

# THE SEDER COMPANION

A Project of NCSY's  
National Teen Board



NCSY is the international  
youth movement of the OU

# INTRODUCTION

Hi,

My name is Shifra Dimbert, your Class of 2020 NCSY National Board President. Thank you for taking the time to actually read the opening remarks: a true feat! I'm being honest—not many people bother. Most head straight to the “meat and potatoes” of the book. But now that you're here, I have to let you know how amazing this guide truly is.

Each of the *divrei Torah* that you will read in this *Seder Companion* has been written and edited by teens all across the country, including Canada! (I know, I know. We keep them for their maple syrup and hockey.) Each teen is in some position of leadership in their respective chapters, regions, and even on a national scale.

There are fifteen steps in the *seder*, and to accompany these steps, there are *divrei Torah*. Many people believe that the fifteen steps of the *seder* can be seen as rungs in a ladder and that they are intended to guide us toward a spiritual ascent on the night of Passover. Rabbi Yitzchak Kook (Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem from 1921–1935) was once asked, “Who is on a greater spiritual level: a person on a low rung or a person on a high rung of the spiritual ladder?” Rav Kook answered, “It depends on which direction the person is moving in. If the person on the low rung is climbing and growing day by day, he/she is spiritually alive and engaged. But the opposite is also true. If a person on a high rung is moving downward, he/she has lost their spark and may continue to sink.”

The NCSY National Board and I hope that this *Seder Companion* allows you to continue your ascent. With each step up the ladder, and with a *dvar Torah* to share, we hope to make this year's *seder* one where everyone is able to continue to move upward on their own personal ladders of growth.

*Chag Sameach!*

**Shifra Dimbert**  
NCSY National Board President  
Class of 2020

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# CONTENTS

Kadeish .....	3
Urchatz .....	4
Karpas .....	5
Yachatz .....	6
Maggid .....	7
Rachtzah .....	9
Motzi Matzah .....	10
Marror .....	11
Koreich .....	12
Shulchan Orech .....	13
Tzafun .....	15
Barech .....	16
Hallel .....	17
Nirtzah .....	18

# • KADEISH •

## Orly Davidov

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On the night of Passover, after the candles have been lit and everyone is sitting around the table, it is now time to begin the *seder* by saying Kiddush over the first cup of wine, *kos rishon*. Normally, during Shabbat, the leader recites Kiddush while the others around the table listen. On Passover, many families have the custom that each man, woman, and child say all of the words together. Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev comments on the interesting phrasing in the Kiddush prayer. Passover is referred to as *Chag Hamatzot*, “the holiday of matzot.” Why is there a distinction between what the Torah calls Passover and what we refer to it by?

Rav Levi Yitzchak elaborates that both the Jewish nation and G-d refer to Passover by a name that reflects a profound love for the other. G-d calls this Yom Tov *Chag Hamatzot*. This name is a reflection of His love for the Jewish people. G-d said to the prophet Yirmiyahu in *Sefer Yirmiyahu* (2:2), “I remember the loving-kindness of your youth and the love of your nuptials when you followed Me into the wilderness, in a land not sown.” This means that G-d remembers and recognizes when the Jewish nation followed Him into the desert with little to no belongings, other than carrying some matzah for food. More than 3,000,000 individuals followed G-d with complete belief that He would protect them, and they all knew how difficult the journey would be. This shows the dedication that the Jewish people have for G-d. Therefore, G-d calls Passover *Chag Hamatzot* in the first step in the Passover *seder* (Kadesh), to express His infinite love for the Jewish nation.

We also refer to this holiday as *Chag HaPesach*. The word “Pesach” means “pass over.” This is because during the last plague that G-d brought onto the Egyptians, G-d passed over the homes of the Jewish people to ensure that their homes would be safe. That is why we call it *Chag HaPesach*, symbolizing the gratitude and love we have for G-d, who saved the Jewish nation from all of the ten plagues.

Thus, both G-d and the Jewish nation call this holiday by a name that expresses our love and dedication for the other. G-d purposely emphasizes this in the prayer of Kadesh, the first step in the *seder*, to remind us that He was there throughout the whole process, and He recognizes how hard it must have been for the Jews to leave everything they had previously owned and to go and live in a barren desert. Yet, they did it with full faith that G-d would save them.

Pesach is a holiday that represents the eternal love that G-d has for the Jewish people. Not only do we celebrate our redemption and nationhood, but we celebrate our relationship with G-d. May we all remember how much He loves us and how much we love Him.

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## Shaindel Turniansky

Regional Board Member, Atlantic Seaboard Region  
Pikesville, MD, Pikesville High School

Everybody knows the first step of the Passover *seder*. It's the step that everyone's actually awake for, before the hours of storytelling, and before the little kids go to bed—when everyone wonders when dinner is. Here, we make a blessing over the first of four cups of wine, and we start the whole *seder* with saying Kiddush. The beginning of the *seder* is the most important part, so why not start with what's arguably the most important mitzvah of the night: telling over the Passover story? What's the significance of starting with Kadesh, especially when we make Kiddush every week on Shabbos? Why aren't we starting with something that we *don't* do all of the time? The answer lies in what Kadesh actually means.

Kadesh means that we're sanctifying something. When we make Kiddush for Passover, we're officially starting the holiday. We're separating it from the rest of the week and truly starting the holiday. We do this to bring in Shabbos every week, but for Passover it's even more important. Passover is a holiday all about freedom. We celebrate the Jews leaving Egypt many, many years ago, allowing us to have the *seders* we have now. Besides that, we celebrate our own freedom. With Passover, we can be free of all our normal struggles of life, like any schoolwork or job responsibilities we have. We have no constraints anymore. When we say Kiddush and have the step of Kadesh, we're separating normal, everyday life from the holiness of Passover. If we didn't have this step first, we wouldn't have the separation, and Passover wouldn't free us or have the holiness it deserves.

# • URCHATZ •

## Sara Weinstein

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Urchatz is the washing of our hands in preparation for when we eat the karpas dipped in saltwater. In the times of the בית המקדש, the Holy Temple, people were able to observe the laws of ritual purity in full. When doing so, they were required to wash their hands before eating any product that had been dipped into water or into certain other liquids. According to many opinions, this washing is not necessary nowadays when we are unable to attain ritual purity. Nonetheless, we do perform this task. But if we aren't able to gain such purity, what is the point?

Not only does washing our hands during Urchatz serve as a reminder of the procedure that was followed in the time of the Beit Hamikdash, but it also cleans our hands of the impurities that come from living in such a materialistic world. We live in a world of wanting. We always want more. We stick our hands into everything, so to speak, and we are always grabbing for more.

