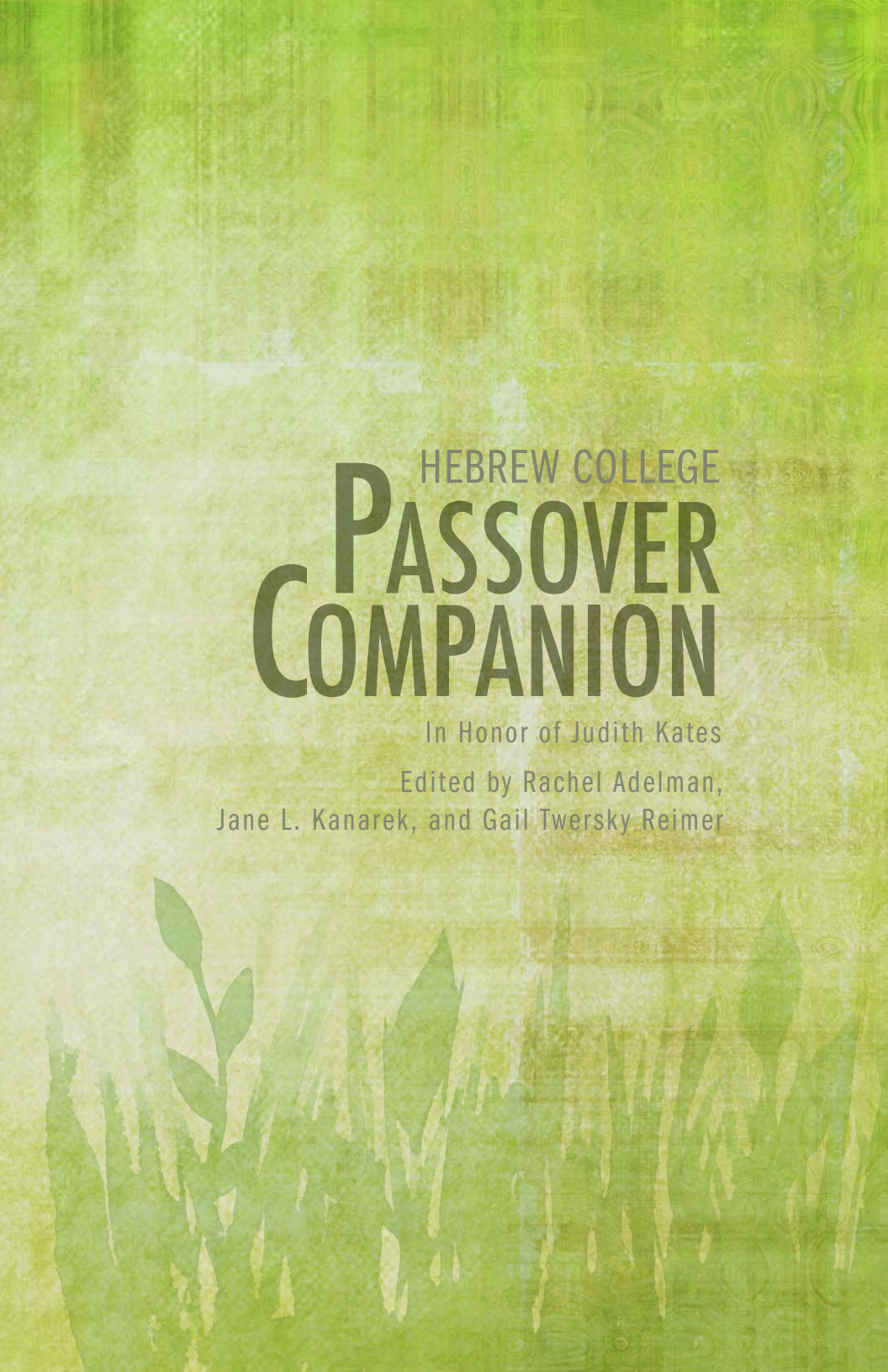
HEBREW COLLEGE

PASSOVER COMPANION

In Honor of Judith Kates

Edited by Rachel Adelman,
Jane L. Kanarek, and Gail Twersky Reimer



Anita Rabinoff-Goldman

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Introduction

RACHEL ADELMAN, JANE L. KANAREK, AND GAIL TWERSKY REIMER (EDITORS)

This collection emerged out of a desire to honor our friend and colleague, Dr. Judith Kates. Professor, author, teacher, and scholar, Kates stands among the pioneers of contemporary Jewish women reclaiming their Jewish literary heritage by bringing a feminist perspective to the interpretation of classical Jewish texts. A graduate of Radcliffe College, Kates received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Harvard University. Initially as a member of the Harvard faculty, which she joined in 1973, and later as a member of the university's administration and the first coordinator of the Faculty Committee on Women's Studies, Kates played a critical role in the integration of the study of women into the curriculum. By the time Harvard finally approved a women's studies concentration (1986), Kates' interests had shifted from Renaissance literature to classical Jewish texts, and she began studying and teaching Bible and midrash in many settings of adult learning in the Jewish community.

Shortly before she was appointed to the faculty of Hebrew College in 1992, Kates began work on *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story* (Ballantine, 1994), a volume of commissioned essays she co-edited with Gail Twersky Reimer. A few years later, Kates and Reimer co-edited a second collection of essays, *Beginning Anew: A Woman's Companion to the High Holy Days* (Simon and Schuster, 1997), this one focused on the different Torah and Haftarah texts read over the course of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

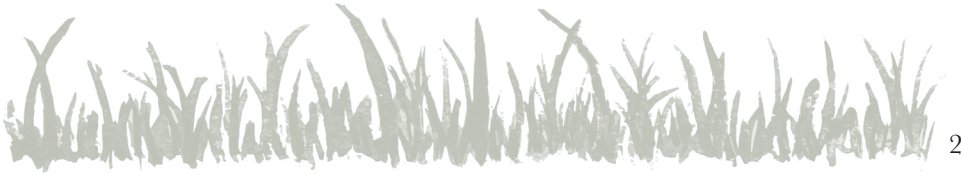
A founding faculty member of the Hebrew College Rabbinical School at its inception in 2003, Kates designed and taught core text courses on Torah to the school's first generation of ordained rabbis. A beloved teacher and passionate scholar, Kates was awarded an honorary doctorate by Hebrew College in 2017. Her wisdom and

deep knowledge of sacred texts have been a gift to generations of her students and colleagues. Kates recently retired, but continues to study, teach, and inspire.

This Hebrew College Passover Companion, written in honor of Judith, represents a unique collaboration among faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of Hebrew College. Following after the Hebrew College High Holiday Companion, it offers a pathway into another of our central ritual moments—the Passover seder.

The Companion is structured around the *simanim*, or signposts, of the seder, bringing you from the ritual's beginning, through the meal, and to its closing. Since Judith begins her family seder with the ritual of *kos miryam*, Miriam's Cup, we too have chosen to begin this volume with that ritual. We have also included a reading of *Shir HaShirim*, the Song of Songs, traditionally recited in synagogue on the intermediate Sabbath of Passover. Many of Judith's friends have been privileged to gather at her and Bill's home during the afternoon of the intermediate Shabbat of Passover to sing together the many songs from *Shir HaShirim*.

Much as Judith's seder table is a place for questions and conversation, we hope that this Passover Companion will generate new questions and new conversations around your own seder table—and that you will be touched and surprised by the many ways we can tell our story of liberation.



Acknowledgements

RACHEL ADELMAN, JANE L. KANAREK, AND GAIL TWERSKY REIMER (EDITORS)

This collection is the work of many hands. We are deeply grateful to Hebrew College President Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, who encouraged and supported us in conceptualizing and bringing this Passover Companion to light. We would like to thank Rabbi Shayna Rhodes (Rabb '08) and Dr. Abigail Gillman who helped us to further define the project. We would also like to thank Anita Rabinoff-Goldman, who generously donated the cover art and picture from her magnificent quilt project, titled "Seeing Torah: A Visual Midrash."

We are grateful to the marketing department of Hebrew College—Sydney Gross, Emily Hoadley, and Wendy Linden—who helped us to shepherd this Companion through its final stages of publication, and are especially grateful to Emily for her artistic vision. Our thanks to Rabbi Susan Fendrick for her timely copy editing of the entire collection. We are grateful to Judith's husband, Bill, her son, Tom, and her daughter-in-law, Kathy, for enhancing this volume with their special contributions.

We are fortunate to be blessed with such wonderful authors, who unhesitatingly contributed to this volume. Thank you!

We are grateful to you, our readers, for joining with us in honoring Judith Kates by entering into this journey through the seder.

Savta: The Great Accompanier

KATHY KATES

My dear mother in-law, aka Savta, aka Judith, aka Mom, is a blessing to our family.

Savta, along with her loving husband, Granddad (aka Dad, Bill, my father in-law), have provided my family with a beautiful example of how to live a Jewish life, through deep learning, relationships, and connection to Jewish text and tradition.

She has helped our daughter, Eva, to find her place in the Torah. Savta was Eva's bat mitzvah tutor. Savta and Eva began a full year before *parashat Noaḥ*, beginning with *Bereshit*, so that Eva would have a context for the story. Savta encouraged Eva to write down questions after their reading of the story, and those questions became the basis of Eva's *devar torah*. Savta provided gentle and thoughtful accompaniment to Eva, helping her to find her own connection to the text through her unique voice.

Savta is a great listener and accompanier. These qualities, infused with constant gentleness, are qualities that have very much influenced who my husband, Tom, is in the world and how he sees the world.

Our family has been blessed to have Savta lead our seder every year. She includes mirrors on her seder plate to teach us the midrash about the mirrors. This midrash aligns well with a central theme in Savta's life—seeing possibilities where others would see endings.

This principle has provided a guiding force in my own Jewish journey. As I went through my conversion process, Savta was always available to thoughtfully listen to and answer my questions. For our wedding and Eva's bat mitzvah, she helped me to think through meaningful ways to include my Catholic family. Most recently, Savta has helped me to read

Torah, bringing the Torah alive for me through her deep knowledge and respect for this tradition. We recently had a conversation about the incredible connection to our tradition that Savta feels when she reads these ancient texts; through teaching both Eva and me, she is helping to keep alive that connection.

When I think about who I would most like to be like in the world, it is Savta—a loving mother, wife, grandmother, and friend, who uses the Jewish tradition and texts as a scaffolding to help her to listen, learn, and accompany all of us through life with gentle compassion.

Kos Miryam

RACHEL JACOFF

On our seder table, we place a cup of spring water—living water, *mayyim ḥayyim*— Miriam's Cup. Linked to water from the time that she stood watching over her brother Moses at the Nile, Miriam the prophetess led her people in song and dance at the crossing of the Red Sea. She sings in response to water, and a miraculous well of water travels with the people in response to her song, forming "a kind of songline through the wilderness." Created on the twilight of the eve of the first Shabbat (Pirkei Avot 5:6), Miriam's miraculous well followed Israel for their forty-year journey through the wilderness, healing and sustaining the people. Wherever it rolled, Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg teaches, it sang "with an unheard music."[1]

The connection between the well and Miriam's song creates a linkage between water and music, between memory and melody. It is as if the itinerant well encodes the Song at the Sea, keeping the memory of these dancing women alive. It also suggests the paradoxical nature of the experience, joining the hardness of the rock that Moses strikes with the fluidity of water that flows from Miriam's well, bitterness with sweetness. This connection of opposites is, as Zornberg teaches, one of Miriam's gifts to the people.[2] When Miriam dies, the well dries up (B. Taanit 9a), and with it some memory of the song. Through Miriam's cup and the other named cup on our seder table, the cup of Elijah, we proclaim our faith that we will one day remember and revive Miriam's song, its unheard music ushering in the messianic era.

