

From the Mishnah to Maggid

Part 3: Why is the Seder So Disorderly?

1) Shemot 13:8

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֵבֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

And you shall explain to your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt.’

2) R. Naftali Maskil le-Eitan (1829-1897), Maamar Yesod Mosad

הנה חובת מצות עשה דספור יציאת מצרים היא מהכתוב והגדת לבנך וגוי שהוא צווי החלטי להגיד ולספר להבנים גם כשאנים שואלים, וכיון שהכתוב הזה הוא המקור והוא השרש למצות עשה דספור יציאת מצרים, על כן ערך בעל המסדר את ההגדה לפי סדר הכתוב הזה והולך בעקבותיו, דרשותיה ועניניה מסודרות לפי סדר המלות במקרא זה, והנה הן שש מחלקות: א) והגדת לבנך, ב) ביום ההוא, ג) לאמר, ד) בעבור זה, ה) עשה ה' לי, ו) בצאתי ממצרים. ולפי ההנחה הקצרה הזאת כבר בולט טעם הסדר, שאין לשנות את הענינים ממקום למקום, שלא להקדים את המאוחר בכתוב ולא לאחר את המוקדם ואין להזיזים ממקומם. ועתה נעבור על כל חלקי הסדר הזה ונפגשם אחד אחד.

The obligation of telling the story of leaving Egypt is from the verse of “and you shall tell your child, etc.” which is a clear command to tell and relate to children even if they don’t ask, and since this verse is the source and root for the positive commandment of telling the Exodus story, therefore the editor of the Seder arranged the Haggadah in its footsteps—its derivations and topics are organized according to the order of the words in this verse. Behold there are six divisions: (1) *ve-higadeta le-vincha*; (2) *bayom hahu*; (3) *leimor*; (4) *ba-avur zeh*; (5) *asah hashem li*; (6) *be-tzeiti mi-mitzrayim*. And according to this short supposition, the reason [for the ordering] of the Seder is already apparent. One can’t shift its parts around, so as not to depart from the sequence of the verse.

3) Rachel Sharansky Danziger, “My Own Private Haggadah,” *Tablet Magazine* (2020)

By pulling us out of the story, the abrupt jumps from tangent to tangent in the Haggadah ... invite us to involve ourselves in making sense of the story. Though the Haggadah instructs us to say “we were slaves” in the first person, for example, it doesn’t allow us to lose our actual “I” in a sweeping narrative that will make that fictional “we” feel natural. ... [T]he 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. By the end we can no longer simply place the story of the Exodus on a shelf and move on to *Sleeping Beauty*. We poured too much of ourselves into it to ever fully let it go. ...

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.

4) Yosef Lindell, “The Seder is Anything but Orderly,” *The Lehrhaus* (2021)

The disorganized Haggadah may not have the markings of a great novel, but perhaps it was never meant to be easy, its meaning delivered on a silver platter. With its non-sequiturs and cryptic passages, the Haggadah looks a lot like any page of the Talmud. So perhaps you can’t just read the Haggadah. Instead, you learn it. The freewheeling, disjointed Haggadah creates a Seder that mimics the dynamics of a *beit midrash*. It is no accident that its central portion is a *midrash*, the *sine qua non* of the Oral Torah.

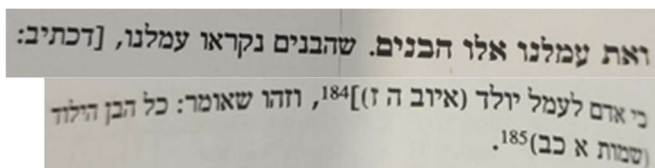
Thus, spirited discussion becomes central to the Seder. Around the Seder table, we must learn the Haggadah together. Its words are the beginning, not the end, of the conversation. *Maggid* is lively: full of questions, answers, and *divrei torah* the children learned in school. We interrupt, talk over one another, discuss the meaning of passages, or perhaps even demonstrate the plagues with plastic frogs. The Haggadah says that “whoever tells more about the Exodus is praiseworthy,” and the Sages of Bnei Brak led by example: going strong all night until their students reminded them to recite the morning *Shema*. Learning Torah in partnership is a heady, engrossing, and sometimes disorganized experience.

