

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SEDER: V'NOMAR L'FANAV SHIRAH HADASHAH

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I

GOALS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE LEIL HASEDER

A: "SEDER"

"Seder", as everyone knows, means "order" - what a strange name for a feast! Why is this meal different from all other meals, in that it is called an "order"?

Rambam's wording may prove enlightening. In Hilkhos Hametz uMatza, 8:1, (after having detailed all of the laws of Hametz, Matza, telling the story, drinking the four cups etc.), Rambam introduces the meal as follows: **Seder Asiyat Mitzvot Eilu b'Leil Hamisha 'Asar Kakh Hu**: - "The order of performing these [above-mentioned] Mitzvot on the night of the 15th (of Nissan) is as follows:"

In other words, "Seder" refers to a particular order in which we perform a series of (otherwise) independent Mitzvot. Why, indeed, are these Mitzvot placed in any order - and why in the order which we identify with **Leil haSeder**(Seder evening)?

Before looking into the Seder itself, we find many analogous situations in the mundane world. Some of you may remember the show "This Is Your Life". The components include a (surprised) "target" - whose life will be highlighted on the show - and significant memories and people from his or her past. A neophyte, reading this description, might think that the order in which these memories are presented is irrelevant - indeed, he may think that we could present a jumbled assortment of guests from different times in the "target's" past - and then identify the "target". He might be surprised to find that the show isn't "working" - even though all of the components are there!

We all understand why this show would not succeed - its success is dependent as much on sequence as content.. First the "target" is identified, so that he or she realizes that it is his or her life which will be highlighted - this allows the target to mentally and emotionally prepare for the evening - and allows everyone else in the hall (potential targets each and every one) to "defocus" from their own lives and hone in on the "star's" life. Each memory or personality subsequently

brought up heightens the excitement - until the final guest brought out, usually a long-lost friend or relative, brings the excitement of the evening to a climax. It would be hard to envision an episode of "This Is Your Life" without tremendous attention paid to the details of sequence.

Actually, we experience the same thing every morning. Upon waking, we are obligated to wear Tefillin, make sure that all of our four-cornered clothes have fringes, say K'riat Sh'ma, say Tefillah. Theoretically, these acts could be performed independently: say Tefillah, put on a Tallit (and then take it off), say K'riat Sh'ma, then put on Tefillin. However, the Rabbis created a system - or "order" - of performing these Mitzvot. First we put on a Tallit (even if we are not technically obligated - that discussion belongs in Hilkhhot Tzitzit); wrapped in that, we put on Tefillin; we then sing praises of God, raising the tone of that praise until the community "comes together" for Bar'khu; this takes us to a communal recreation of angelic praise, which leads directly to K'riat Sh'ma; at that point, if we have properly focused and not been interrupted, the experience of Tefillah will be very ennobling and elevating. This experiential matrix utilizes the various Mitzvot which we must do every day to build an experience which is greater than the sum of its parts.

B: TELLING -> IDENTIFYING -> SINGING PRAISE

Before going into the details of the Mitzvot which we are obligated to perform on the night of the 15th of Nissan (Leil haSeder), we should first look at the overarching goal - or goals - of the evening.

It would seem - both from the prominence of "Maggid" (Telling the Story) in the feast and from the six(!) times (see below) that the Mitzvah of "Haggadah/Sippur" (Telling/Sharing the Story) appears in the Torah - that the goal of the evening is to tell the story. However, a closer look at the text of the Haggadah will demonstrate that telling the story is an objective, the purpose of which is to take us further, to achieve another goal.

Arguably, the central paragraph in the Haggadah comes on the heels of Rabban Gamliel's explanation of the meaning of the three central foods - Pesach, Matzah and Maror. Immediately after that, we declare that

in every generation, a person is obligated to view himself as if he came out of Mitzrayim (Egypt)...

- "telling the story" is a means towards "identifying **with** the story".

The next "turning point" comes immediately after this declaration of "identifying **with** the story":

Therefore, we are obligated to give thanks...to the One who performed all of these miracles for our ancestors and for us...

We have now moved up one more level - from "identification with -" to "singing praises to God for -" the Exodus. The Halakhic term for this type of singing is "Shirah". At this point, we could argue that Shirah is the goal of the evening -but, as always, there's much, much more.