1 Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (New York, 2001), 241.

2 Zornberg, *Particulars of Rapture*, 232.

Kadesh

GRAY MYRSETH

Bitter Water Sweet

The children of Israel walked on dry land in the midst of the sea and the water was like a wall to their right and to their left. (Exodus 14:29)

No question The sea took us in to our necks before doubt
could claim our sound Who could unswim a sea-stretch then
No wonder No willing knees unbuckled
No plea unspent No higher ground

Cry mercy Cry shallow Cry harbor
Cry ancestor Cry warning Cry surface
Cry rescue Cry with an outstretched hand
The sea will swallow all your noise

Ask nothing of the crossing that mountains don't ask of valleys
Ask nothing that moons don't ask of the tide
Give me unedged wilderness I will take it in as remedy

This song's initial phoneme sears the tree of your lungs
They say a certain branch can render bitter water sweet
A certain refrain can leech poison from the wound

Don't stop now Keep going

URḤATZ

AVI STRAUSBERG

In the beginning, there was nothing. When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was unformed and void…Except, that's not exactly true. Because there was something. There was darkness, and there was wind, and there was water. A lot of water. The wind of God sweeping over the water. First, God created light, separating light from darkness. Day from evening. And then, God took to creating an expanse between the waters. God separated the water from the water so there could be space in between. God made the expanse, the *rakiya*, the sky, so that the waters above were separated from the waters below. And then there was evening and there was morning, the second day (Genesis 1:1-8).

We learn in Genesis that even before creation, there was water. This same primordial water traveled with the Israelites in the wilderness in the form of the well. The Talmud teaches us that this well was given to the Israelites because of the merit of Miriam, and this same life-giving source of water disappeared with Miriam's death (B. Taanit 9a). Just a verse after we learn of Miriam's death in the Book of Numbers—"and Miriam died there"—we discover, "And there was no water for the congregation." Miriam is the water. When she is gone, the wellspring is no more.

This is not the only instance in which we see women and water linked together. The daughter of Pharaoh first discovers baby Moses while walking by the water (Exodus 2:5-10). On account of the righteous women who stood by the water, drawing fish to feed and sustain their husbands, the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt (B. Sotah 11b). And Miriam and the women sing together by the water, with timbrels and drums, at the parting of the Reed Sea (Exodus 15:20-21).

If we are to associate women with water, what does this characterization reflect about women? Or, in other words, what are the qualities of water, and how does that inform how we understand women?

Water precedes the creation of the world and it is the life source upon which we rely. We pray for it, we bless it, and when we don't have it, we find our very existence threatened. And yet, water is also the source of destruction: "On this day, all the springs of the great deep were split and the windows of heavens opened up" (Genesis 7:11). Water almost wipes humanity off the earth, altering the world irrevocably.

But water also resists being contained, limited to one definition or one aspect of being. In the tale of Ḥoni ha-Me'agel (B. Taanit 23a), the people find themselves for months without water. Desperate, they turn to Ḥoni and beg him to intercede, to pray to God on their behalf. Ḥoni prays for the rains to fall. At first a very gentle rain falls, droplets trickling down. But this rain proves insufficient, not what the people requested. Again Ḥoni prays, now asking for rains that would fill cisterns, ditches, and caves. Again, the rain falls. This time, it is a furious rain, a torrent of unrelenting water that seems bent on destroying the world. Again, this is not what the people wanted. Ḥoni prays a final time, now for rains of benevolence, blessing, and generosity. And this time, the people do receive the waters they need.

Sometimes water trickles down in droplets and sometimes it is unleashed in sheets. It is not just life-sustaining or benevolent, powerful or destructive. By its existence, water insists that it is and contains all of these things.

Just as water, so too women.

Water teaches us that we need not allow ourselves to be defined by any one characteristic. Sometimes we are like the rains of benevolence,

falling softly and gently, and other times we come down like the rains that fill cisterns and ditches, fierce and strong.

As we let the waters of *urḥatz* cleanse our hands, here is a blessing: May we be like water, resisting definition and defying boundaries. May we allow ourselves to be many things at many moments, calling on different parts of ourselves as necessary. And may we fall gently in droplets and fiercely in sheets, knowing that only we have the power to define ourselves.

Karpas

SHARON COHEN ANISFELD

Arise my darling, my fair one, and come away.
For lo the winter is past,
the rains are over and gone.
The blossoms have appeared in the land,
The time of singing has come.
The song of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The green figs form on the fig tree,
The vines in blossom give off fragrance.
Arise, my darling,
My fair one, and come away.
(Song of Songs 2:14)

When I was growing up, my mother would read these verses from Song of Songs each year at our Passover seder.
This will always be *karpas* for me,
sprigs of fresh parsley dipped in the sound of my mother's voice
Saying "Arise my darling,"
saying "For lo the winter is past."
Saying no matter what bitterness life might bring,
there is *always* the possibility of love.
And where there is love, there is hope.

On all other nights, my mother would teach us hope as a discipline, a choice, an obligation. I remember coming to her upset about a situation that felt desperate to me at the time. "Imagine," she said, "just think how the Israelites felt standing at the Sea with the Egyptian army closing in behind them! If they had hope, so can you!"

At the seder, my mother would read these verses from Song of Songs and remind us that not all hope has to be quite so hard-earned. Sometimes it is just a gift—unbidden, unwilled, unexpected. Like the way your breath catches at the glimpse of a young crocus pushing up through the snow, or the way the heart softens at the sight of a stream melting in early spring.

This is the promise of karpas – at once utterly implausible and inevitable.

Karpas promises that the renewal unfolding in the world around us will come just as insistently to our own lives, to the places that have frozen over in our own weary and wary hearts. Even in the darkest times and narrowest places, there is a song in our souls waiting to well up again.

The Hasidic master, the Sefat Emet,[1] connects the Song that the Israelites sing as they cross the sea on their way out of Egypt to this promise of renewal. He teaches that there is a song in us that will always be there, that has had and will always have the power of renewal. It is in our souls and "it can never be forgotten."

"This is the deliverance that is there for every generation."

The entire seder is an invitation to taste the tears and hopes of our ancestors. To hold them close.
To know that we have been here before.
We have been in narrow places and we have left them behind.
We have stumbled suddenly upon wide open places,
possibilities
opening within us,
before us.

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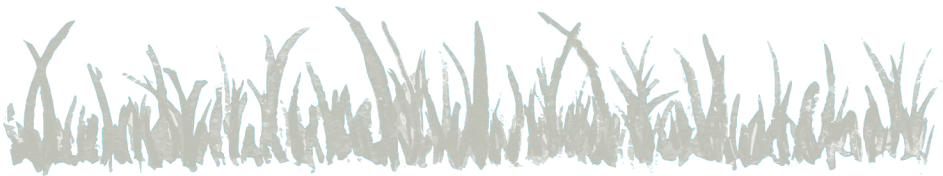
1 *The Language of Truth: The Torah Commentary of the Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger,* Translated and Interpreted by Arthur Green, *Be-Shalach 2* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society 2012), 101.

Karpas is the first taste.
Take your tears.
Take mine.
Take all the tears.
Go back as far as you can.
Put them in a bowl.
Pass them around the table.

Don't let them become a bottomless well of grief.
Dip, don't drown.

A voice beckons:
Mother,
Father,
Lover,
Friend.
Tender, trembling slightly.
Darling,
don't forget.
Not all hope has to be hard-earned.
Sometimes it just comes.
If you let it.

Winter ends.
Blossoms reappear.
Birds return.
Love rises again.
So will you.



Yaḥatz

JORDAN SCHUSTER

The late 18th-century Hasidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav, was born into a mystical tradition that viewed all things—all aspects of this world—as surging with Divinity. "*Melo khol ha-aretz kevodo*—all the earth is filled with God's glory" (Isaiah 6:3). This verse became a watchword in early Hasidic thought. And nearly every early Hasidic thinker sought to convey it to others—to the educated and uneducated alike—instilling in them the notion that some trace of God—luminous, august—flows throughout the core of life, weaving this existence together as one.

Though born into this worldview, though raised and educated according to its dictates, Rebbe Nachman could not seem to access or experience it himself. On the contrary, when Rebbe Nachman looked out onto the world, instead of seeing God's glory filling all the earth, he encountered absence, rupture, breech. Indeed, when Rebbe Nachman looked out onto the world, he saw an abyss dividing us from God, an abyss dividing God from us. Somehow our world had been torn away from Divinity. Somehow our unity with God had broken in two.

Yaḥatz—the Passover ritual of breaking a sheet of matzah in two—takes its name from the Hebrew root *ḥ.tz.ḥ.* meaning quite literally "to break in half." We pull out the middle matzah from a stack of three, we crack it in two, and we hide the larger piece, leaving the smaller piece on the table to consider. For Rebbe Nachman, this smaller piece—this lesser fragment—represents us, and our world. But the larger piece that we are called upon to conceal—this, he teaches, represents God. Cracked away from the larger hidden half, we are severed from Divinity, and a distance—undefined and wrenching—opens up between us.

"*Me-raḥok Adonai nirah li*—from a distance God appears to me" (Jeremiah 31:3). This was one of Rebbe Nachman's favorite biblical passages to cite, most of all because of how it allowed him to read the distance between us and God in more productive terms: It is precisely the recognition of this distance that forces us to shake off our complacency with life and *dream what else is possible*.[1] Wholeness stymies desire, locks us into self-satisfaction. But brokenness—brokenness drives us into a yearning to lessen the gap between what this world is and what it could be. We must feel a break to see this. We must feel a crack to recognize how much we are all still in need of healing. According to Rebbe Nachman, it is only with this recognition that we can begin to figure out new ways to make this healing happen.

Eventually we recover the piece of matzah that has been concealed. But when it returns to us, it does not fit perfectly with its other half. Crumbs unaccounted for remain lost. Space, distance, imperfection loom in the blank scar that marks the reconstituted piece. "And this is as it should be!" Rebbe Nachman would say. Because only as a result of these distances will we be able to find the desire in ourselves to keep dreaming, imagining, acting. And sometimes, as we fill up these distances with our dreams, we may feel God—equally longing for us—reach back.[2]

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1 Adapted from the notes of Rebbe Nachman's scribe, R. Nosn Sternhertz, *Likkutei Halakhot, Giluaḥ* (Laws of Shaving).

2 *Likutei Halakhot, Giluaḥ*.

Maggid

The Four Questions

ZIVA R. HASSENFELD

Anyone who has been to a seder knows that the Four Questions can often be a painful process. The tune is terrible, the questions are scripted, and, most of the time, the child doesn't know what she is asking. Too often, the ritualized recitation feels like an embodiment of the idea that children should be obedient, following instructions and performing on command, rather than making their own meaning in the world.