According to the Torah, Passover was when the Jewish people came into being, in the first month of the Jewish calendar: the birth of our nation. Washing our hands cleanses us of all of the impurities of the past, all the opportunities we grabbed to do wrong, and all the sins we put our hands on. Pesach, and more specifically Urchatz, is a new start: a clean slate. By washing our hands and getting rid of the bad, we are able to truly welcome a good year full of Torah and *mitzvot*—a year of spirituality and truly understanding what matters. Urchatz is our fresh start.

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## Atara Lipetz

National Board Member, Canada Region  
Thornhill, ON, Tanenbaum Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, Wallenberg Campus

After Kadesh, it is time for everyone to wash their hands before eating the karpas. This washing without a *bracha* (blessing) is called Urchatz.

What makes Urchatz different than Hamotzi (washing for bread) is that we don't say a *bracha* after washing. Growing up, this always felt like a very strange tradition. However, a deeper look into the Talmud reveals that this ritual is not necessarily limited to the Passover *seeder*. The sages in the Talmud ordain that it is necessary to wash one's hands before eating food that is dipped in liquid. (The *karpas* that we eat after Urchatz is dipped in salt water.) The given reason for this is that liquids easily contract impurity and conduct it to solid foods.

There is a disagreement about whether this rule still applies in the post-Temple period, the stringent opinion stating that it is necessary to wash for wet foods similar to washing for bread. The lenient view holds that this obligation only applied in the Temple era, when it was the norm for people to eat their food in ritual purity. (The custom follows the more stringent holding.)

Even if one usually does not wash before eating wet foods, the importance of the Pesach *seeder* should be treated with respect by following the more stringent opinion. However, out of respect for the more lenient opinion, no *bracha* is made, so as not to say G-d's name in vain.

# • KARPAS •

## Yitzy Shaykevich

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Every festival meal starts out the same: we say Kiddush and wash our hands. This ritual is performed every Shabbat and even on holidays. The exception to this rule is on Passover. During the *seder*, we drink a cup of wine, “Kadesh,” and then we wash our hands, “Urchatz.” But, the next part, “Karpas,” is different. At this step, we take a vegetable and dip it into saltwater, a seemingly random task. The question we should all be asking now is: Why do we do this? Why not just have a meal as we do every other night?

Two different answers work hand in hand to give us a full picture. One of the themes of Passover is “questions.” We encourage our youth to ask questions throughout the *seder* in order to be more engaged and thoughtful. Karpas is the gateway to questioning. It’s the first seemingly arbitrary custom during the *seder*. This answer explains why Karpas deviates from our normal routine, but not why we use specifically saltwater and vegetables. Another answer is that Karpas is used to evoke our sympathy. When we eat the saltwater, we are reminded of the tears the Jews shed while in slavery.

Karpas manages to teach us the importance of looking for an understanding of the rituals at the Passover meal while also teaching us to sympathize with others. If we take this to heart and apply it to our lives, we can see the connection between the two. If we strive to better understand ourselves, our emotions, and our rituals, it can bring us to have better connections with people. Caring for others and caring for ourselves both have roles to play in Karpas, and if we’re missing either one, we lose the bigger picture.



# • YACHATZ •

## Ohad Tessler

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The breaking of the middle matzah during Yachatz—and placing it aside—is an unusual action. We perform this unusual action to pique the child’s curiosity, to inspire the child to ask questions now and throughout the next section of Maggid, and to keep the child awake throughout the *seder*, in anticipation of finding out what is done with this matzah which we hide away. Why do we hide this second piece of matzah? If the goal of breaking the matzah was merely to pique the curiosity of the children, wouldn’t breaking the matzah and leaving both pieces untouched on the table until later be enough of a diversion from our normal course to accomplish the same goal?

The Vilna Gaon gives a reason as to why we hide the piece of matzah that will be used for the *afikoman* and remove it from the table until after the meal. He says that the reason is very similar to the one given for why we cover the challah when we say Kiddush, which is to prevent the “embarrassment” of the challah which is being passed over in favor of the wine. Normally, bread is considered the most distinguished food, and the blessing on it comes before anything else. On Shabbat, we need to make Kiddush over wine before we begin the meal. Therefore, we cover the challah so it will not be “ashamed” that a blessing is being made on another food before it. Similarly, when we later make the *brachot* on different pieces of matzah, we cover and remove the *afikoman* from the table, to prevent it from embarrassment as it is being seemingly overlooked, since it is not eaten until after the meal.

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## Maddi Fidler

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The fourth section of the Pesach *seder* is called Yachatz. In this part of the *seder* we break the middle matzah into pieces. The larger piece is used as the *afikoman* later in the meal, and therefore it is wrapped in a napkin while the smaller piece is left between the other two full matzahs on the table.

As I sat down at my Pesach *seder* a few years ago, a question arose in my mind: Why do we store one of the pieces of matzah in a napkin? The answer that I found was one that changed the way I view my role in the Pesach *seder*.

We all know that every action done at the *seder* is meant to remind us of when Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim. This is why we do not eat *chametz*, and we lean, and we even read the Haggadah itself. When Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, they took only what they and their livestock could carry. On their animals, they put their valuables such as gold and silver. Meanwhile, it was the matzah that they chose to carry on their own two shoulders.

Why didn’t Bnei Yisrael have their animals also carry this food? It seems necessary to separate them from the rest of the load. How much would some matzah really burden the donkey carrying their supplies? To the animals, a little extra of a load would not have made a difference.

This, however, is exactly why the Jews separated the matzah and marror from their spoils. They knew that these items were special; they were leftover from the previous night’s *korban Pesach*. These leftovers from a mitzvah seemed to be more important to Bnei Yisrael than even the most precious of valuables. The matzah and marror had *kedusha*, while the spoils were valuable but lacking in any sort of spirituality. This is why they carried them close and made sure that these bundles were safe and protected.

Just as our ancestors clung to the *kedusha* found in the world around them, we must do the same, without matzah, to remember our ancestors’ great love for Torah, *mitzvot* and Hashem. We must see the *kedusha* in the world around us, and not let it pass us by in favor of focusing on something that the world believes is more valuable to us.

NCSYers, I challenge you to cling to Torah, cling to your *mitzvot*, and cling to Hashem. Even if it is just a small act, start realizing the *kedusha* of the world that we live in. Be like our ancestors, who sacrificed so much for us to be able to have this Pesach *seder*, and make them and Hashem proud. Choose *kedusha*, and hold it tight.

# • MAGGID •

## Joseph Klores

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It's nine o'clock at night, and you smell the sweet smell of your family's special charoset recipe in the kitchen. The only problem is that Maggid, the longest and most textual part of the Seder, has just started. For many, Maggid is the time where you tune out or get a quick nap so that one can survive the late night at the *seder* table. The countless pages and ongoing commentaries that Maggid encounters can make it hard for one to find significance with the telling of the Exodus and the main mitzvah of Passover. This modern notion is counterintuitive to the very purpose Maggid is meant to represent. The story of slavery-to-freedom is told to remind Jews what Hashem did for us and to inspire us to further our spiritual journey. In our efforts to understand the relevance of Maggid, the following will shed light.

