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**IDEAS**  
& *inspiration*

**FEATURING:**

*Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman*

*Mrs. Stacey Nechama Goldman*

*Dr. Danielle Bloom*

*Mrs. Ora Lee Kanner*

*Pamela Rivkah Simonsson*

*Dedicated in the merit of a refuah shelema for Yitzchak Ben Hadassah*

THE  
*Women's*  
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## A message from **REBBETZIN DR. ADINA SHMIDMAN**

There's an ice breaker exercise that people play around the dinner table. The question posed is if you could invite anyone to dinner, who would you invite: A famous rabbi? A mentor? A great figure in history? The Seder is a night of invited guests, *כל דכפין ייתי ויכול*, *all those who are hungry, let them come and eat*. But our Seder is not only limited to the guests around our table.

Think for a moment about the narrative of the Hagaddah. As we move through the evening, our Seder table gets more and more full. We include the four sons - each one viewing his world through a different lens. We invite the rabbis, halachic authorities, we are motivated by inspirational figures from our national history. Each group plays a crucial role in our liberation from the exile of Mitzrayim and our national trajectory as our nationhood is built on both a past and a future. The past is filled with inspirational figures who provide us with intention and direction while our future, our youth, take the mission and message forward.

The most important guest, Hashem, impacts our present, *ויציאנו ה' אלקינו משם*, *and Hashem our G-d took from there with a mighty hand and outstretched arm*. Just as Hashem removed us from the oppression of Egypt, He continues to be present in our everyday lives. Victor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning* writes, "between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." It is our task on the Seder night and at all times to find Hashem in this space.

After two years of social distancing, we have the opportunity to invite both physical and spiritual figures to our table and into our lives. Having these guests present can inspire not only our Seder nights but our daily experiences as well.

I hope this compilation of Haggadah thoughts adds to your Seder experience and sense of gratitude for the people in our lives and the messages they offer us. Thank you to our beloved educators and contributors for your thoughts and messages.

We are grateful to have sponsorship of this endeavor as a source of merit for a *refua shelema* for Yitzchak ben Hadassah. Finally, thank you to the dedicated Women's Initiative department, Eliana Sohn Cohen, Adeena Mayerfeld, Rachel Miller and Pamela Rivkah Simonsson.

חג כשר ושמה





# ***Fate and Destiny in the Four Cups***

## ***Stacey Nechama Goldman***

What do the four cups at the seder represent? One of the most common explanations is that they parallel the four languages of redemption used in the impassioned speech Moshe gives to Bnei Yisrael in the name of Hashem describing how He will bring them out of Egypt. All four words are included in Shemot chapter 6, verses 6-7: “6 Therefore, say to the children of Israel, ‘I am the L-rd, and **I will take you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and **I will save you** from their labor, and **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 And **I will take you** to Me as a people, and I will be a G-d to you, and you will know that I am the L-rd your G-d, Who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians”. Unfortunately, Bnei Yisrael are too overworked to listen. Verse 9 tells us that “Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel, but they did not hearken to Moses because of [their] shortness of breath and because of [their] hard labor”. The burden of slavery did not allow them to think beyond their current situation. They had descended into slave mentality and accepted their fate.

In order to understand the message of the four cups, we have to go back further in Jewish history to the original prophecy of slavery in a foreign land found in the covenant between the parts (brit bein habetarim) in chapter 15 of Genesis. According to the Kli Yakar (Shemot 6:6), there is a direct correlation between these two passages in the Torah. Within Hashem’s prophecy to Avraham a four-step process is embedded for how his descendants will descend into slavery. First, they will be strangers in a foreign land which will lead to a distancing of Hashem’s presence. Next, they will become slaves in that land, and finally, they will be tortured by their oppressors. Each of the four words of salvation corresponds to an ascent from the despair of their lives in Egypt. This process begins with the end of the torture, the most dangerous to their physical survival, and concludes with Mount Sinai, the end of their status as strangers when they enter a committed relationship with Hashem.