C: RELIVING JEWISH HISTORY IN ONE EVENING

When we examine the various Halakhot and Minhagim (customs) performed on Leil haSeder, we find associations with different times in our history - vastly different circumstances. The Seder evening is indeed, a fantasy evening with a very real "time-warp" component to it. We imagine ourselves as slaves in Mitzrayim, as refugees in the desert, as noble freemen enjoying the feast in Yerushalayim with the Beit HaMikdash standing, as nobles reclining at a feast in the manner of our Roman oppressors - and there are even pieces of the Jewish-history-which-has-not-yet-been-realized which sneak into the Seder celebration.

On Pesach, we identify with - and try to reexperience - the Exodus from Egypt. Beyond that, we walk a mile in the shoes of every Jew who ever lived; every Kohen Gadol who entered the Kodosh Kodoshim on Yom haKippurim, every victim of persecution who died with "Sh'ma Yisra'el" on her faithful lips, every hearty pioneer who risked life and limb to drain swamps in order to reclaim more of the Land of Israel for her sons and daughters.

This idea is introduced rather early on in the evening - before beginning the actual "story-telling", we cover the Matzot (the object around which story-telling happens) and raise our wine glasses (glass #2) (the object used for Shirah) and sing:

v'Hi She'amdah... ...Not only one has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise against us to destroy us - and the Holy One, who is Blessed, rescues us from their hand.

The Seder is a celebration of Jewish history and of God's constant role in our survival and success.

D: REASSESSING THE GOAL

We have identified several goals of the evening - identifying with the Exodus, identifying with the rest of Jewish history and Shirah. Is there one, ultimate goal of the evening?

This question is far from moot. Once we grasp the purpose behind what we are doing, it infuses each step towards that goal with meaning and clarifies each piece as it fits into the larger picture.

The answer is likely a combination - which is only reasonable once we understand the relationship

between the Exodus and the rest of Jewish history.

Besides the obligation to remember/relive it, the Exodus is presented in T'nakh in several contexts:

1. *As a basis for the relationship between God and the B'nai Yisra'el - "I am YHVH, your God who took you out of the land of Mitzrayim, out of the house of slavery." (Shemot 20:2) (see Ibn Ezra there);*
2. *As a motivation for keeping many of the Mitzvot - e.g. just scales (Vayyikra 19:35-36);*
3. *As an internalization of developing proper characteristics: "Do not oppress the stranger - for you know the soul of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Mitzrayim" (Shemot 23:9);*
4. *As a defining factor governing relationships with neighboring nations - "...do not reject the Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land." (Devarim 23:8);*
5. *As a demonstration of the rebellious nature of the B'nai Yisra'el - "Remember how you angered YHVH your God in the desert...(Devarim 9:7);*
6. *As a remembrance of the faith we had in God - "I have remembered the kindness of your youth...following Me in the desert..." (Yirmiyahu 2:2);*
7. *As a demonstration of God's love for us - "Not due to your being the greatest among the nations...rather, out of His love for you...did YHVH take you out of Mitzrayim..." (Devarim 7:8-9);*

There are many more facets of the Exodus experience - but it becomes clear that the entire story is something of a historic metaphor for Jewish existence - our relationship(s) with God, with each other, with other nations - our development of national and personal character and so on, are all rooted in this event which took place 3300 years ago - but which continues to take place in every generation.

The goal of the evening, then, is to not only identify with those slaves who marched out of Mitzrayim years ago under the protection of God and under the leadership of His messenger, Moshe - but to identify with all other aspects of Jewish history which are encapsulated in this story. That is, however, only a piece of the goal. Since a central part of the Exodus experience (and later "repeats") was Shirah, brought about by a deep sense of utter gratitude to God (we read about it explicitly at the Sea - but there were doubtless other occasions when the B'nai Yisra'el sang praises to God during the process of the Exodus). The goal of the evening is, therefore, to totally live through Jewish history - with the perception of it all bringing us to sincere and heartfelt Shira.

