however, the vernacular, including Yiddish, seems to be more widespread in Haggadot.

The Sephardic tradition, when it comes to *Chad Gadya*, has some differing practices among Sephardic groups. Often, one would find two versions of the text: one in Aramaic, and one in Ladino or Arabic, for example. In other Haggadot, the *Chad Gadya* text is a fusion of two or more versions in different languages.[55] It makes sense that each Jewish group would be influenced in language and music by the geographical locations through which they traveled and in which they settled. Sephardic Jews—specifically those originating from Spain and Portugal—can be divided into two main categories: Eastern and Western. Eastern Sephardic Jews left the Iberian Peninsula at the time of the Spanish Inquisition and traveled to France, Italy, Turkey, Greece, the Balkan States, the Middle East, and North Africa. At the same time, Jews who fled to Amsterdam and Gibralter (to the north and south of Spain) are known as the Western Sephardim.[56]

The Eastern Sephardim often have the Ladino *Un Cavritico* in their Haggadot. Because of the wide variety of their locations after escaping the Inquisition, the text as well as the music is varied from group to group. Here is an excerpt from an example of the Ladino text:

1. Un cavritico que lo merco mi padre, por dos levanim, por dos levanim…
10. Y vino el Santo Bendicho El y mato al malaj amavet, que mato al shojet, que degollo al buey, que se bevio el agua, que amato el

[55] Schwadron, Abraham A. "Un Cavritico: The Sephardic Tradition." *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 5 (1982), 28.

[56] Ibid., 25-26.

fuego, que quemo al palo, que jarvo al perro, que mordio al gato,
que se comio al cavritico, que lo compro mi padre, por dos
levanim, por dos levanim.

Here is the translation of this Ladino text:

1. There was a kid goat that my father bought with two
levanim, with two levanim.
10. Then came THE HOLY BLESSED ONE and tied down Death who
killed the butcher who beheaded the ox that drank the
water that extinguished the fire that burned the stick
that hit the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid goat
that my father bought with two levanim, with two levanim.[57]

The Western Sephardim, on the other hand, do not generally include the text at all in their Haggadot. In fact, they oppose its inclusion, because it made the Seder unnecessarily longer and because they were troubled by its message of "an eye for an eye." The timing here is significant because, two groups that were once one have two completely different takes on the same text.[58]

In more modern times, musicians and writers have taken to creating new interpretations of the *Chad Gadya*. Most notably, an Israeli singer in the late 1980s named Chava Alberstein wrote and performed a particularly moving adaptation as a response to the First Intifada. It stirred up so many emotions amongst Israeli citizens that she received multiple threats against her life, and the government took some action to restrict the playing of the song on the radio. She incorporated both the Aramaic text and a Hebrew translation into her song. She followed it by lyrics that openly expressed disapproval of the way the Israeli government handled the situation with the Palestinians. Her criticism, although in an English translation, is clear:

And why are you singing *Chad Gadya*?

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[57] Translation by R. Romero, www.zemerl.com
[58] Ibid., 25-28.

Spring isn't here yet and Passover hasn't arrived.
And what has changed for you, what has changed?
I have changed this year.
For on all the nights, all the nights I only asked four questions.
This night I have another question:
How long will the cycle of horror last
The pursuer and the pursued
The striker and the stricken
When will this madness end?
And what has changed for you, what has changed?[59]

She calls for peace and compassion, and makes a plea for violence to end. From her point of view, even though Israel has often been a victim throughout her history, the people cannot become the Angel of Death killing the slaughterer.

Musically, *Chad Gadya* varies from place to place as it does linguistically. The music these texts are often set to also reflect their geographic culture. For example, Mikhl Gelbart composed a musical setting for the Yiddish *Khad Gadyo*. It is in a major key and has a playful feeling, and the instruments play a significant role in the performance. They actually play the melody with embellished trills in between verses. When singing through the lists in each verse, the vocal line ascends a step. This same motion repeats every time an action in the text occurs, until you get to the line just before *khad gadyo*, where the melody comes down to the tonic again. It seems to resemble a German drinking song. Somewhat contrarily, the Ladino *Un Cavritico*, by Yehoram Gaon is slower, less playful, and in a minor key. The only instruments are the classical guitar, played in a finger-picked style and the flute. Unlike the Yiddish version, *Un Cavritico*'s repetitive lines descend each time and the melody is very simple. Gaon's recording has strong characteristics of Flamenco music. For instance, the flute plays a descant of a descending modified Phrygian scale, unique to the Flamenco style.

[59] Balin, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2*., 216.

