

# THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDER

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

The Seder, the special service unique to Pesach, conducted on the first (and second, outside of Israel) night(s) of Pesach, is highly structured. There are a number of steps that must be followed in this ceremony. The main portion of the Seder is the step of Maggid, in which we recite the Hagadah. The Hagadah is a collection of passages, Medrash, and related praises, blessings and psalms that center on the story of the departure of the nation of Israel from Egypt. "Seder" literally means "order," and the Seder is called such because it is indeed an "ordered" ceremony.

The Malbim, by way of introduction to his unique commentary to the Hagadah, presents the following essay (loosely translated):

"There is one common set of rules and statutes when engaged in studies of a practical nature, of an educational or theoretical nature and the study of Torah as well! With each of these individual types of studies, the knowledge of order, knowing the reasons for connections and divisions, the operative analysis, the relationship of each part to its neighbor, both preceding and succeeding, is the essential element of all knowledge and the root of all wisdom.

In the studies of a practical nature, in all creative processes and skillful works, working with materials whether they be fluid or solid, the knowledge of attachment and separation, the investigation of the essence of a mixture, understanding it as an entire entity and in its specific parts as well, allows us to recognize the specific attributes of each ingredient in the composition and the power or force that together they share. This investigation allows us to discern what is precious from that which is worthless and to extract the full understanding of the purpose of what is being studied from its true hidden power. This knowledge opens gates of light and gives a glimpse of the sensation of the creation of the world. It can reveal to us the buried secrets of nature and we can become aware of the hidden aspects of creation, and from it arises great wonders in this world.

Similarly, with the operation of living beings, or the knowledge of mechanics and engineering, the knowledge of the relationship between the limbs, the attachment of sinews and tendons, and the order of the joints and vertebrae, is essential. Our inquiry is into learning the nature of that which lives, the characteristics of its operation in general and the properties of each specific limb and bone, every joint and orifice with their specific qualities and their relationship to the overall mechanical operation, generally speaking. Through this knowledge, one can extract the practical application and the purpose that is sustained within, the doctor to his practice of medicine and the engineer to his design of machinery. When the knowledge of the relationship of one limb to the other, and the

proper alignment of joints, cogs, gears or spokes is lacking, all is lost, because without the knowledge of the order, no actions can occur, proper calculations are impossible, and there truthfully is no understanding.

Just as with the studies of a practical nature, in the realm of educational or theoretical studies, understanding order is the key that unlocks many sealed gates. Order is the first among teachers, as it brings a knowledge to the heart. It allows an individual to comprehend and grasp the qualities and intentions in an educational debate, because within the realm of logic exists connections and divisions. In expository teachings, there is an operation existing in the subject matter and a bond between various calculations. Through our inquisitive searching through the words of the wise man, it is incumbent upon us to understand the reason why their words were ordered in a specific way, to investigate the relationship between the passages they composed, and the connection of each utterance to the one before it and the one after it. This knowledge will allow us to open the gates to the essence of the matter itself. The order reveals deep secrets of wisdom so we may comprehend the subject matter in its entirety and in its specific parts, through the mechanism of finding the underlying reason behind the order.

This is the method of longing for the Torah: To analyze it, for intellectual exercises and educational studies, as there is only one method for comprehending the holy words of both the Written and Oral Torah. Of utmost importance regarding any process of thought, and before any deep study of any matter or any subject in the Torah, is the search for and successful discovery of the order. Through thoroughly understanding why a topic is or is not juxtaposed with another, through delving into why what appears above and below, what is in front and what in back, we will come to investigate the matter itself. The order gives insight and indicates what the true meaning of the matter is, the explanation of the matter in its entirety and in its parts. It enables us to find solutions for difficult problems, to enlighten the dark. There are times when we will delve into a certain question, whether in the understanding of a certain passage or the comprehension of an entire topic, and we will be stymied, and we will rack our brains because of the internal complexity of the matter or because of apparent contradictions from elsewhere. When the explanation of how this piece of the matter fits into the overall puzzle becomes apparent, and its relationship to neighboring subjects is revealed, all wrinkles are ironed out and it becomes clear as day that there was no question nor difficulty. It is for this reason that those who speak in parables say "The order is half the work, but comprehending the order is understanding the matter either mostly or wholly in its entirety." Our Rabbis of blessed memory, the authors of the Mishna and the Talmud placed emphasis on order, as did the Sages, the Rishonim, with Maimonides leading them, because the importance of order is great, and from its study comes amazing profit.

According to this all-encompassing philosophy, that is, to understand the underlying order of each matter, we now turn ourselves to one specific corner, namely, the Pesach Hagadah. The Hagadah is a composition of the Medrash of the Sages, arranged by the Sages from the Mishnaic era, and its

superiority over other examples of Medrash is like the superiority of that which is mandatory over that which is elective. The reason for this is because our Sages established upon us an obligation to not only to merely recite the Hagadah, but also to learn it ourselves and to teach it to our children annually. With it, we fulfill our positive obligation of telling over the events surrounding our departure from Egypt. Is it not appropriate and fitting that we should give some thought to the order of the passages? Are we not obligated to investigate the reason behind the order of the Hagadah as we have it, to find the thread that binds that Hagadah, from beginning to end, together, with a fastening bolt that attaches one end of the Hagadah to the other, the common denominator that ties together each passage and each topic? Even if we did not grasp all there is to understand about the Seder, we would need to ask what the reason was for the mere placement of the passages, at it defies logic to say that they ended up where they appear by happenstance or coincidence. Why do some topics appear at the beginning when they should more appropriately be at the end? Why are some points stated repeatedly? Why do some portions appear disjointed and solitary, with no correlation to surrounding portions? There are an abundance of questions surrounding the Seder on why our Sages saw fit to join together the pieces of the Hagadah as we see it. Even the comprehension of each specific passage is complex and riddled with solid questions. Perhaps, understanding the reason for the order of the Hagadah will help to straighten out these creases. If these queries are great, as great as the number of explanations and commentaries of the Hagadah, to the extent that one could say that ten measures of commentary fell from the heaven, the Pesach Hagadah took nine of them and the remaining one was taken by the entire Torah, even with all these commentaries we have not appropriately contemplated the order of the Hagadah, and the small amount that do exist are comparable to a fluttering bird, as they touch on this and that, on small specific pieces, in an expository fashion, that do not satisfy the longing soul who desires to know the simple and true explanation. It is correct to say that the question of the order of the Seder is a question yet to be answered, standing still without answer."

The Malbim then concludes that he was therefore compelled to write his commentary, which explains the order of the Seder. He then sets forth his thesis and continues to explain each part of the Hagadah.

---

The Seder is more than just a ritual. As the Malbim wrote, it is an educational experience. We must learn at the Seder, and we should teach at the Seder. If the instructor does not prepare lessons before they are delivered, the inadequacy is readily apparent to those attending the lesson. We, therefore, must review the Hagadah before we sit down at the table on Pesach night. We must spend time and effort to assure that we properly educate and become educated at the Seder. We can not begin to deal with understanding the order of the Seder if we are not first familiar with the parts that together compose the Seder. Pesach involves much preparation. There is the cleaning, the cooking, and the arranging. This preparation must include reviewing the Hagadah. Understanding

the order of the Seder is part of this process.