



Beit Midrash Zichron Dov & Mizrachi Canada

PESACH SEDER COMPANION

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In loving memory of our dear wife and mother,
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Dedicated by Yaakov and Aviva Eisenberger
In memory of our dear uncle Bill Rubinstein z"l
and in honor of our cousins Eli and Renee Rubinstein
You are an inspiration to us all.

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שְׂדֵה: Kadesh or Kidush?

RABBI YOSEF ZVI RIMON

NASI OF WORLD MIZRACHI AND AN INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED
"POSEK" OF HALACHA, AUTHOR, EDUCATOR, AND LECTURER.

THE SEDER BEGINS WITH AN ORDER: "KADESH"—"SANCTIFY!"

What is the significance of this command? After all, we perform a Kiddush every Shabbat. The distinction lies in the conclusion of the Kiddush on Shabbat and on a holiday. On Shabbat, we conclude with "Sanctify the Sabbath," while on a holiday, we conclude with "Sanctify Israel and the times." The Gemara in *Beitzah* (17a) explains that it is Israel who sanctifies the times, and this is why we conclude in this manner. The Jewish People have received a unique holiness, and by virtue of this holiness, they are commanded to sanctify the times (as explained at length by Rav Kook).

Unlike Shabbat, which has been fixed since the beginning of creation, the holidays are directly influenced by the Jewish people. The Jewish People sanctify the months, and as a result, influence the dates of the holidays. Therefore, in the Shabbat Kiddush, we *reveal* the holiness of Shabbat and join it, while in the holiday Kiddush, we *create* the holiness.

A holiday reveals our purpose in the world: to sanctify! The Jewish people were granted holiness so that they could spread this holiness throughout the world. On every holiday, we are reminded of this mission, to sanctify the world, to sanctify the mundane.

This role is particularly evident on Pesach. The holiness of the Jewish People compels us to sanctify the times, a concept that applies to all holidays. However, Pesach, as the first of the Jewish holidays, reveals that the ability to sanctify stems from the unique freedom we have attained. Do you wish to be free? Then sanctify reality!

A slave lives within the existing reality; he works and survives. A free person knows how to change, to develop—to elevate reality to a higher place. A free person knows how to introduce holiness into the material world! This is the first commandment on the first night of Pesach: Sanctify! Elevate reality and ascend with it toward the source of holiness, Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

This article originally appeared in the Rav Rimon Pesach Haggadah: Halacha MiMekora.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

CHILDREN:

- Do you remember your first watch?
- When did you first learn to tell time?

ADULTS:

- Who among the participants can share an experience that helped them understand the meaning of a year? Of a month? Of a week? Of a day? Of an hour? Of a minute? Of a second?
- How can we now better understand the famous words of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi: "Those who are slaves of time are slaves of slaves, but the servant of G-d alone is truly free"?



כרפס: Beyond the Bite

RABBI AVIAD PITUCHEY-CHOTAM
DEAN, BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT TESTS of parental patience is the seemingly endless stream of questions our children can ask. Many of us have already found their favorite AI tool which will help them to handle some of these questions. However, there's one night a year when we're all expected to summon up an infinite amount of patience and encourage our children to ask as many questions as they want—Seder night, or as perhaps we should call it, “the all-you-can-ask night.”

One famous moment designed to stimulate children's curiosity and encourage questions is the eating of the Karpas, as explained by Rabbi Obadiah of Bartenura:

The vegetables are brought so that a young child will recognize them and ask, for it is was not the manner to bring vegetables [to the table] before the meal. (Mishna *Pesachim* 10:3)

And, as our little kids already know, it is even mentioned in the famous Ma Nishtana!

Different children ask different questions, and these questions often reflect the stimuli we provide them. So why do we specifically

choose to eat Karpas? What are we trying to evoke with this custom?



One of the most memorable moments of our wedding planning was the endless discussion over the menu. We spent a very long night analyzing the crucial decision of what kind of salads to serve as the first course, whether to add potatoes or rice to the main dish, and of course, whether our guests would prefer a warm chocolate cake or a refreshing vanilla ice cream for dessert.

Following that night, we were scheduled to meet together with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, the rabbi of Efrat and a key figure in bridging the gap between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry. His commentary on the Pesach Haggadah provided us with the guidance we needed to navigate the complex challenges we were facing, and remember what is the right balance for these pieces in the bigger picture of our wedding planning process.

In his commentary on the Haggadah, Rabbi Riskin suggests that the eating of Karpas and the subsequent discussion can be seen as an educational opportunity to explore the place of food in Jewish tradition and in our contemporary lives as observant Jews. Jewish eating, says Rabbi Riskin, is not merely

a physical act but rather a spiritual one. The Brachot we recite before and after meals remind us of the higher purpose of food and allow us to express gratitude to G-d.

By eating Karpas, we encourage everyone at the Seder to eat a small portion, even after a long day and with a busy evening ahead. In doing so, we teach our children (and ourselves..) the values of moderation and self-control.

Rabbi Riskin adds that for Jews, a meal is a spiritual experience that also serves a social function. It brings families and communities together and connects them to their shared past and future, as well as to their Creator. Food is secondary. The most important aspect of a meal is the spiritual component that arises from the Torah discussions that take place around the table. We elevate the physical act of eating into a spiritual experience by transforming the meal into a learning experience and an opportunity for Tefillah.



As for the final menu we chose for the wedding, we can discuss that in more detail later on in Shulchan Orech.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׂאֵלְךָ

- What other Mitzvot do you know of that are clearly connected to eating?
- What food in your family receives a “special” status (beloved, passed down from generation to generation, etc.)?
- What food would you like to add to the Seder plate? And why?



מה נשתנה: Faith and Facing Our Fears

RABBI SHMUEL LESHER
ASSISTANT RABBI, BAYT

“YETZIAH BI’SHEILAH” IS A TERM THAT was coined by some to describe those who have left a life of Torah. It is used as a play off the term *“Chazer BiTeshuvah*—returning to a life of faith. The word *teshuvah* can be translated as both repentance as well as an answer to a question. Hence the term *“Yetziah Bi’Sheilah”* or leaving with questions. I believe this term emerged from a misconception about what faith is and what it is not.

The night of the Seder is referred to as the night of *Emunah*—the night of faith. It is a night we are given to impart our beliefs and values to ourselves, our children, and to the next generation. However, *Maggid* does not start with teaching principles or a set of beliefs. It begins with the *Ma Nishtanah*: why is this night different from all other nights?

The *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (116a) states that if someone is at the Seder alone with no one else who can ask the *Ma Nishtanah*, he asks himself the four questions. Even two great Torah scholars should ask each other these same questions. First of all, if there are no children to teach the story to, why are we supposed to ask ourselves these questions? Why not just review the answers, isn’t that what is important? Moreover, why do Torah scholars have to ask each other these questions, don’t they already know the answers?

People think that in order to be a religious Jew, we have to “have all the answers,” and if someone doesn’t, they cannot be frum. This is a mistake. As human beings we will never “have all the answers.” *Emunah* is not about having all the right answers, it is about having an authentic and real connection with ourselves and with Hashem.

In fact, the very act of questioning testifies to faith. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer ... Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith—that the world is not random, the universe is not impervious to our understanding, life is not chance ... When faith suppresses questions, it dies. When it accepts superficial answers, it withers. Faith is not opposed to doubt. What it is opposed to is the shallow certainty that what we understand is all there is.

If we are honest with ourselves, either we are afraid of our questions of faith or, if we haven’t found answers yet, we have surrendered to never getting answers. But in reality, not only do we have nothing to fear from our questions—we need them. I once heard from Rabbi Yoni Fischer that the letters F.E.A.R. can be used as an acronym for what we usually do when we are afraid,

we “forget everything and run.” But Rabbi Fischer prefers a different F.E.A.R. acronym: “face everything and rise.”

In truth, the struggle of questions is the birthplace of faith. Questions are the way we engage with something in a real way. When we challenge Torah or Judaism, we are attempting to make sense of our own experience and how it fits into Torah and Hashem’s plan for us. Starting this form of dialogue with Hashem and engaging in this search for meaning is exactly what it means to be a frum Jew.

For those struggling with questions of faith: know that your questions themselves are acts of faith and the path towards a life of meaning. For those without questions: find some! The moment we have no questions, the moment we think we have arrived (or think we will never get there), when we think our search is over and we have no more questions, that is the moment our faith withers and dies.

Precisely because the Seder is the night of faith, it is a night of questions. Questions, challenges, and struggles are what allow us to genuinely and authentically engage with our relationship with Hashem.

May we all merit to ask some questions at Seder night and the rest of the year!

FOR DISCUSSION • והיה כי ישאלך

- What is a question you are afraid to ask about Judaism and why?
- Ask your parents if they have ever had any questions that bothered them about Judaism.
- How did (or do) they deal with these questions?



עבדים היינו: The Song of Slavery

RABBI YEHUDA MANN

ROSH BEIT MIDRASH, BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

A FEW YEARS AGO, I HAD THE PRIVILEGE of taking my children to Orlando to visit Disney's Magic Kingdom. As a child, Disney was the highlight of my childhood, so you can imagine how excited I was to share this experience with my own children.