II

STRUCTURE OF THE SEDER

A: THE MITZVOT

In the beginning of the shiur, I pointed out that the "Seder" is really an ordering - or sequencing - of the various Mitzvot which we are obligated to perform on this evening. Before understanding the nature of that order and its structure, let's take a look at those Mitzvot:

I. Mitzvot unique to the night

*A. From the Torah **mid'Orayta***

- 1. Eating Matzah*
- 2. Telling the Story : Haggadah*

*B. From the Rabbis - **mid'Rabanan***

- 1. Eating Maror (although the Torah commands us to eat Maror, that is only within the context of eating the Korban Pesach (Pesach offering) - without the Korban, the Mitzvah is "only" Rabbinic in source.*
- 2. Drinking four cups of wine*
- 3. Displaying Haroset*
- 4. Hallel (Shirah)*
- 5. Reclining*

II. Mitzvot not unique to the night

*A. **mid'Orayta***

- 1. Kiddush (if Shabbat)*
- 2. Birkat haMazon (blessings after a meal)*

*B. **mid'Rabanan***

- 1. Kiddush (if not Shabbat - according to most Rishonim, Kiddush on Yom Tov is Rabbinic in source)*
- 2. Blessings before food and before doing Mitzvot*

As mentioned above, these Mitzvot (at least in most cases) could have been performed independently; but they are interwoven in such a way as to generate the experiential matrix which

lies at the heart of the Leil haSeder.

B: THE FOUR CUPS - FOUR PARTS OF THE SEDER

Although the Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1) provides a series of "fours" in the T'nakh (most famously the "four terms of salvation" from Shemot 6) to explain the reason for four cups; it seems from the internal Halakhot of the Seder that the reason that there are four cups is because there are four "occasions" for "Shirah" in one form or another at the Seder. The Talmud (Arakhin 11a) rules that **Ein Omrin Shirah Ela 'Al haYayim** - "Shirah" is only sung over wine. The four points in the seder where we drink are four "poles" of Shirah.

1. KIDDUSH

Kiddush is the conventional first part of any Shabbat or Yom Tov meal - although the words change here, Kiddush is still Kiddush. However, the two major differences here are telling. Unlike any other Kiddush, at Leil haSeder, people recline, in a manner of royalty, while drinking. In addition, unlike any other Kiddush, everyone must have his or her own cup and drink the proper amount. Clearly, then, this Kiddush is somewhat unique. Both of these differences point to the essential difference - tonight we are "B'nai Horin" - nobility and royalty. Each of us has his or her own glass and we all recline like royalty. This is, however, still Kiddush.

2. MAGGID

The second cup, which sits (filled) in front of us throughout the entire Maggid (telling the story) - is drunk at the end of that section. That section, as above, moves us from telling and "old" story, to putting ourselves into the story - to praising God for OUR salvation (more about that later). That praise is certainly Shirah and must be said over wine - cup #2.

3. BIRKAT HAMAZON

*As to whether **Birkat haMazon T'una Kos** - Birkat HaMazon must always be said over a cup of wine (held by the leader of the blessings - the **mezamen**) see Shulhan Arukh and commentaries at OC 182; however, it seems that we are again doing what we did at Kiddush - turning a "one person drinks" situation into an "everybody drinks" - hence, Shirah.*

4. HALLEL

*The Hallel at the Seder is broken into two parts - the first part (Psalms 113-114) which focus on the Exodus, is said as the culmination of telling the story. However, there is another part of Hallel to be said - the Shirah for the rest of Jewish history - including the awaited-future which we imagine has already happened immediately after the meal. This Shirah is an anticipatory one, thanking God for the redemption for which we wait. (My high school Rebbi, Rabbi Yoel Sperka, pointed out that the verse in Psalms **Kol Rina vi'Y'shua' b'Ohalei***

Tzaddikim - *"the voice of gladness and salvation is heard in the tents of the righteous" - (Tehillim 118:15) is presented in a seemingly backwards fashion - first, there should be the salvation, then the gladness. However, he explained, that is the way of the righteous - to thank God for a salvation even before it has been realized.) The final cup, then, is the Shirah for the anticipated redemption.*

These four cups mark off the four basic parts of the Seder - Kiddush, telling the story/identifying with the story/praising God, the meal (including all of those Mitzvot associated with eating) and the praise for the anticipated redemption.

C: MATZAH AND WINE

As mentioned above, the wine is central to the Seder as it is the vehicle for Shirah. Clearly (as indicated in the italicized directions throughout the Haggadah) the Matzah is the central symbol at the table. Whenever engaged in story-telling, we keep the Matzah uncovered - and at least once during Maggid (R. Gamliel says:...) we lift it up.

Matzah is called **Lehem 'Oni** - (Devarim 16:3) - which literally means "bread of poverty" - or "poor man's bread". For that reason, it is flat and tasteless. And for that reason, we have a broken piece among the three (or two - Rambam) Matzot over which we say "Hamotzi".

In addition, the word "Oni" could be associated with the word for "response" - (La'anut) - and Sh'muel (Pesachim 115b) makes this connection. Matzah is the bread over which we respond to questions. In other words, it is the focal point for the story-telling.

