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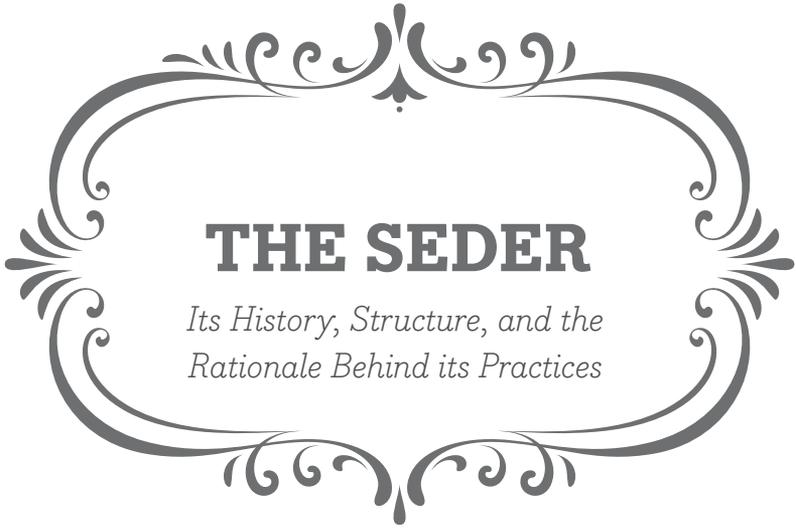
Sincerely,

Rabbi Yehoshua Werde
Director

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ב"ה



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The Pesach Seder

The Seder

For three millennia, our people have gathered together on the first night of Pesach to pass on to our children the tales of our history, how we were slaves in Mitzrayim, and how Hashem took us out with many miracles to bring us to the promised land.

On this night, we drink four cups of wine, eat matzah, and recite the passages of the Haggadah, following the instructions of its fifteen steps. This event is called “The Seder” which means “an order” as we take great care to carry out the practices of the evening in a very specific order.

The seder is one of the central practices of Yiddishkeit, and its structure serves as an ideal paradigm for educating children and passing on our traditions to the next generation.

Why do we have a seder? What are we trying to achieve? Which parts of the seder are original, and what was added over the ages? We will explore the various components of the seder, why we do them, and what they represent. The focus of this study is to come away with a deepened appreciation for, and insight into, the practice and rituals of the seder, to enhance our experience of it, and to make it more meaningful.

History

Over the ages, the seder has undergone several superficial makeovers, but its core components have remained the same.

The very first seder took place on the eve of yetzias

Mitzrayim. The Yidden were instructed to tie a lamb to their bedpost and shecht it four days later (imagine trying to sleep with a lamb tied to your bed). They were told to paint some of its blood on the door-post, roast the lamb and eat it together with matzah and maror.

Hashem instructed that this practice be perpetuated on the same night each year in order to pass on the story to our children.

However, for the entire duration of the forty years that the Jews traveled in the desert, they did not eat roasted lamb with matzah and maror on the night of Pesach. There are two reasons for this:

The Gemarah (Yevamos 72a) notes that for the entire duration of the forty years that the Yidden traveled in the desert, it was dangerous for them to fulfill the mitzvah of Bris Milah. And the posuk clearly requires one to be circumcised in order to partake of the korbun Pesach:

Shemos 12:48

כָּל עֶרְלָל לֹא יֵאָכֵל בוֹ

...No uncircumcised male may partake of it.

Another reason cited by Tosfos is that the Korbun Pesach is only applicable once the Yidden have settled in Eretz Yisrael:

Tosafot, Kidushin 37b Ho'il

כל ארבעים שנה שהיו ישראל במדבר לא הקריבו...וא"ת ולמה לא הקריבו וי"ל דסבירא להו...אינו אלא אחר ירושה וישיבה ובפסח נאמר
ביאה

For the entire forty years that the Yidden were in the desert, they never sacrificed [the Korbon Pesach]...and if you ask why didn't they sacrifice? It can be said that they maintained that ...[the Korbon Pesach] is only applicable after inheriting and settling [in Eretz Yisrael] and concerning the Korbon Pesach the posuk states "entering."

As we find in the posuk:

Shemos 12:25

וְהָיָה כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יָתַן ה' לָכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת:

And it shall come to pass when you enter the land that Hashem will give you, as He spoke, then you shall observe this service.

Early Years in Eretz Yisrael

For 250 plus years following the conquest of Eretz Yisrael until Dovid Hamelech brought the mishkan to its final resting place in Yerushalayim, it was generally permitted for Yidden to bring their own korbanos on private altars (called bamos). For the Korbon Pesach, however, they were required to make a pilgrimage to the mishkan, as the Rambam writes:

Rambam, Hilchos Korbon Pesach 1:3

אין שוחטין את הפסח אלא בעזרה כשאר הקדשים. אף בשעת היתר הבמות לא היו מקריבין את הפסח בבמת יחיד...שנאמר לא תוכל לזבוח את הפסח באחד שעריך.

The Korbon Pesach may only be slaughtered in the courtyard (of the Beis Hamikdash) as other holy offerings. Even during the time when private altars were allowed, they would not sacrifice the Korbon Pesach on a private altar....as the posuk states “You are not allowed to slaughter the Korbon Pesach in one of your gates.”

Following the reign of Dovid Hamelech and Shlomo, the Jewish kingdom was split into two factions - Yisrael and Yehudah. For much of the time, those living in the Kingdom of Yisrael were not permitted to travel to Yehudah to visit the Beis Hamikdash. Malchei Yisrael erected temples in their territories for Yidden to worship pagan gods. The posuk in Melachim tells how in the year 458 BCE (acc. to Jewish chronology), King Yoshiyahu destroyed the temples of the Baal and rededicated the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. The posuk describes how he renewed the practice of making a pilgrimage to Yerushalayim to offer the Korbon Pesach:

Melachim II 23:21-22

וַיִּצְוֵה הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת כָּל הָעָם לֵאמֹר עֲשׂוּ פֶסַח לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כַּכְּתוּב עַל סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית הַזֶּה: כִּי לֹא נַעֲשֶׂה כַּפֶּסַח הַזֶּה מִיָּמֵי הַשְּׂפָטִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁפְטוּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל יָמֵי מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה:

And the king [Yoshiyahu] commanded all the people, saying, “Perform a Korbon Pesach to Hashem your G-d, as it is written in this scroll of the covenant.” For such a Korbon Pesach had not been performed since the time of the Shoftim who judged Bnei Yisrael, and all the days of Malchei Yisrael

and Malchei Yehudah.

The Golus Seder

Following the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, there was a major shift in the way the seder was celebrated. No longer did the seder entail a pilgrimage to Yerushalayim; instead, it was practiced in the home, with certain practices that were instituted to remind us of the way Pesach was observed during the times when the Beis Hamikdash stood.

Our first reference to the specific practices of the post-Beis Hamikdash seder, appears in the Mishnah. The Mishnah describes the seder as a practice that takes place over the drinking of four cups of wine:

Mishnah, Pesachim 10:1-7

מזוגו לו כוס ראשון...מברך על היום... מזוגו לו כוס שני, וכאן הבן שואל... מתחיל בגנות, ומסיים בשבח; ודורש מ"ארמי אובר אבי" (דברים כוה), עד שהוא גומר את כל הפרשה...מזוגו לו כוס שלישי, בירך על מזוגו; רביעי, גומר עליו את הלל

The first cup is poured...he recites the brochoh on the day [kiddush]...the second cup is poured, here the child asks...[he relates the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim] beginning with the shameful [parts of the story] and concluding with praise; expounding on the pesukim from "my father served an Armenian" (Devarim 26:5) until he completes the entire portion...the third cup is poured, he recites birkas hamazon; on the fourth, he completes the recitation of Hallel.

The Haggadah

One of the two biblical obligations of the evening is to recite the Haggadah (the second being to eat matzah). The word “Haggadah” means “the telling” and comes from the posuk:

Shemos 13:8

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.
And you shall tell [“Vehigadeta”] your child on that day saying, “it is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Mitzrayim.”

The version of the Haggadah that we use to guide our seder nowadays is the product of an evolution of hundreds of years of additions and subtractions. While no one author is credited for formulating the Haggadah, the version that became widespread among both Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities is based upon the Haggadah of Rav Amram Gaon, who headed the Babylonian Yeshiva of Sura between 856-876 CE. This is likely due to the invention of the printing press (circa 1450) that made it possible for a single version to become popularized.

Over the centuries, Haggadahs have varied in their songs and poems (such as Dayeinu, Chad Gadya, and Adir Hu), but the underlying formula, basic steps and core texts have remained the same.

Remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim

Every day of the year there is an obligation to remember yetzias Mitzrayim, as the posuk says:

לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ

*...so that you shall remember the day of Yetzias
Mitzrayim all the days of your life.*

Remembering yetzias Mitzrayim is a foundation of our faith.
Several reasons have been given for this:

Faith in Hashem

One of the reasons for Yiddishkeit's emphasis on remembering Yetzias Mitzrayim is because it reminds us of faith in Hashem and Hashem's ability to circumvent the laws of nature:

ואין מן התימה אם באו לנו מצוות רבות על זה, מצוות עשה ומצוות לא תעשה, כי הוא יסוד גדול ועמוד חזק בתורתנו ובאמונתנו. ועל כן אנו אומרים לעולם בברכותינו ובתפלותינו זכר ליציאת מצרים, לפי שהוא לנו אות ומופת גמור בחידוש העולם, וכי יש אלוה קדמון חפץ ויכול, פועל כל הנמצאות אל היש שהם עליו, ובידו לשנותם אל היש שיחפוץ בכל זמן מן הזמנים, כמו שעשה במצרים ששינה טבעי העולם בשבילנו, ועשה לנו אותות מחודשים גדולים ועצומים, הלא זה משתק כל כופר בחידוש העולם, ומקיים האמונה בידיעת השם יתברך, וכי השגחתו ויכלתו בכללים ובפרטים כולם.

Do not be surprised by how many mitzvos there are [relating to yetzias Mitzrayim], both positive and negative commandments, for it is the foundation and pillar upon which our Torah and our faith stand. That is why we always state when making

brochah and praying, “In commemoration of yetzias Mitzrayim,” for it is a sign of the Creation of the world, that there is an omnipotent Master to this world Who created everything, Who can alter Creation whenever He wishes to do so – as He did for us in Mitzrayim when He bent the laws of nature for us and wrought great and unprecedented miracles. It is the rejoinder to anyone who wishes to deny the Creation of the world and it affirms our faith in Hashem’s knowledge and providence both in general and in detail.

Additionally, it reminds us that we were once oppressed ourselves, and should be mindful not to oppress others:

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Faith in the Future, p. 84

The Bible - the common core of the three great monotheisms - issues a remarkable command. It is contained in one word: zakhor, ‘remember’. The verb ‘to remember’ occurs no less than 169 times in the Hebrew Bible. The great historian Yosef Haim Yerushalmi writes that ‘only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.’

Why? The Bible tells us with absolute clarity. ‘You shall not oppress the stranger because you know the heart of the stranger, because you were once strangers in the land of Mitzrayim.’ We are commanded to remember so as not to let history

repeat itself. If we were once oppressed, we cannot become oppressors. And if we once cried for help and no one came, we cannot stand idly by when others cry for help. Memory is the driving force of morality.

Remembering and Telling

If we are obligated to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim every day of the year, what makes the night of Pesach unique in this regard?

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (1853-1918) explains:

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, Stencils

יש ג' חילוקים בין המצוה של זכירת יציאת מצרים להמצוה של סיפור יציאת מצרים: (א) לקיים מצות זכירה אין צריך להזכיר אלא לעצמו, אבל בסיפור יציאת מצרים המצוה היא לספר לאחר דרך שאלה ותשובה ... ב) בסיפור צריך המספר להתחיל בגנות ולסיים בשבח, ולקיים מצות זכירה סגי בזכירת יציאת מצרים לחוד ג) מצוה לספר טעמי המצוות של אותו הלילה כמו שאמר רבן גמליאל כל שלא אמר ג' דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו ואלו הן פסח מצה ומרור פסח על שום מה וכו'

There are three distinctions between the mitzvah of remembering yetzias Mitzrayim (that applies on every day of the year) and the mitzvah of telling over the story of yetzias Mitzrayim (which only applies on the first night of Pesach):

1) *To fulfill the mitzvah of remembering, one only*

needs to remind himself, whereas telling over the story of yetzias Mitzrayim is to tell another person in a question and answer format. ...

2) Telling over requires that the storyteller begin with the shame [the bad times] and end with the praise [with the good times], whereas to fulfill the mitzvah of remembering, one only needs to mention the actual yetzias Mitzrayim and nothing else.

3) There is a mitzvah to relate the reasons behind the mitzvos of the night, as Rabban Gamliel said: Whoever did not mention these three things on Pesach did not fulfill his obligation. And these are they: The Korbon Pesach, matzah, and maror. What does the Pesach commemorate?...

This eloquently summarizes the basic components of the Haggadah. 1) The format of telling the story in response to a child (or adult or oneself) asking questions. 2) Following the story format in which there is a plot that builds (starting with our pagan roots, describing how we got to where we are) 3) Explaining the mitzvos of the Seder night, namely the Korbon Pesach, matzah and maror.

Educating Children

The posuk specifies that “the telling” of the Hagaddah is to children specifically:

Shemos 13:8

וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.

And you shall tell your child on that day saying, “it is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Mitzrayim.”

Children are supposed to be the focal point of the Seder. This doesn't mean the Seder should be any different when there aren't any children around, but when there are, they should be the focus of attention. Even when there are no children present, the approach should still be one of creating an educational experience. To this end, it is advised to read and translate the passages of the Haggadah so that everyone present will be able to follow:

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda'ah Ch. 22

הואיל ועיקר מצות ההגדה היא בבנים, ולפרסם את נסי יציאת מצרים לכל שומע, לפיכך ראוי לראש המסובים שיפרש את עניני ההגדה למסובים ויוסיף בהם הסבר כדי שיבינו הכל. ובפרט לקטנים ולמי שאין לשון חכמינו שגורה על פיהם, ולא מדרשיהם, וביותר בחוצה לארץ שאין הכל שומעים לשון הקדש שתוקנה בה ההגדה... וכך גם נהג ה'חתם סופר' בפרשבורג, שאמר את כל ההגדה בשתי לשונות, לשון הקודש ולשון אשכנז:

Since the Haggadah's primary purpose is to teach the children about Yetzias Mitzrayim and to publicize the miracles and wonders to all those attending the Seder, the leader must explain the Haggadah's different elements and supply additional explanations in a way that is understandable to all those present. He must be especially careful to make sure that the children, as well as the Seder participants who are unfamiliar

with the language and expressions used by our Sages, understand. Outside of Eretz Yisrael, where Jews do not usually speak Hebrew, the language of the Haggadah, [one should recite the Haggadah in the language that is understandable to all]...

Such was the practice of the Chasam Sofer in Pressburg, he recited the entire Haggadah in two languages, Hebrew and German.

To this end, the Gemarah discusses incorporating various gimmicks to keep the children awake and engaged:

Talmud, Pesachim 109a

אמרו עליו על רבי עקיבא שהיה מחלק קליות ואגוזין לתינוקות בערב פסח כדי שלא ישנו וישאלו תניא רבי אליעזר אומר חוטפין מצות בלילי פסחים בשביל תינוקות שלא ישנו.

It is said that Rabbi Akiva would give out nuts on Erev Pesach so that the children should not fall asleep, but would ask questions. Rabbi Eliezer stated, "One grabs [and hides] the matzah on the night of Pesach in order that the children should not fall asleep."

This is where the custom for the children to steal the Afikoman comes from. While this is a popular custom in many communities, in Chabad we avoid having the children steal the afikomen so as not to encourage the act of stealing. We are encouraged, however, to be creative in finding ways to capture the attention of the youth. In several communities,

children put on plays, acting out various parts of the story of yetzias Mitzrayim, to keep them actively engaged and participating.

In Answer to a Question

The purpose of these and many other Seder customs is to pique the child's curiosity and get them to ask questions. Inspiring the children to ask questions is a key component of the seder, since the Torah describes "the telling" of the story as being in response to the child's question:

Shemos 13:14

והיה כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר מה זאת ואמרת אליו בחזק יד הוציאנו
ה' ממצרים מבית עבדים:

And it will come to pass if your son asks you in the future, saying, "What is this?" you shall say to him, "With a mighty hand Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim, out of the house of bondage."

The Rambam explains:

Rambam Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:3

וצריך לעשות שינוי בלילה הזה כדי שיראו הבנים וישאלו ויאמרו מה
נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות עד ששייב להם ויאמר להם כך וכך
אירע וכך וכך היה.

He should make changes on this night so that the children will see and will [be motivated to] ask: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" until he replies to them: "This and this occurred; this

and this took place.”

The Torah's description of the Seder outlines an approach to learning. People learn by asking questions. When information is provided in answer to a question, it becomes many times more meaningful.

At the beginning of the seder, we do Karpas - dip a vegetable in salt-water (for little other reason than) to capture the child's curiosity and provoke them to question.

The Four Questions

It is interesting to note that the four questions we recite today underwent a process of evolution over the ages. When the Mishnah mentions the questions a child should ask at the Seder, it only mentions three questions; and of those three, one of them is no longer recited:

הבן שואל. אם אין דעת בבן-אביו מלמדו, מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות: שבכל הלילות, אין אנו מטבלין אפילו פעם אחת; והלילה הזה, שתי פעמים. שבכל הלילות, אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה; והלילה הזה, כולו מצה. שבכל הלילות, אנו אוכלין בשר צלי שלוק ומבושל; והלילה הזה, כולו צלי.

The son asks, and if his son does not have the intelligence to ask questions on his own, his father teaches him the questions:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

1. On all other nights, we are not required to dip even once. On this night, we dip twice?

2. *On all other nights, we eat chametz or matzah. On this night, only matzah?*

3. *On all other nights, we eat roasted, boiled, or cooked meat. On this night we eat only roasted?*

We see from this Mishnah that the custom of dipping twice (dipping a vegetable into saltwater, and marror into charoses) was a custom that was already practiced in the times of the Mishnah (predating 200 CE).

While the Mishnah lists only three, the Rambam lists, not four questions, but five! He mentions the original three of the Mishnah, including the one about eating the roasted the Korbon Pesach that is no longer applicable today, as well as two new questions that we ask nowadays that were not asked during the times of the Mishnah:

Rambam, Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 8:2

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות שבכל הלילות אין אנו מטבילין אפילו פעם אחת והלילה הזה שתי פעמים. שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמין ומצה והלילה הזה כולו מצה. שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בשר צלי שלוק ומבושל והלילה הזה כולו צלי. שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין שאר ירקות והלילה הזה מרורים. שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בין יושבין בין מסובין והלילה הזה כולנו מסובין:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

1. *On all other nights, we are not required to dip even once. On this night, we dip twice?*

2. *On all other nights, we eat chametz (leaven) or*

matzah. On this night, only matzah?

3. On all other nights, we eat roasted, boiled, or cooked meat. On this night we eat only roasted?

4. On all other nights, we eat any type of vegetables. On this night, we eat maror (bitter herbs)?

5. On all other nights, we eat either sitting upright or reclining. On this night, we all recline?

The idea of asking questions is not limited to children. If there are no children present, the adults ask each other.

Rambam Hilchos Chametz Umatzah 7:3

אין לו בן אשתו שואלתו, אין לו אשה שואלין זה את זה מה נשתנה הלילה הזה, ואפילו היו כולן חכמים, הוה לבדו שואל לעצמו מה נשתנה הלילה הזה.

If a person does not have a son, his wife should ask him. If he does not have a wife, [he and a colleague] should ask each other: “Why is this night different?” This applies even if they are all wise. A person who is alone should ask himself: “Why is this night different?”

And even if the child doesn't ask, one is still obligated to relate the story to the child:

מצוה להודיע לבנים ואפילו לא שאלו שנאמר והגדת לבנך, לפי דעתו של בן אביו מלמדו.

It is a mitzvah to inform one's sons even though they do not ask, as it says, "You shall tell your son" [Shemos 13:8]. A father should teach his son according to the son's understanding.

Learning Modalities

One important lesson from the Seder is that education is not just about conveying information and answering questions, it is about addressing the unique needs of the child, and every child has his or her unique needs and sees things a little differently. The posuk in Mishlei teaches:

חנך לנער על פי דרכו גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה.

Train a child according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not turn away from it.

If education is merely a process of conveying information, over time that information will likely be deemed irrelevant and will be forgotten, unless it relates to the unique needs of the child, in which case it will likely alter the course of the child's life and will have an effect that can last forever.

With this in mind, the Haggadah describes four types of children with different interests:

כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה. אחד חכם ואחד רשע ואחד תם ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול.

The Torah speaks of four sons: one wise son, one wicked one, one simple one, and one who does not know how to ask.

The idea of there being four sons is not an invention of (the anonymous author of) the Haggadah, the Haggadah only points out how the posuk alludes to four different types of sons, and provides answers to each of their questions. Consequently, this idea of addressing the unique questions of each child is part of the original template that the posuk prescribes for the Seder, i.e., that every child should be addressed using the learning modality that will work best for that child.

Stories

In addition to the question and answer format, and addressing the child's unique needs, the Haggadah offers a third point of advice on education—using personal stories to convey messages.

The Rambam outlines what the Mitzvah of telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim entails:

מצות עשה של תורה לספר בנסים ונפלאות שנעשו לאבותינו במצרים בליל חמשה עשר בניסן שנאמר זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים כמו שנאמר זכור את יום השבת,

ואף על פי שאין לו בן, אפילו חכמים גדולים חייבים לספר ביציאת מצרים וכל המאריך בדברים שאירעו ושהיו הרי זה משובח.

It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Mitzrayim on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, as [Shemos 13:3] states, "Remember this day, on which you left Mitzrayim," just as it states, "Remember the Shabbos day" [Ibid. 20:8].

[The mitzvah applies] even if one does not have a son. And even great Sages are obligated to tell about yetzias Mitzrayim. Whoever elaborates concerning the events which occurred and took place is worthy of praise.

The primary mitzvah is to relate the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The word "to relate" "lesaper" is from the same root as the Hebrew word for a story, "sippur."

What is the actual formula for the story that one should relate?

After outlining the child's questions, the Mishnah provides a formula for the answer:

Mishnah, Pesachim 10:4

...מתחיל בגנות, ומסיים בשבח; ודורש מ"ארמי אובר אבי" (דברים כו,ה), עד שהוא גומר את כל הפרשה

...[He relates the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim] beginning with the shameful [parts of the story]

and concluding with praise; expounding on the pesukim from “my father served an Armenian” (Devarim 26:5) until he completes the entire portion.

Why do we begin with the shameful parts and conclude with praise?

Recalling the shameful parts of the history help us appreciate and give praise for the parts that are worthy of it. Human nature is such that we tend to take things for granted. We don't appreciate the freedom that we have until we see it in the context of what we once did not have. In order for us to give praise at the end for what Hashem has done for us, we need to realize what the alternative might have been.

The Mishnah states that we “expound on the pesukim from “my father served an Armenian” (Devarim 26:5) until he completes the entire portion”.

Where does the Mishnah derive this formula from?

There is another mitzvah that requires a person to recite a Haggadah; namely, the mitzvah of bikurim—bringing the first fruits of a harvest to Yerushalayim to be presented to a kohen. Upon presenting the first fruits, the posuk provides a script for the person to declare that includes a brief history of our origins. These are the pesukim from which the story of the Haggadah is comprised. (Interestingly, part of the bikurim declaration refers to the declaration as “higadeti” from the word “Haggadah”)

Given that a big portion of the book of Shmos describes the story of yetzias Mitzrayim, why is the formula in the Haggadah taken from the bikurim declaration that consist of

a few short pesukim in Devarim?

A personal story

The description in the Haggadah (and in the Talmud) of the way in which we should relate to the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim sheds light on why these pesuim were likely chosen:

Haggadah Shel Pesach

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים שנאמר והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים. לא את אבותינו בלבד גאל הקב"ה אלא אף אתנו גאל עמהם, שנאמר ואותנו הוציא משם למען הביא אתנו לתת לנו את הארץ אשר נשבע לאבותינו.

In every generation a person is obligated to see himself as though he had actually come out of Mitzrayim, as it is written, "You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'For the sake of this, Hashem did for me when I went out from Mitzrayim.'" Not only did Hashem, redeem our fathers, but He also redeemed us with them, as it says, "And He brought us out from there, so that He could give us the land which He had promised to our fathers."

We could recount the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim as an event in history, but that would not suffice for the purposes of the Seder. On the night of Pesach we are required to see ourselves as having left Mitzrayim, in the first person.

While there are many pesukim that tell the story of yetzias

Mitzrayim, these peskuim in Devarim are unique in that they represent the only instance in Torah in which someone from a later time period recounts the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim in the first person: “my forefather...treated us cruelly and afflicted us...imposed hard labor upon us...we cried out...our voice...our affliction, our toil, and our oppression...brought us out...brought us to this place...gave us this land...” In context:

Devarim 26:5-9

אַרְמִי אֶבֶד אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְרַם שָׁם בְּמַתִּי מַעַט וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
עָצוּם וָרֹב: וַיַּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה: וַנִּצְעַק
אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת קוֹלָנוּ וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנִיָּנוּ וְאֶת עֲמָלָנוּ וְאֶת
לְחַצְנוֹ: וַיִּצְאָנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה וּבְמַרְא גָּדֹל וּבְאֹתוֹת
וּבְמִפְתִּימִים: וַיְבָאנוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּמְּן לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶרֶץ זָבֶת
חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ:

An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Mitzrayim and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation. And the Egyptians treated us cruelly and afflicted us, and they imposed hard labor upon us. So we cried out to the Hashem, G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And Hashem brought us out from Mitzrayim with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awe, and with signs and wonders. And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The purpose of the Seder is therefore not only to recount the story of yetzias Mitzrayim, but to relive it as well. This means that we should see it, not only as an event that happened to our ancestors, but one at which we were present.

How can we make believe that we were present at yetzias Mitzrayim, an event that took place thousands of years before we were born?

According to the Midrash, our souls were present at yetzias Mitzrayim:

Midrash Lekach Tov, Netzavim

אמר להם משה לישראל בואו ואגידה לכם על כמה יציבות התיצבתם, בתחילה על הים כענין שנאמר התיצבו וראו את ישועת ה', ואח"כ התיצבתם לקבל את התורה שנאמר ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר, ועתה אתם נצבים, ודעו לכם כי גם המתים וגם דורות העתידות לבוא רוחם ונשמתם נצבות פה.

Moshe said to the Yidden: Come and I will tell you in how many places you have stood – first at the Sea, as it says, “Stand and you shall see Hashem’s salvation,” and then you stood to receive the Torah, as it says, “They stood beneath the mountain,” and now you are standing here. You should know that even the souls and spirits of the deceased and future generations are here.

A Personal Yetzias Mitzrayim

Beyond just telling the story in the first person, the Mitzvah is to relive yetzias Mitzrayim—to see ourselves as if we

are leaving Mitzrayim. Since we are no longer slaves in Mitzrayim, what does it mean that we are required to see ourselves as if we are leaving Mitzrayim?

To answer a question with a question: When we sit down to the seder to celebrate our freedom, reclining as kings and drinking wine, there are certain basic conflicts that come to mind. Why are we celebrating the freedom of our nation from exile when that freedom did not last and we are once again in exile and facing threats of annihilation from other nations (as the Haggadah itself testifies that “in every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, but Hashem saves us from their hands”)?

Chassidus explains:

Likutei Torah Bamidbar 4c

מ"ש ביצ"מ כי ברח העם לפי שהיה עדיין הרע בתוקפו כמ"ש במ"א, אבל העיקר הוא לגרש את הרע מקרבנו שיהיה הרע בורח ממנו...ולכן (לע"ל) כתיב כי לא בחפזון תצאו וגו'

That which the posuk says regarding yetzias Mitzrayim (Shemos 14:5) "For the nation fled" this was because the evil within them was still strong as is written elsewhere, but the main thing is to chase away the evil from within that the evil should flee from the person (as opposed to the person fleeing from the evil)...therefore the posuk states (Yesayahu 52:12) concerning the future geulah "without haste you shall go out..."

The posuk does not mean that the people fled from Paraoah,

since Paraoth initially wanted them to leave. Chassidus explains that they fled from the evil within themselves.

Golus is not just circumstantial—a state in which the Jewish nation is enslaved to another nation; it is also a state of being and a frame of mind. Golus is not just a national phenomenon, it is a very personal and individual experience of disconnection from ones soul (a lack of inner alignment).

While physically, the Jews were no longer enslaved to Paraoth, spiritually, they had not achieved a mastery over their temptations and had to run away from Mitzrayim since the evil still remained intact within them. This is why yetzias Mitzrayim was not the final geulah. The final geulah will be marked by a total triumph over temptation wherein there will be no need for an escape, as all evil will have been eradicated.

While yetzias Mitzrayim did not seal the final geulah, it did introduce the notion that geulah is possible, clearing the way for future geulahs. While yetzias Mitzrayim served to break us free from the original Mitzrayim, we still have work to do to attain true freedom, as the Rebbe explains:

Lekutei Sichot vol. 17 p. 88

די גאולה איז געקומען מצד דעם וואס "נגלה עליהם ממה"מ הקב"ה", וואס דאס האט דערנומען זייער נקודת היהדות. און זיי

האבן זיך מער נישט געקענט נארן פון דעם רוח שטות, וואס איז "מכסה על האמת", אז אין דעם מצב קענען זיי זיין פארבונדן מיטן אויבערשטן – און דאס האט פועל געווען דעם "ברח העם"...

און דעריבער זאגט מען "אילו לא הוציא הקב"ה את אבותינו ממצרים הרי אנו ובנינו ובני בנינו משועבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים", ווייל ווען ס'וואלט נישט געווען די יציאה מצד הקב"ה, וואלט דער גלות מצרים זיך

געצויגען ביז עס ווערט דערגרייכט די שלימות הברור והמירוק – ביז
צו דער גאולה העתידה.

The geulah [from Mitzrayim] was brought about on account of “Hashem, the King of Kings, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them” which took hold of their Jewish essence so that they could no longer be deceived by the foolish spirit (ruach shtus) that “covers the truth” (and causes one to sin), for at that moment they had the opportunity to be connected to Hashem - and this caused the “nation to flee.”

We therefore say [in the Haggadah] “If Hashem had not taken out our fathers from Mitzrayim, we and our children and our grandchildren would still be slaves to Paroah in Mitzrayim.” For if Hashem had not taken us out, the golus in Mitzrayim would have continued until the final refinement and cleansing process was complete—i.e., until the future redemption.

Yetzias Mitzrayim provided a temporary relief from the enslavement to the evil within (in a manner of “fleeing” from the evil), but it also serves as a catalyst for all future redemptions, making it possible for us to overcome our own inner slavery and experience a yetzias Mitzrayim from our own Mitzrayim.

At the seder, we are instructed to undergo a personal yetzias Mitzrayim, by realizing that the story of our forefathers is the story of our lives, and that Hashem reveals Himself to us too,

enabling us to see the truth and escape the clutches of evil that enslave us to our emotions or to temporal moments of fleeting pleasure that hold us back from achieving our fullest potential.

The Rebbe provides a practical analogy to explain what this inner enslavement is about:

Letter of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 11 Nissan 5718

בהדרגות שבעולם שמסביבנו - הנה הצומח, כאשר כל הדרוש לצמיחה, אדמה מים ואויר וכדומה, מסופקים לו במילואם - אזי "משוחרר" הצומח מכל ה"דאגות" וההפרעות שלו. ואף שאינו יכול לזוז ממקומו, ו"נגזר" עליו להשאר במקומו כל ימיו - יש לו את מלוא החירות של צומח. כל זמן שאינו אלא צומח - הרי הוא בן חורין באמת. אבל החי, אפילו כאשר מסופקים כל צרכיו, אכילה, שתיה וכדומה, אבל מוכרח הוא לעמוד במקום אחד - הרי זה אצלו המיצר הכי גדול - מאסר, מאסר הכי גרוע, כי חסרה לו עיקר מהותו.

ואילו האדם, שהוא שכלי, אפילו אם יש לו מלוא החירות של תנועה, אבל כשמרחיקים אותו מחיים שכליים - אזי הוא במאסר, מאסר שגוזל אותו מעיקר מהותו.

וכן הוא בעולם השכל עצמו - מי שביכלתו להגיע לדרגות הכי עליונות בשכל, ומגבילים אותו לחיים שכליים של ילד קטן - הרי זה המאסר הכבד ביותר עבור ה"אני" האמיתי שלו, ואם הוא בעצמו מגביל את עצמו בכך - על ידי בזבוז שנותיו ושכלו ואפשרויותיו על אכילה ושתי' וכדומה, ולחיפוש אמצעים להשגת מאכל ומשקה, מבלי להתעלות יותר - הרי, מבחינות רבות, מאסר-עצמי זה מר יותר בהרבה, וגורם תוצאות חמורות יותר.

בני ישראל, שכל אחד מהם יש לו נפש אלקית, חלק אלוקה ממעל ממש, אשר, אפילו כאשר היא מלובשת בנפש הבהמית ובגוף, הרי היא קשורה עם הקב"ה, עם "אין סוף" - שאיפתה לחרות האמיתית שלה, ליציאת מצרים, היא תמידית ו"אין-סופית". היא אינה יכולה להישאר במקום אחד. כל יום, בעלייתה הנוספת ע"י תורה ומצוות, המקרבים לאין-סוף - מרגישה הנשמה בעומק פנימיותה שהמדריגה של אתמול היא היום כבר בבחינת "מצרים", שיש לצאת ממנה ולהגיע למעלה יותר.

From among the various life forms around us - plant life, when it has everything it needs to grow, soil, water, air, and the like, it is completely satisfied—then the vegetation is “free” of any “worries” and disturbances that it might have. And when it is unable to move from its place, and it is “decreed upon” to remain in its place for the entire duration of its life, so long as it is only a plant it enjoys the full freedom of a plant—for it is truly free.

However, an animal, even when all of its needs are met, food, drink, and the like, but it is forced to stand in one place - this is the greatest form of limitation for it - imprisonment, and the worst type of imprisonment, because its primary form of existence is being withheld from it.

Whereas a person, who is an intelligent being, even when he is granted the full freedom of movement, if he is distanced from an intelligent lifestyle - then he

is imprisoned, and [not just any imprisonment,] an imprisonment that robs him of his primary form of existence.

The same is true within the realm of intelligence itself. One who is able to achieve the highest forms of intellectual pursuits and he is limited to the lifestyle of a young child, this is the greatest form of imprisonment for the true “I.” If a person limits himself to this by wasting away his years, intelligence, and abilities, for eating and drinking, and in pursuit of ways to acquire food and drink, without achieving anything greater, then, on many levels, this self-imprisonment is more bitter and has more severe repercussions.

Yidden, every one of whom possesses a nefesh Elohis, a part of Hashem above, that, even when it is clothed within the animal soul and the body, it remains connected to Hashem, to the “Infinite”—its aspiration for its true freedom, its yetzias Mitzrayim, is constant and infinite. It is unable to remain in one place. Every day, with each additional ascent through Torah and Mitzvos, which bring one closer to the “Infinite”—the neshamah feels in its inner depth that the level of yesterday is today considered a “Mitzrayim” that one must leave and arrive at an even higher place.

The 15 Steps

As we have seen, the primary formulation of the Haggadah is to tell and relive the story of yetzias Mitzrayim by expounding on the aforementioned pesukim from Devarim in answer to a child's (or adult's) questions. This mitzvah takes place in the context of a 15 step program that also include reciting kidush, drinking four cups of wine, reciting our thanks to Hashem, eating Matzah and Maror, eating additional Matzah in commemoration of the Korbon Pesach, washing for matzah, eating a festive meal, reciting birkas hamazon, and reciting the Hallel for taking us out of Mitzrayim. It also includes practices that we do to encourage the children to ask questions and to make the narrative more visual (such as the breaking of the middle matzah and the dipping of a vegetable into saltwater, and the like).

4 cups of wine

The Sages instituted that every person should drink four cups of wine (or grape juice) at the Seder, as the traditional way to celebrate has always been by drinking wine. The Sages deemed the four cups of wine so important that they included it as part of the requirement a community has to its poor, to provide them with four cups of wine for the Seder:

Mishnah, Pesachim 10:1

לא יפחתו לו מארבעה כוסות של יין, ואפילו מן התמחוי.

A person should not partake of less than four cups of wine, even [if it requires him to accept] from charity.

Why four cups?

The Jerusalem Talmud describes the meaning of the number four:

Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 10:1

מניין לארבעה כוסות רבי יוחנן בשם רבי בנייה כנגד ארבע גאולות לכן אמור לבני ישראל אני ה' והוצאתי אתכם וגו' ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם וגו' והוצאתי והצלתי וגאלתי ולקחתי

*What is the source for drinking the Four Cups?
Rabbi Yochanan taught in the name of Rabbi Benayah: It is derived from the posuk that mentions four stages of redemption: "Therefore say to Bnei Yisrael [in My Name], 'I am Hashem. I will take you away from your forced labor ... I will take you to Myself as a nation ...'" – 'I brought forth,' 'I saved,' 'I redeemed,' and 'I took.'*

The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Loew 1560–1609) explains the spiritual significance of the number four:

Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 60

כל דבר שהוא בא מעולם הנבדל לעולם הזה יש בו רבוי מחולק לארבע, כי מספר זה הוא מספר הרבוי שהוא נגד ארבע צדדין המחולקים ואלו דברים הם ארבע לשונות של גאולה. וסוד הזה הוא מבואר בתורה (בראשית ב') ונהר יוצא מעדן להשקות וגו' ומשם יפרד והיה לארבעה ראשים, שמזה מבואר לך כי כל דבר שבא מעולם הנבדל כמו הנהר שהוא יוצא מעדן להשקות הגן כשהוא בא אל עולם הטבע הוא עולם הרבוי, יפרד לארבעה ראשים כי זהו נגד הפירוד והרבוי שהוא בעולם הרבוי, ולפיכך הגאולה שבאה מעולם העליון הנבדל היה מתפרד

לארבעה ראשים הם ארבע לשונות של גאולה.

Everything that descends from an upper world into our world is divided into four parts, because this is the number of multiplicity, corresponding to the four directions. There are therefore four Scriptural expressions of redemption. The secret of this can be learned from the Torah: “A stream came forth from Eden ... there it divided, and became four branches,” which demonstrates that anything which descends from the upper world, such as the river which emanated from Eden to water the Garden, divides into four upon reaching our world, the world of diversity. Therefore, the redemption, which descends from the upper, separate world, divided into four heads, which are the four expressions of redemption.

Cup of Eliyahu

We also pour a fifth cup, that is called the “cup of Eliyahu.”
What is the significance of this cup?

Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda'ah, Ch. 22

נוהגים שבשעה שמוזגים כוס רביעי שגומרין עליו את ההלל, מוזגים עוד כוס אחת שהיא גדולה מכולן, ומסבבה לכוס זו בשאר כוסות המסובין, לכבוד ולתפארת; והיא נקראת 'כוסו של אליהו': ענין כוס זו, לפני שנחלקו בה תנאים, ורבי טרפון אומר, תיב כל אדם לשתות חמש כוסות, וכוס חמשי קורא עליו את ההלל הגדול. ולא נפסקה ההלכה כמו מי, הלכך נוהגים למוזג מספק - כדברי רבי טרפון, ואין

שותין - כדברי חכמים. ולכשיבוא אליהו הנביא זכור לטוב ויברר לנו כל ספקותינו, גם ספק זה יתברר. לכך קורין אותה 'כוסו של אליהו':

וכשם שסמכו ארבע כוסות על ארבע לשונות של גאולה, כך כוס זו, החמשית, כנגד וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ האמורה אחריו, ואף היא רומזת לגאולה האחרונה:

ואמרו חכמי הדורות, שכוס זו של והבאתי, רמז לגאולה האחרונה השלמה שתהא בבשורת אליהו הנביא והגואל האחרון (המלכות החמשית, חוץ מארבע המלכויות).

When the fourth cup is poured, over which Hallel is recited, it is customary to pour an additional cup, one bigger than the others. This fifth cup is called the Cup of Eliyahu. Its basis is a Talmudic debate (Pesachim 118a): Rabbi Tarfon maintained that one must drink five cups of wine at the Seder, the fifth being the one Hallel is recited over. Since the dispute is unresolved, the custom is to pour the fifth cup – as per Rabbi Tarfon – but not to drink it – as per the Sages. When Eliyahu comes and clarifies all of our halachic doubts, this too shall be resolved. That is why it is called the Cup of Eliyahu.

And just as the first four cups parallel expressions of redemption in the Torah, so too does the fifth. It parallels a fifth expression, "And I will bring you to the Land," which is written at the end of the posuk. This itself is a hint about the redemption.

The Sages of the generation have explained that the

fifth cup of “I will bring you” hints at the complete and Final Redemption that will be ushered in by Eliyahu and the Final Redemption.

Leaning

Another important requirement that the Sages introduced to the Seder for us to experience freedom is to recline to the left when drinking the four cups of wine and eating the Matzah:

Maharal, Gevuros Hashem Ch. 52

ומפני שיראה עצמו כאלו יצא ממצרים יש לעשות הסבה שנראה שהוא בן חורין.

Since a person must see himself as if he came out of Mitzrayim, he must recline in order to show that he is a free man.

Maror

The maror represents the bitterness of life as slaves in Mitzrayim. At the seder we relive both the bitterness of slavery (by eating maror) and the celebration of freedom (by drinking wine and reclining).

What kinds of bitter herbs count for maror?

Mishnah, Pesachim 2:6

ואלו ירקות שאדם יוצא בהן ידי חובתו בפסח-בחזרת, ובעולשין, ובתמכה, ובחרחבינה, ובמרור. יוצאין בהן, בין לחים בין יבשים; אבל לא כבושין, ולא שלוקים, ולא מבושלים. וכולם מצטרפין בכזית.

These are the vegetables with which a person may

fulfill his obligation to eat maror on Pesach—with [romaine] lettuce, with endives, with horseradish, and with [all kinds of] bitter herbs. One fulfills their obligation with them whether they are moist or dry, but not if they are preserved, or stewed, or cooked. And these vegetables all may combine to make up the size of an olive [which is the minimum amount of maror required to fulfill the obligation].

In practice, most people use a combination of romaine lettuce and horseradish. While the romaine lettuce may not seem so bitter, it is a preferred choice for maror, because the longer it remains in the ground, the more bitter it gets (similar to golus Mitzrayim that with time became increasingly intolerable).

The maror (and the korech sandwich) is dipped into charoses, a mixture of apples, pears, nuts, and wine. The term “charoses” refers to any mixture that is used for dipping. The charoses that we use on Pesach is reminiscent of the mortar that our forefathers were forced to make for Paroah in Mitzrayim. It is made from fruit because the Yidden are compared to fruit, and the wine represents blood, the first of the ten makos.

The Chicken and the Egg

On the Seder plate, we also have two cooked dishes:

Talmud, Pesachim 114b

הביאו לפנינו...ושני תבשילין... רב יוסף אמר צריך שני מיני בשר אחד זכר לפסח וא' זכר לחגיגה [צלי כנגד הפסח ומבושל כנגד חגיגה - רש"י]

[After the head of the household recited kiddush,] they brought before him...and two cooked dishes... Rav Yosef said: Two kinds of meat are required [for the two cooked dishes] one as a commemoration of the Korbon Pesach and one as a commemoration of the Chagigah [Rashi: one roasted dish corresponding to the Korbon Pesach (that had to be roasted) and one cooked dish, corresponding to the Chagigah offering (that was allowed to be cooked.)]

Nowadays, we place a roasted chicken bone (a neck, which is not eaten) and a hard-boiled egg (that some eat during the meal) on the seder plate. These items are not meant to be used during the seder, and are only intended to be present as a reminder of the korbonos that were brought during the times of the Beis Hamikdash.

15 Steps to Freedom

The 15 steps of the Seder are intended to be a system of personal transformation to arrive at a place of inner freedom. This is alluded to by the spiritual symbolisms of each of these steps:

Rabbi Simon Jacobson, meaningfullife.org

1. Kadesh (reciting kiddush)...means 'to separate,' referring to the separation between good and bad, holy and profane. The first step of the Seder process (and of every process) is to create a new space so that the journey toward freedom can begin. We separate ourselves from the mundane past that

enslaves us and enter the sacred spiritual experience of the Seder which frees us.

2. U'rchatz (washing the hands)...Following the separation between the mundane and the sacred, we wash and submerge our hands in water, cleansing our 'tools' in preparation for the following 13 steps. Every new process always requires a cleansing.

3. Karpas (eating a vegetable dipped in salt water)...This is done to provoke the children to ask: why? The Seder begins by stimulating the child to ask questions because a critical component of freedom is the encouragement and empowerment to ask questions.

4. Yachatz (breaking the middle matzah)...Matzah symbolizes...suspending oneself for a higher purpose. ...Breaking the matzah is breaking the self. Even the self as represented by matzah is broken to ensure that even the selflessness does not become another expression of self.

5. Maggid (reciting the Haggadah)...is the story of our lives, the story of all harsh and oppressive forces in our personal 'mitzrayim's,' and our liberation from them. The first and most critical element in achieving redemption is awareness that we are in 'prison.' As long as we convince ourselves that our

constraints are ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ we cannot even begin freeing ourselves. So, we tell the story. Our story. By relating and recreating the story we recognize the limits of our personal struggles and challenges. And once we define the parameters of our own internal “exile,” then, and only then, can we start the process of redemption.

6. Rachtzah (washing the hands)...Once we are elevated to a higher level of holiness through the first five steps (kadesh through maggid), we need to submerge our hands once again in water, preparing ourselves for the next stage of spiritual growth and freedom.

What does this new stage consist of? The first five steps help put us into a psychological frame of mind of a free person, and to give us a taste of that freedom....we are then ready to begin manifesting and implementing this new-found freedom in our physical and material lives, and not just a taste of it but in a way that we can maintain it...

7. Motzi (reciting the blessing HaMotzi)... This first blessing emphasizes the ‘earthiness’ (the body) of Matzah (the primary ingredient of Matzah is flour – which comes from grain of the earth – mixed with water). ...Matzah focuses on the positive side of materialism; on its great potential which is released when we reveal the Divine spark within it. “It is

not on bread alone that man lives, but on the word of Hashem,” the Divine spark within the bread...it remains locked and trapped in mitzrayim, until we begin to release it.

Lechem (bread) also means ‘to battle.’ A meal is like a war between the material and the spiritual sparks that lie hidden within the food, between our temptation to indulge and our ability to transcend and elevate the material meal by revealing and releasing these sparks...The first step of releasing and freeing these sparks is through making the blessing HaMotzi on the matzah.

8. Matzah (reciting the blessing on the matzah and eating it)...This blessing emphasizes not the ‘earthiness’ of matzah, but its spirit – the power of...selflessness...This in turn help us achieve true freedom in our lives, integrating the material and the spiritual, body and soul.

9. Maror (eating the bitter herbs)...materialism – including our food – still holds us in a powerful stranglehold. Therefore, following the matzah we eat the bitter maror, which reminds us that we are still enslaved in a world of selfishness, and the resulting bitterness....

The maror is dipped into charoset (a sweet conglomeration of ground apples, pears, nuts and

wine), sweetening it a bit (but not in a way that eliminates its bitterness). This demonstrates that even when we need to feel bitterness, its purpose and objective is not bitter, but to reach a greater freedom....

10. Korech (eating a sandwich of matzah and maror)...Combining both the matzah's earthiness... and the maror's bitterness (dipped in sweet charoset).

There is a time to sing and a time to cry. A time to celebrate and a time to feel the harshness of life. A time for the sweet and a time for the bitter. But then we must learn to join them both into one seamless experience called life ...

11. Shulchan Oruch (eating the festive meal)... Eating an entire material in an entirely new way, one permeated with a sense of Higher presence and G-dliness...

12. Tzofon (eating the afikoman...the larger half of the middle matzah that we broke and then hid away in Yachatz). Tzofon means 'hidden.' It also means 'north,' where it's cold and seemingly void of spirituality....we now have the power to reveal that which is hidden and unconscious – tzofon – within ourselves and those around us....And we can reveal the enormous spiritual energy that lies hidden in

the ‘north,’ in the places that seem so spiritually barren...

Complete freedom is achieved only when we have been freed not just the conscious levels but also the unconscious and hidden ones.

13. Beirach (reciting grace)...This gives us the power to ensure that the meal – which is symbolic of all our material experiences – will yield the spiritual energy that lies within its Divine sparks. Beirach (to bless) means ‘to draw down’ – to draw down into this physical world spirituality and G-dliness.

14. Hallel (reciting psalms of praise)...through these words of praise we place ourselves in Hashem’s hands. We surrender to Hashem to complement whatever we cannot do on our own and to conclude the process of reaching complete freedom.

15. Nirtzah (Hashem’s promise to accept our service)... We have reached a point that transcends words and praise. After we have completed our Seder service, we are accepted favorably – nirtzah - by Hashem.

As such we are ready for the final and complete freedom and redemption: “Next year in Yerushalayim”

Take-aways

- » The Seder was originally commemorated in Yerushalayim by eating the Korbon Pesach (that could only be brought in the Beis Hamikdash) with matzah and maror. Nowadays, we no longer have the Korbon Pesach, but there is still a scriptural mitzvah to eat Matzah and recount the story of yetzias Mitzrayim.
- » Remembering yetzias Mitzrayim is foundational to Yiddishkeit as it serves as a pillar of our faith in Hashem and reminds us not to oppress others, as we were once oppressed.
- » The Haggadah is recited in answer to a child's questioning. We therefore do various odd things to pique the children's curiosity and get them to ask questions.
- » The text of the Haggadah is designed to tell the story in the first-person, as we are obligated to relive our own yetzias Mitzrayim. This is why the declaration from the mitzvah of first fruits was chosen as the basic text.
- » In addition to the biblical mitzvot of eating matzah and reciting the Haggadah, there is a rabbinic requirement to drink four cups of wine and recline to celebrate our freedom and to eat maror to remind ourselves of the bitterness of slavery. There are various other practices we do commemorate practices that were done in the times of the Temple or to pique the children's curiosity.
- » The fifteen steps of the Seder represent steps on our spiritual journey towards achieving inner freedom.

Appendix

Every Child is an Only Child

In the depiction of the four sons, each of the sons are described as being “one,” this is similar to the way the Torah describes Moshe’s two sons:

Shemos 18:3-4

שֵׁם הָאֶחָד גֶּרְשֹׁם... וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֱלִיעֶזֶר

The name of the one was Gershom...and the name of the one was Eliezer.

Midrash Tanchuma (cited in Moshav Zekeinim Al Hatorah p. 151)

תִּימָה אֲמַאי לֹא אָמַר וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי אֱלִיעֶזֶר... לְפִי שֶׁהִיא מִשָּׁה אוֹהֵבוֹ כְּאִלוֹ
הָיָה בֶן יָחִיד.

Question: Why doesn't it say “and the name of the second, Eliezer”?... because Moshe loved him as if he were an only child.

If we apply this explanation to the statement of the Haggadah that each son is “one” so as to say that each of them should be treated as if they were an only child.

Interestingly, the story of Bereishis tells how the original golus in Mitzrayim came about because Yaacov favored Yoseph over his other eleven sons (symbolized by the multi-colored coat he made for him). This led to jealousy and discord between the brothers that resulted in Yoseph being sold as a slave and ending up in Mitzrayim. His father and brothers eventually came down to Mitzrayim to join him and the slavery began

shortly thereafter.

According to Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1783–1869) in his commentary Yeros Shlomo, this is alluded to by Karpas. Literally, Karpas means celery (a vegetable that was most commonly used - although nowadays many communities replace it with a different vegetable,) however, it also means fine cotton (as in Esther 1:6 - describing the draperies in at King Achashveirosh's feast "White, fine cotton, and blue" - "Chur, karpas, u'secheles"). Rashi in his commentary to Bereishis describes Yoseph's multi-colored coat as being made of "karpas"—fine cotton. We begin the Seder remembering not only yetzias Mitzrayim, but also how we got to Mitzrayim in the first instance—through "Karpas" the multi-colored coat which was an icon of the favoritism that led to the baseless hatred between the brothers.