5) Ritva (13th-14th century), “ve-et amaleinu”

וְאֵת עַמְלָנוּ אֱלוֹ הַבְּנִים. שֶׁהֵם עִמַּל הָאָדָם כִּי כִמָּה הָאָדָם יִגַע לְגַדְלָם וּלְלַמְדָם דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ וְתוֹרָה, וְכֵן יִגַע כְּדֵי שִׂוְכַל לְהַגִּיחַ לָהֶם מִמּוֹן אַחֵר מִוְתוֹ

And our labor, these are the children. For they are the toil of man—A person works very hard to raise them and to teach them the way of the world and Torah. And also works in order to leave them money after he dies.

6) Pirush Kadmon (unknown author from the time of the Rishonim), “ve-et amaleinu”



And our labor, these are the children. Children are called our labor, as it is written: “A person is born for labor” (Iyov 5:7), and that’s what it says: “Every male child...” (Shemot 1:22).

7) The Birds' Head Haggadah (c. 1300)



8) The Amsterdam Haggadah (1695)



9) Vanessa Ochs, *The Passover Haggadah: A Biography* (2020)



How many other sacred texts could tolerate being branded by a product, by corporate sponsorship? Would we tolerate, much less embrace, a Kleenex Lamentations, or the Lens-Crafters Book of Mormon? Could another sacred text come with tear-out inserts: shopping checklists and advertisements for farfel, gefilte fish balls, macaroons, and candied, jellied slices of “fruit”? Surely, Leviticus could not withstand a centerfold of coupons for an ox of the sacrifice of well-being; the goat for the people’s sin offering; 20 percent off turtledoves and frankincense, two-for-one on pigeons.

10) Mishnah Pesachim 10:4-5

...מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח, ודורש מארמי אוֹבֵד אָבִי, עד שְׁיִגְמַר כֹּל הַפְּרָשָׁה כְּלָה:

He begins with shame and concludes with praise; and expounds from “A wandering Aramean was my father” (Deuteronomy 26:5-8) until he completes the whole section.

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חֵיב אָדָם לְרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׂנֵאָמֵר (שְׁמוֹת יג), וְהִגִּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעֵבִיר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לְפִיכָף אֲנַחֲנוּ חֵיבִין לְהוֹדוֹת, לְהַלֵּל, לְשַׁבַּח, לְפָאֵר, לְרֹמֵם, לְהַדְרֵה, לְכַרְתָּ, לְעַלֵּה, וּלְקַלֵּס, לְמִי שֶׁעָשָׂה לְאַבֹּתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ אֶת כָּל הַנְּסִימִים הָאֵלֶּה, הוֹצִיאָנוּ מֵעֲבָדוֹת לְחֵירוֹת, מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׁמְחָה, וּמֵאֶבֶל לְיוֹם טוֹב, וּמֵאֶפְלָה לְאוֹר גְּדוֹל, וּמִשְׁעָבוֹד לְגְּאֻלָּה. וְנֵאמַר לְפָנָיו, הַלְלוּיָהּ:

In every generation a man is obligated to regard himself as though he personally had gone forth from Egypt, because it is said, “And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: ‘It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt’” (Exodus 13:8). Therefore it is our duty to thank, praise, laud, glorify, raise up, beautify, bless, extol, and adore Him who made all these miracles for our fathers and ourselves; He brought us forth from slavery into freedom, from sorrow into joy, from mourning into festivity, from darkness into great light, and from servitude into redemption. Let us say before him, Hallelujah!