Jews use language and music as a strong tool for conveying, understanding, and reinterpreting our collective memory and history. We are constantly aiming to make that history available and accessible for ourselves and for our families by connecting it with our everyday lives and surroundings.

# CONCLUSION

Jonathan Safran Foer and Nathan Englander, both contemporary American writers, recently worked together to produce the *New American Haggadah* in an effort to recreate the Seder experience in a way that would speak to today's Americans. Foer writes:

> Jews have a special relationship to books, and the Haggadah has been translated more widely, and reprinted more often, than any other Jewish book. It is not a work of history or philosophy, not a prayer book, user's manual, timeline, poem, or palimpsest—and yet it is all of these things. The Torah is the foundational text for Jewish law, but the Haggadah is our book of living memory. We are not merely telling a story here. We are being called to a radical act of empathy. Here we are, embarking on an ancient, perennial attempt to give human life—our lives—dignity.[60]

It seems to me that his goal in composing this book was to offer something that fit the identity of today's American Jews. Unfortunately, it received some reviews that were not so supportive of their creation. One such review, written by Leon Wieseltier, comes from the Jewish Review of Books in an article entitled, "Comes the Comer:

> A history of Jewish literacy remains to be written. It will be a colorful and complicated work, as befits the variegated linguistic history of the Jews, and for American Jewish readers of our day, I mean the honest ones, it will be a disturbing work. Whereas the Jews have always used many languages, Jewish and non-Jewish ones, and whereas complaints about the faltering level of competence in Hebrew appear in many medieval and modern sources, the awful fact is that Jewry of the United States has decided—it was a decision, even if it was never formally made—that the Jewish tradition may be adequately received, developed, and transmitted not in a Jewish language.

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[60] Jonathan Safran Foer, *New American Haggadah* (Little, Brown and Company, New York, NY, 2012), v.

Wieseltier goes on to ridicule American Jews by criticizing their unwillingness to make any effort when it comes to learning Hebrew. He says that today more than ever, Jews are "pathetically dependent" on translations.[61] His review of the Haggadah was quite harsh, but in reality, he was not reviewing the Haggadah itself. It seemed more like he was actually rating American Jewry and the incorporation of translation into the vernacular, in general.

David Arnow suggests that the Haggadah has developed over time into more of a fixed work than was originally intended in the Mishnah.[62] In my opinion, while it is definitely important to continue to use and teach Hebrew in our synagogue and home life, it is equally—if not more important—to make sure that Judaism is accessible to the people to which it belongs. That means that there must be multiple interpretations. Americans in general have less pressure to learn any foreign language than many other countries. In fact, English is often the "other" language to know in countries that do not speak English as a first language. There is something to be said for meeting people—American Jews in this case—where they stand.

Mia Sara Bruch created an ongoing timeline in this new Haggadah. In her 1989 timeline caption she writes,

> In response to the hundreds of young Israelis who backpack through the Himalayas after completing their army service, two Lubavitch rabbis travel to Katmandu, Nepal on the orders of the Lubavitcher rebbe to organize a Seder. With help from a local restaurant, they prepare a meal that draws 350 people. The Katmandu Seder becomes an annual event, attracting over 2,000 guests every spring.[63]

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[61] Leon Wieseltier, The Jewish Review of Books, "Comes the Comer" 2012, www.jewishreviewofbooks.com

[62] Arnow, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2.*, 18.

[63] Mia Sara Bruch, *New American Haggadah*,137.

It may not be specifically language, but those rabbis made an extreme effort to bring Judaism to Jews who probably would have otherwise forgone a Passover experience. Furthermore, based on the dramatic increase of attendants, it would seem that their Passover experience was so meaningful that it shaped the Judaism and the Jewish practice of the attendants, which one could imagine was the goal.

Many Jewish communities are experiencing the difficulty of meeting the needs of their congregants. Unfortunately, American Jewish leadership cannot expect congregants to come to them anymore. Today's Jews need more guidance. We have to find them and then find a non-intimidating way to allow them to follow us. The identity of American Jewry is constantly evolving, as Jews have done for thousands of years. Language is a major key in this process, and the use of the vernacular is incredibly important. The *New American Haggadah* speaks to the identity of at least a generous portion of American Jews.

The central focus of Passover and of the Haggadah is knowledge and understanding. When the Haggadah lists the four different kinds of sons and how one should approach each to explain the Passover story, it is clear that allowing every Seder participant the opportunity to know the story of the Jewish people is imperative. Hoffman relates Passover to Jewish knowledge by writing, "When Jews put down their Haggadah, they are expected to have a heightened Jewish identity and to be more attuned to their Jewish responsibilities. People, that is, who leave the Seder and ignore the plight of the homeless have missed the point."[64]

In these ways, language is a key ingredient in the formation of one's identity. Even more so is it a defining factor in the identity of a people. The ways in which a people uses language tells outsiders things about the way they live their lives and observe customs.