However, I couldn't take them to my absolute favorite ride, Splash Mountain. It was closed for renovations. Later on I heard that I'll never be able to take them on it because Disney is completely redoing it. They're changing the story and replacing that catchy song, "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah." Why? Because they've decided that Splash Mountain is... racist.

The obvious question is: How can a ride be racist? Apparently, the ride is based on a movie from 1946 called *Song of the South*. The film has gotten a lot of criticism because it shows a young boy on a plantation, surrounded by African American slaves who seem happy—singing and smiling as if everything's wonderful, giving the impression that slavery wasn't so bad, *chas v'shalom*.

However, this phenomenon of people seeming content in slavery didn't start with *Song of the South*. The Chiddushei HaRim, the first Rebbe of Ger, pointed out that something similar happened with our own ancestors in Mitzrayim.

In *Tehillim* (106:44), it says: "He saw their

distress [in Egypt] when He heard their song." The Rebbe asks a sharp question: If they were in distress, how could they be singing?

The Rebbe explains that this was the deepest cruelty of Mitzrayim. The Jews had become so used to the suffering that they didn't even realize they were suffering anymore! They got used to the backbreaking work, to the humiliation, and thought, "Nu, this is life." They started to believe that this is normal.

The Rebbe further elucidates this idea through the verse in *Shemot* [6:7]: "I am the Lord, who brought you out from under the "Sivlot" of Egypt." *Sivlot* doesn't only mean burden. But rather "Savlnut"—patience, acceptance of their oppression.

We see this same idea in the Midrash Tanchuma. The Midrash explains how it all started. Pharaoh didn't just announce, "You're slaves now." That would've been too obvious. Instead, he approached the Jews and said, "Let's work together on this big project! Do me a favor, help out just for today." Pharaoh himself picked up a basket and shovel, so everyone thought, "Wow, if Pharaoh is working, we should too!" It started off almost like a fun community project. But slowly, without anyone noticing, it turned into slavery. By the time they realized what had happened, it was too late.

The Rambam, in his *Iggeret HaMussar* (*Letter*

of Ethical Guidance), teaches us that Pharaoh represents the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Just like Pharaoh, the *yetzer hara* doesn't show up with chains and a whip. No, no—it starts off with a sweet voice, a *peh rach* (gentle speech).

The *yetzer hara* might say, "You should really get a smartphone—it's so convenient! You'll love it. It'll make your life easier." And at first, it feels great! But before you know it, you're a slave to your phone. The emails, the notifications, the constant pressure—it's always with you, even and especially during family time.

Or take work for an example. Getting a promotion sounds wonderful—extra money, extra *kavod*. But if you spend all your time working, what's left of you for your family?

The *yetzer hara* today doesn't need to oppress us with chains. Instead, it tempts us with things that seem good—so good, we don't even realize we're becoming enslaved. Like the Jews in Mitzrayim, we sing along, not recognizing the distress beneath the surface: "He saw their distress when He heard their song..."

As we celebrate Pesach and learn the stories of Yetziat Mitzrayim, let's think about our own personal exodus. May we have the clarity and strength to take charge of the blessings in our lives, so they serve us—not the other way around.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

- Have you ever experienced something in your life that made you question whether it was more harmful than helpful, similar to the way the article discusses smartphones or work promotions?
- The article talks about how the Jews in Egypt got so used to their hard lives that they didn't even realize it was unfair. Can you think of a time when someone got so used to something difficult that they stopped trying to change it? What do you think they could do to make things better?



מעשה ברבי אליעזר: Sadness to Simcha

RABBI DR. SETH GRAUER

CHAIRMAN MIZRACHI CANADA & ROSH YESHIVA, BNEI AKIVA SCHOOLS

“MATCHILIM B’GNUT U’M’SAYEMIM b’shvach” — “We begin with disgrace and conclude with praise.” This fundamental structure of the Pesach narrative echoes far beyond Seder night. The journey from degradation to dignity, from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, has become a recurring motif throughout Jewish history.

As we fulfill the Mishna’s directive to begin our story with our people’s humble or challenging origins and conclude with our redemption, we recognize this pattern in our collective experience across generations. It is a profound statement about the Jewish journey and it personifies what Jewish history has been.

As Rabbi Sacks zt”l says in his Haggadah:

“In this simple rule the Rabbis were doing more than outlining the form of the Haggadah narrative. They were summarizing the structure of the Jewish imagination. A nation’s emotional tonality is expressed in how it tells its story.”

This eternal truth resonates with particular poignancy and relevance in our times. The horrific events of October 7th, represented one of the darkest moments in post-Holocaust Jewish history. The brutal attack on innocent civilians, the targeting of young people at a music festival, the invasion of peaceful communities ... These acts of barbarism shocked the world and left deep wounds in the Jewish psyche.

The subsequent war and rise in global antisemitism have added another layer of pain to an already traumatic period.

Yet, even in this darkness, we have witnessed remarkable demonstrations of “shvach”—praise-worthy responses that remind us of the Jewish people’s resilience and dignity.

We have seen unprecedented Jewish unity, with communities across the religious and political spectrum standing together. The immediate mobilization of global Jewish support networks, the outpouring of chesed, and the strengthening of Jewish identity among many who had felt disconnected. These represent powerful examples of light emerging from darkness, or as Rabbi Sacks repeatedly taught: “Judaism is the principled rejection of tragedy in the name of hope.”

The Haggadah’s structure teaches us that acknowledging the darkness is essential to appreciating the light.

Life is not always celebratory, and we do not skip over the difficult parts of our story, whether ancient or modern. On the contrary, by facing these historical nightmares directly, we are able to draw strength from our collective communal response and resiliency. We are able to see that throughout history there have been times in which we were so down and incredibly low, but we maintained our Emunah and Bitachon and rose above those dark times.

Yetziyat Mitzrayim was not an escape from oppression, it was a journey toward Matan Torah and ultimately Eretz Yisrael. Similarly, we should try our best to look at our response to our current challenges and frame it in terms of where we are headed and how we will end up. Will we emerge stronger physically and will Israel emerge with greater power and strength? And will we emerge with a greater connection and commitment to Torah and Mitzvot?

As we sit at our Seder tables this year, the journey from “gnut” to “shvach” takes on new meaning. We see in our own time how the Jewish people continue to move from darkness toward light, from trauma toward healing, from division toward unity.

The story we tell is not just about what happened to our ancestors in Egypt, but about the ongoing Jewish journey through history—a journey that repeatedly demonstrates our people’s extraordinary capacity for resilience, renewal, and spiritual growth.

May this Pesach bring us closer to the ultimate “shvach”—a time of complete redemption, when the Jewish people’s light will shine forth in its fullest brilliance, inspiring all of humanity with its message of hope, peace, and divine purpose. As we navigate our present challenges, may we merit to see the fulfillment of our ancient promise that we sing in Hallel: “מִמְקוֹרֵי שָׁמֶשׁ עַד מְבוֹאוֹ מְהֵלֵל שֵׁם ה’” — “From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is praised” (Psalms 113:3).

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

- Why do you think we have to mention the bad things that happened to the Jewish people as well as the good?
- Why did Hashem take us out of Egypt in the first place? What was the higher purpose?
- Can you think of examples in your own life where sadness and disappointment turned into simcha and joy?



ארבע בנים: The Parent-Child Bond at the Seder

RABBI EDDIE SHOSTAK

OR CHAIM MINYAN & MENAHEL OF YESHIVAT OR CHAIM

SEDER NIGHT IS THE NIGHT THAT revolves around children, with parents assuming their roles as educators. The Arba Banim present different modes of dialogue between parents and children to this end. “*Ve’Afilu Kulanu Chachamim*” — “Even if all of us were wise,” the Haggadah tells us, “all of us understanding, all of us knowing the Torah, we would still be obligated to discuss the exodus from Egypt; and everyone who discusses the exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt”l, explains that on the eve of the original Pesach, at the very moment when a new chapter in the life of the Jewish people began, we found out what it means to be a Jew: “About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators” (Radical Then, Radical Now, p. 32).

The Rambam tells us concerning the mitzvah of “*Ve’higadeta le’vincha*” — telling the Passover story: “It is a mitzvah to inform one’s sons even though they do not ask, as the Torah [Exodus 13:8] states: ‘You shall tell your son.’ A father should teach his son according to the son’s knowledge: How is this applied? If the son is young or unlearned, he should tell him: ‘My son, in

Egypt, we were all slaves like this maid-servant or this slave. On this night, the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeemed us and took us out to freedom.’ If the son is older and wise, he should inform him what happened to us in Egypt and the miracles wrought for us by Moses, our teacher; everything according to the son’s knowledge (*Laws of Chametz and Matzah* 7:2).

As we see, it is clear that the mitzvah of a parent telling the Pesach story to his child is more than disseminating information. Even if the parent has nothing new and novel to offer his child by way of knowledge or understanding the story, even if the child is more learned than his parent, the mitzvah of *ve’higadeta le’vincha* still applies.

