

HAGGADAH SHEL PESACH: AN OVERVIEW AND EXPLANATION OF THREE SECTIONS FROM THE HAGGADAH

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HA LACHMA 'ANYA

A. The Text

Just before beginning the "question-answer" format of the Seder, we raise the Matzah and make a three-tiered statement:

1) This is the bread of poverty/oppression that our ancestors ate in Egypt.

2) Anyone who is hungry, let him come and eat, anyone who needs to, come and partake in our Pesach (offering?) (celebration?)

3) This year we are here, next year - in Eretz Yisra'el. This year, we are slaves, next year - noblemen.

As can be seen, the first "tier" is a declaration regarding the Matzah - it is the lehem 'oni (see D'varim 16:3) which our ancestors ate in Egypt. The second "tier" is an invitation; and the final piece is a prayer, that next year we should be freemen/noblemen in our Land.

B. Approach #1 - an Explanation of "Yahatz"

Just before beginning the "question-answer" format of the Seder, we raise the Matzah and According to the Rashbam, this declaration is an explanation of the previous action - breaking the Matzah in half. Although we need to have a broken piece of Matzah as part of our three (or two - according to Rambam, Rif and many other Rishonim) Matzot, we could set the table that way before the meal. Instead, we bring three (or two) complete Matzot to the table and break one of them in front of the assemblage (the most likely reason is to further provoke the children's interest). Rashbam explains that we then explain - in the vernacular (Aramaic at that time) - why we broke this Matzah - because it represents the bread of poverty which our ancestors ate. (See further down, in our explanation on Mah Nishtanah, for a further development of this idea.)

One of the difficulties with this approach (besides it being marked as part of "Maggid" in all standard Haggadot) is that this doesn't explain the rest of the paragraph. The declaration regarding the Matzot explains "Yahatz" - but what does that have to do with the rest of the paragraph?

C. Approach #2 - Re-Creation of Mitzrayim

The Rashbam explains that the rest of the paragraph - the invitation and the prayer - are not part of the explanation to the children - rather, this is what the B'nei Yisra'el would say to each other in Egypt - (it is unclear whether he means that they said this that night - see below for a problem with that understanding - or that they would speak to each other that way in general) inviting each other to share their meager meal. The prayer at the end is also a re-creation of the Egypt experience; the B'nei Yisra'el prayed to God that the next year they would be freemen/noblemen in our Land.

The difficulty with this explanation is one of language - unlike the rest of the Haggadah, this paragraph is in Aramaic. If we insist that it be said in Aramaic, it can only be a "re-creation" of our Babylonian exile, with which we have associations with that language (even in the Tanakh). If it is truly to be part of the "fantasy" of the evening (see our shiur on "The Structure of the Seder"), it should be in Hebrew, like the rest of the Haggadah.

D. Approach #3 - The "Apologia" for the Seder.

Before presenting a new approach, I'd like to summarize and expand on the questions we have asked regarding "Ha Lachma'Anyah":

Why is the paragraph in Aramaic?

How could we reasonably be inviting someone into our house for a Seder - at that late hour? This question becomes more impactful once we remind ourselves that no one may partake of a Pesach offering without having joined the Havurah of that particular offering in advance; what, then, is the import of yeytei v'yiph'sach - "let him come and partake of the Pesach"?

Why is the prayer at the end presented in a doubled form - here/Eretz Yisra'el, slaves/noblemen? Why not combine the two?

What is the purpose of this paragraph?

As we defined in an earlier shiur, the ultimate goal of the evening is "Shirah" - giving thanks to God for the Exodus which, from the perspective of that evening's fantasy, has just happened. The vehicle for that Shirah is "Hallel", beginning (but not limited to) T'hilim (Psalms) Ch. 113-118. Since this is an evening of Hallel, it is prudent for us to examine some of the factors which "make or break" a successful Hallel experience.

The Gemara in Megillah (14b) discusses the problem of Hallel on Purim - and why it is not said. The Gemara gives three answers:

- a) The Megillah is the Hallel (proper treatment of this issue is beyond the scope of this shiur; perhaps next Purim?)
- b) Hallel is not recited for a miracle which took place outside of the Land. (The Gemara challenges this by pointing out that the Exodus itself took place outside of the Land - and responds that before

we entered the Land with Yehoshua, the entire world was "Hallel-accessible"; it was only after we entered and sanctified the Land that the rest of the world became excluded from that possibility.)

c) Hallel is guided by the opening line: "Give thanks, you servants of God" - the implication being that we are only servants of God, and not (anymore) servants of Pharaoh. In spite of the great salvation of Purim, we were still enslaved to Ahashverosh.

When we think about the ultimate goal of the Exodus - to bring us to Eretz Yisra'el and realize the dream of being a free people, governed only by God's laws, serving as a moral beacon for the rest of the world (see Yeshayah 2) - we must sadly admit that much of that goal has not yet been realized. Even those components which were "real" for a time are not now part of our reality. There is no Beit haMikdash, we continue to be scattered throughout the world and our position as instructors and guides for the world is sorely tarnished by our own ethical and religious weaknesses.

We come to a Seder with only one side of the Exodus experience - the poverty and oppression; the nobility and freedom are still part of an unrealized future and a nostalgic past. There are two roles for the Matzah - as an independent Mitzvah commemorating the refugee experience and as an auxiliary to the regal Pesach offering. The only one which we can honestly point to tonight is the "bread of oppression" - we are very similar to our ancestors in Egypt - before the salvation.

Now we can understand the paragraph. Before beginning our fantasy trip through Jewish history (one symptom of which is conversation around the table in Hebrew), we declare that we are celebrating a "poor" Seder - and we pray that next year, we should be able to do it "the right way".

We make this declaration in the vernacular, as it is the last point of "reality" during the evening.

We ironically invite people in to share our "Pesach" - at once reminding ourselves that the Pesach is missing from the table as the Temple lies in ruins and we are far away from that glory while pointing to the sad situation that we could reasonably have fellow Jews who are hungry and need a place to have their Seder. (This is not close to the dreams we had for our future as we left Egypt). This invitation underscores the pain we feel that our Seder is so incomplete and must be a "fantasy" and removed from our reality if it is to be a celebration at all.

We then point to the two factors making our Hallel (the goal of the evening) incomplete - we are "here" (even those in Eretz Yisra'el say this because the rest of us are not yet home) and we are "slaves" (under foreign rule). As we saw above, these two features get in the way of a complete and proper Hallel.

At this point, we pour the second cup, signifying the redemption which we will reenact - and, God willing, live to experience in "real time".

IIIMAH NISHTANAH

The "Four Questions", as they are conventionally known, present us with several difficulties - best

expressed with one question:

Who is reasonably asking these questions?

If the asker is honestly "clueless" as to the special nature of the evening (as seems to be the case from the nature of the opening question), how does he know that we will later eat bitter herbs and will dip another time?

If, on the other hand, he is familiar with the rituals of the Seder and knows what to expect - then he already knows how this night is different?

Note: We never really answer these questions. Although we do explain why we eat Matzah (much later on - not very effective for a very young questioner), we never explicitly explain why we avoid Hametz (which seems to be the gist of the first "question".) We certainly do explain the meaning of Maror - but, again that is much later. The final two questions (dipping and reclining) are never (explicitly) answered.

I would like to suggest an approach which is grounded in a basic understanding about the evening:

Although the ultimate goal of the evening is "Shirah", achieved by reexperiencing the Exodus (and, through that experience, all of Jewish history) - this can only be accomplished by successfully informing all assembled about those events which we are endeavoring to reenact. After all, it is impossible to imagine life in Egypt without first learning about it: Haggadah (telling the story) is a necessary prerequisite to reexperiencing and thanking God.

As the Mekhilta (quoted in the Haggadah: "The Four Sons") teaches us, the Torah commands us to teach every one of our children - in a way which is appropriate for each. Not only must each child be informed in a way that he can comprehend - but he must also be drawn into the Seder in a way which is effective - as well as getting a response in an appropriate and timely manner for his level of comprehension and attention span.

I would like to suggest that the opening paragraph - Ha Lachma 'Anyah - is directed chiefly at the "child who cannot ask". Note that unlike the rest of the Haggadah, this section is not presented in a question-answer format (and, indeed, directly precedes the opening of that format). Note that the entire message of the Seder is summarized in those three lines:

a) This is what we experienced;

b) We welcome everyone to join us;

c) We pray for a completion of the process.

Ha Lachma 'Anyah, following this line of thinking, is said in the vernacular because the "child who cannot ask" will not be attracted to something in a foreign tongue.

Now, let's take a look at the Seder from the perspective of the "third son" ("Tam" or "Tipeset"). I will assume that this child, who, in the wording of the Torah, can only say Mah Zot ("What is this"), is so young that he doesn't yet have a sense of memory from previous years (somewhere between 4 and 6 years old). He does, however, have a sense of "conventional behavior" from regular and Shabbat meals.

What does he see? Kiddush (so far, so good); washing (okay - but why no B'rakhah?) - then, instead of the usual bread, father takes out a small vegetable, dips it in something and says the B'rakhah over it. This is a clear departure from the norm. Then, father takes the Matzot, breaks one and announces that it will be hidden until the end of the meal etc. This is decidedly strange and should evoke the question: "What is going on here?" from this child.

[That the child would ask here is premised on a household which encourages questions and which does not smother a child's natural curiosity - food for thought].

Now - a child who asks this type of question would reasonably be afraid of ridicule (from older siblings, perhaps) over such a "dumb" question. Father does the most effective thing here to continue to promote questions - he not only validates the question by attending to it, he also strengthens the question by adding his own information to it. "Not only have we done strange things until now, we will also avoid Hametz, eat bitter herbs etc."

There aren't four questions - there is one - "Why is this night so different"? The father supports this question (which is answered in the next paragraph) with added information, thus strengthening the child's interest in participating in the education happening around the table.

IIIDAYYENU

The section known as Dayyenu is comprised of two parts: The "If...but not" section, in which each stanza ends with Dayyenu and the Al Achat Kamah v'Khamah paragraph which follows it. I would like to pose several questions regarding these two paragraphs: [I strongly suggest following this section with Haggadah in hand].

1) It seems that the Ba'al haHaggadah (author) "stretches" the narrative a bit, including both "bringing us close to Har Sinai" and "giving us the Torah", both "taking care of our needs for forty years in the desert" and "feeding us the Mahn". Why the stretch?

2) Why does this paragraph come immediately before "Rabban Gamliel says..."?

3) What is the meaning of the rarely-used word Ma'alot (kindnesses) in the opening line?

4) An ancillary question: Why do we use the Arami Oved Avi paragraph as the focal text of the Haggadah - and not the narratives in Sh'mot?

5) If this is part of the Exodus narrative, why does it end up at the Beit haMikdash - instead of at Sinai or at the Reed Sea?

6) Why are there two paragraphs of "Dayyenu"?

7) What is the meaning of Dayyenu? Is it even thinkable that we could exist without every one of these events?

In order to understand this, we have to review the point made in the "The Structure of the Seder" shiur - the goal of the evening is to relive all of Jewish history (using the Exodus as the archetype) and to give thanks to God in the form of Shirah.

The central locus of Shirah in our lives is the Beit haMikdash. Not only is our Shirah limited as a result of - and in response to - the destruction of the Temple, but one of the Avodot (worship actions) of the Levi'im performed there is Shirah.

Dayyenu is a form of Shirah - in two parts. The two paragraphs, in the style of "Talmudic" reasoning, establish the motivation for giving such thanks. Each one of these great things which God did for us is enough, on its own, to obligate us to sing praises and thanks to God. In other words, the "Dayyenu" does not mean "it would have been enough for us to exist", it means "it would have been enough reason to give thanks" (Question #7). This is the premise established in the first paragraph. The second paragraph takes this argument to its logical conclusion: How much more so (Al Achat Kamah v'Khamah) that He did all of these things for us - are we obligated to give thanks (Question #6).

As mentioned, the goal of the evening is to relive all of Jewish history - through the prism of the Exodus. Keeping in mind that the goal of the Exodus was to bring us to Eretz Yisra'el and for us to build a House for God in the place where He chooses to make His Name dwell (i.e. Yerushalayim) - it is reasonable that we would want to include all steps leading up to that event in our Shirah of the evening (Question #5).

This explains why we use the Mikra Bikkurim paragraph (Devarim 26) as the springboard for the Haggadah - it is the Torah's example of a later generation of Jews, standing in the Beit Hamikdash and giving thanks to God (the ideal Seder - see above at Ha Lachma 'Anyah) and describing the process of the Exodus (Question #4).

The Ba'al haHaggadah wants to evoke the image of the Beit haMikdash (and enhance the "fantasy" of our Seder taking place there) by utilizing Mikdash-associations. The word Ma'alot (lit. "steps") immediately brings the 15 Shirei haMa'alah - the fifteen chapters of Tehillim (120-134) which begin with the title Shir haMa'alot (except #121 - Shir laMa'alot).

According to the Gemara in Sukkah (51b), these fifteen songs of "steps" were sung by the Levi'im as they ascended the fifteen steps from the Women's Courtyard to the Israelite Courtyard in the Beit HaMikdash - during the celebration of Sukkot (which begins on the fifteenth of Tishri). The use of Ma'alot in this context cannot help but evoke the Beit HaMikdash and the beautiful Shirah sung there

(Question #3).

As we explained in the "Structure" shiur, the three symbolic foods (Pesach, Matzah and Maror) which Rabban Gamliel maintains must be explained - and which Hillel held must be eaten as one - are representative of the three stages in Jewish history - slavery/oppression (Maror), royalty and chosenness (Pesach) and refugee/transition (Matzah). If you look carefully at the Dayyenu, you will see that there are fifteen events/miracles recalled in that list - which break down very neatly into three groups of five each:

A) Maror (in Egypt): Exodus, plagues, warring with their gods, slaying the firstborn and giving us their money;

B) Matzah (transition): splitting the sea, walking us through, drowning them, giving us our needs, the Mahn;

C) Pesach (special relationship with God): Shabbat, Sinai, Torah, the Land, the Beit haMikdash.

This explains why this section is immediately followed by Rabban Gamliel's statement. Once we have sung all of God's praises for each of these three steps, we explain the association with the foods in front of us (Question #2).

This also explains why some of the items seem to be a bit "stretched"; the Ba'al haHaggadah created a symmetry of these three "groups" in order to highlight (via foreshadowing) the implication of Rabban Gamliel's triumvirate of Jewish historical stages (Question #1).

By doing so, he also created fifteen "steps" from Egypt to the Beit HaMikdash - corresponding to the fifteen steps inside the Beit haMikdash itself. Just as these songs were sung on the holiday of the fifteenth (Sukkot), so we give thanks on the night of the fifteenth (Pesach).

One final note: Since the Korban Pesach is symbolic of our "chosenness", we now understand why the Beit haMikdash is referred to as "Beit haB'hirah" ("the chosen house") - it is reflective of our being chosen by God as He passed over our houses in Egypt.

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