The pendulum-swinging between wine (Kiddush) and Matzah (Ha Lachma 'Anyah) and wine (v'Hi She'amdah) and Matza (Tzei ul'Mad) and wine (L'fikhakh) reflects the way that information (story-telling - with the Matzah as the "show-and-tell" piece) and reaction (Shirah -with the wine) build upon each other to the beautiful crescendo of "Ga'al Yisr'ael". We will examine the particulars of this "buildup" later on.

D: THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THE SEDER

Common convention holds that the Leil haSeder is a "children's night" - nothing could be more misleading. While the Torah commands us in four different places (and in four different ways) to teach our children about the Exodus on this night, the Torah also commands us in two other places to "remember" the Exodus. As we shall see when examining the "introductory" part of the Maggid, there are two distinct obligations, directed at two different audiences.

The obligation towards the children (which may devolve solely or chiefly upon the direct parents of each child) involves several components:

- (1) Imparting to them specific information about the Exodus;*
- (2) Gearing that information to each child based on his attitude, background and sophistication;*
- (3) Using specific objects to teach the child and*
- (4) Using the "question-answer" method to teach - and, if the child doesn't ask, provoking questions through odd behavior (e.g. hiding the Matzah, dipping vegetables in a liquid, etc.)*

In this obligation, there is clearly a teacher (father) and a student (child).

On the other hand, everyone is obligated to participate in story-telling with each other, expanding upon the story as much as possible and analyzing in detail the components of the story. This "adult" (or, better yet, "peer") component is different as follows:

- (1') It does not demand specific information be imparted, just involvement with the story all night;*
- (2') Although any conversation, in order to be successful, must be on a level appropriate for the participants, there is no "leveling" involved here;*
- (3') There are no objects associated with this teaching (as adults are able to think in abstract terms and generally do not use "show-and-tell" for learning) and*
- (4') The method is discussive, not necessarily question-answer. There are no "provocations" brought on by strange behavior as part of this obligation.*

In contradistinction to the "child" obligation, there are no teachers or students here.

By the way, there is no age limit for either category. There are young children who are already well-versed and enthusiastic who could easily join in with the "adults" (although their father may yet have a particular obligation to engage them in question-and-answer parrying); and there are certainly many adults who lack the background and are just starting out. "Children" and "adults" should be understood as archetypes, not as definite divisions. (See also Rambam, Hilkhos Hametz uMatza 7:1 and 7:2 - the two obligations are clearly presented as independent pieces).

The experience of the Leil haSeder is targeted at everyone present at the table. The scholars, the children, the (temporarily) disaffected, the sophisticated, the eager and the simple. When we left Egypt, Mosheh declared to Pharaoh: "We will go out with our youths and with our aged ones, with

our sons and with our daughters..." (Shemot 10:9). That is the goal of the Seder - to recreate the communal experience of everyone going out - but that is a great challenge which demands multiple modes of education.

E: BASIC BREAKDOWN OF MAGGID

1. PROVOKING QUESTIONS

After Kiddush, we immediately begin the story-telling (one could even argue that the reclining during Kiddush is also a provocation for the children to ask - evidenced by "reclining" as one of the "four questions"). By washing (no room here to get into that!) and dipping, we arouse the curiosity of the children (of all ages) who are unfamiliar with the practice. Then, we break a Matzah and hide it - keeping the children ever more interested - if not in the goings on, at least in the outcome of the "hunt".

A note about the broken Matzah: as I pointed out above, we have a broken Matzah because of the "poverty" angle of Matzah - but, for that purpose, we could just bring 2 (or 1) and a half Matzot to the table to start with! We break it as part of the Seder to arouse the questions.

We then engage the child(ren) with their questions (the four questions is an entire piece which deserves its own shiur) - and we offer a very quick response (which, if you look carefully, isn't really an answer to any of the questions.)

2. INTRODUCING THE MITZVAH

We then have several introductory paragraphs, which belong to a different shiur (perhaps next year?). However - one note; you will see that the two obligations of "informing" (children) and "discussing" (adults) are outlined quite clearly in these introductory paragraphs. On the one hand, we have the five sages, expansively staying up all night in B'nei B'rak, discussing the Exodus; on the other hand, we have the paragraph "Yakhol meRosh Chodesh" - which clearly limits the Mitzvah of "informing" to a particular time-frame. Note that according to the latter paragraph, the Mitzvah of Haggadah only applies when the Pesach, Matzah and Maror are in front of us. According to R. Elazar b. Azariah, the Pesach may not be eaten after midnight (Pesachim 120b). Why then did he stay up all night discussing the Exodus? He should have left at midnight! Rather, the Mitzvah of "informing the children", which is tied to the particular objects at the Seder, begins and ends when those objects are brought and removed. The Mitzvah of "discussing" goes on all night.