The Slonimer Rebbe zt”l writes in *Netivot Shalom* that the Seder night is the Rosh Hashana for Emunah. The entire Seder is designed in order to strengthen the chain of Emunah that was established at the time of Yetziat Mitzrayim. Through hearing the miracles of Pesach from his parents, the child is not just hearing information, he is hearing the same story that was told to his parents by his grandparents and teachers, which is the same story told to them by their great-grandparents—all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Seder is thus a pristine time designated for parents to connect to their children and for children to connect to their parents, no matter what age, no matter what level of knowledge or learning. These are moments to strengthen our children’s connection to the past.

Also, Seder night is the time to instill faith in our children, faith that they have a unique role to play in Hashem’s world and for the future.

The Piaseczna Rebbe, Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, in his important introduction to *Chovat haTalmidim*, defines the essence of chinuch as instilling a sense of worth and value within a child, introducing him to himself and guide him into revealing his true potential. This process, of course, takes time and much emotional investment and Seder night is the prime time to engage in this mission in a big way.

So while each one of us is preparing for Pesach, whether it be cleaning, schlepping, cooking, travelling or learning, let us keep the end in mind. Namely, that of strengthening the bond with our children and parents, thus intensifying our Emunah in Hashem, and at the same time instilling faith in our children.

FOR DISCUSSION • והיה כי ישאלך

- Why do we tell the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim every year, even if we already know it?
- How does hearing the Pesach story from our parents and grandparents help us feel like part of Jewish history?



וְהָיָא שְׁעִמְדָּה: Resilience and Perseverance

RABBI AZ THAU

SHALIACH & ROSH BEIT MIDRASH, MIZRACHI CANADA

THE PHRASE “וְהָיָא שְׁעִמְדָּה” IN THE HAG- gadah carries a powerful message of endurance and divine protection. The Maharal emphasizes the significance of the word “לָנוּ” (for us) in this passage. This word highlights that Hashem’s promise of redemption is not just a historical guarantee for our ancestors but a living promise for us today. Many have the custom to lift their cups of wine at this point, corresponding to the redemption language of “וְהִצַּלְתִּי” (and I will save you). This physical act reinforces our faith in Hashem’s unwavering commitment to our survival.

This idea aligns with the Rambam’s teaching that each Jew must see themselves as if they personally left Egypt. If we do not internalize the reality that Hashem has saved us in the past, it becomes nearly impossible to imagine that He will do so again in our time. The Exodus serves as the foundational proof that Hashem actively intervenes in history. Just as He redeemed our ancestors, so too will He continue to redeem us in every generation.

The Shiblei Haleket adds another layer to this idea by pointing to “ברית בין הבתרים” (the Covenant of the Parts), where Hashem foretold both our enslavement and redemption. He also revealed that in every generation, new adversaries will arise to oppress us. Yet, just as the decree of servitude was fulfilled, so too is the guarantee of salvation. This cyclical pattern of oppression and redemption is part of Hashem’s divine plan, assuring us that no matter how dire the circumstances, His protection is eternal.

The Sfat Emet comments on two critical aspects of this passage. First, the phrase “ולא אחד בלבד” (not just one) implies that oppression will not come from a single enemy or nation but from many throughout history. This resonates with Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s teaching that “Amalek” is not restricted to one people but can be assumed by any group or nation whose actions align with the wickedness of Amalek. The *Zohar* explains that while the Jewish nation is small, we are united across generations: past, present, and future. This eternal connection strengthens us, making us an indestructible force despite our small numbers.

Rabbi Soloveitchik expands on this by pointing out the deliberate juxtaposition of “וְהָיָא שְׁעִמְדָּה” with “ארמי אוֹבֵד אָבִי” (An Aramean sought to destroy my father). This positioning underscores that our struggles are ongoing, but so too is Hashem’s promise of salvation. Just as Lavan sought to uproot Yaakov, and Pharaoh enslaved our ancestors, each generation faces its own threats. Yet, through it all, Hashem ensures our survival.

Rabbi Rosner, quoting Rav Yaakov Emden, adds that the greatest proof of Hashem’s providence is Jewish survival itself. This sentiment is echoed in Mark Twain’s essay “Concerning the Jews,” where he marvels at the Jewish people’s endurance despite centuries of persecution. “What is the secret of his immortality?” Twain asks. The answer lies in our faith—Emunah in Hashem, Who orchestrates history and safeguards His people.

This is the essence of the Seder night. It is not just about recounting past miracles but

about strengthening our faith in Hashem’s continued presence in our lives. As we lift our cups and declare “וְהָיָא שְׁעִמְדָּה,” we affirm our trust that just as Hashem has saved us before, He will continue to do so, bringing the ultimate redemption speedily in our days.

October 7 changed the way I and many of us have read and said this Tefillah. It metamorphosed from a historical memory into a living promise. The miraculous salvations of 1973, 1967, 1956, and 1948 were supposed to be in the past. I never imagined we would be living through such events again in our time.

No matter how challenging, difficult, or dark the events we experience, we must always remember that there will be light at the end if we kindle the candle of our salvation and destiny. We cannot wait for someone else to do it for us; we must take ownership and responsibility for our shared dreams and future.

How many times did my tank crew and I climb onto our tank, heading out to find those who perpetrated heinous crimes against our brothers and sisters? We did not want to leave until we knew we had succeeded—until total victory.

Geulah has two possible outcomes: “זכו—אחי—; שנה, לא זכו—בעיתה if we merit it, redemption will come speedily; if not, it will come in its time.” We hold our future in our hands, together with Hashem. Even away from the battlefield, we can continue the national fight—the fight for our hostages, for all of them to come home; the fight to defeat our enemies entirely; the fight to return home to our land in the times of Mashiach.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָא כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

- How/where have you seen Hashem in your life?
- What was a challenge that you faced that Hashem helped you to overcome?



אָרְמֵי אֹבֵד אָבִי: VaNitzak—I Am the Son of Amram

RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER

ROSH BEIT MIDRASH EMERITUS, BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

A DRAMATIC MIDRASH (DEVARIM RABBAH 11:10) describes Moshe resisting when the angel Samael tried to claim his life. In a fiery speech, Moshe recounted his many great attributes and deeds. I was born circumcised! As a child I took Pharaoh’s crown from his head! I performed signs and wonders in Egypt! I split the sea into twelve parts! I battled malachim and I received the fiery Torah! And so on. But Moshe began this litany of traits and accomplishments with a simple sentence: “I am the son of Amram.” Why was that an appropriate way for Moshe to begin?

To answer that question, we need to ask another question. Moshe is only named once in the Haggadah, a cameo appearance when the Jews cross through the Yam Suf, “And they believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe.” The omission is not by chance, a midrash highlights Moshe’s absence and indicates it is intentional (*Shir haShirim Rabbah 3:2*). The Haggadah even says that during the plague of the firstborn Hashem passed through Egypt—and not “the agent,” Moshe.

Certainly, it is true that Moshe did not take us out. As Rabbi David Avudraham wrote, Moshe was the Jews’ agent to Pharaoh, not Hashem’s assistant. But is that a reason to entirely elide his role?

Further, the Haggadah does credit other Jews with catalyzing our exodus. The Maggid begins by describing how we descended to Egypt and became slaves, and

it depicts the misery we suffered under the Egyptians. The picture turns when the Haggadah quotes Devarim 26:7, “And we cried out to Hashem, G-d of our ancestors.” Hashem heard our cry and registered our suffering, and then the plagues and miracles followed. The fulcrum of the story is our newly expressed belief that Hashem could and would answer us with redemption. This passage positions the crying Jews as the cause of the exodus. Why are **they** highlighted, and not Moshe?

Perhaps the answer is that the Haggadah is their story, and **not** Moshe’s story. As the Talmud teaches, we begin the Maggid by describing our disgrace and we build toward the heights of our glory (*Pesachim 116a*). The core of the story is our journey from disgrace to glory. Moshe never experiences that disgrace; he never truly suffers in Egypt. Certainly, he is frustrated at the beginning of his mission, but soon Hashem sends miracles to support him. The Haggadah is the story of Jews who did not have the ability to summon frogs and boils and darkness, but who nonetheless davened and believed.

We develop this idea outside of the Haggadah, too. We emphasize midrashim about Jews who did not change their names, their language, and their dress. We study stories of the superlatively righteous women who kept their families going despite Egyptian persecution, and in whose merit we escaped from Egypt. We are awed by the fearlessness of brave ancestors who, in the midst

of idolatrous Egypt, slaughtered the representative of the lamb-god for the korban Pesach. The exodus from Egypt is **their** story.

Perhaps this emphasis on the Jews who suffered is why our ancestors historically insisted upon baking their own Matzah. The Torah calls Matzah lechem oni, which may be translated as “the pauper’s bread.” As a gemara (*Pesachim 116a*) explains, we emulate and honor the Jews awaiting redemption from Egypt, making their own Matzah in their poverty.

The Haggadah of the suffering Jews can be a source of hope for us. For so many months, Israeli Jews have lived with suffering and fear, with hostages and war and displacement and degradation in the eyes of hostile nations. Jews around the world have shared that experience, on their own level. We have also cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our ancestors, and we have seen sparks of redemption in Azza, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. The Haggadah is our generation’s story, too.

Perhaps this focus on the suffering Jew explains why Moshe began with, “I am the son of Amram.” Amram had no visible Divine support. Amram, a leader of the generation (*Sotah 12a*), who never sinned (*Shabbat 55b*), could not rescue the Jews himself. Moshe wore his father’s name as a badge of pride: this is where I come from! This is the Jew whose prayers Hashem heard, and answered. So it was then, and so it shall be again.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאָלְךָ

- Why is Moshe not credited in our Haggadah for his role in the exodus from Egypt?
- The Haggadah reports that the Jews cried out, and then Hashem heard and redeemed us. What was special about their cries?



מכות: Makkat Bechorot and Erev Pesach

R' EZER DIENA

MAGGID SHIUR, BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV.

MASECHET SOFERIM (21:3) WRITES THAT

although it is prohibited to fast during Nisan, there are exceptions for firstborns, who fast on Erev Pesach, and for those “tznu'im” (modest ones) who fast on account of the Matzah. These two customs are brought by the *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chaim 470:1 and 470:3) who writes that both a firstborn and an “istenis” (one who may not be able to eat Matzah properly at night if they eat at all during the day) should fast on Erev Pesach. Similarly, the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Pesachim* 10:1) records a debate as to whether Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi fasted on Erev Pesach because he was a firstborn or because he was an *istenis*.

Interestingly, when the Tur (*Orach Chaim* 470) brings the initial custom, he deviates from the presentation of *Masechet Soferim*. Although *Masechet Soferim* lumps both these groups together and does not provide a reason as to why the firstborns fast on Erev Pesach, the Tur explains that the fast for firstborns is to commemorate the miracle that they were saved from *Makkat Bechorot*.

However, the Alei Tamar (*Yerushalmi* ad loc.) is very bothered by this explanation. If we are commemorating the miracle of the firstborns being saved, it would make more sense to decree a day of rejoicing, not of fasting!

He suggests that even in Egypt, the firstborn children fasted on the 14th in order

to merit being saved that night, and based on a statement of the Kolbo (58), he adds that the reason for our fasting nowadays is still for this same reason—to show how we are not sinners like the Egyptian firstborns who were worthy of death. Indeed, the Alei Tamar explains that for this reason, some had the custom to redeem their firstborns on Erev Pesach (in addition to the regular Pidyon Haben ceremony). He also notes that this fast is therefore stringent, even more so than Tisha B'av or Yom Kippur, in that a parent fasts for their child, even if the parent is not a firstborn themselves, because it shows the love of the parent to fast to protect their child from harm, G-d forbid.

In truth, it is very hard to accept this interpretation. Firstly, we see no mention of Jewish firstborns fasting on Erev Pesach in Egypt anywhere in the text of the Torah or any midrashim; in fact, we see that specifically Egyptian firstborns died, and the Jewish firstborns were saved due to the smearing of the blood on their doorposts, not fasting!

Secondly, the “stringency” he states is relevant only here is hard to accept; the reason why a parent cannot fast to fulfill the obligation of their minor child is because the parent is obligated to fast on their own.

Thirdly (and this objection applies to the Tur as well), none of the ancient sources for this custom (such as the *Yerushalmi* and *Masechet Soferim*) which are the basis for

such fasting provide the reason as being due to commemorating a miracle.

And finally, there is a view ascribed to Rabbi Yechiel of Paris (brought by the Beit Yosef, *Orach Chaim* 470), that firstborns may eat “*minei targima*”, often translated as “refreshments” on Erev Pesach. How could this be compatible with a view of fasting for repentance and forgiveness?

Perhaps we can suggest that the commemoration of the miracle of *Makkat Bechorot* is not in the act of fasting per se, but rather in the fact that they will be eating the Pesach, Matzah and Marror with a greater appetite to commemorate their salvation. If so, the reason for the firstborn and “*istenis*” being grouped together is because they have the same motivation; while an “*istenis*” is physically unable to eat Matzah properly if they eat all day on Erev Pesach, a firstborn wants to enjoy the Matzah specifically as a way of thanking Hashem that they were not on the wrong side of history. Thus, there is room for leniency—the fast is not “double or nothing”, but rather, avoiding heavier foods allows for a greater appreciation for the Matzah and for the miracles it represents.

So, firstborn or not, and whether you fasted fully or not, let's take the time tonight to eat our Matzah and thereby celebrate the wonderful miracles we read about in the Haggadah, with the *Eser Makkot* at the forefront!

FOR DISCUSSION • והיה כי ישאלך

- Why do firstborns fast on Erev Pesach?
- Why do some others fast on Erev Pesach?
- What foods do we eat on Seder night that require us to be the hungriest?



רבי יוסי הגלילי: Midrashic Miracle Multiplication

ADEEV SEGAL
EDITOR, TORONTO TORAH

ONE OF THE MOST PUZZLING PARTS OF the Seder is found right in the middle of *maggid*, a seemingly tangential diversion in the middle of the climactic retelling of the Exodus. After discussing the mighty plagues that G-d sent in Egypt, we all of a sudden switch to discussing the precise number of plagues that the Egyptians were struck with at the Splitting of the Sea. Why does it matter whether there were 50, 200, or 250 plagues at the sea? And what is this mathematical discussion doing in the Haggadah?

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag teaches that the key to understanding this section of the Haggadah is to realize the importance of the *pasuk* that is quoted by the Sages to derive the number of plagues. The *pasuk* (Tehillim 78:49) states: “He sent upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and fury, and trouble, a band of messengers of evil.” If we look at this verse in its original context in *Tehillim*, we can see that the *perek* describes the history of Am Yisrael from the Exodus to the times of King David. It is replete with descriptions of G-d’s hand in history and the way He saves us time and time again from the misfortunes that we bring about because of our sins. The specific *pasuk* describes the Splitting of the Sea and

the way that G-d smote the Egyptians who were chasing us.

In the introduction of *Tehillim* 78, the Psalmist stresses an important point: the generation of the Exodus was a wayward one that did not appreciate the miracles that G-d did for it. Therefore there needs to be a chapter in *Tehillim* that expresses the glory of these miracles so that future generations will not forget them and ungratefully rebel against G-d. This is the backdrop for the dozens of verses that describe the wonders of Jewish history—we cannot repeat the mistakes of the past generations who did not internalize how much G-d cared for them. This all leads up to the time of King David, who recognized G-d’s role in his life and made it his goal to credit G-d for all the miracles that he experienced on a personal and national level, which is what made him worthy to be the scion of the everlasting dynasty of Jewish kings.

Knowing this, we can turn to the strange midrash that the Haggadah quotes. The Sages were preventing us from making the mistake that the generation of the Exodus made. They came up with greater and greater numbers of miracles to stress how much good G-d did for us then, and also how much He continues to do for us always. If

we keep this in mind, our gratitude for His miracles will lead us to listen to Him and become better people who walk in His path.

However, there is even more hiding beneath the surface of this midrash. Tehillim 78:5-8 begins with an address to parents:

He established a decree in Jacob, ordained a teaching in Israel, charging our parents to make them known to their children, that a future generation might know—children yet to be born—and in turn tell their children that they might put their confidence in G-d, and not forget G-d’s great deeds, but observe His commandments.

We see that the focus of this chapter is not only to recognize G-d’s hand in history and understand how many miracles He does for us, but specifically for parents to impart this lesson to their children to ensure that future generations do not stray from the path. In a way, this chapter is a perfect template for Seder night—Jewish parents must teach their descendants about the story of our history in a way that will transform them spiritually and ethically. This encapsulates the whole purpose of the Seder. We are not just reciting history, we are internalizing the lessons of our past and using them to become better people for the future.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהִיא כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

- Think of someone who recently did something you are thankful for. How did you express your gratitude to them?
- What are some lessons that your parents taught you that you will be sure to pass on to your own children?



ד״ר: The Crescendo of Redemption

RABBI IDAN RAKOVSKY

MAGGID SHIUR, BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV; DIRECTOR, JLIC AT BEN GURION UNIVERSITY

AFTER OVER 480 DAYS IN CAPTIVITY, Agam Berger, a soldier who was kidnapped on October 7th, came home. Agam is a talented violinist, whose deep connection to music helped sustain her spirit. The Grammy-winning violinist Miri Ben-Ari even invited Agam to play with her in New York. “I would love for this to be part of her healing journey. It could help her soul,” she said. Agam’s story resonates deeply with the themes of liberation, spiritual renewal, and the redemptive power of music. On the shore of the Yam Suf, we find the prototype of a musical woman: Miriam HaNeviah.

The Torah describes: “Then Miriam the Prophetess, Aharon’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang: ‘Sing to Hashem, for He has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider He has hurled into the sea’” (Shemot 15:20-21).

This moment is remarkably surprising, as it is the first and only time in the Torah that Miriam is explicitly called a prophetess. Why is her prophecy emphasized here? The Kli Yakar explains:

“Miriam actually turned into a prophetess now, since in this event all women got to see the Divine Presence, as our sages said: ‘a maid-servant witnessed what even the greatest of prophets had not seen.’ That is why all the women followed Miriam in singing and dancing; she prophesied first, and all the women followed and prophesied after her. And since the Divine Presence exists only when one is

happy, Miriam played the drum and danced to bring joy to all women so they would be able to experience prophecy as well.”

This commentary provides a profound insight: prophecy requires joy. The ultimate joy of redemption, intertwined with musical instruments, allowed the women to experience the Divine Presence. Miriam led them in song and dance, creating the spiritual joy necessary for prophecy to flow.

The link between music and prophecy is not unique to Miriam. We find a similar theme in the stories of Shaul HaMelech, David HaMelech and Elisha HaNavi. Shaul encounters prophets playing musical instruments, and this music signals the arrival of prophetic inspiration (*Shmuel I* 10:5). Along those lines, David appoints musicians who prophesy through their music (*Divrei HaYamim I* 25:1). Similarly, Elisha calls for a musician, and as the music plays, prophecy descends upon him (*Melachim II* 3:14-15).

Chazal (*Bava Batra* 12b) state that we no longer experience prophecy since the destruction of the temple. However, we can still tap into its essence through joy and music. Music has a unique ability to elevate the soul, create emotional depth, and bring us closer to Hashem. It is no coincidence that Shirat HaYam, the Song at the Sea, is one of the foundational moments of Jewish history—redemption itself is accompanied by song.

The Haggadah tells us: “Had He split the sea for us, but not led us through on dry land, it

would have been enough for us.”

This line in Dayenu seems puzzling. Would it really have been enough for the sea to split, if Bnei Yisrael were left without a way forward? We might suggest that this line emphasizes the miracle of the moment itself—witnessing Hashem’s greatness, even before we stepped forward, was already transformative. The spectacle of the sea splitting was a revelation of Hashem’s power. It was a moment of prophecy. Similarly, Miriam’s song does not wait for the end of the redemption—it bursts forth at the very sight of Hashem’s hand. Her joy was not contingent on reaching Eretz Yisrael, nor on the resolution of Bnei Yisrael’s journey. It was about experiencing the Divine, *in that moment*, and embracing the joy it brought.

As we welcome Agam home, we should reflect on the enduring lesson of Miriam’s tambourine. Even in the darkest moments, music has the power to sustain us. Like Miriam, we must carry instruments of joy and redemption with us, prepared to sing even before the journey is complete.

Let us bring more songs into our lives—not only when we experience personal triumph, but even as we await the full redemption, just as we wait today. Let us use music, joy, and celebration as vehicles to connect with Hashem, to inspire ourselves and others, and to recognize the miraculous moments in our own lives. Like Miriam, let us sing, dance, and create moments of spiritual elevation, embracing the joy of redemption even before we experience its completion.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

- Can you imagine a world without music? What will such a world look like? What will be missing?
- What is your favourite musical instrument? Can you think of ways to use it in your Avodat Hashem?



פסח מצה ומרור: Does Archaeology Strengthen The Passover Story?

RABBI SHAANAN SCHERER

ISRAEL AND TORONTO TOUR GUIDE, JUDAIC STUDIES TEACHER TANENBAUM CHAT

IT CAN BE VERY DIFFICULT BALANCING the role of an Orthodox Jew and an Israel tour guide of Biblical Archaeology. Usually, when I give tours I mention the incredible matches of unearthed discoveries to the Holy Book. This always inspires both the tourists and myself whenever discussed. However, this is not the entire picture. An accurate approach towards Biblical Archaeology poses many great challenges to the traditional understanding of Tanakh. More often than not, I find myself learning from the academic world conflicting messages about the authenticity of our Biblical history.

The story that we read on Passover night is one of those irreconcilable stories. Most archaeologists will claim that there is no clear evidence that there was ever an Israelite nation that went from slavery in Egypt on a journey of salvation to Israel as told every year in the Passover Haggadah. There are many theories which attempt to prove the Biblical stories with their own discoveries. However, most are scoffed at by some of the most respected authorities of Biblical Archaeology today. After years of questioning, with some confusion and other matters of clarity, the lack of archaeological evidence for the Passover story does not hinder my religious belief in the historical truth of the origins of Judaism.

Despite the overriding skepticism in the world of archaeology towards the Passover story, there are some discoveries which I think demand attention and verify some basic facts about the Biblical narrative of the Exodus. One noteworthy, ancient inscription is called the Mernepta Stele. It is the first extra-biblical document of the name *Israel*. It was discovered in 1896 by the British explorer Flinders Petrie and has been in the Cairo Museum for display to the public. It dates back to the late 13th C. BCE and states 'Israel is laid waste, its seed is not.' Are you surprised to read that the very first record of the Jewish People outside of the Hebrew Bible is calling on the death of the Jews? How many times today and in our history has this statement been repeated?

My time of perplexity as a Rabbinic student and tour guide led me to take comfort in the unknown as most of our understanding of ancient history based on physical evidence remains questionable. Many archaeologists claimed that there never was a King David until a stele was found in 1993 in Tel Dan with an inscription stating 'Bet David'. Had the Mernepta Stele never been discovered, perhaps archaeologists would have doubted the existence of Israel as early as the 13th C BCE? Most of Egypt and the Sinai Desert is yet to be excavated, there is still so much

more waiting to be revealed! Who knows what future discoveries can do for Biblical Archaeology?

The discovery of the Mernepta Stele strengthens one of the main ideas said at the Passover Seder in the V'Hi She'Amda statement. Just like the Egyptian Pharaoh Mernepta wanted Israel to be laid waste and destroyed, so did the countless of other enemies of the Jewish People throughout our history and to this very day. What is far more impressive to me than any ancient inscription dug up in the desert is the *living* Jewish People today who continue 3300 years after Mernepta's victory song over Israel. Nothing but the opposite of the Mernepta Stele is true! Israel is *NOT* laid waste, Israel's seed is *prosperous*! We have not yet found Moses' staff or Miriam's cymbals buried underground by the Sea of Reeds. However, we are the best example in the world of any group of people who observe ancient rituals against all odds. We are *still* telling the same story about the Exodus from Egypt and eating the same Matzah that the story records was eaten by the people who were redeemed. It is the greatest story ever told, it is the classic of all classics and *we* are the people of *The Story*. There has to be *Something* that has kept the Jewish People around for so long.

Chag Sameyach.

This essay was inspired by the "A Tale of Two Civilizations" essay by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, published in his Haggadah.

FOR DISCUSSION • והיה כי ישאלך

- How many enemies of the Jewish people in our history (and today) can you name who 'tried to destroy us but Hashem saved us' that we sing about in the V'Hi Sheamda?
- Israel is a name for our people; what other names are used to describe our people in the Tanach?



כוּרֵךְ: Redefining Freedom and Building from Sorrow and Strength

RABBI ELAN MAZER

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF MIZRACHI CANADA

PESACH NIGHT ENCAPSULATES THE complexity of Jewish history. It is simultaneously a joyous celebration and a solemn remembrance, reflecting the intricacy of the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. On one hand, we joyously commemorate our liberation and selection as Hashem's chosen nation; on the other, we recall the painful years of slavery, suffering, and loss that preceded our redemption.

This duality is woven throughout the Seder rituals. We demonstrate our freedom by joyously reciting Kiddush and drinking the four cups of wine, yet dip our Karpas in salt water to remember the tears shed during our enslavement. Matzah symbolizes our rapid, miraculous redemption, yet we break one piece in half to represent the brokenness of our servitude and the poor man's bread—*לחם עוני*. Our Sages instruct that the story of the Exodus must begin by retelling the hardships (*מתחיל בגנות*) and only afterward transition to praise and gratitude (*מסיים בשבח*).

Korech epitomizes this powerful duality. We take Matzah, the ultimate symbol of freedom, and eat it alongside Maror, the embodiment of bitterness and slavery. By doing so, we internalize that every aspect of our history—both joyous and painful—is essential in shaping who we are today. We cannot truly

celebrate freedom without acknowledging the sorrow we endured. True freedom is not merely the ability to experience happiness or peace but also the resilience and strength to maintain our faith and purpose through life's inevitable challenges.

This message resonates profoundly in light of the past year, a time marked by tremendous pain and suffering due to the ongoing war. We have witnessed heart-breaking losses, immense sorrow, and deep anguish. Yet simultaneously, we have experienced extraordinary unity, acts of heroism, unprecedented achievements, and miraculous moments of divine intervention. The Jewish People's resilience has been evident, transforming profound sorrow into renewed strength, compassion, and communal growth.

This idea redefines how we mark Pesach as the celebration of freedom, *זמן חירותינו*. In his book, *Escape from Freedom*, German philosopher Erich Fromm explores the notion that freedom is more than simply escaping oppression; it involves having a meaningful purpose. Rav Kook raises this point in his Haggadah, explaining that Yetziat Mitzrayim was not only about freedom from slavery but also about gaining freedom for a divine purpose. True freedom, according to Rav Kook, is self-expression uninhibited

by external constraints: being genuinely ourselves.

However, Rav Kook explains, achieving true self-expression and freedom requires discipline and servitude to something greater than oneself. For example, one cannot simply decide to become a doctor overnight; significant time and effort must first be dedicated to acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills. Similarly, to reach ultimate freedom, we must first learn to master ourselves, combining life's joy (Matzah) and pain (Maror) to fully express our unique potential.