Why did Avraham merit to see this entire process in his prophecy? Is there a deeper message than simply a chronology of future events? Perhaps Hashem’s words to Avraham at the beginning of this prophecy hold the key. The scene opens with Hashem “bringing Avraham out” and telling him to “look down (habet na)” at the stars (Bereishit Raba 44:12). Where did Hashem take him out from? What does it mean to look “down” at the stars? Rashi, based on the midrash, unfolds the extended dialogue not included in the written Torah. Avraham wonders how Hashem could promise him children when he sees in the stars that he is fated to remain childless. Hashem tells him he is not bound to his fate. To paraphrase the Meiri on Shabbat 156a, if he leaves the limiting mentality of idolatry which relies on the stars to predict the future and limits humanity’s potential through the capricious actions of the gods, he

can enter a world that is not bound by natural law. When one accepts and recognizes that a just and merciful G-d is in control, he can rise above his fate and realize his destiny. Anything is possible, with Hashem's help.

This is the gift Avraham gave to the world: the ability to see beyond the circumstances of one's birth; the desire to make the world a better place; the trust and faith that there exists a G-d who created the world and actively cares about its inhabitants; if only they would recognize Him and choose to live moral and ethical lives. It is this gift that allows us to dream of travelling to Mars and curing cancer. In a world of fate, humanity is bound by the limitations of nature. If someone gets sick, it is their punishment, there is nothing that can be done – why bother to search for a cure? Why dream of something greater when a god can randomly decide to destroy all you have built? The Torah proclaims the opposite. We have the power to imagine and to try to create a world free of suffering, a world of true freedom. The Torah presents us with the blueprint to this noble way of life.

Every year we are commanded to imagine that we have achieved freedom from slavery. The immersive experience of the seder takes us on this journey from slave mentality to true freedom. What thoughts are we enslaved to that currently hold us back from achieving our potential and making the world a better place? How can we liberate ourselves from that constrictive space into a world of true freedom?

After finishing all four cups of wine, have we internalized the message of redemption as Hakadosh Baruch Hu intended through the experiential learning of the seder? Or do we suffer the same myopic world view as when we were slaves in Egypt? May we all emerge from our seder this year as truly free people, only beholden to Hashem and His Torah, to allow us to fulfill our destiny.

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סיפור יציאת מצרים

## Making the Story Our Own

Dr. Danielle Bloom

Pesach descends upon us in earnest as we sweep away the crumbs of the *hamentashen*. We spend a month *kashering* kitchens, preparing food, buying new clothes and cleaning the car. Matzah can be found across the country, and the world, in Jewish stores and national chains. What makes this the mitzvah that transcends religious groups and social divisions? What is this Yom Tov really all about?

Pesach is the yom tov that commemorates יציאת מצרים with its apex on Seder night. The mitzvah of sippur yetziat mitzrayim (telling the story of leaving Egypt) is fulfilled during magid. How can we use the structure of magid to bring the mitzvah of והגדת לבנך to life? And how is this mitzvah interwoven with the daily mitzvah of זכירת יציאת מצרים, remembering that we left Egypt?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks OBM points out that the Torah, the oldest recorded written history, never uses the word history, but instead uses the word זכירה, the mandate to remember. He would discuss the difference between history and memory. “History is someone else’s story. It’s about events that occurred long ago to someone else. Memory is my story. It’s about where I come from and of what narrative I am a part. History answers the question, “What happened?” Memory answers the question, “Who, then, am I?” It is about identity and the connection between the generations. In the case of collective memory, all depends on how we tell the story.” On seder night, we bring this collective memory to life through the additional mitzvah of סיפור יציאת מצרים, the obligation to tell our children the story of our nation leaving Egypt. (<https://www.rabbisacks.org/archive/do-remember-the-past-but-do-not-be-held-captive-by-it/>)

What is the difference between transmitting information and telling a story? Why do we love to read or hear a good story? Stories engage our emotions and transport us to another place. A good story puts you in the perspective of another. It takes you outside of yourself and lets you see the world with new eyes. It is by G-d’s design that our foundational religious tradition takes the form of storytelling.

If I told you that you were obligated to tell the story of leaving Egypt, where would you find your source material? Most of us would turn to Shemot and read through the first 12 chapters. Ironically, when we look at the haggadah, we notice that we never do that! We do not tell the Exodus story from the text where it occurs. In actuality, we continuously refer to other retellings of the story. We refer to the narration of Yehoshua and Yechezkel centuries later. In fact, the foundation of *magid* is four *pesukim* beginning with ארמי אוֹבֵד אֲבִי from Devarim 26, which are not the story as it happened, rather they are the verses that the farmer recites when he presents his *bikkurim* to the *Kohen*. Why do we do this?

To understand why the haggadah takes this form, let's explore the concept of temporal distancing. This is the ability to put your current situation at a distance from yourself. This way of seeing the world can relieve stress and provide perspective and meaning. In the book *Chatter* by Ethan Kross, the author tells of a young girl from a slave background, a struggling Harvard student, who was the first in her family to attend college. Only after immersing herself in her family history did she develop the strength to succeed. Why? "This historical perspective gave her a bird's eye view of how far she had come, even making her think her ancestors would be proud of her. At the same time, learning about the suffering that her forebears had endured also helped her put her trials and tribulations in perspective.(p. 62)" Only once she was able to see herself as part of a larger story, as a link in the chain of history, was she able to maximize her opportunities.

Temporal distancing can be a route to understanding the structure of the haggadah. The farmer living in the land, enjoying his produce, needs to reflect on his success and see it in the context of *brit bein habetarim*, the *Covenant between the Parts* (Bereishit 15). He needs to verbalize and internalize the message that he is a part of a larger story, the fulfillment of an ancient Divine promise. We, on seder night, using the words that the Torah dictates for the farmer, are seeing ourselves in the same way. We are part of the ongoing, unfolding narrative of Jewish history. This helps us to place our lives in a greater context, connects us to our ancestors and gives us the fortitude to endure.

Erica Brown writes in her book, *Seder Talk*, "With shelves of so many Haggadot, it is not hard to ask why another is necessary. My conclusion: it is not. Appropriately, I asked myself, מי אנכי "Mi anokhi?"- Who am I to write my own commentary to this enduring and majestic work? ... We write and transmit our Passover truths not to be original but because it is how we satisfy the demand to relive the Exodus story in each generation through ourselves. We should all write our own commentary as a fulfillment of the commandment to make this story truly our own." On this night, we transform our national experience into each of our personal stories.

The fulfillment of our obligation on Seder night is not only found in the telling of an event that occurred long ago but in ensuring that this story is retold. Therefore, the psukim that we use in the haggadah to fulfill the mitzvah of sippur yetziat mitzrayim are themselves a retelling of the original story. That is the mitzvah; to make sure that the story keeps being retold. The platform of seder night is the springboard for everyone seated around your table to create the portrait that informs the story they will one day tell to their children. Our mandate on this night is to remind ourselves and our children that we are an integral part of something far greater than ourselves. We are conveying the message that what forms our identity and our mission is found in the personal space where yetziat Mitzrayim is woven into the narrative of our lives.

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# The Response to the Ben Harasha

## Ora Lee Kanner

The Torah in Sefer Shemot describes a son who our Rabbis later name the *ben harasha*, who addresses his parents with a quasi- statement, quasi-question:

וְהָיָה כִּי־יֹאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם:

“And it will come to pass if your children say to you, ‘What is this service to you?’” (Shemot 12:26)

The Torah continues to instruct the parents to respond to this son by explaining that:

וְאָמַרְתֶּם זְבַח־פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר־פָּסַח עַל־בְּתוּלֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנִגְפוֹ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־בְּתוּלֵינוּ הִצִּיל וַיִּקַּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ

This is the Passover sacrifice that we offer to G-d because He passed over the houses of the Jewish people in Mitzraim when He struck the Egyptians and He spared our homes, and the people bowed in thanksgiving (Shemot 12:27).