3. MIT'HILAH 'OVDEI 'AVODAH ZARAH...

We then begin the pre-history - with a piece about Avraham being chosen by God. The reason for this inclusion is based upon the ruling of the Mishnah in Pesachim that we must begin the story with "disgrace" and end with "praise". Rav and Sh'muel disagree about the "disgrace" meant by the

Mishnah - Rav says it refers to the disgrace of our originally being idol-worshippers and Sh'muel maintains that it connects with the disgrace of being enslaved. We follow both leads - although the clear emphasis is on the disgrace of slavery.

There is something else lurking in this paragraph; if we look carefully at the verses chosen (from Yehoshua's farewell speech), we see the theme of wandering already introduced into our history. This sets the tone that the Exodus experience was part - and the archetypal example of - Jewish history. In addition, the two "extra" verses (after the "idolatry" verse) seem unnecessary and somewhat disconnected from the "disgrace" of idolatry - putatively the point of this paragraph. Rather, these two verses help connect the Abrahamic movement with the Mitzrayim experience - by linking Avraham - Yitzchak - Ya'akov - his children - Mitzrayim.

4. V'HI SHE'AMDAH

As I pointed out above, this paragraph is a mini-Shirah, inserted at this juncture to widen the scope of our story (as has just been done with the Yehoshua' paragraph) to encompass the entire historical experience of the Jewish people. What we are about to tell is not just a story about Egypt, Pharaoh and our ancestors - it is about Shushan, Haman and our (more recent) ancestors; it is about Berlin, Hitler and our grandparents - it is about being Jewish.

5. TZEI UL'MAD

This next section is one of the two central pieces of the story-telling (see Rambam, Hilkhoh Hametz uMatzah 7:5). The rabbis selected this piece of Midrash (mostly from the Sifri) as it analyzes and interprets four of the verses from the Mikra Bikkurim (recited when bringing your first fruits to the Beit HaMikdash - Devarim 26:5-8); there are many explanations as to why they selected this one. I would like to suggest that since the goal of the evening is Shirah, and this is the only section in the Torah where the Exodus narrative is presented in the context of (commanded) Shirah - it is the most appropriate piece to use for describing the Exodus experience.

The "Tzei ul'Mad" section takes us through the ten plagues (and R. Yehudah's acrostic).

6. R. YOSSI HAG'LILI, R. ELAZAR AND R. AKIVA

The three paragraphs which follow are surely the strangest in the Haggadah (besides "Had Gadya"). Not only are the Midrashim a bit hard to "buy into", they also seem to have no place here. Explanation below...

7. DAYYENU

This selection is really made up of two paragraphs - the 14 Dayyenus (which list 15 great "Ma'alot" which God did for us) and the "Al Achat..." which lists them again, without the "if God had done X but not Y..." formula. Again - explanation to follow...

8. RABBAN GAMLIEL

This section is the second of the two core pieces of the Haggadah. Here we explain the symbolism of each of the three central foods at the table (theoretically - these days we have to make do with only two). It is interesting that each of these foods, along with their attendant explanations, represents one of the three types of experiences we go through as a people -

(a) Pesach - chosenness, royalty, protection - i.e. the good times

(c) Maror - persecution, slavery, vulnerability - i.e. the bad times

(b) Matzah - poverty (but freedom), refugees (but alive and unharmed) - i.e. the slow process of building up from Maror back to Pesach.

The two cores of the Haggadah - "Tzei ul'Mad" and "Rabban Gamliel" also seem to be connected with the two obligations that evening - "Tzei ul'Mad" is a direct invitation to study together, to examine, to discuss - i.e. the "adult" mode. "Rabban Gamliel", on the other hand, directs the attention to physical symbols, is only related to verses (no interpretation) and demands only that specific information be transmitted.