This past year, more than ever, has taught us that our greatest strength as a people lies in our ability not only to endure difficulty but to transform it into positive growth. Families and communities have harnessed their sorrow, channeling it into acts of kindness, unity, and purpose. From the depths of our pain, new institutions, initiatives, and legacies continue to emerge, demonstrating that hardship can be a powerful foundation for building a hopeful future.

This Pesach, as we eat Korech, let us reflect deeply on its timeless lesson. True freedom means embracing our past fully—both the Matzah and the Maror—and using it to shape a stronger, brighter future and continuing the eternal journey of Am Yisrael toward true redemption.



הלל: Hallel HaGadol—Why Begin the Story at the End?

RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING

SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH EMERITUS, BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

AS CENTRAL AS THE EDUCATIONAL AND narrative components of Seder night are, so too are those of praise and thanksgiving. The first unit of Hallel emphasizes the experiential. We declare that each generation must view itself as if it left Egypt; “therefore” we sing. Who would not burst into song while personally leaving Egypt?

The end of the Seder continues with praise, though the chosen chapters also include narrative nuggets that shed light on the Exodus. Furthermore, we broaden our perspective, looking to the past and future, framing the miracles in Egypt as part of G-d’s general providence.

When we reach Hallel HaGadol, Psalm 136, this pattern is clear. It begins with the general:

Praise the LORD; for He is good,
His steadfast love is eternal.

The next eight verses praise G-d for the creation of the world, detailing the earth and the luminaries. Many commentaries (Maharal, Likut M’Ibn Ezra, Likut M’Radak) note that the next unit (10-22) transitions from the universal to the particular, praising G-d for the miracles during and immediately following the Exodus, culminating with the battles won as the Jews entered the Israel. Radak notes that it is these miracles that show that G-d is not constrained by nature.

Interestingly, this unit begins at the end of the plagues, with the smiting of the firstborns and specific details of the Splitting of the Sea.

Who struck Egypt through their first-born,
His steadfast love is eternal;

and brought Israel out of their midst,
His steadfast love is eternal;
with a strong hand and outstretched arm,
His steadfast love is eternal;

Why begin the Exodus story at the end? Some suggest practical reasons—namely this was the proximate cause for Pharaoh letting the Jews leave (Radak, Maharal, Malbim). Others focus on this being particularly punitive (Ibn Ezra). Others, however, see this as indicative of broader themes. Sforno, for example, understands that G-d killed the firstborns as this would convince the Egyptians to let the Jews go, thus allowing the rest of the Egyptians to survive. Thus, amazingly, our first mention of the Exodus thanks G-d for his mercy towards the Egyptians.

They are the chosen ones among the people, and in this way, he subdued them without a great slaughter among the people, in his mercy for the masses.

Rabbi Cooperman notes how striking this is.

The kindness toward Israel is already mentioned in the following verse, and therefore, here it refers to the kindness shown to the Egyptians themselves. This is why it does not say ‘to Him who struck the firstborn of Egypt,’ but rather ‘to Him who struck Egypt through their firstborn,’ meaning that through their firstborn, He struck them all, thus saving the rest of the people. This is a remarkable novelty—an act of mercy toward the Egyptians. But this is the entire essence of our teacher’s interpretation: ‘And the Egyptians shall know

that I am the Lord.’

He suggests that the focus is not just that G-d was kind to the Egyptians, but reminds us that the purpose of the Exodus was not only for the Jews, but also to educate the Egyptians, which required their survival. These dual goals are clear in the Sforno’s other presentation.

To Him who struck Egypt -but not all of them, only striking them through their firstborn so that the others would see and take heed. For the Lord does not desire the death of the wicked, for His kindness endures forever.

The Alshich focuses on the measure for measure aspect. As the Jews are G-d’s firstborn, by killing the firstborn, He was sending a message. This accomplished another goal—educating the world about G-d.

Thus, the choice to begin the praise of G-d with the plague of killing the firstborn provides content for the narrative. For some, we thank G-d for getting the Jews out of Egypt, thus making only the final plague, which succeeded in this goal, worthy of mention. For others, it expands the purpose of the Exodus to educating people about the truth of G-d, the miracles acting to teach the Jews, Egyptians, and the wider world. Finally, it may also remind us that G-d’s retribution is tempered by mercy, and thus we cannot mention the plagues without balancing our perspective of G-d. The content of our praises on Seder night (and throughout the year), thus frame how we understand our stories, both personal and national, teaching us what is important, and demanding that our praises be tailored to the narratives of our lives, properly understood.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

- Is there a connection between praise and narrative? Are they different?
- What do you think we learn from the specific aspects of the Exodus story that are mentioned in Hallel HaGadol?



I Had a Disappointing Seder

SIVAN RAHAV-MEIR

**MEDIA PERSONALITY AND LECTURER, AND FORMERLY SERVED
AS WORLD MIZRACHI'S SHLICHA TO NORTH AMERICA.**

Someone wrote, "I had a disappointing Seder, the whole holiday was stressful and upsetting, I feel like I missed out." This reminded me of a beautiful quote I once heard: "our feelings are not the measure of the value of fulfilling a mitzvah." Even if we didn't feel particularly excited during the Seder, we still received a great spiritual charge that impacts us and the entire world: we ate Matzah and Maror, drank four cups, and heard the story of the Exodus. Even if we weren't feeling particularly "illuminated," this immense treasure became a part of us and was absorbed by our souls. In every crumb of Matzah and drop of wine, there is a precise dose of faith, hope, and meaning.

Our prayers for the captives, for the situation, and for all of Israel, the words we said from the Haggadah, even if we didn't invest particular thought in them—the very fact that we were privileged to sit at the Seder table on this holy night (especially this year, when we know how precious it is!)—all of this is important, all of this counts.

And now we have a great task ahead of us: everyday life. Most of life is not the closing prayer or the Seder night. The prophet Zechariah said, "Who despises the day of small things?" meaning we shouldn't underestimate or belittle the "small" days. Every day after the holidays is also holy.

Wishing you Hatzlacha and happy post-Pesach.

This article originally appeared in The Daily Portion.

FOR DISCUSSION • וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ

CHILDREN:

- *What did you enjoy most about the Seder?*
- *What is your favorite part of the time after Pesach?*

ADULTS:

- *Who among us is more of a "peak" person and who is more of a "routine" person? What can we learn from each other?*
- *Does the fact that we celebrate two Seders abroad make things easier or more difficult for us?*



Sefirat HaOmer

RIFKA SONENBERG

YOETZET HALACHA, CANADIAN YOATZOT INITIATIVE

TUCKED AWAY TOWARD THE END OF THE second seder is something that seems to have little to do with Pesach and its goal of remembering the exodus from Egypt. In fact, it's something that turns our attention away from Pesach and shifts the focus and anticipation to the next holiday: Shavuot. I'm referring, of course, to Sefirat haOmer. Why would we start thinking about the next holiday when this one's barely begun?

Although it seems like counting toward Shavuot shifts the focus away from Pesach, Sefirat haOmer is actually connected to both Pesach and Shavuot, experientially and conceptually. Rav Soloveitchik teaches that although grammatically we think of time as past, present, or future, experientially “the present can never be isolated and perceived; the point of time we call present lies either in the past or in the future ... What we call the present is nothing but a vantage point from which we look either forward or backward.” (Festival of Freedom) In fact, Rav Soloveitchik says, Judaism sees time as incorporating both past and future simultaneously—a memory of the past and an anticipation of a future that has not yet arrived but we know is on its way.

Within the seder are elements that remind us of our former slavery and our future sovereignty; we taste the bitterness in our past and the sweetness in store for us in the future; we experience both realities

in an immediate, immersive way. Staying up all night to learn on Shavuot is both a present-day repair for a mistake made at the historical receiving of the Torah as well as the recommitment to our ongoing, future-oriented relationship with Hashem and the Torah.

On a larger scale, the entire holiday of Pesach represents our release from Egyptian bondage in the past while the holiday of Shavuot represents the ultimate goal and purpose of our freedom—the exclusive relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people that will continue to carry us forward through the millennia. These two concepts are connected by the counting we do between them, and counting itself contains both past and future: the mitzvah to count the Omer is both a bittersweet reminder of the count toward the Omer sacrifice when the Beit Hamikdash still stood, as well as a joyful counting in the present toward the holiday of Shavuot and the yearly renewal of our national covenant with Hashem through receiving the Torah.

The very act of counting encapsulates the relationship between past and future, since any count starts at some specific event and ends with another event in the future. In counting the Omer, we witness this dynamic relationship between past and future on a small scale—from day to day—and on a larger scale, as we count the seven

weeks leading up to Shavuot. Both cycles—days and weeks—are counted simultaneously throughout Sefirat haOmer.

Other cycles of counting, such as the multi-year count toward the *shmita* (sabbatical) year and the multi-*shmita* count toward the yovel (jubilee) year, display the combination of past and future on a larger, national, scale, while a woman's counting of seven days toward mikvah immersion is the same pattern on a smaller, individual, scale.

In each of these cycles the pattern is played out in varying scales, bringing Jewish history and our hoped-for future into focus on a macro and micro level simultaneously. But these cycles are more than just a repeating pattern: they are a spiral which meets us at different points in our lives and thereby allows us to both experience our history and create our future. As Rabbi Matis Weinberg explains in his series on Jewish time, “The differences in our persons and in our history become an actual part of the measurement of time. This combination of recurrence and difference is reflected in the Hebrew word for the year—*shana*, having the double meaning ‘repetition/change’” (*Patterns in Time* 1).

May this year be the year that we experience the modern-day exodus from exile and arrival at the renewed covenant with Hashem, rooted in our past while forging our future.

FOR DISCUSSION • והיה כי ישאלך

- Can you name some mitzvot from each of the other holidays that demonstrate the dynamic between past and present?
- Are there any events from your past that you wish you could live over again? Are there any upcoming events that you wish you could “practice” in advance?

🌿 Did You Know? 🌿

- We were pleased to host Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon this year, Nasi of World Mizrahi and an internationally acclaimed *posek* of Halacha, author, educator, and lecturer.
- Every Shabbat, close to 500 copies of our Toronto Torah are distributed throughout the city!
- Shlichim from Israel make a significant contribution to the work of the Beit Midrash.
- We are proud partners of the Mizrahi Beit Midrash at the BAYT.
- Rabbi Mann offers the international Semichas Chaver Program in two different shuls every week!
- We are pleased to offer six weekly Zoom classes this year, on various and diverse topics.
- We offer over 30 chavrutot, private and public classes for adults each week.
- Our audio recordings on YUTorah.org were visited many thousands of times in 2024!
- Hundreds of people participated this year in the various programs we held for the High Holidays, Hanukkah, and Tu BiShvat!
- We have held four Medical Ethics programs so far this year, with over 250 participants! Two additional programs are planned for this summer.
- This coming summer we will have three accredited business ethics classes!
- We were delighted to host the annual Tanach In A Day this year, with over 250 participants and in the presence of Mrs. Sivan Rahav Meir!
- We were happy to cooperate with various schools this year, and to learn Torah alongside Associated Hebrew Schools, Bnei Akiva Schools, Netivot HaTorah, Eitz Chaim Schools and Yeshivat Yesodei Hatorah!
- Our women's classes in Halacha and Parashat HaShavua provide high-level learning for dozens of women in the Toronto community.
- "בשבתך בביתך"—our Torah learning also takes place in Chaburot groups in various homes throughout the city.
- Our weekly שיעור בעברית is designed to enhance Hebrew skills and facilitate Aliyah readiness.
- We are happy and proud to learn together with the business professionals in the city center as part of our lunch & learn program.
- **We are locally-funded. To support our work, go to www.torontotorah.com/donate.**

מעבדות לחירות



FROM CAPTIVITY TO FREEDOM STORIES OF HOSTAGES FREED FROM HAMAS CAPTIVITY

Dedicated by Robbie and Brian Schwartz and Family to the brave observers and soldiers of Nahal Oz military base, many of whom were murdered, wounded or taken hostage, who repeatedly warned the IDF of the imminent attack and fought heroically on October 7. May the memory of the departed be for a blessing and may the wounded have a refuah shleima.

Tales From Captivity to Freedom

Emily Demari

EMILY TEHILA DEMARI, 28 YEARS OLD, LIVES IN THE “DOR Tzair” neighborhood in Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Emily is the daughter of Mendi and Avichai Demari, and a younger sister to Ben, Tom, and Sean. Her friends and family describe her as a shining light full of energy and love, who enjoys hosting friends, engaging in sports, and spending time at the beach. She is known for her deep love of animals, especially her beloved dog, a constant companion. Family is a core value to her, and anyone close to her benefits greatly from her presence. She radiates joy, love, and light wherever she goes.

On October 7, 2023, Emily was abducted from her home. Early in the morning, Emily was at home when she entered the safe room (*mamad*) with her neighbor Gali Berman, sending a selfie from there, which reached Gali’s mother only in the evening after they were abducted. During the incident, Hamas terrorists broke into her home, shot her beloved dog while she hugged him, and injured her hand with gunfire, resulting in the loss of two fingers. Her mother, Mendi, hid in a locked room, and a bullet hitting the door lock prevented the terrorists from entering her room.

Emily was held captive in Gaza for 471 days. Throughout this period, there were no signs of life from her, leaving her family in uncertainty and constant worry. Emily has British citizenship, and her mother met with British government representatives in London, urging action for her daughter’s release and ensuring humanitarian assistance.

On January 19, 2025, as part of the exchange deal between Israel and Hamas, Emily was released along with Doron Steinbrecher and Romi Gonen. Their return to Israel and reunion with their families were emotional moments full of hope for the entire country.

Upon her return, Emily posted an emotional message stating, “I’ve returned to my beloved life—you’ve moved my heart.” She shared about the injury she sustained on the day of the abduction, which resulted in the loss of two fingers. Immediately upon her release, Emily became a symbol of bravery, pushing back against one of the Hamas terrorists and providing a victorious image during a phone call with her family, showing her injured hand.

Two weeks after her release, Emily returned to where she was abducted: her destroyed home in Kfar Aza, posting on Instagram: “I’m Back—Today I returned to my home, to my apartment, to my air that I had and it was almost gone. I returned to the place

where my whole nightmare began, 485 days ago, and I finished only part of the story that I had so hoped to finish,” Emily wrote.

Her brother, Tom, posted a picture of his sister next to Romi Gonen during their visit to Kfar Aza, with a background image of Aviv Bar-Am, one of Emily’s close friends who was murdered on October 7. “Emily came today to finish the story. To win her private victory and return to where she was kidnapped by Hamas monsters. She returned there with her family and accompanied by someone who entered our family and became an inseparable part of the family, Romi Gonen. Romi and Emily have become one and it’s so amazing to see,” he wrote.

Emily Demari has become a symbol of hope and perseverance, representing human resilience to cope with extreme situations and the desire for life and freedom.

Luis Har

LUIS HAR, 71 YEARS OLD, LIVES IN KIBBUTZ NIR YITZHAK, where he built his life around a warm and supportive community. Dance and performance have been an inseparable part of his life. He participates in various dance troupes, including the “Galgaley Rishon” troupe, and has specialized in diverse styles such as salsa, tango, and folk dance. His friends and family describe him as a lively person who always spread joy around him.

On the morning of October 7, 2023, terrorists infiltrated Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak. Luis, who was at home, was kidnapped and taken to captivity in the Gaza Strip. The abduction left his family and community in uncertainty and deep concern for his well-being.

Clara Marman (65), Luis’s partner of over 20 years, was released after 53 days in captivity along with her sister Gabriela Leimberg, her daughter Mia, and her dog Bella. Clara’s brother, Fernando Marman, was also kidnapped and rescued along with Luis.

During the 129 days he was held captive, Luis endured harsh conditions and isolation. The dancing that had always brought him joy was forbidden to him. In an interview, he shared: “Dancing in captivity was impossible; they don’t look kindly at a man who dances.” One time, when he tried to perform warm-up movements, his captors reacted angrily, and he was forced to stop. However, in his thoughts, he continued to replay dance steps, which helped him maintain his sanity and hope.

On February 13, 2024, after 129 days in captivity, Luis was rescued in “Operation Golden Hand,” along with Fernando Marman, from

Tales From Captivity to Freedom

the Rafah refugee camp. The operation was a complex mission carried out by the Shabak, the Yamam Special Forces Unit and the IDF.

After his release, Luis returned to his great love—dancing. During Passover 2024, he participated in the “Dancing in Spring” performance in Rehovot, dancing in support of the release of the remaining hostages in Gaza. Additionally, he performed with the “Galgaley Rishon” troupe at the Rishon Lezion Cultural Hall in a show marking 500 days since the war began, dedicating his dance to his friends still in captivity, hoping the performance would provide hope and encourage efforts for their release.

The time spent in captivity deeply impacted Luis’s worldview. In an interview, he stated: “My opinions have completely changed since I was kidnapped.” He shared the harrowing experiences he endured, the moments of tension and fear, and the personal awakening he underwent due to the events.

Luis Herr’s story highlights the power of the human spirit to overcome trauma through art and community. His return to dance is not just personal rehabilitation but also a message of hope and solidarity, encouraging society to strive for the release of all captives and to continue aspiring for a life of freedom and joy.

Ori Megidish

ORI MEGIDISH, 18 YEARS OLD FROM KIRYAT GAT, SERVED AS a forward observer at the Nahal Oz outpost. Ori enlisted in the IDF after a year of learning in Mechinat Netivot and half a year of agricultural work. Her friends and commanders describe her as a professional soldier, responsible, and possessing a high team spirit.

Ori was kidnapped and held captive by Hamas for 23 days. During this period, few details were disclosed about her condition or location. On the night between October 29 and 30, 2023, IDF and Shabak forces conducted a complex ground operation in Gaza, during which she was rescued. She was the first captive to be rescued in an operation from Gaza.

After her rescue, she was found to be in good condition and reunited with her family. Almost a month after her release, Ori released a video thanking everyone for the broad support she received: “I’m home with my family, happy that I got my life back.” She expressed joy at the release of other captives and sent a strong message: “Hopefully, coming home will be the first step in a journey of healing, comfort, and renewed strength.”

Four months after her release, Ori decided to return and serve in the IDF, this time in the Intelligence Corps. Her decision to return to active duty testifies to her determination and desire to contribute to the security of the country, despite the trauma she endured.

Ori was honored with the opportunity to light a torch at the national Yom Hazikaron ceremony in 2024. After being released from captivity, Ori not only paid attention to the small details that make up coping with loss and recovery, but also rose above the pain and dealt with internal wounds. The invitation to light a torch stemmed from admiration for her courage and her ability to serve as a model of resilience and fortitude against the toughest challenges.

Yagil Yaakov

YAGIL YAAKOV WAS A 13-YEAR-OLD BOY FROM KIBBUTZ NIR Oz when the war started. On the morning of October 7, Yagil and his 16-year-old brother, Or, were home alone when terrorists broke in. The two hid in their safe room and managed to inform their mother about the intrusion. During the attack, Yagil turned to one of the kidnapers and said, “I’m too small, don’t take me.” Despite his plea, they were abducted and taken to Gaza. Their father, Yair, and his partner, Merav Tal, were also kidnapped, and Yair’s body is still being held in captivity.

Yagil and his brother were held hostage by Hamas for 52 days. During this time, they endured harsh conditions and ongoing uncertainty. On November 24, 2023, Yagil, Or, Merav, and other hostages were released.

After his return, Yagil felt a deeper connection to faith and Jewish tradition. He shared: “When I came back, I decided to start wearing a kippah and tzitzit. Everyone laughed and said I was crazy, but during captivity, I thought about it a lot.” He added: “The belief that Hashem was with me kept me going while I was a hostage.” In an emotional post, he wrote: “Thank you, Boreh Olam, for the privilege of being here today.”

The experiences of captivity left Yagil with difficult memories. When a video of hostage Liri Elbag was released, Yagil reacted: “The video gave me a flashback of myself over a year ago. I stood in front of a Kalashnikov pointed at me, terrified and begging to go home.” He expressed hope for the return of all the hostages and emphasized the importance of support and faith in difficult times.

Tales From Captivity to Freedom

Yagil shares glimpses of his life after captivity on social media and has become an Instagram and TikTok star, with 150,000 followers.

His story highlights the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. His spiritual growth after captivity serves as an inspiration to many, demonstrating the ability to find light and hope even in the darkest moments.

Agam Berger

AGAM BERGER, BORN IN HOLON, IS THE DAUGHTER OF Meirav and Shlomi and the twin sister of Li-Yam. She also has two brothers, Bar and Ilai. From age eight, Agam played the violin and was part of the music program at Kiryat Sharet in Holon. After finishing her studies, she joined Mechinat Gal in Akko as part of the “Acharai” program, where she stood out as a leader and a dedicated friend. She later enlisted in the IDF and served as a forward observer. During the training course, she was chosen to serve as a squad commander and participated in the “Kochavim” program for officer training.

On October 7, 2023, during the Hamas attack on the Nahal Oz military outpost, Agam was abducted by Hamas terrorists and taken to the Gaza Strip. That morning, while staying in a bunker with her fellow soldiers, she managed to make a phone call using a device belonging to a wounded comrade, reporting the sound of gunfire and the presence of terrorists. Shortly after, contact with her was lost, leaving her family in uncertainty and ongoing worry.

Agam was held in captivity for 482 days. During her time as a hostage, she was held alongside other abducted women, including Liri, Naama, Karina, and Daniela. They were moved between different hiding locations and occasionally gained access to information from the outside world through radio and newspapers. Agam shared that her faith and adherence to religious observance, such as Tfila and Brachot, helped her cope with the hardships of captivity.

On January 30, 2025, Agam was released as part of an exchange deal and returned to Israel. She was transferred into the hands of IDF forces and later reunited with her parents, Meirav and Shlomi. From there, she was airlifted to Beilinson Hospital, where she reunited with four of her fellow soldiers who had been released from Gaza a few days earlier.

Upon her return, Agam reunited with her family and began a process of physical and emotional rehabilitation. She became a symbol of perseverance and faith, and her story continues to inspire many.

Maya Laimberg

MAYA LAIMBERG, A 17-YEAR-OLD GIRL FROM JERUSALEM, IS a student at a high school for the arts in the city. Her friends describe her as a special, funny, energetic young woman with a huge heart. She is known for her singing talent and her great love for her beloved dog, Bella. Eitan, a close friend, shared: “Maya is a person who can’t be explained in words. She’s special, funny, energetic, and it’s an experience to be with her.”

On October 7, 2023, during the Hamas attack, Maya was with her mother, Gabriela, and her aunt, Clara Merman, at her aunt’s house in Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak. When the attack began, the family took shelter in the Mamad, but the terrorists broke into the house, looted belongings, and kidnapped the three women along with their dog Bella to the Gaza Strip.

For 53 days, Maya, her mother, and her aunt were held captive in the Gaza Strip. During this time, no signs of life were received from them, and their family lived in uncertainty and deep worry. On November 28, 2023, as part of the exchange deal, they were released. The moment of their release was especially emotional, as upon crossing the border into Israel, Maya was seen holding her dog Bella, who had been with her throughout the entire captivity.

Upon her return, Maya was warmly welcomed by her family, friends, and teachers. The WhatsApp groups of the arts high school were filled with joy at the news of her return. Her teacher said: “I see in the photos Maya holding her dog, Bella... we were searching frantically for the dog... we thought she had run away.”

After her return, Maya shared that Bella had been a source of comfort for her during the captivity and helped her endure the difficult moments. She thanked everyone who supported her and her family during the period and expressed hope to return to routine soon.

Tales From Captivity to Freedom

Yaffa Ader

YAFFA ADER, 85 YEARS OLD, IS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF Kibbutz Nahal Oz. She is a mother of three, a grandmother to eight grandchildren, and a great-grandmother to seven great-grandchildren. Her friends and family describe her as a strong, determined woman with a youthful spirit. She was a central figure in the community.

On October 7, 2023, during Hamas's attack on the communities of the Gaza border region, Yaffa was at her home in Kibbutz Nahal Oz. Hamas terrorists broke into her house, kidnapped her, and transported her on a golf cart into the Gaza Strip. A photo of her smiling during the abduction, taken by the terrorists, was shared on social media and became a symbol of resilience and courage.

Yaffa was held captive by Hamas for 49 days. During this time, there were no signs of life from her, leaving her family in a state of uncertainty and ongoing anxiety. On November 25, 2023, Yaffa was released as part of an exchange deal. Upon her return to Israel, she was welcomed with great emotion by her family and members of the kibbutz. Her daughter-in-law, Yael, shared: "There was incredible tension and immense excitement when we recognized her, as if we had captured Jerusalem all over again."

Upon her return, Yaffa was unaware of the full scope of events that had occurred during her captivity. Her daughter-in-law noted: "She didn't know about the neighbors who were kidnapped, the neighbors who were murdered, the grandson who was taken hostage. She didn't know that she had no home to return to." In her first interview after her release, Yaffa spoke about her experiences in captivity and how she coped with the trauma: "I decided that I would not let them break me."

Yaffa Ader's story highlights strength and resilience in the face of extreme circumstances. The image of her smiling during her abduction has become a symbol of hope and perseverance, demonstrating the unbreakable human spirit and inspiring us all.

Nili Margalit

NILI MARGALIT, 40 YEARS OLD, IS A NURSE IN THE PEDIATRIC ward at Soroka Hospital in Be'er Sheva. She lived in Kibbutz Nir Oz with her beloved dog, Nechi. Her friends and family describe her as a dedicated professional with a big heart and a deep love for animals.

On October 7, 2023, during Hamas's attack on the communities of the Gaza Envelope, Nili was at her home in Kibbutz Nir Oz. As the attack began, she took shelter in her Mamad with Nechi. When the terrorists broke into her house, she made sure to release her dog so he could escape. The house was completely burned down, and Nili was kidnapped by the terrorists and taken to Gaza. For weeks, her family had no information about her fate until hostage Yocheved Lifshitz was released and reported that Nili was alive and caring for wounded hostages.

Nili treated a wide range of illnesses and injuries, using both her professional knowledge and creativity. For example, when one of the hostages, Tami Metzger, was injured on a motorcycle, Nili provided her with antibiotics, but the wounds did not improve. Remembering that there was honey in a cupboard, Nili decided to try dressing the wounds with honey. The treatment worked, and Tami's wounds began to heal.

During 55 days in captivity, Nili used her skills as a nurse to care for injured and sick hostages, which also helped her cope with the harsh reality. On November 30, 2023, as part of an exchange deal, Nili was released and returned to Israel. Upon her return, she was reunited with her dog Nechi and expressed her gratitude for the support she had received: "It's amazing how much animals provide strength and hope."

After her return, Nili shared her experiences from captivity, including the difficult moments and the strength she found in helping others. She became an advocate for the release of the remaining hostages and for ensuring that medicine reached those still in captivity. In addition, Nili received recognition for her actions, and in April 2024, she was honored by the president for her contributions as a nurse. In May 2024, Ben-Gurion University awarded her an honorary doctorate in recognition of her dedication and efforts during captivity.



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