How strange that this is not the response provided by the Haggadah to this son. Rather than merely quoting the answer of the Chumash, the Baal Haggadah instructs us to tell this son,

“לכם ולא לו. ולפי שהוציא את עצמו מן הכלל כפר בעיקר. ואף אתה הקהה את שניו ואמר לו בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים. לי ולא לו, אילו היה שם לא היה נגאל.”

“To you and not to him! Since he has excluded himself from the community, he has denied that which is essential to our faith. Therefore, you should blunt his teeth and say to him, ‘It is because of this that Hashem acted for me when I came out of Mitzraim.’ For me and not for him. Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.”

Why? What led the Baal Haggadah to disregard the response of the Chumash, and then scold this son with his own harsh words of reprimand? The dilemma becomes more confounding when we consider that in fact the pesukim provided as the response to the *ben harasha* are the exact words that Rabban Gamliel uses at the culmination of *Maggid* to explain the mitzvah of *korban pesach*!

Why does the Baal Haggadah omit these pesukim in the response to the *ben harasha*, where the Torah specifically instructs its teaching, and utilize it later as critical according to Rabban Gamliel to fulfill the mitzvah of *korban pesach*? Furthermore, why is the fulfillment of the mitzvah of *korban pesach* derived from the pasuk that is the response to the *ben harasha*?

I'd like to suggest that whereas an initial answer to the *rasha* is provided at the beginning of *Maggid*, it is only at the culmination of *Maggid* that the full answer to the *rasha* is presented. Perhaps the initial response to this son composed by the *Baal Haggadah* at the beginning of *Maggid* is הקהה את שיניו - blunt his bite, soften the sharpness of his assertion, dull the teeth of his challenge- by explaining to him that though his statement sounds like heresy, it is merely the result of gross ignorance. The father is in essence directed to say, "My dear son, your perspective is myopic; your statement reflects a gross misunderstanding of the עיקר, the fundamental purpose of this night. Listen as I recount our history with all its colorful and painful details and then you will understand how critical tonight is to our past and our future. But know that you are not a *rasha*, for had you been a *rasha* you would not have been redeemed. You would have died in *makat choshech* along with the other 80% of the Jewish people who were *reshaim*."

After sitting through an interactive, experiential, educational course at the Seder, the Haggadah turns to the *rasha* and says, "Now, let me give you the answer the Torah wants you to know."

And what is the message to the *rasha*?

The *korban pesach* is a *korban toda*, our expression of thanksgiving to G-d. Not because He emancipated us from slavery, not even because the eldest son of the Jews was spared during this night of terror and plague. The miracle celebrated that night was the redemption and reformation of the *bayit* - וישתחוו את- את בחינו הציל ויקוד העם וישתחוו - the fact that each family was intact, secure, together, united in hope, in faith, and belief in their imminent redemption. It is, after all, the Jewish home that is at the very core of the Pesach story for it is the very secret of the continuity of the Jewish people.

This, then, is the answer to the *ben harasha*. "My dear son, now that you have heard the detailed story of our enslavement, the tragic deconstruction of our home and its miraculous reconstruction, the *korban pesach* is not merely a commemoration of the past, it is a celebration of what gives us our identity and ensures our survival, the cohesion of the family of our *bayit*." Now, asserts Rabban Gamliel, when even the *ben*, who sounded like a *rasha* earlier, understands the significance of this evening, has one fulfilled the purpose and essential point of Pesach.

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**Batya**

**Pamela Rivkah Simonsson**

Desperate times in Egypt, and a devoted mother places her precious baby into a basket and leaves his fate in Hashem's hands as she positions him in the bulrushes by the River Nile. Baby Moshe, the conduit for future redemption from servitude in Egypt, implicit potential as of yet unrealized, lies suspended under the watchful eye of his sister Miriam.

Descending to bathe in the waters of the Nile, is a princess, daughter of the tyrant who will relentlessly inflict back-breaking labor and intense suffering upon the Jewish People and who has decreed that newborn boys should be killed. This princess is the daughter of Paroh.

Approaching the Nile, she catches a glimpse of the basket, reaches out and ushers it towards her. Opening the basket, she finds a weeping child and declares that this is one of the children of the Hebrews (Shemot 2). Driven by compassion, the daughter of Paroh chooses to care for Moshe despite her father's hateful directives to his people and she raises Moshe in the palace as if he were her own son.

The daughter of Paroh sees light amidst the darkness. Under her father's evil regime, the darkness of exile in Egypt, she perceives truth, spirituality. For the daughter of Paroh was descending to the Nile at that time to cleanse herself of her father's idols, to convert to the service of the One True G-d (Talmud Sotah 12b with Rashi). On arrival, she saved a child on her father's hit-list, she turned her back on oppression, and took a risky path in pursuit of truth.

Darkness is associated with confusion, confinement, despair. And light is metaphorically used to depict revelation, clarity, freedom, relief. The allegorical interpretation of dark as concealment and light as revelation is woven throughout Tanach. From the very moments of the conception of the world it is apparent that the *movement* from dark to light, physical phenomena, is the movement from restriction and masked truth, darkness, to spiritual freedom, to perception of that which was always present but somewhat hidden heretofore, light.

We find this threaded through the first few pesukim of the Torah, in Bereishit 1:1-3:

“In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth. And the earth was bewilderment and void, and darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the spirit of G-d hovering upon the surface of the water. G-d said ‘let there be light’ and there was light”.

Explains the Ohr Hachaim about these opening verses of the Torah - “תהו ובהו” - the portrayal of the earth as

being bewildered and empty, is an allusion to times when the Jews are in exile, when G-d's dwelling on this earth is less apparent, more concealed. "Darkness on the face of the deep" is a reference to the current exile that we are in now, seemingly endless, long like the "deep" and "dark" in that we are subservient to others and discriminated against, surrounded by darkness. But in the very next pasuk, G-d declares "there will be light". And this is the light of redemption which Hashem decreed would be concealed until its revelation in the time of Moshiach.

Until then it is a hidden treasure that we await, knowing that the hiddenness is only temporary because we have this promise. By letting us in on this secret, Hashem has been reassuring us from the time of creation with the imagery of darkness moving towards light. As we probe behind the scenes of stories in Tanach, we can find that this path from exile to redemption is the underpinning fabric of the world.

The daughter of Paroh saw light through the darkness and she chased after it. She saved Moshe's life and raised him and she received life in return, she merited to enter Gan Eden alive (Otzar Hamidrashim 50) and she acquired her name Batya, daughter of G-d, for G-d declared that as she took in a child who was not hers and called him her own son, so too would Hashem call her His own daughter (Vayikra Rabba parsha 1).

The Midrash elucidates that on seeing Moshe, the daughter of Paroh experienced the Shechina, G-d's Presence, with Moshe, which the Brisker Rav teaches was a sign that she had been accepted by G-d. But more than her own personal growth, and more than saving one life, she facilitated the movement from darkness to light, from exile to redemption, as she saved and nurtured the instrument in Hashem's redeeming the Jews as a whole; she saved Hashem's messenger Moshe.

Moshe led the Jews to Har Sinai. The Torah is compared in Mishlei (6:23) to light. Torah provides clarity. Batya's actions paved the way for bringing the Jews from darkness to light- from suffering to freedom and ultimately to the spiritual clarity of Torah, light. The Gemara teaches that the date of Batya's revelation at the river was the 6th of Sivan. Incredibly, this is the same date as our revelation at Har Sinai, Matan Torah.

Perhaps as we study on the night of Pesach, we can hear a message of Batya's, a woman whose kindness saved lives and precipitated light from darkness by facilitating redemption; a woman who chose truth amidst a confused world. As we praise Hashem for saving us from Egypt on the first night of Pesach, a night conducive to the blessings of emunah, we can charge our hearts and minds with yearning for spiritual kindling as we hope for the final redemption that will reveal the beautiful unconfined light that always bubbled since the days of creation beneath the darkness waiting to surface, the light of the ultimate geula.

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