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[64] L. Hoffman, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2*., 6.

Ultimately, Passover, because of its malleable format and texts is a perfect example of how the Jewish journey molds both the Jewish collective journey and the journey of those Jews living throughout the world. Finally, "the importance of Passover lies not in the purity of its ancient origins, but in its capacity to adapt, and thereby to remain an unending source of hope for the prospect of redemption—regardless of the obstacles that beset us."[65]

[65] Arnow, *My People's Passover Haggadah, Vol. 2*., 14.

## APPENDIX 1

### "THE BICENTENNIAL PASSOVER HAGGADAH" ECHAD MI YODEA

**One** is the good ship Peartree which in 1654 brought the first Jewish settlers to these shores.

**Two** are the early settlers Jacob Barsimson And Asser Levy who demanded their right to serve in the defense of their colony, New Amsterdam.

**Three** are the great waves of immigration of 1654, 1830, and 1880, that brought our forefathers from their various habitations and oppressions to the promise of this new land.

**Four** are the wars fought for our liberty; the Revolutionary War of 1776, the Civil War, World War I and II.

**Five** are the synagogues of Philadelphia, Newport, Charleston, Richmond and Savannah, praised by George Washington on his ascendancy to the presidency of the United States. To them he wrote: May the same Deity who long since delivering the Hebrews from their Egyptian Oppressors… whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States continue to water them with the dews of heaven and to make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah.

**Six** were the justices of the first Supreme Court established to protect and preserve our Republic and among whose luminaries we remember with pride, Louis Brandeis, Benjamin Cardoza, and Felix Frankfurter.

**Seven** are the exceptional women of our American Jewish experience. Rebecca Gratz immortalized in Walter Scott's Ivanhoe, who with Isaac Leeser established a program for religious education in this new land; Emma Lazarus, whose poetic inscription on the base of our Statue of Liberty calls to the oppressed and the wretched of the world; Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah, an incomparable commitment to health and education; Lillian Wald of the Henry Street Settlement, an emerging pattern for our Nation's concern for the least of its citizens; Hannah Salomon, founder of the National Council of Jewish Women given to developing an awareness of our political system and its potential for good; Ernestine Rose, protagonist for women's rights; and Golda Meir, the school teacher from Milwaukee who became Prime Minister of the reborn State of Israel.

**Eight** are the words "And Thou shalt proclaim liberty throughout the land!" taken from our Bible by the founders of our Republic and fashioned by them into a ring for the Liberty Bell.

**Nine** are the illustrious generations of the Judah Nathan family from 1776 to this day. Judah begot Simon, Simon begot Isaac, Isaac begot Gershom, Gershom begot Edgar, Edgar begot Edgar Jr., Edgar Jr. begot Edgar II, Edgar II begot Edgar III, Edgar III begot Arthur and Sarah.

**Ten** are the courageous ones of our faith who fought the battles of the Revolution. Francis Salvador, the first to fall of the field of battle, August 1, 1776; the Sheftalls, Moderchai, captured at Savannah, the leader of Georgia's rebels; and Shefta; Flag Master of the Carolina-Packet who broke through the battle lines and brought relief to General Moultrie, captured by the British; Levy Salomon, helped effect the invasion of British Canada; Haym Salomon, the financial hero of the War of the Revolution; Phillip Minis who led the expedition against the British at Savannah and his mother Abigail, the Colonial Matriarch who provisioned the expedition; Major Benjamin Nones who fought all the battles of the Carolina campaign; Colonel Solomon Bush, Deputy Adjutant General of the Pennsylvania State Militia; and Isaac Moses who put his fleet at the disposal of the Revolutionary Forces.

**On the 11th** of April in 1854, the bicentennial of Jewish settlement in the United States, the Senate of the Unite States was petitioned by the families Gratz, Ettling and Hays, to obtain for every American citizen travelling abroad a just degree of civil and religious freedom.

**Twelve** and more are the Nobel Laureates who have from this land broadened the horizons of health, science and peace: Landsteiner, Erlanger, Gasser, Muller, Waksman, Lippman, Lederberg, Kornberg, Bloch, Wald, Nirenberg, Axelrod, Edelman, Calvin, Stern, Glaser, Hofstadter, Feynman, Schwinger, Gell-Mann, Kuznets, Samuelson and Kissinger.

**Thirteen** are the Colonies joined at the Continental Congress to form a more perfect union for liberty and democracy.

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