But when we turn to Mishnah Pesaḥim 10:4, the source of the Four Questions, a very different picture emerges. With its words, "Here, the son asks his father questions," this mishnah invites parents to make space in the seder for their children's own questions:

> *The attendants pour the second cup for the leader of the seder, and here the son asks his father questions. And if the son does not have the intelligence [to ask questions on his own], his father teaches him, "How is this night different from all others?" (M. Pesaḥim 10:4)*

As this mishnah makes clear, in an ideal scenario, the child comes to the seder with her own original questions. If this is not the case, the child, nonetheless, remains at the center of the ritual. The parent models questions for the child. The Babylonian Talmud (B. Pesaḥim 116a) goes on to add one more level of differentiation: if the child can't handle four model questions, give her fewer.

What emerges here is an approach to children's learning that begins from a place of *their* questions, not just for the most eager or engaged child but for all children. Yes, the Mishnah and Talmud affirm a place for ritualized telling even in the questions we have children ask. But equally importantly, the Mishnah and Talmud also encourage children to come

up with their own questions. Sometimes, in our own proclivity towards how it's always been done, we forget to strive for the Talmud's ideal—that children bring their own authentic questions to our seder table, our Jewish lives, and our Jewish learning.

What might this approach to the Four Questions look like? In *Opening Dialogue*, educational researcher Martin Nystrand reminds us that asking questions is the key to learning.[1] When we ask our children truly open-ended questions instead of test-questions with right and wrong answers, and when we show our children that we care about their questions, they begin to see themselves as legitimate participants in the conversation. The Mishnah's vision of the seder is one where adults and children can come together as partners, though not always equal partners, in the project of learning and thinking about the meaning of the Pesaḥ story.

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1 Martin Nystrand, *Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning in the English Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press 1997).

Maggid

Vehi She-amda

ARTHUR GREEN

"She who stood up for our ancestors and ourselves…" The surprising presence of the feminine pronoun in this sentence (which probably originally just meant: "*that which* transpired both for our ancestors and ourselves") gave the mystical tradition a chance to point to the hidden divine female as the force that redeemed Israel from Egypt. This particular face of God (or "aspect of the divine unity," if you prefer) is named *binah*. "She" is the deep inward place toward which we turn in contemplation. But she is also Y-H-W-H as Great Mother, the inner force of creativity, the cosmic womb out of which each new idea, design, and even moment will flow forth. She comes into our "Egypt," *mitzrayim*, the narrow straits out of which our freedom needs to be born, stretches us forth in all directions, and thus guides and saves us in that birth-giving process of newness. We become mothers like Her, birthing our ideas, our teachings, our students themselves. "One who teaches another's child Torah is like one who bore them both" (B. Kiddushin 30a). This is intellectual and spiritual parenthood, well-known to rebbes of all sorts across many generations.

The love of Mother-*binah* is so great, they claim, that She brings us all the way out of Egypt, ready to take us directly to the mountain, to give us the Torah all at once. An old Talmudic tradition claimed that "there are fifty measures of binah in the world, and Moses received forty-nine of them" (B. Rosh Hashanah 21b). This teaching immediately links up in the mystical imagination with both the counting of the omer and the numbering of the sabbatical (every seven years) and jubilee years (every fifty years). Moses in his wisdom saw that liberation from Egypt, given as a gift from beyond, would not be able to sustain itself. The newly expanded mind, like the recently released Hebrews of the biblical tale,

would founder as soon as the first challenges arise. Therefore, even though our compassionate Mother has totally liberated us on the eve of Pesah, making "the mountains skip like rams" (Psalms 114:4), we are not allowed to dance our way to Sinai all at once. We are not ready. On the day after liberation we begin counting, working our way "up the mountain" or into the open heart, each day struggling to find our own path through the wilderness, until we are ready to receive the Torah.

But what is that Torah we receive on the fiftieth day? Isn't that the one that even Moses couldn't attain? Could it be that Torah is none other than *binah* Herself? As we count the days of the *omer*, we measure out seven times seven, each of the seven lower *sefirot*, manifest in us as emotional qualities, combined with each of the others. *Binah* is the mind that contains and transcends them all. But the tradition has us moving in the other direction. We start, on the second night of Pesah, with *ḥesed she-beḥesed*, ultimate divine grace, the first-born quality to emerge from *binah's* womb, and go toward *malkhut she-bemalkhut*, divinity in its most manifest form. It is only after our fifty-day journey that Torah, now identified with *malkhut* or *shekhinah*, is ready to enter the world. That will make Israel into Torah's proper suitor, at Sinai to become God's worthy son-in-law, the husband of His/Her daughter the Torah. We receive the deep wisdom of Mother as evolved into Bride. The incest taboo is thus avoided, but it remains clear that it is Mother who set the whole process in motion.

To try to penetrate the psychospiritual meaning of this liberation by the inner Mother, we turn to a passage from the opening pages of the Zohar, the great poetic rendition of the symbolic language called Kabbalah. The teaching addresses itself to Israel, a nation scattered throughout the world, its brokenness given expression in the destroyed city of Jerusalem. "Your breach is as wide as the sea," says the poet of Lamentations (2:13), with a metaphor of destruction that is also notably reminiscent of birth. Israel, or the Holy City, has been split wide open.

She feels as though repairing that breach is impossible. Her children are scattered everywhere, seemingly never to return. "Who can heal you?" the verse goes on to say, as if no restoration is possible.

But then the Zohar works its charms. The word for "sea" in Hebrew is *yam*. But its two consonants, reversed, spell *mi*, which means "Who?" The letters *mem* and *yod* (numerically adding up to fifty) form a symbol-term for *binah*, since She is ever mysterious, beyond knowing, that elusive fiftieth "gate." *Binah* is the eternal question to which there is no answer: "Who?" The latter part of 2:13 is then taken not as a despairing question ("Who can heal you?") but as the ultimate comforting reassurance ("the Who can heal you!").

All of us go through moments when we feel broken beyond repair. Our own restorative powers are scattered, beyond our reach. We cannot easily "put ourselves back together again." The exile of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem are both powerful symbols of the human condition, the alienation from ourselves and from our Source that we all feel as we go through our daily lives, our multiple forms of "wandering through the wilderness." But the Zohar offers an assurance that we have within ourselves a mysterious deeper resource, a part of us that has escaped this great breakage. It is the internal womb, the great Mother of healing and creativity. We learn to call her forth by the act of reversing the letters—discovering that the great breakage is itself the great healing, that the moment of confronting despair is also that of turning toward that deeper source, to find redemption there.

She, the broken heart within you, is also the heart that heals. That is how we come out of Egypt, over and over again.

Maggid

Storytelling

ALICE SHALVI

The seder night is a night of storytelling. The name of the text we read is *haggadah*—story. At the heart of this story lies the section entitled Maggid—story teller. At two points in the ritual of the seder, there is an exhortation: "And you shall tell your child, *vehigadta levinkha*…" Compiled over a period of time, the text comprises a motley collection of excerpts from the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and midrash.

The story that the haggadah presents, in picaresque fashion, is essentially a concise history of the Jewish people. Beginning with the time when "our Fathers were idol worshippers," it ends with the song *Dayeinu*, a triumphant record of miraculous survival. The final item in this recitation is the building of the First Temple.

There follows a striking injunction. In every single generation, it is a person's duty to perceive him or herself as though he or she had come out of Egypt. "And you shall tell your offspring… 'This is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:18). For it is not only our fathers whom the Holy One blessed is He redeemed, but we were also redeemed with them."

The passage of time is eliminated. Past and present blend, so much so that the penultimate verse of this chronicle of events appears, *mutatis mutandis*, wholly appropriate to our own times: "And God brought us out of there, so that He might bring us in to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers (Deuteronomy 6:23)."

Is it not therefore incumbent upon us to bring the list of God's wonders up to date? There is, after all, another injunction at the beginning of the seder: to "tell the story," with the rider that the more one dwells on the story, the more praiseworthy the telling becomes.

We, in our times, must continue the story, citing the events of recent history in which, as in every generation, there were "those who sought to destroy us."

Tell of the Holocaust, in which six million Jews perished and entire Jewish communities in Europe and elsewhere were wiped out.

Tell of the War of Independence in 1947-48, in which a tiny community of 600,000 Jews resisted the onslaught of neighboring countries to establish the State of Israel—at the cost of 6,000 lives.

Tell of the Six-Day War of 1967, when the Israel Defense Forces not only withstood a similar attack but also liberated East Jerusalem, enabling Jews once more to worship at the Western Wall.

Tell of 1973, when a dastardly surprise attack on the holiest day of the Jewish year led to a long conflict that cost Israel too many lives, yet ultimately led to peace with neighboring Egypt.

There may well be people at the seder table who experienced, or learned about, other murderous attacks. My mother and grandmother, both born in Galicia, used to tell us of the pogroms in Eastern Europe before the First World War, of how Jews left their doors open on the seder night, to prove they were not murdering Christian children in order to drink their blood.

And I recall the miserable seder night of 1934, when my father had already fled Nazi Germany while my mother, her mother, my brother and I still remained behind, not knowing if and when we might be permitted to join him.

But, like all Jewish women of my generation, I have another story to tell: the story of women's liberation, the revolution that began in the 1970s, which resulted from women's acquisition of Jewish literacy and the inspiration of second-wave feminism, first in the US, then in Israel, and finally throughout Jewish communities around the world.

Jewish feminism often found expression in the celebration of a separate women's seder complete with its own haggadah. It chronicled the exclusion of women from Jewish ritual and reinstated women into the story of enslavement and the Exodus, citing the bravery of the midwives, the faith of Yocheved, the mother of Moses, and the ingenuity of his sister, Miriam. It exalted Miriam as the leader of the Israelite women and initiated a new custom, Miriam's Cup, with an accompanying prayer to the Shekhinah to pour faith and love on the gentiles who, throughout the ages, saved Jews from persecution and death.

From this stage of "separate but equal," women have now found their rightful place at the regular seder table. No longer limited to being the providers of food and washers of dishes, today women can wholeheartedly say, "Once we were slaves; today we are free."

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There is an additional element in the seder night that can lead to the creation of more family lore. It is the invitation to "let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are needy come and partake of the Pesaḥ offering." The seder night is one on which families congregate, but it is also a time when Jews everywhere open their doors to those who have nowhere to celebrate. Such occasions of hospitality also become subjects of reminiscence.

In 1941, Jews in the East End of London celebrated a makeshift seder in a public air-raid shelter, while overhead German bombs obliterated their homes.

In that same year, the Jews who remained in the Warsaw Ghetto added to the haggadah a prayer asking God to forgive them for being unable to fulfill all the commandments relating to the festival, and promising to revert to the custom if they survived. Tragically, few lived to fulfill that promise.

Each year, my father used to relate how, as a prisoner of war in Russia in 1919, he succeeded in rounding up the necessary ingredients to bake matzah and boil eggs for a makeshift seder for his fellow Jews.

In 1944, while we were evacuated from London to a small village in a "safe" part of England, my father undertook to organize hospitality for Jewish soldiers posted nearby. Finding himself with nearly thirty men who were still without hosts, he invited all of them to our totally inadequate home. My mother took it all in her stride, as she did two years later, when my father returned from Warsaw, where he had attended the first anniversary of the Ghetto uprising. He unexpectedly brought home with him two distinguished writers and a noted singer, all of whom had been unable to return to their respective countries—Israel and the United States—in time for the seder.

I tell these stories time and time again to my children, grandchildren, and their children to inculcate in them the essential Jewish values and observances.