11) Devarim 26:5-10

וְעָנִיתָ וְאָמַרְתָּ לְפָנָיו | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֲרַמִּי אֲבִי בְנִדָּה מִצְרַיִמָּה וְנִגַּר נַשְׂמָה בְּמַתִּי מֵעַט וַיְהִי־יְשָׁם לִגְדוֹל עֲצוּמִים וְרַב: ⁶וַיְהִי־עוֹ אֲתָנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲבֹדוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה: ⁷וַנִּצְעַק אֱלֹהֵי־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת־קִלְנוּ וַיִּרְא אֶת־עֲנִינוּ וְאֶת־עֲמַלְנוּ וְאֶת־לַחֲצוֹנוּ: ⁸וַיּוֹצֵאֲנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְיָרֵעַ נְטוּיָהּ וּבְמַרְא גְּדוֹל וּבְאַתּוֹת וּבְמִפְתִּימִים: ⁹וַיְבִאֲנוּ

אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתְּנֵנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ: ¹⁰וְעַתָּה הִגַּה הַבִּאֲתִיל אֶת־רֵאשִׁית פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתָּה לִּי יְהוָה וְהַנְּחִיתוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

You shall then recite as follows before the LORD your God: “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O LORD, have given me.” You shall leave it before the LORD your God and bow low before the LORD your God.

12) Psalm 78:2-5, 41-58

אֶפְתָּחָה בְּמִשְׁלַל פִּי אֲבִיעֶה חֵידוֹת מִנִּי־קִדְּמִים: ³אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְנוּ וַנִּדְעֵם וְאָבֹתֵינוּ סִפְרוּ־לָנוּ: ⁴לֹא נִכְחַד | מִבְּנֵיהֶם לְדוֹר אַחֲרָיוֹן מִסִּפְרֵים תְּהִלּוֹת יְהוָה וְעֲזֹנוּ וְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: ⁵נִגְיָקֵם עֲדוֹת | בְּנִיעֲלָב וְתוֹרָה שֵׁם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֶת־אֲבֹתֵינוּ לְהוֹדִיעֵם לְבְנֵיהֶם: ⁶לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ | דוֹר אַחֲרָיוֹן בְּנִים וַיִּלְבְּדוּ יְלָמָדוּ וַיִּסְפְּרוּ לְבְנֵיהֶם:

I will expound a theme, hold forth on the lessons of the past, things we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not withhold them from their children, telling the coming generation the praises of the LORD and His might, and the wonders He performed. He established a decree in Jacob, ordained a teaching in Israel, charging our fathers to make them known to their children, that a future generation might know—children yet to be born—and in turn tell their children.

וַיִּשׁוּבוּ וַיִּנְסוּ אֶל וּקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַתּוֹ: ⁴²לֹא־יִזְכְּרוּ אֶת־יְדֹוֹ יוֹם אֲשֶׁר־פָּדַם מִנִּי־צָר: ⁴³אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם בְּמִצְרַיִם אֹתוֹתָיו וּמִוִּפְתֵּי בִשְׂדֵה־צֹעַן: ⁴⁴וַיִּזְהַפֵּךְ לָדָם יֵאֲרִיחֵם וַיִּנְזְלִיחֵם בַּל־יִשְׁתַּמְּחוּ: ⁴⁵וַיִּשְׁלַח בָּהֶם עָרָב וַיֹּאכְלֵם וַצִּפְרִדֵּעַ וַתִּשְׁחִיתֵם: ⁴⁶וַיִּתֵּן לְחֶסֶד יְבוּלָם וַיִּגְיַעֵם לְאֶרֶב: ⁴⁷וַיִּהְיֶה בַּבֶּרֶד גִּפְגָּם וַשְׁקֹמוֹתָם בַּחֲנָמַל: ⁴⁸וַיִּסְגַּר לְבַרְדַּב בְּעִירָם וּמִקְנֵיהֶם לְרִשְׁפִּים: ⁴⁹וַיִּשְׁלַח־בָּם | חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ עֲבָרָה וַזַּעַם וַצָּרָה מְשַׁלַּחַת מִלְּאֲכָזֵי רַעִים: ⁵⁰וַיִּפְלֹס נְתִיב לְאִפּוֹ לֹא־חָשָׂה מִמְּנוֹת נִפְשָׁם וַחֲסִיתָם לְדַבָּר הַסִּגִּיר: ⁵¹וַיִּנְדֹּף פְּלִי־בִכּוֹר בְּמִצְרַיִם רֵאשִׁית אוֹנִים בְּאֶהֱלֵי־חֵם: ⁵²וַיִּנְסַע בְּצֹאן עֲמֹן וַיִּנְהַגֵם כְּעֹדֵר בַּמִּדְבָּר: ⁵³וַיִּנְגַחֵם לְבַטַח וְלֹא פָחַדוּ וְאֶת־אוֹיְבֵיהֶם כִּפְּסָה הַיָּם: ⁵⁴וַיִּבְיֵאֵם אֶל־גְּבוּל קְדֻשׁוֹ הַר־זֵה קִנְיָתָהּ מִיָּנוּ: ⁵⁵וַיִּגְרֹשׁ מִפְּנֵיהֶם | גּוֹיִם וַיִּפְּלֵם בְּתִבְלֵ נַחֲלָה וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ בְּאֶהֱלֵיהֶם שְׁבֻטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁵⁶וַיִּנְסוּ וַיִּמְרוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵיהֶם עֲלֵיוֹן וַעֲדוֹתָיו לֹא שָׁמְרוּ: ⁵⁷וַיִּסְגְּנוּ וַיִּבְגְּדוּ כַּאֲבֹתָם וַהֲפֹכוּ כְּקִשְׁתַּת רַמְיָהּ: ⁵⁸וַיִּכְעַרְסוּהוּ בְּכַמּוֹתָם וּבִפְסִילֵיהֶם יִקְנִיאוּהוּ:

Again and again they tested God, vexed the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His strength, or the day He redeemed them from the foe; how He displayed His signs in Egypt, His wonders in the plain of Zoan. He turned their rivers into blood; He made their waters undrinkable. He inflicted upon them swarms of insects to devour them, frogs to destroy them. He gave their crops over to grubs, their produce to locusts. He killed their vines with hail, their sycamores with frost. He gave their beasts over to hail, their cattle to lightning bolts. He inflicted His burning anger upon them, wrath, indignation, trouble, a band of deadly messengers. He cleared a path for His anger; He did not stop short of slaying them, but gave them over to pestilence. He struck every first-born in Egypt, the first fruits of their vigor in the tents of Ham. He set His people moving like sheep, drove them like a flock in the wilderness. He led them in safety; they were unafraid; as for their enemies, the sea covered them. He brought them to His holy realm, the mountain His right hand had acquired. He expelled nations before them, settled

the tribes of Israel in their tents, allotting them their portion by the line. Yet they defiantly tested God Most High, and did not observe His decrees. They fell away, disloyal like their fathers; they played false like a treacherous bow. They vexed Him with their high places; they incensed Him with their idols.

13) Psalm 105:1-6, 26-38

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה קראוּ בְשֵׁמוֹ הוֹדִיעוּ בְּעַמִּים עֲלִילוֹתָיו: ²⁷שִׁירוּ לֹו זְמֵרוֹ לֹו שִׁיחוּ בְּכָל־נִפְלְאוֹתָיו: ³הִתְהַלְלוּ בְּשֵׁם קְדוֹשׁוֹ יְשׁוּחַ לֵב | מִבְּקִשֵׁי יְהוָה: ⁴דַּרְשׁוּ יְהוָה וְעֲזְרוּ בְּקִשׁוֹ פִּגְיוֹ תִמְיֵד: ⁵זַכְּרוּ נִפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה מִפְתִּיּוֹ וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי־פִיו: ⁶זַרַע אֲבָרָהֶם עֲבָדוּ בְּנֵי יִעֲקֹב בְּחֵירָיו:

Praise the LORD; call on His name; proclaim His deeds among the peoples. Sing praises to Him; speak of all His wondrous acts. Exult in His holy name; let all who seek the LORD rejoice. Turn to the LORD, to His might; seek His presence constantly. Remember the wonders He has done, His portents and the judgments He has pronounced, O offspring of Abraham, His servant, O descendants of Jacob, His chosen ones.

שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה עֲבָדוֹ אֶהֱרֹן אֲשֶׁר בְּתַרְבוֹ: ²⁷שָׁמוּ־בְּם דְּבָרֵי אֹתוֹתָיו וּמִפְתִּיּוֹ בְּאֶרֶץ חָם: ²⁸שָׁלַח חֹשֶׁךְ וַיַּחְשֹׁךְ וַלֹא־מָרוּ אֶת־הַקֶּף אֶת־מִימֵיהֶם לְדָם וַיִּמָּת אֶת־דַּגְתָּם: ³⁰שָׁרַץ אֲרָצָם צִפְרֻדָּעִים בְּסַדְרֵי מַלְכֵיהֶם: ³¹אָמַר וַיָּבֵא עֲרָב כְּזִים ²⁹דְּבָרוֹ: בְּכָל־גְּבוּלָם: ³²נָתַן גִּשְׁמֵיהֶם בְּרֹד אֲשֶׁר לְהַבֹּת בְּאֲרָצָם: ³³וַיָּבֵא גַפְנִים וּתְאֵנִים וַיִּשְׂבֵּר עֵץ גְּבוּלָם: ³⁴אָמַר וַיָּבֵא אַרְבֵּה יִלְקַח וַאֲיֵן מִסְפָּר: ³⁵וַיֵּאכַל כָּל־עֵשֶׂב בְּאֲרָצָם וַיֵּאכַל פְּרִי אֲדָמָתָם: ³⁶וַיָּבֵא כָל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֲרָצָם רֵאשִׁית לְכָל־אוֹנָם: ³⁷וַיִּזְצִיאֵם בְּכֶסֶף וַזָּהָב וַאֲיֵן בְּשִׁבְטֵי כּוֹשֵׁל: ³⁸שָׁמַח מִצְרַיִם בְּצִאתָם כִּי־נִפְל פָּחַדָם עֲלֵיהֶם:

He sent His servant Moses, and Aaron, whom He had chosen. They performed His signs among them, His wonders, against the land of Ham. He sent darkness; it was very dark; did they not defy His word? He turned their waters into blood and killed their fish. Their land teemed with frogs, even the rooms of their king. Swarms of insects came at His command, lice, throughout their country. He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land. He struck their vines and fig trees, broke down the trees of their country. Locusts came at His command, grasshoppers without number. They devoured every green thing in the land; they consumed the produce of the soil. He struck down every first-born in the land, the first fruit of their vigor. He led Israel out with silver and gold; none among their tribes faltered. Egypt rejoiced when they left, for dread of Israel had fallen upon them.

14) R. Hai Gaon (10th-11th century), Teshuvat Ha-Geonim

ואמר ב' (ב' סר רב האיי דמלתא כדקאמר
רב צמח אב ג') שאין מברכין כלילי פסחים
לגמור ד' ואין אנו אוסרים אותו בתורת קוראין אלא
בתורת אוסרין שירה ה' שכך שנינו רבניא וכולי
ובסופה לפיכך אנו חייבים להודות ליהלל ונאמר
לפניו הללויה, כך היא שנויה במשנתנו וכך מנהג
כל ישראל לפיכך אם בא אדם לברך משתקין אותו.

And R. Hai said: that which R. Tzemach Av said that we don't say a bracha of "ligmor" [on Hallel] on the night of Pesach [is because] we aren't reading it, but we are singing it. As we

learned: “Rabban Gamliel used to say...” etc. and in the end: “Therefore we are obligated to give thanks and praise ... and say in front of Him Halleluyah.” This is what is taught in our Mishnah and it is the custom of all of Israel. Therefore, if one makes a blessing [on Hallel], we silence him.

15) Joshua Cahan, “Storytelling at the Seder: *Lesaper*, *Lehaggid*, and the Purpose of the Haggadah,” *Sources Journal* (2023)

[The Haggadah] does not tell a tale that *progresses* from disgrace to praise, but one that includes only these two elements: we were in a place of disgrace and God redeemed us. And the point of this explanation is not the story itself but the lesson it teaches: God came for us in our time of need and did wondrous, astonishing, supernatural things on our behalf to bring us to freedom and make a place for us in the world. What we must do in the present is be thankful for those acts, acknowledging that they were done not just for our ancestors, but for us. Our devotion to God, which we show by performing the Passover ritual, celebrating the festival, and observing all of God’s laws, flows directly from that awareness.