Initially, the central obligation of the *seder* is the Torah commandment which states, "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, it is because of this that the Lord did [all these miracles] for me when I left Egypt (Exodus 13:8)." The source of Maggid is this verse that teaches your children about what happened in Egypt, but why is it even important to pass down this story *l'dor vador* (from generation to generation)?

According to Rav Chaim of Brisk, "Throughout the year, the commandment is to remind oneself. On the *seder* night, the commandment is to tell others. In addition, it is possible that the way the story must be told is through questions and answers." Rav Chaim is saying that the central idea is to integrate the story in our lives, but on Passover, especially, we must act as a reminder for each other and so we do this actively, engaging each other through questions and answers.

The Mah Nishtanah is included in the *seder* for this very reason. The Mah Nishtanah's purpose is to stimulate questions in the children and to initiate dialogue so that not only can the children learn, but also the adults' thoughts and curiosity are aroused.

In the Gemara Pesachim (115b), a story is told about Abaye at a young age, where he questioned why the table was removed before him since he had not eaten yet. Rabbah responded by saying that, because of Abaye's question, they were excused from saying Mah Nishtanah. As long as questions are being asked, you are fulfilling the obligations of the *seder*.

Questions should not be limited to the *seder*, but should also be asked upon oneself. One should ask, "How can I improve?", "What can I give?", and "How is my relationship with Hashem?" The importance of asking questions is crucial to developing a connection to not only the *seder* but also to Hashem as a whole.

To continue, the recollection of the Exodus is not meant to be a history lesson, but rather a guide in modern life. Ramchal notes that important events leave a mark on the time they occur each year. G-d's presence during this time at the *seder*, as He led us from slavery to freedom, is not just a historical account. Maggid is a time to reflect and connect with our spirituality and see how the Exodus lives today.

At the table, our freedom can be seen through our independence and our opportunity to serve Hashem as we please. We should see ourselves as Jews being freed, having the opportunity to rediscover our freedoms once again. This is a great time to capitalize on our freedoms and consider how can each and every one of us can grow and improve in our *middot* (character traits) and connection to Hashem. As Passover occurs in Nissan, the first month in the Torah, our freedoms to improve can never be stronger.

Furthermore, the retelling of the Exodus is also meant to motivate us to be grateful. As Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explains, "The duty of remembering does not impose on a person an obligation to recite praise and thanks, whereas the commandment to tell the story obligates one not only to relate the wonders and miracles that G-d did for us, but also to praise and thank Him." Maggid starts by recalling the Exodus, and then transitioning to the story of the sages who had their *seder* together. Then we recite Baruch Hamakom to praise G-d for bringing us out of slavery and giving us the freedoms we have today. It is not enough to retell the story; we must also internalize it.

Take a moment when you reach this part of Maggid and think of everything Hashem has given you, whether it's your family, community, education, or just a beautiful *seder* table where you are surrounded by loved ones and blessed with lots of good food. After you fully reflect and appreciate everything that you have been given, it will be much easier to follow along with Maggid and reveal its depths.

At the *seder* table, this year, try to add to your experience by either reading a few commentaries in the Haggadah or just following along in English. Reflect on the *seder*, ask questions, appreciate the freedoms you have, and be thankful to Hashem. Of course, you are going to be hungry and tired, but don't let that ruin the opportunity for a spiritual *seder*. Try to be attentive and listen to a *dvar Torah* at the table: you never know where inspiration can spark from.

# • MAGGID •

## Cecelia Ashenberg

New Jersey Regional President, New Jersey Region  
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Education is a vital aspect of the Jewish culture, and it's something we take for granted very often. Especially in my community, we take for granted the fact that we can go to school, learn and ask questions, feel connected to a community, and especially feel connected to our people and nation. We are free to ask what we want to know, and learn from whom we want to learn, thus showing that the Jewish people are finally free. Chief Rabbi Emeritus Lord Jonathan Sacks says that "Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted." He further explains this quote by sharing that it is our duty as members of the tribe to share the experiences that we've been through, to teach our children (or for our parents to teach us and for theirs to have taught them, etc.) what happened to our nation, and to learn resilience from all we have been through. Without these things, "our nation will falter and we will lose our way."

A core element of our survival as a nation has been the concept of asking questions and learning from the answers. The Torah, in *parshat Bo*, פרק יב פסוקים כו-כז, emphasizes the fact that children will not only ask questions but that they *must* ask questions. This is where the questions of the Four Sons, which we read so diligently in the Haggadah every year (to the point that, if asked, people can quote the answers) first come up.

Rabbi Sacks explains that it is no coincidence that these four sons ask their questions right after the youngest at the *seder* sings the Mah Nishtanah; rather, it shows that, just as Judaism is structured around the asking and answering of questions, so too the *seder* should be structured around these principles. Rabbi Sacks further explains that "Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey." However, this is not the case within Judaism. Instead of "children must be seen and not heard," we are taught to be loud, to ask about what we want to ask about, and make sure that people know we are present.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski used to tell the story of when he was young and his teacher would *love* it when a child would challenge his arguments. In his teacher's broken English, he would say, "You right! You 100 prozent right! Now I show you where you wrong."

The questions of the four sons are structured in the manner of teaching how to ask a question, and showing how the answer will shape the worldview of the asker. This is especially clear with the question of "the son who does not know how to ask." The Midrash, in *Shemot Rabbah*, asks why the answers for the wicked son and the son who doesn't know how to ask are virtually the same. It goes on to explain that while the answer is "It is for the sake of this that Hashem did for me when I left Egypt," for both the wicked son and the son who does not know how to ask, the underlying meanings of the answers are very different. When speaking to the wicked son, the answer is specifically to show that because when the question was asked, he excluded himself from the community; therefore the answer excluded him from the community as well. With the son who does not know how to ask, the answer is trying to show how one *needs* to be able to ask questions in order to be part of the community of the Jewish people. "It is for the sake of this that Hashem did for me when I left Egypt" means that because I asked, Hashem saved *me*. This midrash continues to explain that a parent must teach a child how to be able to ask these questions, and not to stay silent and remain passive in the community.

This idea that one should not be passive—rather, be active in the environment one is in—is vital to freedom. "Freedom is lost when it is taken for granted," and we should not take for granted our good fortune that we are free to project our beliefs and our Judaism—through NCSY/JSU or anything else—and that we are free to learn and ask questions and be active members of the Jewish community. Learning/asking questions/being active and not passive keeps us free as a nation, and the answer given to the son who does not know how to ask can change from "It is for the sake of this that Hashem did for **me** when **I** left Egypt" to "It is for the sake of this that Hashem did for **us** when **we** left Egypt."