So long as the Jewish people exists, so long as Jews gather—no matter what the circumstances—to mark the Exodus from slavery, the telling can, must, and will continue.

Each generation has its own chapter to add to the chronicle of God's wonders, and it is incumbent upon us to do so, for "the more one dwells on the story…the more praise one deserves."

Maggid

The First Passover Story

AVIVAH GOTTLIEB ZORNBERG

The Exodus, according to a profound midrashic tradition, is best understood as the release from a constricted world of the soul: in Hebrew, Egypt is *mitzrayim,* which evokes *meitzarim*, narrow places, straits from which one cannot at first even cry to God.

Passover celebrates such a release; but the exodus from Egypt—*yetziat mitzrayim*—takes place in *Egypt*. At the seder table, we thank God for taking us out from slavery to freedom, from misery to joy, from mourning to celebration, from deep darkness to great light, and from bondage to redemption. This kind of release, we say, requires a new song. The birth begins in and through contraction. The first matzah is eaten under house arrest, in Egypt. What characterizes the moment of redemption?

Even in Egypt, among all the many calamities of slavery, there are moments of celebration. But these moments have an excessive, frenetic quality. Six births at a time—or is it twelve, or six hundred thousand?[1] — the raucous cries of a baby in a brick,[2] the emergence of a free nation of 600,000 families into a wilderness where all adults will die…What does it mean to celebrate when each birth is a dark reminder of before and after?

Perhaps Egypt represents not simply death but a disturbing surplus animation, a sense of being rigid with energy. Egyptomania, the Egyptian sickness,[3] then, would be the experience of being *undead*, neither alive nor

1 Tanhuma Pekudei 9.

2 Moses is placed in a caulked and upholstered box that from the outside must look like a brick—the material of slavery.

3 See Exodus 15:26.

properly dead.[4] And *yetziat mitzrayim*—the Exodus, the birth from such a place—would have to be a genuinely enlivening experience. Can such a moment of shocking release be found in the biblical narrative?

I'd like to suggest that the word *ḥipazon*—panic haste—goes some way towards evoking this sense of explosive spontaneity. "You shall eat it [the paschal offering] in haste" (Exodus 13:11); "in haste you left the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 16:5). Birth, or redemption, occurs as a pure event—s*omething else*, that arises incomprehensibly from a world complete in itself, surprising both redeemer and redeemed. The French philosopher, Alain Badiou, gives the example of Haydn's emergence from within a situation governed by the baroque style. With Haydn came the classical style. But "what this event was to authorize in terms of musical configurations was not comprehensible from within the plenitude achieved by the baroque style; it really was a matter of *something else*."[5] In a moment, a complex series of subtle interactions comes together and the child is born. Crying and laughing, a nation comes prematurely to life.[6] At this moment, there can be no narrative, no celebration. The aftershock of release still reverberates. Later, there will be stories, versions of the event.

Looking for the history of such moments of paroxysm, we remember the laughter in which Abraham and Sarah gave birth to their son Isaac. Both father and mother of this miracle child laugh when told of his imminent birth. Abraham "fell on his face and he laughed, saying to himself, 'Can a child be born be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?'" (Genesis 17:17). Sarah is in her tent, listening to the conversation between her husband and the mysterious "man:"

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4 See Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 19, 64.

5 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York and London: Verso, 2012), 68.

6 See *Song of Songs Rabbah* 2:19 on the words, "The voice of my beloved, here he comes, leaping over the mountains…" In his desire to redeem, God pays no heed to calendar-time,

Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have pleasure—with my husband so old?" Then God said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I really bear a child, old as I am?' Is anything too wondrous for God? I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was frightened. But he replied, "But you did laugh." (Genesis 18:11-15)

Sarah, within herself, is preoccupied by absence, loss, the lack of pleasure. She is strangely animated in her inner accounting of the failure of the life-force. And she laughs; out of her "undeadness," her state of uncanny surplus animation, something explodes. Is this a skeptical laugh, as some have suggested? The man/angel then interrogates her laughter, affirming that nothing is too wondrous for God—or perhaps that nothing is hidden from God, who sees her through and through. In fear, she denies, "No, I did not laugh." And he re-affirms, "No, but you did laugh." This cryptic scene, ending with the man/angel's apparent reproof of Sarah's laughter, leaves the reader baffled at his insistence—an almost comic verbal tussle between him and Sarah—and at the sudden ending of the story.

According to midrashic tradition, this moment takes place on Passover, and the birth of Isaac will happen on Passover—"the time of new life," *ka-et ḥayah*.[7] If Passover is to be the time of new life, then perhaps laughter is essential. Sarah's laugh, a different midrash suggests, celebrates a new fact—she has suddenly gotten her period: "Now that I am withered, *I have become menstrual!*"[8] Suddenly, her body opens up. She laughs—not skeptically, not forgetting her history of long dry seasons—but in baffled joy, out of a complex sense that "this is incredible."

7 See Rashi to Genesis 18:10

8 See Rashi to Genesis 18:12; and B. Baba Metzia 87a.

Or perhaps the very idea of such rejuvenation—its absurdity within the closed system of her body and Abraham's—suddenly releases her into the spasm of laughter, which means overflow, excess;[9] and the blood begins to flow. She has *cracked up*, and at first she is afraid, ashamed. But the man-angel insists, 'No, you really did laugh!' The words are left hanging in the air, insisting that Sarah own her laughter and the rupture it has made.

This, then, is the first Passover story: a barren body and the shocking moment of transformation that triggers laughter and is triggered by it. Did she feel her body opening and laugh in incredulous joy? Or did her spontaneous laugh at the very idea of a child break her open and place her suddenly in the very midst of life?

All Passover stories celebrate an awakening to unimagined life, a personal paroxysm of redemption within the calamities of a life: "In every generation, a person should *see himself* as though he had left Egypt" (B. Pesaḥim 116b). One is obliged to see oneself, whenever one lives, as having experienced exodus.

But the event of redemption would not have been comprehensible as it was happening. Leaving Egypt in *ḥipazon*, eating the paschal sacrifice in *ḥipazon*, has the power—like Sarah's spasm of laughter—to break us open and transform a known reality. It is only afterwards that the event can be rounded out into a story. Only then can one see oneself, or—according to another tradition[10] —perhaps even *show oneself* as though one had left Egypt. Only now, and here, in the midst of life, can some fragment of the story be told. "Then our mouths shall be full of laughter" (Psalms 126:2).

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9 I am grateful to Adina Roth who pointed out that in the Quran, laughter and menstruation in Arabic are both indicated by the same root, *va-daḥikat*, which is analogous to *tzaḥak*, and which signifies excess, overflow.

10 The Sephardi haggadah, following Rambam, has this version.

Maggid

From Barukh Ha-Makom to the Four Children

NEHEMIA POLEN

Nestled between two major sections of the haggadah is a short and rather puzzling benediction:

> *Barukh ha-makom, barukh hu;*
> *Barukh she-natan torah le-amo yisrael, barukh hu.*
> *Blessed be God [literally, the Place], blessed be He;*
> *Blessed be the One who gave Torah to the people Israel, blessed be the One.*

The benediction is followed by one of the most commented-upon passages in the haggadah, the Four Children. But what is the significance of the brief benediction inserted at this point?

I turn to the words of Ritva (Rabbi Yom Tov ben Abraham of Seville; d. 1330):

> *Since the haggadah's author needed to put into exegetical play* (lidrosh) *four Torah verses, each one having a different context, to be applied to the matter of four children, that is why the haggadist introduces this section by blessing God for having given us a complete Torah* (torah shelemah).

Ritva's brief comment displays a profound understanding of midrashic method and its underlying assumptions. The Four Children section of the haggadah goes well beyond the rather straightforward interpretive techniques of simple midrash. In this section, we find a complex four-part mini-drama constructed by assembling four verses that do not necessarily all relate to Passover. In the biblical context, the verses do not suggest an obvious typology of childhood personalities, nor do the parental responses match those responses found in the haggadah. Furthermore—as Ritva observes—the biblical settings differ from the expansive discussion in the Passover seder.

To be specific: The context of the verse assigned to the *ḥakham*—the learned child—is not the Passover ritual at all, but rather the entire set of commandments. The verse states: "When your child asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?'" (Deuteronomy 6:20). For the so-called wicked child, the question is indeed drawn from the Passover context, concerned with the nature of the paschal sacrifice: "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?'" (Exodus 12:26). But the parent's response (verse 27) is to recount God's salvific beneficence to the Israelites in sparing their firstborn. This is markedly different from the haggadah's response of sharp rebuke ("set his teeth on edge"). The question of the *tam*, the so-called "simple child," is drawn from this verse: "So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'" (Exodus 13:14). The context that triggers the question is not the Passover sacrifice but the commandment to redeem the firstborn. Finally, for the child "who does not know how to ask a question," the answer is found in the context of the Passover—more precisely the Festival of Matzot: "And you shall tell your child in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt'" (Exodus 13:14). Here, however, the Torah gives no indication that the child being addressed is lacking in any way in intellectual capacity. The label "not knowing how to ask a question" is attributed to the child by the haggadah.

In short, the haggadist has taken four disparate verses and formed an innovative structure that differentiates voices, perspectives, queries, and responses, and then juxtaposes them in a highly creative manner. Such an erudite and deft midrashic construction displays creative confidence, a thorough familiarity with the texts of the Torah as well as the daring and dexterity to combine them in ways previously unseen. As Ritva says, this activity calls for a fresh blessing on the Torah—one that goes beyond mere study of received text and that reflects mastery, boldness, and utter assurance.

Ritva's phrase "*torah shelemah*"—complete Torah—deserves further discussion. I believe that he is referring to the multi-vocal, multi-perspectival character of the received Torah, the one we see in presentational moments such as *hagbahat ha-torah,* the lifting up of the Torah in synagogue (either before or after the public reading, depending on local custom). *Hagbahah* is not simply a functional act associated with unrolling or tying up the parchment of the scroll; it is a presentational act—a ritual moment of displaying the Torah whole, so that the community may gaze, absorb the sacred rays, and declare *"Vezot ha-torah"*—This is the Torah, in Torah's glorious entirety, *shelemah*. The declaration is meaningful precisely because the composite nature of the scroll is open for all to behold—in the individual parchment panels held together by stitching and by the open spaces *(petuḥot u-setumot)* that serve a function comparable to our paragraph markers. This display of the Torah scroll represents the "complete *(shelemah)* Torah"; it provides a visual for the pastiche work that midrash and aggadah do with the biblical verses and commentary.

The haggadah's Four Children exposition seizes happily—one is tempted to say almost gleefully—on the diversity of voices, so as to construct a pedagogy of diverse questions and responses, based on a classification scheme that categorizes children by disposition, ability, and attitude toward tradition. It should not escape notice that the haggadah provides an ethical frame for telling the Passover story, one that modulates the plain reading of the biblical verses in Exodus. The Four Children passage promotes pedagogy as central to Passover in general, and the seder night specifically. In all, the haggadah is a remarkable exemplar of rabbinic midrash in its most vivid and robust form. It demonstrates a model of polyphony, of the juxtaposition of interconnected yet unmerged voices, without attempting a harmonization or enforcing an erasure of diversity. Just as the blessing leading into this section acknowledges God, the "One Who Spoke." four times as "blessed" *(barukh)*, so too we are invited into the vitality and blessing of interpreting the "spoken word" of God in the Torah through midrashic play on the Four Children.