One more comment on "Pesach/Matza/Maror" - as we know from later on in the Seder ("Korekh"), Hillel's opinion is that all three must be eaten as one. Perhaps the lesson is that identifying as a Jew cannot be done selectively - our reconfirmation of our membership in Am Yisrael must include a readiness to celebrate when things are good for our people (Pesach), to share in our sorrows (Maror - see Rambam, Hilkhos Teshuvah 3:11) - and to do the hard work to recover from the difficulties we encounter (Matzah).

9. B'KHOL DOR VADOR

This is the turning point, where we step into the story and make it our own. Rambam has an interesting read here - instead of **lir'ot et 'atzmo** (to view himself), he reads **l'har'ot et 'atzmo** - to show himself (as if he left Mitzrayim). This is the source for those customs of walking around the table with the Matzah (in a cover) on the person's back (as if leaving) and other "acting out" Minhagim.

10. LEFIKHA KH - GA'AL YISRA'EL

Story turns to Shirah. With the one word - "Lefikhakh", we acknowledge that, since all of these wonderful things have happened to us, we are duty-bound to thank God for all of it. Note that in the first paragraph, we thank God who did miracles for "our ancestors and us" - whereas in the final paragraph - for "us and our ancestors" - note how the first two paragraphs of the Hallel transform us to center stage.

F: BACK TO THE MIDRASHIM AND DAYYENU

Above, I left two sections unexplained - the three Midrashim of R. Yossi haGlili, R. Elazar and R. Akiva - and the Dayyenu. Since they seem to form a bridge between the two core pieces of the Haggadah - and they seem a bit strange on their own - an explanation is in order.

1. KOL HAMARBEH HAREI ZEH MESHUBACH

In the introductory paragraph of the Haggadah (containing the "short response" to the children) we end off by saying "anyone who adds/increases/does more to tell the story of the Exodus, this is praiseworthy." The question could be raised (I have heard this question in the name of the Netziv) - since we are obligated to be involved with the story all night, how can we "increase" beyond the obligation?

Besides quantity/time, there are two other ways to "increase the story". First of all, a person could increase the praise for God by finding more praiseworthy elements in the story which are "hiding" in the verses. Second, a person could increase the scope of the story by adding his own novel explanations. In these three paragraphs, we find each of these great sages adding their own pieces to the story - increasing the story, if you will. They are also adding to the praise for God - since they are multiplying (through valid Midrashic means) the numbers of miracles God performed for us during the Exodus. These three paragraphs, coming on the heels of the obligatory "Tzei ul'Mad" piece, demonstrate for us how we should take our own place at the Seder - by adding our own novel ideas and by increasing God's praise within the story. Note that, in the tradition of our sages, each of them builds on the previous ones' ideas. Instead of negating and ignoring, we validate our fellows' Torah by adding on to it and including it in our own.

2. SHIREI HAMA'ALAH AND DAYYENU

Now, let's reorient ourselves. Before reciting/singing Dayyenu, we have told the story and discussed it - and, hopefully, followed the lead of R. Yossi haGlili, R. Elazar and R. Akiva by sharing our own input into the story. Now, we look back on all that we have retold - each of these miracles alone is enough to obligate us to thank God and have this thanksgiving feast.

We could just list all of the things which God did for us; however, in order to bring home the point and not to lose sight of all the "little" things which led to the Exodus - and all of the later miracles which led us to the goal of that Exodus (Sinai, Israel, Beit haMikdash) - we detail them out, one by one.

Earlier, I mentioned that the evening allows us to imagine our way through Jewish history. At this point, as we are about to move into Shirah, we imagine ourselves in Yerushalayim, celebrating at the Beit HaMikdash. The Beit HaMikdash had fifteen steps (Ma'alot), ascending from one section to

another. On Sukkot, the Levi'im would climb these stairs, singing one of the fifteen "Shirei haMa'alah" on each - until they reached the top (Sukkah 51b). By detailing 15 things for which we give thanks (note that they are easily divisible into three even groups of five - line them up with Pesach, Matzah and Maror!) and referring to these kindnesses as "Ma'alot", we bring ourselves back to the Beit HaMikdash. This prepares us to recite Rabban Gamliel's dictum -which includes the (temporarily) missing Pesach - and to fully identify with those who are redeemed.

III

POSTSCRIPT

There is, of course, so much more to explain about the Seder. I hope that this shiur has proven to be a helpful guide in understanding the basic goals of the evening, the methods through which these goals are achieved and the way in which the individual components of the Seder help to create the experiential matrix of Jewish history, jammed into one evening, leaving us singing thanks to God for every piece of it.

Text Copyright © 1998 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom.

The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles