

KORBAN PESACH

שמות יב:ג-ד

דָּבְרוּ אֶל כָּל עַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּעֶשֶׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׁה לְבַיִת אֵבֶת
שָׁה לְבַיִת: וְאִם יִמְעַט הַבַּיִת מִהְיוֹת מִשָּׂה וְלָקַח הוּא וּשְׂכֵנו הִקְרַב אֶל בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסֵת
נִפְשֵׁת אִישׁ לְפִי אֲכָלוֹ תִּכְסֹּה עַל הַשָּׂה:

Shemot 12:3-4

Speak to all the community of Israel saying: On the tenth of this month [i.e. Nissan] each individual [*ish*, lit. “man”] should take a lamb for a family, a lamb for a household. And if the household does not have enough [people to eat] a lamb, then he together with his near neighbor can take a lamb according to the number of people, each person in accordance with what he eats will be numbered upon the lamb.

תלמוד ירושלמי קידושין א:ז

תני האשה עושה פסח הראשון לעצמה והשני טפילה לאחרים, דברי ר' מאיר. ר' יוסי אומר: האשה עושה פסח שני לעצמה, א"צ [=אין צריך] לומר הראשון. ר' אלעזר בי ר' שמעון אומר: האשה עושה פסח ראשון טפילה לאחרים ואינה עושה פסח שני. מה טעמא דר' מאיר? "איש שה לבית אבות" - ואם רצו לבית. מה טעמא דר' יוסי? "איש שה לבית אבות" - כ"ש [=כל שכן] לבית. מה טעמא דר' אלעזר בי ר' שמעון? "איש" - לא אשה. מה מקיימין רבנן? "איש" - פרט לקטן

Talmud Yerushalmi Kiddushin 1:7

We learn in a baraita: A woman makes the first [*korban*] *Pesach* [14 Nissan] for herself. But on the second [14 Iyyar, *Pesach Sheini*], she is an adjunct to others; [these are] the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yosei says, a woman makes *Pesach sheini* for herself, and it goes without saying that she's obligated in the first [the standard *korban Pesach*]. Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon says: a woman makes the first *Pesach* as an adjunct to others, and does not make *Pesach Sheini*. What is Rabbi Meir's rationale? "Each man should take a lamb for a family" and if they want, "for a household" [i.e. wife]. What is the rationale of Rabbi Yosei? "Each man should take a lamb for a family" and how much more so "for a household" [i.e. a wife]. What is the rationale of Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon? "Each man" and not a woman. How do our sages interpret it? "Man" – to exclude a minor.

.... ורבי יוסי מאי טעמא? דכתיב בראשון "במכסת נפשת" – ואפילו אשה...

Pesachim 91b

And what is Rabbi Yossi's rationale? For it is written regarding the first [*Pesach*], "according to the number of people" [*nefashot*] and [that means] even a woman.

רמב"ם הלכות קרבן פסח א:א

מצות עשה לשחוט את הפסח בארבעה עשר לחדש ניסן אחר חצות, ואין שוחטין אלא מן הכבשים או מן העזים בלבד זכר בן שנה, ואחד האיש ואחד האשה חייבין במצוה זו.

Rambam, Laws of Korban Pesach 1:1

It is a positive commandment to sacrifice the Pesach on the fourteenth of the month of Nissan after mid-day, and we sacrifice only from the sheep or from the goats, only a yearling male, and both men and women are obligated in this commandment.

MATZA AND MAROR

שמות יב:ח

וְאָכְלוּ אֶת הַבָּשָׂר בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה צְלִי אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת עַל מְרִירִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ:

Shemot 12:8

They shall eat the meat on that night, roasted with fire and *matzot*, on *merorim* they shall eat it.

פסחים קכ.

אמר רבא: מצה בזמן הזה דאורייתא ומרור דרבנן. – ומאי שנא מרור דכתיב על מצות ומררים בזמן דאיכא פסח – יש מרור, ובזמן דליכא פסח – ליכא מרור. מצה נמי הא כתיב על מצות ומררים! – מצה מיהדר הדר ביה קרא בערב תאכלו מצת.

Pesachim 120a

Rava said: Matza today is on a Torah level and *maror* is rabbinic. How is *maror* different – as it is written "upon *matzot* and *merorim*"! At the time when there is a [*korban*] Pesach, there is *maror*, and at a time when there is no [*korban*] Pesach, there is no *maror*. [This should be true for] matza as well – it is written

“upon *matzot* and *merorim*”! [Regarding] matza, Scripture repeats it: “in the evening you shall eat *matzot*.”

שמות פרק יב:ט-כ

שְׁבַעַת יָמִים שָׂאֵר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבֵיתְכֶם כִּי כָּל אֲכָל מִחֻמֶּצֶת וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעֵדֻת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ: כָּל מִחֻמֶּצֶת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֵיתְכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ מִצּוֹת:

Shemot 12:19-20

For seven days leaven shall not be found in your homes, for all who eat something leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the assembly of Israel whether a sojourner or citizen of the land: All that is leavened you shall not eat, in all your settlements you shall eat *matzot*.

דברים פרק טז:ג

לֹא תֹאכְל עָלֶיךָ חֵמֶץ שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תֹּאכְל עָלֶיךָ מִצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בְּחַפְזוֹן יָצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם יְצִאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

Devarim 16:3

You shall not eat upon it *chametz*, for seven days you shall eat upon it *matzot*, the bread of affliction, because in haste you left Egypt in order that you should remember the day of your leaving Egypt all the days of your life.

תלמוד ירושלמי קידושין פרק א:ז

מצתן מהו? אמר ליה: חובה.... נאמר “לא תאכל עליו חמץ” ונאמר “שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצות לחם עוני.” את שהוא בבל תאכל חמץ, הרי הוא בקום אכול מצה. ונשים הרי הן בבל תאכל חמץ, הרי הן בקום אכול מצה. והא תנינן “כל מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא האנשים חייבים והנשים פטורות!”? אמר ר' מנא: חומר הוא מצות עשה שהיא באה מכח בלא תעשה.

Yerushalmi Kiddushin 1:7

What is [the halachic status of] their [women’s] matza? He said to him: An obligation... It is said “you shall not eat upon it *chametz*” and it is said “for seven days you shall eat upon it *matzot*, the bread of affliction.” Whoever is included in the prohibition against eating *chametz* is also included in the positive injunction to eat matza. Women are included in the prohibition against eating *chametz*, so they are included in the injunction to eat matza. And that which we teach: “All positive commandments that

are time-bound, men are obligated and women are exempt”!? R’ Mana said: A positive commandment that draws force from a negative commandment is more severe.

פסחים מג.-מג:

הכתיב “כל” (שמות יב:ט). ההוא מיבעי ליה לרבות את הנשים...אימא בבל תאכל חמץ נמי ליתנהו, קא משמע לן. והשתא דאתרבו להו בבל תאכל חמץ – איתרבי נמי לאכילת מצה, כרבי אלעזר, דאמר רבי אלעזר: נשים חייבות באכילת מצה דבר תורה, שנאמר לא תאכל עליו חמץ וגו’ כל שישנו בבל תאכל חמץ – ישנו באכילת מצה. והני נשי נמי, הואיל וישנן בבל תאכל חמץ – ישנן בקום אכול מצה.

Pesachim 43a-b

Isn’t it written “*kol*” [all] (*Shemot* 12:19)? That is necessary to include the women....I might say that they [women] are also not included in the prohibition against eating *chametz*. This [word] teaches us [that they are]. And now that they are included in the prohibition against eating *chametz* – they should also be included in eating matza, like Rabbi Elazar, as Rabbi Elazar said: Women are obligated from the Torah to eat matza, as it says “You shall not eat upon it *chametz*...” – whoever is included in the prohibition against eating *chametz* is included in eating matza. These women also, since they are included in the prohibition against eating *chametz* – they are included in the positive injunction to eat *matza*.

רמב”ם הלכות חמץ ומצה וי:

הכל חייבין באכילת מצה אפילו נשים...

Rambam, Laws of Chametz and Matza 6:10

Everyone is obligated in eating matza, even women...

רש”י פסחים צא: ד”ה לית ליה

וכשם שנשים באכילת מצה חובה – הכי נמי במרור.

Rashi Pesachim 91b, s.v. Leit lei

Just as with eating matza women are obligated – so too with *maror*.

טור אורח חיים הלכות פסח סימן תעב

ואחד אנשים ואחד נשים חייבים...בכל מצות הנוהגות באותה לילה כגון מצה ומרור

Tur OC 472

Both men and women are obligated... in all the *mitzvot* practiced on that night, such as matza and *maror*.

FOUR CUPS

פסחים קיז:

אמר ליה: ארבע כסי תיקנו רבנן דרך חירות, כל חד וחד נעביד ביה מצוה.

Pesachim 117b

[Rava] said to him: The rabbis established the four cups in the manner of freedom; with each one, a person does a mitzva.

פסחים קח:

תנו רבנן: הכל חייבין בארבעה כוסות הללו, אחד אנשים ואחד נשים....

Pesachim 108b

Our rabbis taught: Everyone is obligated in these four cups, both men and women...

פסחים קח.

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: נשים חייבות בארבעה כוסות הללו, שאף הן היו באותו הנס.

Pesachim 108a

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Women are obligated in these four cups, for they indeed/too (*af hen*) were part of that miracle.

Shayna Goldberg, 'Celebrating Freedom in a Postmodern Age.' Times of Israel

We were liberated and set free from the slavery of Egypt only to become the servants of God a few weeks later. We were given the freedom to be commanded. The freedom to choose the meaningful life we want to live....the seder night is all about experience. It is full of eating, smelling, and acting, and, ultimately, feeling as if we ourselves left Egypt. It is not hard to understand why Pesach is one of the most widely observed Jewish holidays, for experience is often what connects us more to meaning than does doctrine, philosophy or even revelation.