Maggid

Go and Learn

JOE REIMER

> *"My father was a wandering Aramean* (arami oved avi)*" (Deuteronomy 26:5): Go and learn what Laban the Aramean wanted to do to our father Jacob. Pharaoh only wanted to kill the young boys, but Laban wanted to uproot the whole.*

In the midst of the Maggid, when seder participants have begun to tell the story of the Exodus, we find this unexpected diversion. Suddenly, the haggadah says, "You think your job tonight is to tell that familiar story about the struggle of the Hebrews to gain freedom from Pharaoh, but have you considered how much worse were the actions of Laban than those of Pharaoh?" No sooner do we absorb that frightening possibility than the haggadah slips back to "But he [Jacob] went down to Egypt." What happened to Laban?

Laban enters the Maggid through a midrashic misreading of *"arami oved avi."* Most commentators read these words as meaning "My father was a wandering Aramean"—a reference to Abraham. This midrash, however, reads the verb *"oved"* not as wandering, but as "intent to destroy." Since Laban is known in Genesis as an Aramean, he becomes the subject of the phrase that the midrash reads to mean "Laban the Aramean sought to destroy my father." Rabbi Jonathan Sacks warns that this could not be the plain sense of the text, for "there is no clear evidence in the Torah that Laban did try to destroy Jacob."[1] Perhaps what the midrash is asking us to imagine is a subtle and more disturbing danger posed by Laban. What might that be?

We receive a hint from R. Menachem Mendl of Rimanov: "The name Laban means 'white.' Laban had a tendency to whitewash everything. On the outside it looked good. On the inside it was rotten."[2] We are in

1 Jonathan Sacks, *Haggadah* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 24.

2 Eliyahu Touger, *The Chassidic Haggadah* (New York: Moznaim Press, 1988), 54.

the realm of appearances and deception. What at first looks one way ("white") ends up being entirely different ("rotten").

When we look back to Genesis 31, we immediately notice how central deception is to Laban's narrative. The Torah describes Jacob's fleeing Laban's house as "Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean in not telling him he was fleeing" (Genesis 31:20). In turn, when Laban chases after the fleeing Jacob, his first complaint focuses on being deceived.

> *What have you done, deceiving me, and driving my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee in stealth and deceive me and not tell me? (Genesis 31:26-27)*

Laban is the aggrieved father whose son-in-law secretly stole off in the middle of the night without giving him the chance to say goodbye. If only he had known that Jacob was leaving, he would have sent him off "with festive song, with timbrel and lyre" (Genesis 31: 27). But is this correct?

The man gives himself away. Laban is hardly the one to arrange a going-away party. Yet at the end of his opening speech, Laban throws an unexpected punch.

> *And so you had to go because you longed so much for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods? (Genesis 31:30)*

Jacob is caught up short by this charge. He does not know what we readers know, that "Rachel stole the household gods *(terafim)* that were her father's" (Genesis 31:19). So he boldly announces, "With whomever you find your gods, that person shall not live" (Genesis 31:32). Laban searches for the gods that Rachel has hidden, does not find them, and has to leave with no rescued property or gods to show for his trouble.

At first appearance, this confrontation with Laban ends well for Jacob's family, who then continue on their way back to the land. But between the lines something terrible has happened. As Robert Alter comments, this incident and Jacob's response to Laban "foreshadow her [Rachel's] premature death in childbirth" (Genesis 31:19).[3] Rashi is more

3 Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: Norton 1996), 171.

emphatic: "Because of his [Jacob's] curse, Rachel died on the way."[4] What is it in the encounter with Laban that ends up with Rachel's dying? How did Jacob and Rachel get caught in this trap?

These questions lead us back to Rachel's actions. When Laban went to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's "household idols *(terafim)*" (Genesis 31:19). No motive is assigned. No words are spoken. As soon as the act is done, the family secretly flees. We do not know why Rachel has done this or why she has not told anyone else. But we do know this: Rachel stole these idols that belonged to her father at the penultimate moment before fleeing her father's house. Might this theft have been her way of holding on to her father and the gods of his household? Does Rachel identify with Laban to a greater extent than we may have previously noted?

There is one final scene with Rachel alone with her father. He is searching for his gods, and she has hidden them "in the camel cushion and sat on them," claiming that "the way of women is upon me" (Genesis 31:34). Many have noted the comic association of these gods with her menstrual blood, but few have noted the intimacy of the scene. Rachel has set this up so her father visits her alone in her tent where she will be able to carry out a final deception on him. We realize how thoroughly Rachel is acting here as Laban's daughter, besting him at his own game. What she fails to realize is that when you play by Laban's rules, the costs can be horrific. How does Laban destroy our father Jacob? By having shaped his daughter Rachel in his image.

We are reminded of Laban's world at this point in the seder to highlight the contrast between Laban and Pharaoh. For all his many faults, Pharaoh has one good trait. He lets you know exactly where he stands. Pharaoh openly takes his oppressive stance and never wavers. At the seder that might not seem like much of a virtue, but the midrash drops this hint about Laban to remind us that where deception rules, the results can "uproot the whole."

4 See Rashi on Genesis 35:19

Raḥtzah

JANE L. KANAREK

"And the Lord took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great awe, and with signs and with wonders." (Deuteronomy 26:8)

And the Lord took us out of Egypt. This refers to washing *(raḥtzah)*, which is the beginning of redemption. As it says, "And the daughter of Pharaoh went down to wash *(liṛḥotz)* in the Nile" (Exodus 2:5).

With a strong hand *(yad ḥazakah).* This refers to the daughter of Pharaoh, who sent out her hand to those in need, as it is said, "And her hand *(ve-yadehah)* is sent out to the needy" (Proverbs 31:20).

With an outstretched arm. This refers to the daughter of Pharaoh who extended her arm many cubits *(amot)* to reach the basket in the reeds, as it says, "And she sent out her arm *(amatah)*" (Exodus 2:5).[1]

And with great awe. This refers to the revelation of the Divine Presence to the daughter of Pharaoh, who knew the child was a Hebrew, as it says, "And she opened [the basket] and saw It, the child *(va-tirehu et ha-yeled)*" (Exodus 2:6).[2] Why does it say, "She saw It *(va-tirehu)*" and "the boy *(ha-yeled)*?" Because at that moment she saw both the Holy Blessed One and the child.

And with signs *(otot).* This refers to prophecy, that the daughter of Pharaoh prophesied that this boy and no more would be cast into the water,[3] as it says, "And this will be the sign *(ha-ot)* for you" (Exodus 3:12).

And with wonders *(mofetim).* This refers to compassion, that the daughter of Pharaoh returned the child to his mother for nursing, as it is said, "Take this child from me and nurse it for me" (Exodus 2:9). And it is said, "I have become as a wonder *(ke-mofet)* for many, since You are my mighty refuge" (Psalms 71:7).

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1 B. Sotah 12b; Rashi to Exodus 2:5.

2 B. Sotah 12b.

3 B. Sotah 12b.

Motzi Matzah

EBN LEADER

We say two blessings before eating matzah. We bless the One who brings forth bread from the earth *(ha-motzi)* and we bless the One who has given us the practice of eating matzah. The former is the blessing we say upon eating bread or matzah all year around, while the latter is unique to this Passover ritual. It is important to note that by the time we reach the blessing over bread, the bread—or in this case, the matzah—has already been broken. Half of the middle matzah has been hidden away to be eaten later. We will eat only the smaller part now.

Beginning a festive meal with broken bread creates a striking contrast to Shabbat and every other holiday, when the traditional practice is to make sure to say the blessing over whole loaves. Putting two whole loaves on the table expresses a sense of bounty and abundance: Shabbat is the day we step away from the rush of daily life in order to acknowledge that we have all we need, indeed, that we have more than we need. But the brokenness, as the Talmud notes, is part of what identifies matzah as "bread of affliction" or, as the Talmud reads it, of poverty. We eat "like a poor person, who eats only part of their bread" (B. Pesaḥim 115b). Rashi even proposes that the blessing on eating matzah is directed only towards this broken piece, while the blessing over bread is directed to the remaining two whole matzot as it would be on any other holiday. Common practice, however, avoids the need to make this distinction by holding both the broken and the whole matzah together while saying both blessings. Some people even make sure to eat from both the whole and the broken matzah simultaneously.

Our practice has thus become an embodiment of the rabbinic teaching that "the tablets and the fragments of the tablets were put in the Ark of the Covenant" (B. Menaḥot 99a). Both the tablets that Moshe shattered when he witnessed the Golden Calf and the second whole set of tablets

he brought down as a sign of God's forgiveness find their place in the Ark. As we hold the broken and the whole pieces together in our hands on Passover night and then take them into our body, we do well to reflect on the spiritual challenge posed by holding them both together. Putting the broken tablets in the Ark implies that our shortcomings, our failures, and our worst moments are no less central to our relationship with God than our best moments. Do we dare, do we even know how to bring that kind of fullness into a relationship, human or divine?

And what does it mean to eat the bread of a poor person, always worried about what is left for tomorrow, while at the same time eating the bread of satisfaction and abundance? Can I simultaneously acknowledge the environmental devastation, the poverty, the war, the oppression, and the abundance, the gift of life and opportunity, and the beauty of the moment? Can I acknowledge that I am simultaneously my best and my worst, part of the problem and part of the solution? Might that be one of the meanings of freedom that this ritual is meant to teach? And now that we have joined the blessings of *ha-motzi* and matzah, will the memory of the brokenness of the matzah linger every time we say *ha-motzi*?

Maror

Miriam's Passing

TAMAR BIALA

"Oh, let him kiss me (yishakeni) *with the kisses of his mouth…"*
(Song of Songs 1:2)

The Holy Blessed One said: Their desire (meshukayuton) *is for me; and the Rabbis say: These ones' souls will be taken with a kiss. Rabbi Azariah said: We found that Aaron's soul was taken by none other than a kiss, as is written: "And Aaron the priest went up on Mount Hor* ***at God's word*** (al-pi hashem, *lit. 'by God's mouth'), and died* ***there****" (Numbers 33:38). And from where do we know as regards Moses' soul? As is written: "And* ***there*** *died Moses, the servant of God,* ***at God's word*** *(*al-pi hashem, *lit. 'by God's mouth')" (Deuteronomy 34:5). And from where do we know as regards Miriam? Since it is written: 'And Miriam died* ***there'*** *(Numbers 20:1). Just as the* ***"there"*** *later on [with Aaron and Moses] is by God's mouth, so too here, but it is indecent to spell it out. (Song of Songs Rabbah 1:5).*

From the day that Miriam returned to the encampment, God's statement about her "would she not be disgraced" (Numbers 12:14) was fulfilled, and she hid in the tent and no longer revealed herself to the Children of Israel. Like the moon, which, too, sought to reign as an equal, and was told "Go and diminish yourself," she would emerge only at the time when darkness would descend, and hurry to that well which the Holy Blessed One had left them, which tumbled along with them on their journeys.

Miriam sat alone, as the people were scared of her leprosy, lest it return, and she herself waited for that leprosy to come and destroy her face and take her soul.

And what would she do every night at the time that she would come to the well? She would lean down to those very same waters, to see if the delicate splendor of her face had dimmed. She wanted to know if the skin pendant on it had been devoured, and her eyes sunk again in their graves. When at that time she would see that the light still flowed from her countenance, that she had asked for forgiveness and been forgiven—she wept for her face, which nobody any longer ever saw or kissed, not her beloved, not her brothers, not her friends.

One night, at the time she usually went to the well to check her appearance, the full moon that hung above her appeared to her in the water. Her tears dripped into the well, and the reflections of her face and of the moon mixed one with the other.

As she cried, the waters began to recede. She wanted to know what they were up to, and she doubled over the mouth of the well and her heart sank, as her image was no longer visible in the water. She strained her eyes into the waters and the moon rose in them again in all her fullness. The moon trembled in the waters, and her visage hid and revealed itself and seemed like that of her mother, Yocheved.

Miriam's heart rose up, as the longings imprisoned in her from the day that her mother had died broke the lock of her heart and flooded her. She wanted to look at her more, sank her head into the well until she felt a mouth kissing her on her lips.

Her empty pitcher slipped to the ground and shattered.

At first light, the one called the morning star, the daughters of Israel came to fill their pitchers at that same well and found it dry. They said, let's call our sister Miriam to raise the waters, since this well has been given to us in our wanderings only because of her.

They said, "Who will go into that tent?" since they were scared to.

Zipporah said: "I will, since after all this disease infected her because she tried to bring my husband back to me." She found her lying in her bed, draped in a gentle light, her eyes closed, and her lips pursed like a baby's.

She said, "We will return to you, my sister."

She exited and told them.

Some say that as they were preparing her body for burial, they wailed over her, "'Who is she that shines through like the dawn, beautiful as the moon?'" (Song of Songs 6:10). And some say they wailed "'Oh, let him kiss me *(yishakeni)* with the kisses of his mouth!'" (Song of Songs 1:2).

**Translated into English by Yehudah Mirsky. This piece was originally written in Hebrew as "Midrash Petirat Miriam", and published in* Dirshuni: Midreshei Nashim*, eds. Tamar Biala and Nehama Weingarten Mintz (Yedioth Ahronoth and the Jewish Agency 2009).*

Korekh

SHOSHANA MEIRA FRIEDMAN

For us it was never enough to be people of the book. We are also people of body, of flesh and tongue, of stomach and loins. We are a people who love our scripture so much that we eat it. Whole verses written in meat and vegetables, whole chapters written in bread—braided, flat, covered, hidden. Sermons laid out on plates and spooned into bowls. Some of it optional, much of it commanded.

To eat the *korekh* sandwich is to ingest the truth that the world is beautiful but it is not safe.[1]

It is beautiful: for us, for the lamb, for the creatures who scurry in the plowed fields of wheat and between the garden rows of leafy greens, for the insects who relish the dark hug of soil around the gnarled roots.

And it is not safe—not for us, or for the lamb, or for the lamb's mother. Not for creatures who flee the shadow of wings or seek in vain for water, not for the insects who feel the tug of the beak or the crushing weight of poison.

The world is beautiful but it is not safe.

I have railed to God against this truth, filled the cracks in my broken heart with wails like a river roaring. I have flailed and jabbed at the Holy One of Blessing, looking for a foothold, a chance to claw us all out of this deal, this existence where mountains shimmer and music soars, where the tiniest flower opens in season. And where children grow sick and hungry, where animals languish, where sea levels rise and fires rage, where suffering still occurs, and *en masse*.

1 Thank you to my teacher, Rabbi Allan Lehmann, for articulating this wording to me years ago.

Then every year, I sit at a table and bring this terrible truth to my plate: the bread of freedom that is also the bread of want. The herb that purges my sinuses and also burns my eyes. The mixture like mortar that also tastes of spring.

And the missing lamb.

"They will eat the Passover lamb on *matzot* and bitter herbs," God tells Moses (Numbers 9:11).

I look at my plate: Here is the matzah, and here the bitter herb, but where is the lamb for the offering?[2]

My son reaches for his water. My sister nurses her new spring baby. My parents graze each other's arms over the greens. Like a shepherd, my husband watches over us at the table as he brings another bowl of haroset.

The world is beautiful but it is not safe.

Our scrolls written on their skin, our months and years heralded by blowing their horns—we pretend otherwise, and yet are never far from the sweat and muzzle of the herd. I take a bite, and as the sting burns like a knife in my throat, I run my hands over my body and could swear I feel the soft grease of wool, the weight of tiny hooves, the hot fluttering heart, longing for the sun.

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2 See Genesis 22:7.

Shulḥan Orekh

GAIL TWERSKY REIMER

Some of my favorite childhood memories are of setting our seder table. In addition to laying out the embroidered damask tablecloth with its matching napkins, and the handsome fine china, freshly polished silverware, and exquisite crystal wine glasses—all of which, after the two seders, would be stored away till the following year—there was the classic seder plate with its special ceremonial foods, the ornate Elijah's cup, the bowls of salt water, and an assortment of other silver and crystal items, each with its special place on our table. As soon as guests arrived, before any words had been spoken, they understood that this night was different from all other nights. The set table served as an overture to the forthcoming evening's symphony.

My table looks a good deal like my mother's, though over the years some new items have enlarged the story our table tells. Among these are a set of dangling mirrors that we added some two decades ago, shortly after Avivah Zornberg introduced us to the tale of the mirrors of the women in Midrash Tanḥuma Pekudei 9. Alongside many items on the table recalling the bitterness of slavery, the mirrors joined Miriam's cup in recalling the agency of the women of the Exodus as well as their faith in a future.

The midrash describes how, as Pharaoh's decrees became increasingly harsher leading the Israelite men to despair, the women used their mirrors to ignite in their husbands both passion and hope. "The women would take mirrors and look into them with their husbands, and she would say, 'I am more comely than you,' and he would say, 'I am more comely than you.' As a result they would accustom themselves to desire and they were fruitful and multiplied."[1]

1 Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture: Reflections on Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 2001), 57-80.

These same mirrors, the midrash tell us, would later be contributed by the women for the construction of the laver, the basin in the Tabernacle in which the priests had to sanctify themselves before making their offerings on the Tabernacle's altar or table (Exodus 38:8). [2]

The connection of the women's mirrors with the Tabernacle extends the symbolic meaning of our dangling mirrors to the set table upon which they sit, creating a link between our seder table and the Tabernacle. A central furnishing in the Tabernacle, second only to the ark in holiness, is the set table — "bring in the table *(shulḥan)* and lay out its due setting *(ve-arakhta et erko)*" (Exodus 40:4). This "due setting" includes a special blue cloth, a variety of dishes (bowls, ladles, jars, and jugs), all of pure gold, and twelve freshly baked loaves of bread known as the "bread of the (Divine) Presence" or "showbread *(leḥem panim)*" (Exodus 25:30). Aaron and his sons would place the loaves of unleavened bread (akin to matzah) on the sacred table, where they would sit in the presence of God for the whole week. On the Sabbath, they would eat the loaves they had laid out for God the week before, and replace them with newly baked loaves (Leviticus 24:6-9). Each Sabbath, God's table became a shared table—the food offered to God, a shared meal.

The kind of closeness between humans and the Divine that the Tabernacle in general is intended to foster, and that the shared set table within it symbolically represents, is at the heart of Psalm 23, where we once again find the phrase "*shulḥan orekh*". The psalmist, confident of God's presence and protection, imagines himself seated in God's house, at a set table overflowing with food and drink. "You spread a table for me—*ta'arokh lefanai shulḥan*" (Psalms 23:5). The pronouns—You, me—bespeak a personal relationship, while also pointing to a crucial

2 See Tanḥuma Pekudei 9, discussed by Zornberg (above). See also Rachel Adelman, "A Copper Laver Made from Women's Mirrors", https://thetorah.com/a-copper-laver-made-from-womens-mirrors/

difference between this set table and the one in the Tabernacle: rather than priests setting the table for God, the table in Psalm 23 is set by God for the psalmist.[3]

Shulḥan Orekh, the *siman* (signpost) for the seder meal, recalls these two spaces in which God's presence resides and to which we are welcomed as God's guests. Many of us expend a good deal of time and effort planning and preparing the seder meal. Yet all too often the meal, in spite of its inclusion in the *simanim*, is experienced as a break or rest from the evening's ritual.

A poignant reminder that, far from being a break, the meal is an integral part of the ritual, is the phrase chosen to mark the meal: *"shulḥan orekh."* In addition to underscoring the sanctity of the meal, the phrase suggestively foregrounds the set table upon which the meal is served and around which all, or most, of the seder ritual takes place. A central rather than peripheral component of the evening's ritual, the table functions as the stage on which the drama of the Exodus is played out. Often the first thing seder participants see, the set table instantly communicates the spiritual journey ahead. Like Maggid, which tells the story of that journey, the set table invites expansiveness. On a night of questions, thoughtfully chosen objects placed on the table alongside more familiar ones can prompt new questions. On a night of storytelling, they can add layers of meaning. And on a night in which we are enjoined to see ourselves as coming out of Egypt, they suggest new ways of connecting to the Exodus.

We look to add to the table objects that carry memories and stories, that point towards hidden aspects of the Exodus story, and that allow us to tell a more expansive story—"And everyone who enlarges upon the telling of the Exodus story is praised—*vekhol ha-marbeh lesaper bi-yetziat mitzrayim harei zeh meshubaḥ*." We choose the objects with care, understanding that how we decorate is integral to how we celebrate.

3 For a fuller discussion of the psalm see Edward Feld, *Joy, Despair and Hope: Reading Psalms* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 63-70.

Tzafun

RACHEL ADELMAN

Now we play hide-and-seek with the hidden half—that part of the matzah, cracked open and secreted away at the opening of our seder. This is the last stage of the feast, as the wise son is told: "One may not conclude the pesaḥ (sacrifice) with an afikoman *(eyn maftirin aḥar ha-pesaḥ afikoman)*" (M. Pesaḥim 10:8). The term "afikomen" derives from the Greek, meaning "dessert *(epikomon)*", perhaps an allusion to the drinking and carousing following the traditional Roman feast *(epikomion)*. In the Jewish feast we don't go out carousing but stay in, munching on that half matzah divvied up as "just desserts," symbolizing the paschal lamb. According to the dominant halakhic practice, the afikoman must be eaten by rabbinic midnight *(ḥatzot)*, so the search entails a sense of urgency, a panic haste *(ḥipazon)* reminiscent of the anxiety of the first Passover in Egypt. The Israelites stood inside their houses poised for flight, with loins girded, sandals on their feet, and staff in hand (Exodus 12:11). Instead, we upend couch pillows, grope behind curtains and picture frames, in search of the symbol of our freedom. The children or grandchildren then bargain for a gift in exchange for revealing the hiding place.