# • RACHTZAH •

## Aviva Schwartz

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As every Jewish family around the world begins their *seder*, we all wash our hands without a *bracha* following Urchatz, the second step in the *seder*. After we dip the karpas into the salt water, break the matzah, and tell the story of Pesach, we wash again—and this time, with a *bracha*. Simply, we wash again because we are about to say Hamotzi over matzah, but what if it was for another more philosophical reason? As we enter the *seder* we want to clean ourselves of any impurities we have or anything we are bringing with us from the outside world, but we are not blessing it.

The difference with Rachtzah is that this is where we say *Al Netilat Yadayim*, which translates to the lifting up of hands. Although we would normally assume that washing our hands would signify removing the impurities of us before we eat, we previously did that! After we finish telling the story of Pesach and mourning the slavery and bringing us back to that tragic time, the Jewish people as a nation bless our hands, and the lifting of our hands here is representing our freedom: it is taking us from being controlled by any other nation.

As Urchatz is a personal and individual time, Rachtzah is communal and united. We thank Hashem for lifting up our hands and for saving the Jewish nation. As we continue with Rachtzah, we remember our ancestors and our family and all of our friends as they follow the same process and keep in mind the freedom that we now have.

*Chag Sameach!*

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## Sara Elyassian

Regional Board Member, New York Region  
Great Neck, NY, Great Neck North High School

Our hands were already washed in Urchatz; why must we do it again? Although our hands were touched by water earlier in the *seder*, this time is different. This time is, rather, a deeper step. Not only are we washing our hands in Rachtzah, but it is also accompanied by a blessing.

Why? The answer is simple—we have just meaningfully and deeply told our People's story in Maggid, the previous step in the Haggadah, and because we have experienced the beauty of the Jewish journey from degradation to dignity, **we raise our hands in holiness**, remembering that once again that our liberation is bound up in everyone else's. By washing our hands a second time, we are signifying the end of slavery that was described in Maggid. Each step we take together with others toward liberation is a blessing. The blessing translates as, "Blessed are you, eternal, our G-d, Ruler of the World, who has sanctified us with commandments and instructed us regarding **lifting up our hands.**"

Washing your hands is a way to pause and be reflective about what you are about to consume, which is why you are not to speak after the blessing is recited. So, make sure to remember your ancestors, reflect on the past, tell stories, and most importantly, not speak after washing!

*Chag sameach!*

# • MOTZI MATZAH •

## Eloise Appel

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Denver, CO, St. Mary's Academy

It is a positive commandment to eat matzah on the *seder* night because it relates to the time when the Jews left Egypt. The Jews left in the middle of the day without warning; therefore, there was no time to wait for their dough to rise. They had been enslaved for so long that they also did not have time to prepare themselves. Matzah is known as *lechem oni* (bread of affliction) because it symbolizes the redemption and freedom the Jews had experienced after escaping Egypt. Therefore, it became a part of the Passover *seder*, known as Motzi Matzah.

To fully fulfill the obligation of eating matzah at the Passover *seder*, one must eat a great portion (traditionally determined as one ounce; 25.6 grams). Some believe that the matzah must be eaten within four minutes while reclining on the left side. While reciting the blessing of Al Achilat Matzah, one should have in mind that it refers not only to the matzah about to be eaten but, also, to the matzah eaten after Korech, as well as the *afikoman* at the end of the meal.

The word “matzah” can also mean “strife,” meaning freeing yourself from anger or any bitter feelings. Eating matzah signifies freeing ourselves from negative feelings, relating to how the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt. *Chametz* symbolizes anger, which we must always strive to free ourselves from. During Passover, we remove all *chametz* from our lives, just like what we should do with our negative and angry feelings.

In this day and age, we tend to focus on the materialistic aspect of life. Because of this, we tend to forget to connect with the people around us, but most importantly, we forget to connect with Hashem. Freeing ourselves from anger and materialism can mend the disconnect and help us recognize how free we truly are.

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## Sammy Rosenberg

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Charleston, SC, Academic Magnet High School

Within *halachah* there is a distinction between Birchat Hanehenin and Birchat Hamitzvah, specifically with regard to making a blessing on food. Under Birchat Hanehenin, when making a blessing, one may not make it for others if they are not partaking in the food as well. This is because that type of blessing is derivative of receiving benefit; one makes a blessing in appreciation of eating food. One of the few times when eating is in the other category—Birchat Hamitzvah—is during the *seder*. A Birchat Hamitzvah is said as a blessing over the mitzvah, thus distinguishing it from the action, which relieves the person of being liable to conduct the action accompanied with the blessing.

At the *seder*, making a blessing on matzah is entirely relevant to the general mitzvah, not in appreciation of eating it (*Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chayim* 167:23). Although this is quite understandable, as it's often tough to appreciate eating matzah, this leaves a blatant question that we just read earlier in the Haggadah: What makes tonight different from all other nights? The blessing on matzah at the *seder* is a unique one, as its obligation is inherently communal. Every individual is obligated on their own to eat at least a *kezayit*, an amount the size of an olive—roughly equal to one ounce. When it comes to a food as thin and insubstantial as matzah, that is a lot of matzah! Why do we need to have so much? And for some reason, we are each obligated to have so much that we may not even be enjoying it.

This answers the first question: most of the time when we make a blessing on food, we make it for the purpose of then enjoying the food, as the primary reason for having this *bracha*—even on Shabbat when we are obligated to have certain amounts of food—is for the enjoyment of the food. At the *seder*, we do not make the *bracha* just to enjoy the matzah, but to symbolize something much greater. By eating matzah, it simultaneously brings us up and down: it brings us up as we reconnect with three millennia of ancestors eating this not-so-enjoyable food, and it brings us down as it humbles us and reminds us of our history. The *bracha* we make is inherently communal because we eat matzah for the community! It seems odd that the *Shulchan Aruch* makes a note that in the Pesach *seder* a person can make the *bracha* for someone else without partaking because everyone is obligated to partake! What it teaches us is that the true mitzvah of Motzi Matzah is not enjoying the matzah but, rather, connecting with the entire Jewish people as we undertake that very same commandment. Now that you understand all that, enjoy (or don't enjoy) your matzah!

# • MARROR •

## Brandon Melamed

Vice President Greater South, Regional Board Member, Southern Region  
Jacksonville, FL, Stanton College Preparatory

*Chag Sameach*, everyone! This step of the *seder* is Marror, which literally means bitter. Symbolized by eating a bitter herb to commemorate the slavery in Egypt, Marror is one of the three things (along with the Pesach offering and matzah) that are crucial to identifying and recognizing this holiday.