רש"י פסחים קח: ד"ה שאף

שאף הן היו באותו הנס – כדאמרינן (סוטה יא, ב) בשכר נשים צדקניות שבאותו הדור נגאלו; וכן גבי מקרא מגילה נמי אמרינן הכי, דמשום דעל ידי אסתר נגאלו; וכן גבי נר חנוכה במסכת שבת (כג, א).

Rashi Pesachim 108b, s.v. She-af

They indeed were part of that miracle – as we say (*Sota* 11b) in the merit of the righteous women of that generation they were redeemed; and similarly regarding *megilla* reading we also say thus, because they were redeemed through Esther, and similarly regarding the Chanuka light in Tractate *Shabbat* (23a).

פסחים קטז.

מאי מצוה? רבי לוי אומר: זכר לתפוח. ורבי יוחנן אומר: זכר לטיט. אמר אביי: הלכך צריך לקהוייה וצריך לסמוכיה. לקהוייה- זכר לתפוח, וצריך לסמוכיה- זכר לטיט.

Pesachim 116a

What is the mitzva [of *charoset*]? Rabbi Levi says: In remembrance of the apple tree. Rabbi Yochanan says: In remembrance of the mortar. Abbaye said: Therefore, it is necessary to make it sour and to make it thick. To make it sour – in remembrance of the [sour]-apple tree and it is necessary to make it thick – in remembrance of the mortar.

סוטה יא:

דרש רב עזירא: בשכר נשים צדקניות שהיו באותו הדור – נגאלו ישראל ממצרים, בשעה שהולכות לשאוב מים, הקדוש ברוך הוא מזמן להם דגים קטנים בכדיהן ושואבות מחצה מים ומחצה דגים, ובאות ושופתות שתי קדירות אחת של חמין ואחת של דגים, ומוליכות אצל בעליהן לשדה, ומרחיצות אותן וסכות אותן ומאכילות אותן ומשקות אותן ונזקקות להן בין שפתים, שנאמר: אם תשכבון בין שפתים וגו', בשכר תשכבון בין שפתים זכו ישראל לביזת מצרים, שנאמר: כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ [תהלים סח:יד], וכיון שמתעברות באות לבתיהם; וכיון שמגיע זמן מולדיהן, הולכות ויולדות בשדה תחת התפוח, שנאמר: תחת התפוח עוררתיך וגו', ...

Sota 11b

Rav Avira expounded: In the merit of the righteous women of that generation Israel were redeemed from Egypt. When they would go to draw water, the Holy One, blessed be He, would provide them with little fish in their pitchers and they would draw half

water and half fish, and they would come and cook two pots, one of hot water and one of fish, and bring them to their husbands to the field, and bathe them and anoint them and feed them and give them to drink and have relations with them between the banks, as it is said, “If you lie between the banks...” in the merit of lying between the banks, Israel merited to plunder Egypt, as it is said, “Doves’ wings coated with silver and its feathers with yellow gold” (*Tehillim* 68:14) and when they became pregnant, they would come home, and when the time to give birth would come, they would go and give birth in the field under the apple tree, as it is said: Under the apple tree I aroused you...”

תוספות פסחים קח:

שאף הן היו באותו הנס – ואי לאו האי טעמא לא היו חייבות, משום דנשים פטורות ממצות עשה שהזמן גרמא. אף ע”ג [=על גב] דארבעה כוסות דרבנן, כעין דאורייתא תיקון

Tosafot Pesachim 108b

For they, too, were included in the miracle: Were it not for this rationale, women would not be obligated in the four cups, because women are exempt from positive time-bound commandments. Even though the four cups are a rabbinic-level mitzva, rabbinic commandments were established like Torah ones [so women would be exempt].

EXTENDING AF HEN

תוספות מגילה ד. ד”ה שאף

גבי מצה יש מקשה: למה לי היקשא ד”כל שישנו בבל תאכל חמץ ישנו בקום אכול מצה?” תיפוק ליה מטעם שהן היו באותו הנס! וי”ל [=ויש לומר] דמשום האי טעמא לא מחייבא אלא מדרבנן אי לאו מהיקשא. ורבינו יוסף איש ירושלים תירץ דסלקא דעתך למיפטרה מגזירה שוה דט”ו ט”ו דחג הסוכות...

Tosafot Megilla 4a, s.v. She-af

Regarding *matza* one could ask why it is necessary to draw the analogy [*hekeshe*] that “Anyone who is included in the prohibition against eating *chametz* is included in the positive obligation to eat *matza*.” Why can’t it [women’s obligation to eat *matza*] be learned from the rationale of “inclusion in the miracle?” And one must say that it is for this reason, that this would only obligate women rabbinically were it not for the analogy. Rabbeinu Yosef of Yerushalayim suggested that one might have thought women should be exempt because of the connection between the fifteenth [of Nissan] and the fifteenth [of Tishrei] for Sukkot.