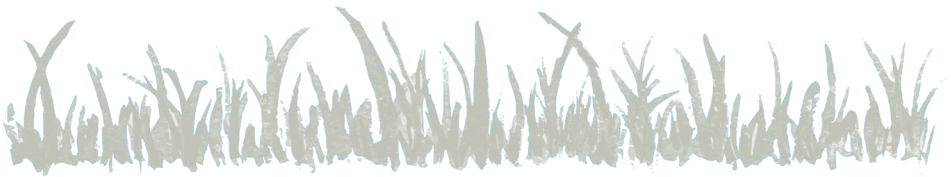
But what are we really engaged in when we play hide-and-seek at the conclusion of the seder? The narrative of our redemption is book-ended by hiding. The Hebrew verb "to hide" *(tz.p.n.)* nests within the word *tzafun*, and appears at the opening of the Exodus. Moses as an infant is the first to be hidden away, when his mother defies the decree to throw all the Hebrew male infants into the Nile: "…And when she saw that he was good, she hid him *(va-titzpeneihu)* for three months. And when she could no longer hide him *(hatzpino)*…" she made a box, sealed it with bitumen and pitch, placed the infant in the little ark, and sequestered him among the reeds at the banks of the river (Exodus 2:2-3). There, Pharaoh's daughter finds him, adopts him, and

raises him in the palace. Moses is the first Marrano ("secret Jew")—of Hebrew slave origins, raised as royalty in Egypt; both the prince and the pauper, he embodies a hybrid identity. Yet he never appears by name in the haggadah. Are we in search of the one who led us out of Egypt, strangely anonymous, invisible yet indelible (like lemon-ink) between the lines of the haggadah?

So let's turn to the closure of the Passover seder. It ends with singing; in some homes the Song of Songs is recited. The theme of hide-and-seek flits throughout the Song, as the two, the *dod* (the male lover) and the *ra'ayah* (the female lover) repeatedly pursue each other—ever elusive, ever desirous. "I sought him, but did not find him…" declaims the *ra'ayah* (Song of Songs 3:1); "Have you seen him? Have you seen the one I love?" she asks the guards (v. 3). Later, in what seems like a dream sequence, she pursues him through the night—"I sought him everywhere but could not find him. I called his name but he did not answer" (5:6)—until she encounters the guards again who beat her, bruise her, and strip off the shawl from her shoulders, those "watchmen of the walls" (v. 7). It is dangerous for a woman to pursue her lover, to go out at night in search of the one who has slipped away.

The rabbis read the Song of Songs as an allegory for the love between the Holy Blessed One and Israel—the *dod*, the male lover, representing the elusive God, and the *ra'ayah*, the female beloved, the collective embodiment of the Jewish people. We are constantly in search of God, run ragged, perhaps even beaten, as we grope through the exiles of the past two millennia and the darkest century in Jewish history. But perhaps God too is in search of us. Just as we want to be sought after, God is engaged in the game of desire, looking for us and looking to be sought after by us. Like a young stag, "he stands behind our wall, gazing through the window, peering through the lattice" (2:9). The Song of Songs ends with an adjuration: "Flee, my lover, swift as a gazelle or a young stag, to the hill of spices" (8:14). The chase must go on!

One of the most mysterious lines of the Song features the root imbedded in *tzafun*: "The mandrakes *(duda'im)* give forth their fragrance. At our openings are all the choice fruits, new and also old *(ḥadashim vegam yeshanim),* my beloved which I have hidden for you *(dodi tzafanti lakh)*" (Song of Songs 7:14). According to midrash, the Jewish people are the mandrakes *(duda'im)*, a play on the word "beloved ones" *(dodim)*, who give sweet fragrance (Song of Songs Rabbah 7:14.1). The choice fruit represents learning and good deeds—laid at the openings of our homes, our synagogue, and our houses of study. The fruits are both "new *(ḥadashim)*"—full of creative innovation, *ḥiddushim*, in new interpretations of Torah and practice—and "old *(yeshanim)*"—traditional, continuous with our ancestors and the sages. But for whom do we hide away or store up these precious fruits? It is for the *dod*, the lover—"At our openings are all the choice fruits…my beloved which I have hidden for you (*dodi tzafanti lakh)*." And there God crouches, where all the sweet things are hidden at the threshold of our being, both singular and collective. And there God beckons for us to seek, in the new and the old, between the lines of lemon-ink, the Hidden Face of the divine being.



Barekh

JORDAN BRAUNIG

Blessing beforehand is easy.
Praises spill out when the table is set,
bounty before us, still untouched.
Gratitude pours freely from hungry lips.

> Blessed is the Place where steaming
> matzoh balls await.
> Blessed is the Source of countless kugels.
> Blessed is the chicken and the egg,
> the tender stewed chicken with preserved lemons
> and the smoky slow-cooked huevos haminados
> and the Was/Is/Will Be that entwine the two.

Our collective instinct,
like some ancestral muscle memory,
compels us to thank before we take.

Afterwards, all bets are off.
It's not difficult to slink off sated;
to remove ourselves quickly from the matzoh crumbs,
the stray macaroon and the haroset-stained table;
to slip past Elijah when the door is opened
and
not look back.
To make like the sea
and split.
So long,
seder.

What greater service is there then
than letting go of this
newly found freedom,
our miraculous ability
to get up and go
and, instead,
to make the choice,
full-bellied,
to pick up
another glass
and give thanks
for that which
just was.

Hallel

SHAYNA RHODES

"To give honor to Your name—for Your kindness, for Your truth."
(Psalms 115:1)

We give honor to God's name for God's *ḥesed*, kindness. The Talmud teaches us that the Torah begins with kindness and ends with kindness. As Rabbi Simlai expounded: In the beginning of Genesis, God makes garments for Adam and Eve, and at the end of Deuteronomy God buries Moses (B. Sotah 14a). Rabbi Simlai's statement tells us that all of Torah is filled with God's *ḥesed*.

The psalmist, however, goes beyond *ḥesed* and states that we give praise for both God's kindness and truth. Why does he choose these two traits? We must look to the book of Genesis to see how they work as a unit. There, they come together as a hendiadys, a single idea expressed in two words. Jacob, on his deathbed, requests that his son Joseph deal with him in *ḥesed ve-emet* and not bury him in Egypt (Genesis 47:29). A midrash picks up on the language and asks: "Is there a *ḥesed* of falsehood *(sheker)*, that he says *ḥesed* and truth *(emet)*?" (Genesis Rabbah 96:5).

The pairing of these words must mean more. The verse speaks of a true *ḥesed*, a *ḥesed* that goes beyond the norm, a *ḥesed* for which one expects no compensation. When Miriam waits by the river and watches to see what will become of Moses, she exhibits an act of true *ḥesed*. On the eve of the redemption from Egypt, when all of Israel is busy fulfilling God's command by collecting gold and silver, Moses wanders around the city for three days and three nights searching for Joseph's burial site. Seraḥ bat Asher, in her endless acts of *ḥesed*, meets Moses and tells him that Pharaoh's astrologers, knowing of the Israelites' promise not to leave Egypt without Joseph's bones, placed his body in a fifteen-ton coffin and threw it into the river. Moses then stands on the bank, much as his

sister did decades earlier, and calls to Joseph. When the coffin miraculously rises to the surface, Moses emulates his adoptive mother, the daughter of Pharaoh. With the same *ḥesed ve-emet* with which she drew his basket in from the Nile, he draws the coffin from the water. He places it on his shoulder and carries it to freedom. For this act of true *ḥesed*, God proclaims, "I will personally see to your burial" (Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:7).

This act of God, attending to Moses' burial, in turn, shows all of us how to conduct our own lives. "Rabbi Hamma son of Rabbi Hanina asks: 'What is the meaning of the verse, "After the Lord your God you should walk?" (Deuteronomy 13:5). How can we walk after God? Isn't God a devouring fire? (Deuteronomy 4:24). Rather we should follow God's ways.'" We should look to God as a teacher and role model. Just as God buried Moses, so too we should bury the dead. (B. Sotah 14a). Just as God performs acts of *ḥesed ve-emet*, so should we.

I would go a step further. God, in the very act of teaching, has already demonstrated *ḥesed ve-emet*. The courage to teach does not come easily. As Parker Palmer writes, "The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able."[1] A good teacher goes far beyond any monetary compensation provided. The hours upon hours of preparation, the giving of one's soul cannot be compensated for with money. True compensation comes when the student has internalized the teaching and carries it forward. Unlike the Divine, however, human teachers are never given the privilege of witnessing the full effect of their words. The positive ripples in the universe that result from holy teaching are impossible to track. They are a *binyan adei ad*, an invisible, eternal structure that travels into the future. When a dedicated teacher teaches Genesis and Deuteronomy, she has taught all of Torah, so to speak, embodying a merismus of *ḥesed ve-emet* that knows no temporal or spatial boundaries.

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1 Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 11-12.

But it is not just the content of the teaching that is so powerful. It is the inspiration that moves the student on to heights of greater consciousness and understanding that is the real gift. In the *Sefat Emet* (the Torah commentary of Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter), he interprets the phrase "…And I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt…" (Exodus 6:6), to mean that God took the Israelites out from their willingness to endure the ways of Egypt. God brought about a shift in consciousness that allowed the Israelites to awaken, to recognize the environment they were in, to see slavery for what it was and to begin to imagine a new and better world. This enabled the children of Israel to cry out, taking the first step towards redemption.[2] Similarly, following God's lead, a teacher exhibiting *ḥesed ve-emet* gives her students a voice that they will use to teach their own redemptive Torah to others, a *binyan adei ad* echoing into the world without end.

God's *ḥesed* is for the world, God's *ḥesed* is forever: *ki le-olam ḥasdo* (Psalm 136:1-2).

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2 Judith Kates, "Cry of Redemption," in *Jewish Mysticism and the Spiritual Life,* eds. Lawrence Fine, Eitan Fishbane. and Or N. Rose (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011), 46-50.

Shefokh Ḥamatkha

LAWRENCE ROSENWALD

Shefokh ḥamatkha, "pour out your wrath," is an orphaned and thus intensely charged passage in the haggadah. It floats between Barekh and Hallel, and is assigned sometimes to the former and sometimes to the latter, belonging to neither in any evident way. The passage as spoken is separated from both sections by the opening of the door preceding it, and the closing of the door following it; it is, essentially, what we say when the door is open, not only as text but also as theater, in which actions matter as much as words. A door is opened, a glass is filled, words are spoken, sometimes words are sung, and the door is closed. The door, the glass, the speech, the song, the door.

What then are the words that we say? I mean the words themselves, not any words we might wish to substitute for them, since an important teaching of our tradition is always to look at the words as given, always to start there (wherever we may wish to go later), always to linger there longer than we might wish to.

The words are a curse, or a series of curses, beginning in striking symmetry, then strikingly breaking that symmetry, jarring our confident expectations:

> *Pour your wrath upon the nations that did not know you and upon the kingdoms that did not call upon your name! Since he consumed Jacob and they laid waste his habitation (Psalm 79:6-7). Pour your fury upon them and the fierceness of your anger shall reach them! (Psalm 69:25) You shall pursue them with anger and eradicate them from under the skies of the Lord (Lamentations 3:66).*

Imprecation and imprecation, reason and reason, imprecation and imprecation—and then we expect reason and reason but get, instead, imprecation and imprecation, as if the anger of the liturgist had broken the symmetries of the psalms being quoted. Hence, perhaps, the

turn to Lamentations for the last imprecation, which also allows the intensification of the verbs throughout, from "pouring" at the beginning to "reaching" in the middle to "eradicating" at the end. A curse both controlled and uncontrolled

We say all this with the door open. What does it mean to open a door, from without, from within? Why do we open our doors at this point, or at all? Tradition says that we open the door because this night is *leil shimurim*, the night of being watched over (as *shemurah matzah* is watched over); originally the door may have been open the whole night long. We are free and fearless to welcome those who come our way: pilgrims, Elijah and Miriam, refugees and wanderers (Elijah among them), the Messiah. The haggadah itself tells us as much: "Let all who are hungry come and eat," we say, and to let the hungry come and eat we have to open our doors and let them in.