The first source of Marror being mentioned in the Torah is from Shemot/Exodus 12:8, וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִיאֵשׁ, וְאֵלֶּיֶם יֵאָכְלוּ וְאֵלֶּיֶם יֵאָכְלוּ—They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.” Rashi and many other commentators conclude that the word “bitter” is used because the Egyptians made the slaves’ lives bitter, and that’s a core message to drive home every Pesach.

As it is said in Pesachim 2:6, the Mishnah offers five vegetables to use for the bitter herb. This can be *chazeret*, *ulshin*, *tamcha*, *charchavina*, or *marror* itself, which are all various kinds of bitter plants to fulfill the requirement. Today, many people use different kinds of lettuce, horseradish, and other things that are bitter, and if you are unsure of what you may or may not use, please CYLOR (Consult Your Local Orthodox Rabbi). They cannot be eaten boiled or processed, as this detracts from the bitterness and the overall meaning of the food.

This is so important because it’s a tradition to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day (Devarim/Deuteronomy 16:3), which includes the bitterness of the slavery that our ancestors endured. But there’s a reason we remember the entire Exodus, and not just the slavery. Additionally, the first of the Ten Commandments states, “I am Hashem your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.”

There are so many takeaways from the story, so many ideas to obtain, and so many lessons to learn, yet specifically in regard to Marror, there is always more than one way to approach something. For everything that was and is negative, there is always a positive to it. The Egyptians tortured, beat, and dehumanized the Hebrews, yet they still stayed strong. They still believed in Hashem, and in the end, the Jewish slavery was 210 years instead of 400 (with the remaining 190 years attributed to Isaac and Jacob and their families living in lands that weren’t theirs). Additionally, the Jews originally were wealthy in Egypt before the slavery and had food to eat and land to live in. At the end of the slavery, G-d performed ten incredible feats of nature that appear to defy the laws of physics, in order to free the slaves from bondage.

Being all-powerful, Hashem only needed one miracle to decimate all the Egyptians, and it could have been done with no problem. However, G-d chose to perform ten diverse and unique miracles in order to show that everyone is different and there are different approaches to things in life.

Overall, whether it’s eating different kinds of marror, or thinking about the ten different plagues, the entire Pesach story overall, or anything else, there will always be more than one way to learn and understand. There’s more than one way to connect to G-d. There’s more than one way to follow the commandments. There’s more than one way to approach a subject. There’s more than one way to be the best version of yourself that you can be. Find your way.

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## Jacob Plumb

Southwest Region  
Houston, TX, Robert M. Beren Academy

There was once a Rabbi who lived in Austria in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries named Rabbi Yitzchak Tyrnau. Rabbi Tyrnau traveled from town to town across Europe, collecting and documenting all the *minhagim* that he could find to compile them in his book, *Sefer Haminhagim*.

There was one town he visited that had such a strange *minhag* that even Rabbi Tyrnau had never heard of it. When it came time for the Pesach *seder*, the Jews of this town would take their matzah and dip it into their marror.

When Rabbi Tyrnau asked the elders of the town about this *minhag*, they responded with the following explanation: Matzah represents two things. It is the bread of our affliction and it is the bread of our freedom. Now, there are another two matters to discuss. If matzah is indeed the bread of our affliction, for what purpose are we dipping? Dipping is a practice of rich people, and rich people don’t dip to remember their suffering. Contrarily, if matzah is the bread of our freedom, then a similar question can be asked. Why would rich, free people dip the bread of freedom into a reminder of their affliction?

The town’s sages answer these two questions by highlighting the duality of dipping. The first part of dipping is simple, putting in. However, it would not be dipping without the second part, taking out. The most important thing to remember about Bnei Yisrael’s time in Egypt is that Hashem took us out. The Jews may have suffered miserably in Egypt; however, that is only the first part of the dip. Had Hashem left the Jews in Egypt, we most likely would not be a nation. The defining characteristic of our period of slavery in Egypt is that Hashem completed the “dip” by taking us out of Egypt in order to serve Him as His Nation. *Chag Kasher Vesameach!*

# • KOREICH •

## Aaron Baron

National Board Member, NY Regional President, New York Region  
Great Neck, NY, Great Neck North High School

We dip the marror that will fill the Korech sandwich into charoset. The marror is placed between two small pieces of matzo, similarly to how the contents of a sandwich are placed between two slices of bread and then eaten. The consistency of charoset is reminiscent of the clay our ancestors used in Egypt while manufacturing bricks.

But why would we want to eat something that reminds us of such a low point for our nation? There were two basic materials used in construction: stone and bricks. The “bricks” that we eat represent the materials G-d provides us, to build our lives. In our personal lives, these are the elements that are naturally qualified to serve as part of a home for G-d and readily lend themselves to this end: our positive character traits, the sacred times and places in creation, objects and forces designated for the performance of a mitzvah. Rather than remembering the harsh times we faced in Egypt, we are celebrating our personal and spiritual growth.

Many might think that there is a random element to eating the sandwich, but they are terribly mistaken. It was the custom of Hillel during the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, to take the Passover lamb, matzah, and marror and eat them together, fulfilling the statement: “On matzah and marror, they will eat the Passover lamb.” The Passover lamb represents our moment of freedom, our break from Egyptian culture and control. Matzah is the bread of our conquest and, at the same time, our liberation. Marror represents our suffering as slaves in Egypt. Before Hillel, all these elements were eaten in turn, each representing another aspect of our holiday, each part of the Passover message. The sandwich we eat today is a true testament to Hillel’s message that we must not separate ourselves from our communities or their pasts—especially when considering the dire times we as a nation have faced.

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## Gavriel Warren

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Sharon, MA, Maimonides School

There is an idea in Judaism of wanting to extend *mitzvot*. This would make it seem as if we should eat the elements of Korech separately. However, Hillel ate them together. So why would Hillel, who clearly knew this idea of extending *mitzvot* as much as possible, purposely condense this into one sandwich? Before we answer this question we need to look at matzah and marror individually.

The matzah symbolizes freedom. But what does it mean to be free? To be free means to be able to make decisions without anyone or anything else forcing the decisions on you. In Egypt, the Jewish people were not free because they were unable to make their own decisions. They had to listen to their taskmasters, who forced them to work and to build cities etc. Once we left Egypt we were able to make our decisions without being influenced by Pharaoh, and we were able to begin serving G-d.

The marror symbolizes the polar opposite of the freedom of matzah. Its bitter taste symbolizes servitude. Servitude is mainly thought of in tandem with slavery, i.e. the Jewish people in Egypt. But slavery is not all that is encompassed by servitude. In today’s modern world, people are in servitude to their learning and careers. They would study for years on end in order to become lawyers, doctors, physicists. This longevity of work in order to achieve the knowledge that is required to join these professions is also servitude. But just as the servitude of the Jewish people led to them entering the Land of Israel and completely becoming their own nation, so too does the servitude of working long hours and studying hours on end yield great accomplishments

Now we can go back and address the earlier question of why Hillel decided to combine the freedom of matzah with the servitude of marror. Both of these attributes—freedom and servitude—need to be able to act without interference from the other. When you are working hard either studying or making a sales pitch, you do not want your freedoms to interfere and distract you. You want to focus on the task at hand. However, when you are enjoying yourself and acting on your freedoms, you should not be held back by your servitude of having to study for that final exam next week or working on your report because the quarter is almost over.

Hillel recognized that while these two attributes may initially seem as if they are unable to coexist, in reality they do. When we serve G-d we need to be able to harness both sides of ourselves. We dedicate parts of our lives in order to study His Torah. However, engraved in His Torah are the ideals of freedom—as we see in Shabbat, where we separate ourselves from our weekly toil to enjoy our freedoms. Therefore Hillel insisted on eating the Korech foods in conjunction, because only by using them together are we able to serve G-d. (These ideas were taken from Rav Kook: [http://ravkooktorah.org/PESACH\\_68.htm](http://ravkooktorah.org/PESACH_68.htm))

# • SHULCHAN ORECH •

## Shifra Dimbert

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Teaneck, New Jersey, The Frisch School

Rabbi Mordechai Perlman says that one of the unique aspects of the *seder* is that we interrupt the saying of Hallel with a meal. This is strange though. We have just done a recounting of the Exodus story, we are on such a spiritual high, and we now pause and decide to eat. Why is that? The Netziv explains: The purpose of going out of Egypt was to receive the Torah. With the Torah we gained the ability to serve Hashem not only through spiritual means, such as Torah study and prayer, but through physical *mitzvot* as well, such as enjoying Shabbat, wearing *tefillin*, and eating matzah and maror. We now eat in the *middle* of Hallel in order to praise Hashem for sanctifying our physical existence. Even “mundane” things like eating are elevated when we do them in the service of Hashem. This does not mean, though, that we can’t elevate our meals even more by sharing words of Torah.

Constantly during the *seder* do we refer to ourselves as בני חורין. What does that mean though? Are we not already free? To better understand this seemingly ambiguous phrase, there is a necessary distinction to be made between חירות and חופש. I think there are two potential routes one could take in order to answer this question.

חופש represents physical freedom. Looking at שמות כ”א:ב we see ... וּבִשְׁבַע יָצָא לְחֶפְשִׁי חָנָם — “When you acquire a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years; in the seventh year he shall go free, without payment.” This פסוק demonstrates that חופש, not חירות, is a freedom from slavery. Thus, בני חורין can’t be referring to a literal freedom from slavery, but rather a spiritual or ideological freedom—a freedom toward something.

Looking at שמות ל”ב:ט”ז we see וְהִלַּחַת מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הַמָּה וְהַמְכַתֵּב מִכְתָּב אֱלֹהִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל־הַלְחָת.

When the Torah describes the *luchot*, it uses a word with the same root as חירות. The root of this word is חרת, meaning to engrave or dig deeply into stone or wood. This implies internalizing something, supporting the idea of חירות being a deeper level of freedom.

Now that this distinction has been established, it is important to understand this new deeper level of freedom for which we hope. There are two answers that provide potential explanations to what this deeper redemption is: either it is to become בני תורה or be united in Israel.

The first answer is from a משנה in פרקי אבות in משנה ו:ב. Using the פסוק that was mentioned above, this משנה teaches us that one is not truly free if they do not involve themselves in learning Torah. By aspiring to be בני חורין next year, we are hoping to become בני תורה.

Erich Fromm supports this answer through his explanation of the two types of freedom. Fromm explains that there are two levels of freedom: *freedom from* and *freedom to*. *Freedom from* is a negative freedom, and is the freedom from slavery or oppression or, as we stated earlier, the freedom described by the word חופשית. *Freedom to* is a positive freedom, when you finally have the ability to do something on your own, otherwise known as the freedom described by the word חירות. According to Fromm’s definitions, we can say that when we say we hope to be בני חורין, we are hoping to have the complete freedom to be able to act in proper ways following the words of the Torah.

Being reunited in Israel is found in the text of the Torah. Moshe is given his mission to lead the people out of Egypt twice. I believe it was repeated twice to teach two different lessons. Meaning, Moshe needed the information twice for he had two different missions. The first was to merely redeem the nation from slavery in a true חופשית fashion. The second was to take the nation out so that they could become Hashem’s nation, in a more חירות way. The text seems to teach us that this deeper level of freedom was becoming a unified people who serve Hashem.

By saying בני חורין הַבָּאָה בְּיַד אֱלֹהֵינוּ at the *seder*, we are hoping to all be united as one people again in Israel. While we may not be enslaved at the moment, we are still in *galut*. We are longing to be in Israel, where we can truly be free to serve Hashem as one.

# • SHULCHAN ORECH •

## Shayna Roberts

West Coast Regional President, West Coast Region  
Las Vegas, NV; Faith Lutheran Academy

At the end of the Haggadah, in the song, *Had Gadyah*, there is a description of the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He slaughtering the Angel of Death. This surprising end symbolically describes one of the hidden goals of the *seder*, which is the victory over death.

Every adult ponders from time to time what he will leave behind. Our corporal lives are limited, but each of us would like to leave a dent, even a small one, on this earth. We take photos endlessly and wealthy people use monuments, plaques, and good deeds to be remembered. People have children and give them the names of the previous generation, as if to say that the chain is continuing.

The *seder* provides a substantive answer to this existential need, to leave something of us behind. The philosophy of the *seder* is that very little will remain of our private "I." The private existence of most human beings will be forgotten. The *seder* does not suggest that we eliminate our private identity. The *seder* calls upon us to add our general layer as a basic element of identity. The *seder* provides us with a night in which we pass along the collective memory, the tribal memory.

We don't remember our great-grandfather. But we do know exactly what he was doing on *seder* night 150 years ago. Perhaps this year we are reading the Haggadah. We won't understand everything in it, but even through our somewhat incomprehensible reading we'll connect to our past and our future in the endless time tunnel. But the Haggadah does not end, and it invites us to add our own chapters to the ongoing Exodus from Egypt, whose goal is to build a Jewish people securely in our own land. Therefore, on this night, our grandfathers and grandmothers will tell the story of their Exodus from Egypt.



# • TZAFUN •

## Shayna Kahane

Midwest Regional President and National Board Member, Midwest Region  
Memphis, TN, Margolin Hebrew Academy

We all know that time during the *seder*. We have just finished eating the meal, or Shulchan Orech, our stomachs filled to the brim. Yet we must again consume some matzah: this time the *afikoman*. While the idea behind Tzafun and hiding the *afikoman* is on a surface level, in order to keep the kids awake and involved in the festivities, there is a much deeper and integral Judaic concept that is reinforced during this part of the *seder*.

One of the major components of Judaism is that there is a spiritual realm and world equal to every physical one. Just as we have physical drives, we have spiritual drives in the spiritual realm, and what drives these spiritual drives is something called the spiritual essence. The spiritual essence is, many times, hidden, and as a result it may be difficult to feel motivated in our spiritual lives. We feel distant from the spiritual realm and as a result continue to let that essence be tucked away deep inside of us. Pesach, however, is a chance to be reborn. We are born again as a nation and as individuals who are dedicated to the service of Hashem. By searching and searching until we find the *afikoman*, it is as if we are bringing that essence once again to the forefront of our minds, and allowing it to once again motivate us in the right directions.

While Tzafun has the ability to be a changing point in the way we view our relationship with our spirituality, it is not the only time. In Tzafun, the matzah that we eat is only a small portion of the matzah that we are required to eat that night. We should use the *seder*—instead of as just a singular instance of spiritual growth—to jumpstart the growth for the entire year. Even when the essence seems repressed and hidden, we should search it out, because this is the only way to truly reignite it. Have a great Pesach.

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## Zach Magerman

Atlantic Seaboard Regional Copresident, Atlantic Seaboard Region  
Merion Station, PA, Kohelet Yeshiva High School

Tzafun is the first step of the *seder* after the main course in Shulchan Orech, transitioning from a focus on our past, now to looking ahead to our future. So why exactly do we look for a piece of matzah, and why is it so important that we dedicate a whole step of the *seder* to it? Furthermore, many people have the custom of hiding it and letting the children find it, only to have them negotiate a “deal” to give it back, but why can’t we just grab a piece of matzah, call it the *afikoman*, and eat it?

I feel that there is actually a larger question being answered here: Now that we are freed from slavery, what are we supposed to do with our lives? I spoke about this with one of my *rebbis*, Rabbi Menashe Benedict, and he gave me a very interesting answer. He explained to me that Hashem gave us a piece of Him—our *neshamah*—and that our goal on earth is to make it as holy as we can by being good people and keeping *mitzvot*. Then, before we go to Olam Habah, we can be judged by Hashem and eventually become pure.

So too, I think this is very similar to Tzafun. Just as kids look for the *afikoman*, so too we look for our place in this world. Then, once the kids find it, they bring it to their parents—just as when our lives are over on earth we are brought in front of Hashem in Shamayim. They both give their rulings about what needs to happen for us to return what they want, so while kids are given prizes to return the *afikoman*, we are given a prize in Shamayim too: we get our soul purified and are allowed to enter Olam Habah. We see even more similarities when we look at which piece of matzah we use for the *afikoman*: the middle piece, representing our *neshamah*, which is the core of our bodies.

In the end, we see that during Tzafun we aren’t just looking for a bland piece of matzah every year, but rather, we are reminding ourselves that we will be judged after our time on earth is over, and thus we need to find our purpose in the world and do *mitzvot*. So, we can use this part of the *seder* to transition from reflecting on our past year to looking ahead to the future.

# • BARECH •

## Dovie Gecovich

Cleveland Executive Board Member, Central East Region  
Beachwood, OH, Fuchs Mizrahi School

It's time for Barech. We've recounted the miraculous Exodus, the splitting of an entire sea! We've discussed moral values that we derive from the four sons. We've struggled with moral questions and spent hours understanding the perspective of the greatest rabbis to ever live. We've even eaten a meal that we're not even hungry for, following the Hillel sandwich during Korech.

But now, the *seder* decides to take a breather. For the next five minutes, we sit still, quietly (or loudly) mumbling or singing together the words of *bentching*, the prayer to Hashem appreciating the meal He provided us with. This seemingly random interjection is already curious, but to further our confusion, the rabbis implemented the prayer of *Shfoch chamasecha* at the end of *bentching*, which seems very random.

During this stage, we leave our house and go outside to welcome Eliyahu Hanavi. This is how we demonstrate to all the other nations that we are not scared. In fact, we have become one of the most powerful nations despite our historical persecution. Thus, *Shfoch chamasecha* reminds us of the sole purpose of the *seder*, reminding us that not only are we free, but we are safe. It ties all of the messages of Pesach together before we move on the last steps of the *seder*, making *bentching* the segue from the beginning to the end.

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## Rachel Joseph

National Board Member, Southern Region, Jacksonville, FL, Jacksonville Torah High School

The word Barech means "bless," and at this point in the *seder* we say Birkat Hamazon, thanking Hashem for the meal we just ate.

The *seder* has many important steps symbolizing the importance of the night. We eat vegetables dipped in salt water to commemorate the suffering we endured in Mitzrayim, and we lean when we eat or drink to symbolize being freed from the slavery. All of these steps are unique to the *sedarim*.

Why is Barech added as a step in the *seder* when Birkat Hamazon is something we say every day? There is seemingly no significance of adding Barech as a step in the *seder* when we already know to say Birkat Hamazon after we wash for bread (or matzah, in this case); doesn't it seem puzzling?

A lot of us go through our day without really focusing on the things we do. We do things habitually without thinking about it too hard; we wake up, brush our teeth, etc. The same thing can happen with things that *do* have meaning. If you pray *shacharit* every morning, you might find yourself not focusing on the words as much as you'd like, because it has become a habit.

Every mitzvah, every *davening*, every time we *bentch* is a vehicle for us to connect to Hashem. The essence of Jewish law and ritual is to create a relationship with our Creator. If we go through life doing things by rote, with little inspiration and meaning, we are missing the purpose of doing those things! Barech as a step in the *seder*, in our retelling of the Exodus from Egypt, teaches us that in order to be truly free, we have to find meaning in everything that we do.



# • HALLEL •

## Nessa Moussadji

Regional Board Member, Canada Region  
Thornhill, ON, Westmount Collegiate Institute

Hallel is the second last part of the *seder*. After a long night of discussions, food, storytelling and more food, we finally make it to the end. Our *seder* ends with us singing songs. During the *seder*, we are supposed to feel as if we were the ones that escaped from Egypt. The entire *seder*, including what we eat and what we say, is built around emphasizing that concept. When we finally get to Hallel we are free from Egypt, which is why we begin to sing a song to thank Hashem for freeing us.

Many of us know the power that music has. It can help us to express feelings and emotions that words can't otherwise convey. Have you ever felt so happy or excited about something that you just wanted to burst into song? During the Passover *seder*, that is Hallel. Typically Hallel is said while standing up, but during the *seder* we stay seated. This is because Hallel is supposed to be a spontaneous outburst of song expressing how happy we are to be free.

Hallel articulates hope. After so long in Egypt, where we were constantly silenced, we are able to pour out our hearts to Hashem, which is a mark of our freedom. As you sing Hallel tonight, try to keep in mind a time when you were so happy that something turned out amazing, you just wanted a way to express your excitement. Use that feeling of excitement to understand how the Jews felt as they left Egypt and started singing Hallel. Happy Passover!

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## Lily Levine

Teaneck Chapter Board Member, New Jersey Region  
Teaneck, NJ, The Frisch School

...כי הטא אזנו לי...—אהבתי, כי ישמע ה' את קולי, תחנוני. כי הטא אזנו לי...—*I love Him, for Hashem hears my voice, my supplications. For He has inclined his ear to me...*" (Hallel prayers, from Tehillim 116:1–2)

Rav Yitzchak Hutner finds a difficulty within these two verses. The first says that Hashem has heard "my voice," meaning that He has answered the prayers favorably. The other says that Hashem has inclined His ear: this means Hashem has listened, but has not necessarily answered the prayer favorably.

First, Hashem is being thanked for answering the prayers. Then, He is thanked for listening to them. Rav Hutner notes that this seems out of order. It is nonchronological, and it is thematically awkward. Typically, one expresses thanks for the smaller thing—in this case, listening to the prayer—first, and then the larger thing. This order makes the expression of gratitude anticlimactic.

Rav Hutner connects this to another issue from *ספר שמות*, where *משה* is *davening* for *בני ישראל* at the *ים סוף*. Here, Hashem interrupts *משה*'s prayers, saying: "Why do you cry out to Me?" and instead must call the Jews to venture forward. *לחז"ל* tell us that Hashem is rebuking *משה*; He is saying that it is not a time for lengthy prayers but, rather, to take care of the Jews. The implication of Hashem telling *משה* to stop *davening*—explains Rav Hutner, from the teachings of the *מהרל*—is that Hashem's salvation could not begin until *משה* stopped *davening*. Why is this so? Furthermore, why did Hashem allow for the Egyptians to frighten the Jews so much as to lead them to this point of terror where *משה* is crying out to Hashem?

The *מדרש* answers this with a *משל*. There once was a king, who, while traveling, heard a princess crying out to save her from thieves. He then went out to save her. Soon after, the king decided that he wanted to marry her. However, when he tried to talk to her, the princess was so shy that she would not speak to him. The king then hired actors to pretend to be thieves and frighten the princess. The princess was terrified, and began to cry out for help. The king exclaimed, "This is what I'd hoped for: I wanted to hear your beautiful voice!" Similarly, Hashem wanted to hear the voice of *בני ישראל*. Hence, He sent the Egyptians to frighten them to the extent that the Jews would cry out to Him.

Rav Hutner explains that Hashem cut off *משה*'s prayers and told him to shorten them because the experience of prayer was enough. Hashem had achieved his goal: to prompt *בני ישראל* (including *משה*) to *daven* to Him. The experience of *davening* might even be considered more important than the prayer's answer, in Hashem's eyes.

If this is true for Hashem, Rav Hutner explains, it should be true for us as well. We should always hope to have our prayers answered, but that should not be our only focus. We must use *תפילה* as an outlet to become closer to Hashem, and *daven* so that He does not just answer, but hears us at all.

Therefore, the expressions of gratitude in "...אהבתי..." are in perfectly logical order. We first thank Hashem for answering our prayer—an important aspect of our *תפילה*, but not the primary one. Then, we thank Hashem for listening to our prayers; this shows that we have fostered a relationship with Hashem, and that our connection to Him is our greatest gift of all.

# • NIRTZAH •

## Mima Kohn

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Just as the ten *makkot* that battered Egypt served as a testament to G-d's existence, the bouncy song of *Echad Mi Yodea* encourages us to loudly proclaim G-d's might. After hundreds of years of physical and spiritual subjugation, Hashem's grand gestures within *yetziat Mitzrayim* established the legitimacy of our faith and the strength of our G-d. Finally free from Egypt's shackles, we were able to publicly embrace our nationhood and receive our Torah at Har Sinai. The song *Echad Mi Yodea*, found within Nirtzah, carries a similar sentiment.

As an exciting finish, the chant triumphantly marches through Jewish history as we loudly declare Hashem's capability. When asked, "Who knows one?" we eagerly respond that "We do!" Having spent the *seder* rehashing our dramatic Exodus from Egypt, a Jew is once again charged with sharing the message of G-d's power and the beauty of our tradition with others.

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## Bram Hoffman

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The marathon has come to an end. The *seder* is concluding, people are drowsy, and amid all this we are singing songs that objectively make no sense, screaming in a medieval tune that the stick came and beat the dog, which bit the cat, which ate the goat, and on and on.

We have come to Nirtzah, the final part of the Haggadah, in which we state that we have fulfilled all of our obligations for the night. Nirtzah is usually translated as *acceptance*, in that we want Hashem to accept our recounting of the miracles that He performed for our ancestors, millennia ago. And then we get to scream, "Next Year in Jerusalem," which is supposed to call to our mind a vision of the Messiah coming to redeem the Jewish people. A time to be, and a World to Come where there is no war, not even the study of it.

This is one of the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith: that every day, we should long for the coming of the Messiah. But taking a look at the Rambam's Haggadah—described in his halachic work, *Mishneh Torah*—the Rambam doesn't even have Nirtzah in there. It's just Hallel, *bentching*, and you're done. How could this possibly be? The great sage Maimonides didn't include a core tenet of Judaism in his Haggadah? This must be a mistake.

Well, it isn't.

Judaism has two sides to it: a static, fixed text that is the Torah; and a dynamic body of rabbinic literature that has been evolving for thousands of years. While we do draw from a rich and extensive tradition we have kept with us since the Bronze Age, it is not the only thing that has kept us together as a nation. It is the rugged sense of communalism, where we all take care of one another and everybody eats, both figuratively and metaphorically. It is the nomadic nature of our people, where even if you are anywhere from Reykjavik to Nairobi you will find a place to stay for Shabbos.

As we're prone to have our own opinions and customs, it was probably the case that some Jews just began to add their own message at the end of the *seder*. Which is the beauty of Judaism: you can creatively, logically, or customarily add your own mark to the collective story of the Jews. Our ability to painstakingly keep each letter of the Torah intact, while adding our own spin to the *minhagim* that we keep, has made us the nation that will never die. However, throughout the generations there have been some people who have had their own ideas about how Judaism should function, often casting aside the word of G-d for personal or political convenience.

I dream of seeing the day when the walls of labels that divide the Jewish people come crashing down, and waves of Jews can be seen dancing together, all the way up to the Temple Mount.

*Chag Sameach!*