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים שנאמר (שמות יג) “והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים” לפיכך אנחנו חייבין להודות להלל לשבח לפאר לרומם להדר לברך לעלה ולקלס למי שעשה לאבותינו ולנו את כל הניסים האלו הוציאנו מעבדות לחירות מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב ומאפילה לאור גדול ומשעבוד לגאולה ונאמר לפניו הללויה:

Mishna Pesachim 10:5

In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he went out of Egypt, as it is said (*Shemot* 13) “you shall tell your son on that day saying: it is on account of that which God did for me when I went out of Egypt.” Therefore, we are obligated to give thanks, praise, laud, acclaim, exalt, glorify, and bless, to elevate and extol, the One who performed all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: He brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to great light, and from enslavement to redemption, and let us say before Him *Halleluyah*.

מזגו לו כוס שלישי מברך על מזונו רביעי גומר עליו את ההלל ואומר עליו ברכת השיר

Mishna Pesachim 10:7

They poured him the third cup, he recites *birkat ha-mazon*. The fourth, he completes *Hallel* over it and recites over it the blessing of song.

משמע כאן דאשה פטורה מהלל דסוכות וכן דעצרת וטעמא משום דמצוה שהזמן גרמא היא, אף על גב דבהלל דלילי פסחים משמע בפרק ערבי פסחים (דף קח.). דמחייבי בד' כוסות ומסתמא לא תיקנו ד' כוסות אלא כדי לומר עליהם הלל ואגדה. שאני הלל דפסח דעל הנס בא ואף הו באותו הנס...

Tosafot Sukka 38a, s.v. mi she-haya

This indicates that a woman is exempt from *Hallel* on Sukkot and Shavuot, because it is a [positive] time-bound mitzva. Yet regarding *Hallel* on Pesach nights, *Pesachim* 108a indicates that women are obligated in the four cups [of wine], and presumably the four cups were established specifically so we could say *Hallel* and the *Hagadda* over

them. *Hallel* on Pesach is different because it is on the miracle, and they too [women] were part of that miracle ...

בית יוסף אורח חיים תעב:כה

ואחד אנשים ואחד נשים חייבים בהם. שם (ק.ח.) נשים חייבות בד' כוסות שאף הן היו באותו הנס ומטעם זה צריך לומר שהן חייבות בכל מצות הנוהגות באותו הלילה.

Beit Yosef OC 472:25

Both men and women are obligated in them [the four cups]. Women are obligated in the four cups because of inclusion in the miracle, and for this reason one must say that women are obligated in all the *mitzvot* practiced on that [*seder*] night.

Reclining

Eating while reclining was common practice at formal Greek and Roman meals. The Mishna seems to take it for granted that men of means will recline for the meal. On *leil ha-seder*, however, the mishna teaches that even a poor man must eat in a reclining position:

משנה פסחים י"א

ואפילו עני שבישראל לא יאכל עד שיסב

Mishna Pesachim 10:1

Even a poor person in Israel may not eat until he reclines

Rashi explains that reclining is yet another way to experience our freedom.

רש"י פסחים צט:

עד שיסב כדרך בני חורין, זכר לחירות, במטה ועל השלחן.

Rashi Pesachim 99b

Until he reclines in the manner of free men, as a commemoration of freedom, on a couch and at the table.

Why is reclining a sign of freedom? In Mishnaic times, reclining at a meal was a symbol of status and was not customary for slaves. Slave quarters were unlikely to be furnished with the requisite couches. Furthermore, a slave would be hard-pressed to relax enough at a meal to eat it reclining, at liberty.

The Talmud stipulates that one must maintain a reclining position while eating matza and drinking all four cups. It then goes on to discuss whether married women must recline:

פסחים קח.

איתמר: מצה – צריך הסיבה, מרור – אין צריך הסיבה. יין...אידי ואידי בעו הסיבה...אשה אצל בעלה – לא בעיא הסיבה, ואם אשה חשובה היא – צריכה הסיבה. בן אצל אביו – בעי הסיבה. איבעיא להו: תלמיד אצל רבו מאי?

Pesachim 108a

It was stated: Matza requires reclining, *maror* does not require reclining. Wine...both [the first and second pair of cups] require reclining...A woman in the presence of her husband does not need to recline, and if she is an important woman, she needs to recline. A son in the presence of his father needs to recline. It was asked of them: What about a disciple in the presence of his master?

Why should a woman's reclining be called into question? Rav Achai Ga'on suggests that reclining simply was not done by the average woman:¹

שאלתות דרב אחאי פרשת צו שאלתא עז

אשה אינה צריכה הסיבה מאי טעמא לאו דירכא דנשי למזגא. ואי אשה חשובה היא צריכה הסיבה

She'iltot of Rav Achai Tzav 77

A woman does not need to recline. What is the reason? It is not the manner of women to lean over. If she is an important woman, she needs to recline.

On this reading, reclining was a typically male signifier of freedom, only taken up by a specific subset of women. Rav Achai Ga'on does not explain, though, why the Talmud introduces the qualifier that it is a woman “with her husband” who does not recline.

The passage goes on to discuss other hierarchical relationships – father and son, master and disciple. In this context, Rashbam explains the reference to a married woman as based on a particularly hierarchical understanding of the marital relationship:

רשב"ם פסחים קח.

אשה אינה צריכה הסיבה. מפני אימת בעלה וכפופה לו

Rashbam Pesachim 108a

A woman does not need to recline, for she is in awe of her husband and submissive to him

If a woman were fearful of and fully submissive to her husband, it would be difficult for her to physically inhabit a posture of freedom. Meiri takes this line of thought a step further, noting that the important woman singled out by the Talmud as obligated in reclining, is someone who experiences a different, less servile, marital relationship:

בית הבחירה למאירי פסחים קח.

... שאין חירות לאשה אצל בעלה ואם אשה חשובה היא צריכה הסבה שאין שפחות באישות שלה...

Me'iri, Beit Ha-bechira Pesachim 108a

A woman has no freedom in her husband's presence, and if she is an important woman she needs to recline because there is no servility in her marital relationship

Perhaps in this light we can understand Mordechai's assertion that in his era (the 13th century) all women had become important:

מרדכי פסחים תוספת מערבי פסחים תריא

דכולהו נשים דידן חשובות נינהו וצריכות הסיבה:

Mordechai, Addition to Arvei Pesachim 611

For all our women are important and need to recline.

It is hard to say that Mordechai means that the nature of women had changed. Rather, he may intend that the marital relationship of his era, or that women's status in general, was different from what it had been.

Rabbeinu Mano'ach of 13th century Provence adds more possibilities for what makes a woman important and why that should matter:

ספר המנוחה הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:ח

...ואם אשה חשובה היא כלומר שאין לה בעל והיא גברת הבית צריכה הסיבה א"נ [=אי נמי] שהיא חשובה בפני ה' אשה יראת השם בת גדולי הדור כוללת שבחי אשת חיל וזאת האשה אם נמנע מציאותה אף על פי שיש לה בעל צריכה הסיבה א"נ [=אי נמי] יש לפרש אינה צריכה הסיבה לפי שהיא טרודה בתיקון המאכל והכנתו פטורה מהסבה כמו שפטרה ממצות עשה שהזמן גרמא אבל אשה חשובה שיש לה עבדים ושפחות הטורדים בעניני המאכל והיא יושבת בקתדרה צריכה הסיבה.

Sefer Ha-menucha Chametz U-matza 7:8

If she is an important woman, that is to say, she does not have a husband and she is the mistress of the house, she needs to recline. Or possibly, that she is important before God, a God-fearing woman, daughter of great religious personalities who encompasses the praises of *Eishet Chayil*, and this woman, though she is hard to find, needs to recline even if she has a husband. Or possibly, one can explain that she does not need to recline because since she is busy with preparing and setting up the food, they exempted her from reclining as they exempted her from positive time-bound commandments, but an important woman with servants and maids, who are busy with the matters of food while she sits in an armchair, needs to recline.

Two of his explanations depend on circumstance. An important woman may be a widow, who has gained importance as head of her household. Alternatively, she may be wealthy, and have servants to allow her to recline at liberty rather than busy herself with *seder* preparations.

His second rationale differs in being more intrinsic. A woman is important because God views her as such by dint of her own religious standing and fear of Heaven. A true woman of valor must recline.

Are all women today “important”? What does that mean for us?

What is the practical halacha about women reclining? Shulchan Aruch rules like the Talmud. Rema adds that, although all women are important, women do not recline in practice, relying on the viewpoint that this is no longer how free people eat.

שולחן ערוך אורח חיים הלכות פסח תעב:ד

אשה אינה צריכה הסיבה אלא א"כ [=אם כן] היא חשובה. הגה: וכל הנשים שלנו מיקרי חשובות (מרדכי ריש פ' ע"פ ורבינו ירוחם), אך לא נהגו להסב כי סמכו על דברי ראבי"ה דכתב דבזמן הזה אין להסב.

Shulchan Aruch OC 472:4

A woman does not need to recline unless she is important. Rema: All our women are called important, but are not accustomed to recline because they rely on the words of Ra'aviyah, who wrote that nowadays one should not recline.²

Note that neither Shulchan Aruch nor Rema discourage women from reclining. That makes sense because, if reclining while fulfilling the *mitzvot* of the *seder* is a mitzva for men, it can be seen at least as a stringency for women.

Women with a family tradition of women not reclining may choose to continue that tradition. Women without a firm family practice, and even those that have one, may consider reclining as a reflection of women's importance and a desire to discharge all opinions about how best to fulfill the obligations of eating matza and drinking the four cups.

כף החיים תע"ב:כח

דהמנהג בין הספרדים להיסב... נראה דגם בק"ק [=בקהילות הקדושים] האשכנזים שנהגו הנשים שלא להיסב המחמירה להיסב תע"ב [=תבא עליה ברכה] כיון שאינו אלא דנהגו להקל. ולכן כיון שהם חשובות כנז[כר] טוב לצאת אליבא דכו"ע [=דכולי עלמא].

Kaf Ha-chayyim 472:28

The custom among Sefardim is to recline... it seems that also in the holy communities of Ashkenazim where the women had the practice not to recline, that a woman who is stringent and reclines should merit a blessing, since it is merely a custom to be lenient. Therefore, since they are important, as mentioned, it is good to fulfil the mitzva according to all opinions.

Telling the Story

The Torah commands telling over the Pesach story, *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, on *leil ha-seder*:

שמות פרק יג:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֵבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מֵמִצְרָיִם:

Shemot 13:8

You shall tell your son on that day saying: it is on account of that which God did for me when I went out of Egypt.

While the verse specifies telling one's child, perhaps just one's son, the obligation is understood to apply more broadly than that.³

The essential components of the story are Pesach, Matza, and Maror, which recount the Exodus in miniature: the bitterness of slavery, God's sparing us from the fate of the Egyptians, and eating the bread of redemption:

משנה פסחים י:

רבן גמליאל היה אומר כל שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו ואלו הן פסח מצה ומרור פסח על שום שפסח המקום על בתי אבותינו במצרים מצה על שום שנגאלו אבותינו במצרים מרור על שום שמררו המצריים את חיי אבותינו במצרים

Mishna Pesachim 10:5

Rabban Gamliel would say: Whoever did not say these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation, and they are these: Pesach, Matza, and Maror. Pesach, because God skipped over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. Matza, because our ancestors were redeemed in Egypt. Maror, because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt.

Food and narrative are deeply intertwined in the *seder* experience. Matza plays an essential role in telling the story. The Talmud expands on the Torah's description of it as "*lechem oni*" "the bread of affliction" with a play on words:

לחם עני – לחם שעונין עליו דברים הרבה

Pesachim 36a

Lechem oni – bread upon which we recite (“*onin*”) many words

The matza is not only important for telling the story; telling the story might be essential for proper fulfillment of the mitzva to eat matza. Ramban even suggests that the mitzva of eating is the one that cannot be properly fulfilled without mentioning Pesach, Matza, and Maror.

מלחמת ה' ברכות ב: (בדפי הרי"ף)

אלא ודאי מאי לא יצא ידי חובתו שלא קיים מצוה כהלכה ... אבל לחזור ולקרוא אינו לנו ושנינו כיוצא בה כל שלא אמר ג' דברים אלו בפסח לא יצא ידי חובתו ולא שיהא צריך לחזור ולאכול פסח מצה ומרור...

Milchemet Hashem Berachot 2:2 (Rif Pagination)

But certainly, what is “he has not fulfilled his obligation”? That he did not fulfil the mitzva according to halacha... But he does not need to go back and read. And similarly, we learn “whoever did not say these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation,” but not that he needs to go back and eat Pesach, Matza, and Maror...

Rachel Sharansky Danziger reflects on how the *haggada* compels each of us to personally retell and re-experience the Exodus:⁴

Rachel Sharansky Danziger, My Own Private Haggadah, Tablet

...the Haggadah doesn't even give us the benefit of a discernible story arc. Since we must rely on ourselves to give the evening any form of coherence, we are forced to draw upon resources that lie beyond the bounds of the text itself, such as our familiarity with the Exodus story in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, and, even more importantly, our own concerns, experiences, and ideas. This process forces us to act as authors and interpreters and recreate the Exodus story in our own image....Perhaps when the authors of the Haggadah told us to see ourselves as if we came out of Egypt, they meant something more than envisioning ourselves wearing tunics, marching out of Egypt with matzos in our sacks. Perhaps they meant that we should take this opportunity to experience what it means to become the authors of our own story. By

liberating us from the mindset of a passive audience, the Haggadah frees us to taste self-determination, in an echo of the very event which it so circuitously explores.

Women Reciting Maggid

Are women obligated to tell the Pesach story?

Halachic consensus is that women are. Shulchan Aruch seems to suggest that women are obligated when he refers to “all the *mitzvot*” of *leil ha-seder*:

שולחן ערוך או"ח תעב:יד

גם הנשים חייבות בארבע כוסות ובכל מצות הנהגות באותו לילה

Shulchan Aruch 472:14

Women, too, are obligated in the four cups and in all the *mitzvot* that are practiced on that [*seder*] night.

As we saw [earlier](#), Tur’s language is similar. Mishna Berura, for one, does take this halacha to refer to *sippur yetzi’at Mitzrayim*:

משנה ברורה תעב:מה

מצות הנהגות וכו' – כגון מצה ומרור ואמירת הגדה:

Mishna Berura 472:45

The *mitzvot* that are practiced – such as matza and *maror* and reciting the *haggada*

Is this obligation on a Torah level or rabbinic? This question might have practical ramifications: if the obligation is only rabbinic, a woman cannot [discharge a man’s obligation](#) when reciting parts of the Seder.⁵

Let’s look at the two main positions regarding the level of obligation, and at the rationales behind them:

I. Rabbinic Obligation: As we saw in [Seder I](#), Rav Yosef Karo attributes his view to [the principle of *af hen*](#).

ואחד אנשים ואחד נשים חייבים בהם. שם (קח.) נשים חייבות בד' כוסות שאף הן היו באותו הנס ומטעם זה צריך לומר שהן חייבות בכל מצות הנוהגות באותו הלילה.

Beit Yosef OC 472:25

Both men and women are obligated in them [the four cups]. Women are obligated in the four cups because of inclusion in the miracle, and for this reason one must say that women are obligated in all the *mitzvot* practiced on that [*seder*] night.

This application of *af hen* makes sense, since *maggid* is indeed a commemoration of the miracle. Furthermore, if Tosafot understand women as obligated in *Hallel* at the *seder* because we recite it over the second and fourth cups, in which women are obligated, so, too, women should be obligated in *maggid* recited over the second cup.⁶

We also saw earlier that Tosafot presented two different ways to understand *af hen*, one of which limited it to rabbinic commandments. Following this view, Minchat Chinuch articulates the position that women have a rabbinic level obligation in *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim* by virtue of *af hen*:

מנחת חינוך מצוה כא:

...ולו' [ולומר] הטעם שנשים היו ג"כ [=גם כן] באותו הנס כמו מ"מ [=מקרא מגילה] וד' כוסות כבר הוכיחו התוס[פות] דד"ז [=דדבר זה] אינו אלא דרבנן בכ"מ [בכל מקרה]... בסיפור י"מ [=יציאת מצרים] ובאמת כל שאינו מחויב בדבר אין מוציא ... ומדרבנן בודאי נשים חייבות דחייבי[ן] בד' כוסות ...

Minchat Chinuch 21:6

Regarding the reason that women were also in that miracle, as with *megilla* reading and the four cups, Tosafot already demonstrated that this only works on a rabbinic level in any case...with telling the story of the Exodus, and really anyone who is not obligated in something cannot fulfill another's obligation... and also, women are certainly obligated on a rabbinic level, since they are obligated in the four cups...

II. Torah Obligation Sefer Ha-chinuch asserts that women are fully obligated in the Torah-level commandment of *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim*:

לספר בענין יציאת מצרים בליל חמשה עשר בניסן כל אחד כפי צחות לשונו, ולהלל ולשבח השם יתברך על כל הנסים שעשה לנו שם, שנאמר [שמות י"ג, ח'] "והגדת לבנך" וגו'. וכבר פירשו חכמים דמצות הגדה זו היא בליל חמשה עשר בניסן בשעת אכילת מצה, ומה שאמר הכתוב לבנך, דלאו דוקא בנו, אלא אפילו עם כל בריה... ונוהגת בזכרים ונקבות, בכל מקום ובכל זמן. ועובר עליה ביטל עשה.

Sefer Ha-chinuch Mitzva 21

To tell about the Exodus from Egypt on the night of 15 Nissan, everyone according to his skill in speaking, and to praise and glorify God for all the miracles that he performed for us there, as it is said, "you shall tell your son." The sages already explained that this mitzva of telling is on the night of 15 Nissan at the time of eating matza, and when the verse says "your son," it doesn't mean specifically his son, but could even be anyone...and it applies to males and females, in every place and at every time. Violation is the negation of a positive commandment.

Unfortunately, Sefer Ha-chinuch does not lay out his rationale for saying women are obligated in the mitzva. Since he often draws his analyses from Rambam, it is natural to look there for an answer. Rambam, however, is at best enigmatic on the subject. On the one hand, he does not mention *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim* as a positive time-bound mitzva in which women are obligated on Pesach:⁷

רמב"ם הלכות עבודה זרה יב:ג

...וכל מצות עשה שהיא מזמן לזמן ואינה תדירה נשים פטורות חוץ מקידוש היום ואכילת מצה בלילי הפסח ואכילת הפסח ושחיטתו והקהל ושמחה שהנשים חייבות.

Rambam, Laws of Avoda Zara 12:3

All positive commandments that are from time to time and not constant, women are exempt, except for *kiddush* and eating matza on Pesach night and eating the *korban Pesach* and sacrificing it and *hak'hel* and joy [on festivals], in which women are obligated.

On the other hand, he also does not list the mitzva of *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, Mitzva 157, in his summary list in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* of *mitzvot* from which women are exempt.⁸

Why would one say that women are obligated in this mitzva on a Torah level?

As part of a responsum ruling that women may recite the *haggada* on behalf of men, *Iggerot Moshe* raises two possibilities:

1. Perhaps the principle obligating women to eat matza extends to *maggid*. This stands to reason, since matza and the mitzva of telling the story are so closely related. According to this view, *af hen* is only relevant for the four cups, where we might have thought our sages would be lenient because the four cups are only obligatory on a rabbinic level.
2. Alternatively, the principle of *af hen*, as understood by Beit Yosef, may obligate women in the mitzva on a Torah level.

שו"ת אגרות משה אורח חיים ה כ:ג

אם אשה יכולה להוציא איש ידי חובת ההגדה...הנה פשוט לכאורה דמאחר שהאשה נמי חייבת באמירת הגדה כאנשים, דבכל חיובי פסח האשה חייבת מהיקשא דכל שישנו באכילת חמץ ישנו באכילת מצה, שהוא גם לכל מ"ע [מצות עשה] דאיכא בפסח מדאורייתא. והא דהוצרך ריב"ל [=רבי יהושע בן לוי] בפסחים דף ק"ח ע"א, על מה שחייבות נשים בד' כוסות, לטעם שאף הן היו באותו הנס, הוא משום דכיוון דהוא רק מדרבנן היה מקום לומר דכיוון דהוא זמן גרמא, שהתורה הקלה להן בשאר מצוות, לא תיקנו להן רבנן, אף בפסח שחייבות במ"ע [=במצוות עשה] שמן התורה. לכן אמר ריב"ל [=רבי יהושע בן לוי] שגם לנשים תיקנו, מטעם שאף הן היו באותו הנס... אבל עיין בב"י [=בבית יוסף], שכתב נשים חייבות בד' כוסות שאף הן היו באותו הנס, ומטעם זה צריך לומר שהן חייבות בכל מצוות הנהוגות בלילה. והוא דלא כתוס[פות] דסברי שלענין מ"ע [מצות עשה] דאורייתא לא אמרינן טעם זה, כדהוכיחו מסוכה, אלא סובר הב"י [=הבית יוסף] דגם למ"ע [=למצות עשה] דאורייתא, נמי אמרינן טעם זה. ..

Iggerot Moshe OC V 2:3

Can a woman fulfil a man's obligation in the *haggada*?... It seems simple that, since a woman is also obligated in reciting the *haggada* like men, because a woman is obligated in all the obligations of Pesach based on an analogy [*hekesheh*], that whoever is obligated in [the prohibition against] eating *chametz* is obligated in eating matza, which also applies to all positive Torah-level commandments of Pesach. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (*Pesachim* 108a) needed the reason that they also were included in the miracle for women's obligation in the four cups because, since it is only rabbinic, there is room to say that since it is time-bound, with which the Torah was lenient for women with other *mitzvot*, the Rabbis did not institute it for them, even on Pesach when they are

obligated in Torah-level positive commandments. Therefore, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said that they established it for women as well, for the reason of inclusion in the miracle...But see Beit Yosef, who wrote that women are obligated in the four cups because of inclusion in the miracle, and for this reason one must say that they are obligated in all the *mitzvot* practiced that night. This is not in accordance with Tosafot, who thought that this reason does not apply to positive Torah-level *mitzvot*, as they proved from *sukka*, but Beit Yosef thinks that this reason also applies to positive Torah-level *mitzvot*.

Rav Ovadya Yosef, too, maintained that women are obligated in *sippur yetzi'at Mitzrayim* on a Torah level:

שו"ת יחיה דעת ב:סה

גם הנשים חייבות בהגדה ובסיפור יציאת מצרים בליל פסח, מן התורה, ויכולות להוציא את האנשים ידי חובתם.

Yechaveh Da'at II:65

Women are also obligated in the *haggada* and in telling the story of the Exodus on Pesach night, from the Torah, and can fulfil men's obligations.

Familial customs differ regarding whether all Seder attendees or only a leader recite each section. According to Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Ovadya Yosef, a woman would not be limited in the role she could play. (For more on women fulfilling others' obligations in practice, see [here](#).)

In Practice

It can be tricky even for important women to be present for all of *maggid*, whether because of being involved with children or with checking on and laying out the meal.

Chayyei Adam addresses the case in which a Jewish female servant is very busy *seder* night, presenting an absolute minimum of what she can hear of *maggid*.

חיי אדם חלק ב-ג (הלכות שבת ומועדים) כלל קל

גם נשים חייבות בכל המצוות ובאמירת הגדה. ולכן חיוב שגם המשרתת תשב אצל השולחן ותשמע כל הגדה. ואם צריכה לצאת לחוץ לבשל, על כל פנים מחויבת לשמוע הקידוש, ולכשיגיע לר' גמליאל אומר כל שלא כו', תכנוס ותשמע עד לאחר שתיית כוס ב', שהרי מי שלא אמר ג' דברים הללו, לא יצא. ונוהגין שגם קוראין אותם שתשמע העשר מכות שהביא על המצרים, כדי להגיד להם כמה נסים עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא בשביל ישראל.

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Women are also obligated in all the *mitzvot* and in reciting the *haggada*. Therefore, the maid must also sit at the table and hear the whole *haggada*. If she needs to go out to cook, she is at least obligated to hear *kiddush*, and when he reaches “Rabban Gamliel says, whoever did not...,” she should come in and listen until after the drinking of the second cup, for whoever did not say these three things, has not fulfilled his obligation. Our practice is also to call them to hear the ten plagues that He brought upon Egypt, in order to tell them how many miracles the Holy One, blessed be He, did for Israel.

In addition to mentioning sections of *maggid* we would expect, Chayyei Adam singles out hearing the ten plagues. He explains that reciting the plagues emphasizes the miracles God performed for Israel. What is he getting at? Perhaps he means to suggest that this mitzva is so basic and essential to our understanding of Torah, and ourselves as Jews that it's crucial for women to participate as much as possible in it in a way that will maximize our awareness of what God has done for us.

How can someone balance home responsibilities with the mitzva of maggid?

In practice, in *maggid*, women should make every effort to hear or read:

- *Ma Nishtana*
- *Avadim hayyinu*
- The ten plagues
- The paragraphs explaining Pesach, matza and *maror*
- The beginning of *Hallel*.