Our history of being persecuted tells us that we also open a door to discover and unmask informers, enemies, conspirators, blood libelers lurking at our doors. The closed door lets them spy, keeps us from seeing that they are spying. We open the door in self-defense, not fearless but justly fearful.

If we move outside the text, we recognize that our history of seeking refuge teaches us that we are as often outside the door as inside it. It is often we who ask that the door be opened. "I lift my lamp beside the golden door," writes Emma Lazarus; this golden door must be, of course, not only illumined by the lamp but also opened by the hand to let us in, refugees as we were from pogroms and Nazis and poverty. Philip Halle's account of how 3,000 Huguenot inhabitants of Le Chambon helped 5,000 Jews fleeing the Nazis to get to safety begins with such a hand. Magda Trocmé was at home, heard a knock, and opened the outer door. She saw a woman covered in snow. The woman asked to enter. Trocmé responded, "Naturally, come in and come in." Let all who are in need, come and celebrate the festival of freedom.

What then is the relationship between the open door and the curse?

The easy way to align them is to understand the opening of the door chiefly as a strategy for dealing with enemies. We open the door, we discover our hidden enemies and we curse them; action and words are in concord.

A second way, not as easy though still not conceptually difficult, looks at when the various elements of the drama were assembled. The tradition of the open door came first, before there were spies. Then, later, spies and blood libelers appeared, and their deadly presence required us to reinterpret the door that had previously been open in welcome. Such an analysis frees us from the contradiction, each element emerging from the clear needs of its moment, however those needs oppose one another.

But do we want to be freed from the contradiction, to disentangle the elements the liturgist fused together? Writing of the Bible translation that he did with Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig commented that they were aware of Higher Criticism and the figure called "R", the final redactor of the biblical text, but that they themselves thought of "R" as standing for *Rabbenu*, our Teacher, "for whoever he was, and whatever text lay before him, he is our teacher, and his theology is our teaching."[1]

The liturgist or liturgists here sought to bring us not unison but harmony and counterpoint. We welcome and we curse. We curse and we invite. We do not curse in secret; even our cursing is, at least potentially, dialogic, spoken in the hearing presence of those we direct it against. We have to curse; opening the door exposes us to the world around us, and in that world there are those who have devoured Jacob. But also in that world there are those we must welcome, and who have welcomed us.

1 Franz Rosenzweig, "The Unity of the Bible: A Position Paper vis-à-vis Orthodoxy and Liberalism," *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1994), 23.

Nirtzah

MICHA'EL ROSENBERG

Nirtzah may be the most puzzling of all the steps of the seder. In what other Jewish ritual is there an explicit statement that you have finished the ritual? One does not give *tzedakah* and then state: "I have completed the mitzvah of giving *tzedakah*." The seder, however, has as its final step this reflexive act of declaring ourselves finished.

That reflexivity is itself puzzling. Consider Kadesh, the first of the seder's signposts (*simanei ha-seder)*. Kadesh describes a specific action: You hold a cup of wine, recite certain words over the wine, and then drink it. So too, for example, Hallel, which immediately precedes Nirtzah: The word *hallel* refers to the act of reciting songs of praise. But merely saying the word *kadesh* or *hallel* does not fulfill the step. Nirtzah, on the other hand, seems to be entirely self-referential; there is no action that makes your seder complete. Nirtzah is simply mental power; we assert that we're done and it means that we're done.

Even the choice of calling this section Nirtzah is enigmatic. It's not a normal word for saying you're done with something; it doesn't even appear in the poem that now appears at the end of the seder, introduced to the haggadah in the fourteenth century to give this so-called step more heft. In that poem, the word for finished is the more literal *ḥasal*. So why label the section Nirtzah?

The word appears only twice in this form in the Bible. The first instance, Leviticus 1:4, is a description of a particular kind of sacrifice; someone places their hand on the head of a sacrificial animal "so that it will be *nirtzah*," that is, accepted. In the other biblical appearance, no slaughtered animals are in sight. Rather, the prophet Isaiah consoles the Jewish people in exile, telling us that Jerusalem's sinfulness and consequent punishment have been accepted (*avonah nirtzah*; Isaiah 40:2), and that the suffering at the hands of an oppressing colonial force will

come to an end. The suffering of Jerusalem, rather than an animal on an altar, is accepted in order to bring about God's pardon.

To state that our seder is *nirtzah*, then, is to frame it as something that must be acceptable and accepted, whether as an animal slaughtered in a temple, or as the suffering and atonement for our sins that Isaiah implies.

The idea of the seder-*qua*-sacrifice is relatively easy to see. Sacrificial language suffuses the entire seder. Rabban Gamliel includes the paschal offering as one of its three essential symbols; so too we split up *hallel*, only on this night, so that it bookends the meal, thus paralleling the Jews' constant singing of *hallel*, for the entirety of their slaughtering of the Passover offering in the Temple. The highly regulated, almost compulsively "ordered" nature of the seder (that is, the "order") likewise mimics the sacrificial service, with its emphasis on process and ritualization. In the absence of the Jerusalem Temple, our seder both points to the absence of animal sacrifice and takes its place. And just as Leviticus makes clear that a sacrifice must be accepted, so too we pray that our performance of the seder-qua-sacrifice will find acceptance before God.

That our suffering should find acceptance before God is more difficult to understand, both theologically and literarily. Hackneyed and misguided jokes to the contrary, the seder is not meant to be a time of suffering or punishment. The seder is primarily a joyous night, less focused on remembering our sufferings than on celebrating our redemptions. Classical Jewish law even states that one should reserve one's finest china and cutlery for the seder, since this is the most glorious night of the year! Still, the seder alludes to the historic suffering of the Jewish people: "In every generation, they stood against us to destroy us." And in medieval Europe, the world in which both *simanei ha-seder* and the concluding poem of the seder were composed, springtime, with the joint arrival of Easter and Pesaḥ, was often a time of increased

anti-Jewish violence. We can imagine, and perhaps we even feel in some way—however conflicted or ambivalent—the desire to make meaning of our suffering, to ask God to see it and to accept it, as God did for the Jews in Egypt, as it says: "the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression" (Deuteronomy 26:7).

We ask God, then, to accept both our offering, like those of Leviticus, and our suffering, like the punishment of Jerusalem in Isaiah's time.

There is, however, a third meaning to *nirtzah*. At least as early as the thirteenth century, some contended that the word *nirtzah* modifies that which immediately precedes it, that is, *hallel*. The interpretation solves the earlier problem of *nirtzah* having no clear referent. Rather than an unusual signpost in the seder with no action to which it refers, it describes *hallel,* which on this seder night is unusual, both in its bifurcated performance before and after the meal, but also in the several additional paragraphs that do not normally appear as part of the *hallel* recited on holidays and new-month celebrations. Reading *nirtzah* this way opens a third path for understanding what it is we want accepted on this night: our songs and praise. This is not to negate the biblical resonances of bringing ritualized gifts before God, or of pointing to our sufferings, all in the hopes that God will see them and accept us. But on this seder night, when we break out our finest place settings and sit as free people together with friends and family, we also offer, and hope that God will accept, our songs, our praise, and our joy.

Shir HaShirim

ABIGAIL GILLMAN

The sublime *Shir HaShirim,* Song of Songs, has a unique status vis-à-vis the Tanakh. Rabbi Akiva grasped this when he said that "all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies" (Mishnah Yadayim 3:5). And one midrash captured it when referring to Song of Songs as a "handle" or study aid for the Torah as a whole (Song of Songs Rabbah 1:8). An interpretive lens, a commentary, a poetic rendering: *Shir HaShirim* both belongs to, and transcends, the Torah as a whole. How else might we understand this dialogue, this interconnection?

Rabbis and scholars have parsed each and every word in the Song of Songs to argue that the work is an allegory for the romance of God and Israel as narrated in the Torah. In Midrash Tanhuma Toledot 18 (ed. Buber), for example, the words "I slept, but my mind was alert. Hark! my love knocks…" (5:2) are read as alluding to the Exodus from Egypt and redemption: "'My beloved knocks'—this is Moses, as it is said: 'And Moses said: "Thus said the Lord: 'Around midnight I am going out in the midst of Egypt…'" (Exodus 11:4).[1]

In a similar vein, Rabbi Moses Isserles wrote:

> *It is the custom to read Shir HaShirim on Shabbat of ḥol ha-moed pesaḥ [the intermediate days of Passover] because it speaks of the redemption of our people from Egypt, as is written: "To a mare among Pharoah's cavalry/Would I compare you, my darling." (Song of Songs 1:19). (Shulḥan Arukh Orakh Ḥayyim 490:9).*

The widespread notion that the love poetry of *Shir HaShirim* is a metaphor for the spiritual love between God and Israel has always made perfect sense to me. As a young girl I could relate to it, I think, because I experienced God's love, at home and in school. I recall

1 Tanhuma (ed. Buber) Toledot 18

discovering the Song of Songs at the back of my haggadah, and learning about the custom of reading it following the seder. I knew instinctively that the spiritual high of the seder, culminating with the jubilant singing of *hallel, eḥad mi yodea,* and *ḥad gadya*, could really only be followed by something like: "Kiss me, make me drunk with your kisses! Your sweet loving/is better than wine" (Song 1:1).[2]

The practice of chanting the Song in the synagogue on *Shabbat ḥol ha-moed*, the intermediate Shabbat of Pesaḥ, invites us to consider a more nuanced connection between the Song of Songs and the Exodus story. The period known as *ḥol ha-moed*, as its name suggests, is a liminal time—holy and earthly--much like the Song of Songs itself. Joy is commanded, as on the festival, but work is not entirely prohibited. Appropriately enough, the Torah portion for Shabbat *ḥol ha-moed* Pesaḥ describes the fraught encounter between Moses and God following the episode of the Golden Calf, between the shattering of the first tablets and the composing of the second tablets (Exodus 33:12-34:26). In this suspenseful back and forth, Moses implores God. Will God stay with this sinful people? Will Moses be granted a glimpse of God's presence or "glory *(kavod)*"? Can the relationship be repaired? Will the partners find a way back to one another?

One verse captures the emotional dance of God, Moses, and Israel during this confusing period. "And so, when My glory passes over, I shall put you in the cleft of the crag and shield you with My palm until I have passed over. And I shall take away My palm and you will see My back, but My face will not be seen" (Exodus 33:22-23).[3] I try to visualize the scene, but in vain. Nevertheless, the symbolism of Moses in this vulnerable, feminine space, both hidden from and seen by God, viewing

2 Translation from Chana Bloch and Ariel Bloch, *Song of Songs* (New York: Random House 1995).

3 Translation by Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2004).

God but only modestly from behind; and being shielded by God's own hand—this Moses, far more than the Moses at the Burning Bush, on Mount Sinai, in Pharaoh's palace, or at the Red Sea—epitomizes for me the love between God and Israel that we commemorate on Passover, and that infuses the Torah as a whole.

The Song of Songs recapitulates God's and Moses' desire as follows

My dove in the clefts of the rock,
In the shadow of the cliff,
Let me see you, all of you!
Let me hear your voice,
Your delicious song,
I love to look at you.
(Song of Songs 2:14)[4]

The Song of Songs is a love poem, and the Torah is a love story. But rather than call the Song an allegory, I read it as a parable *(mashal)* about God's love for Israel. A *mashal* is an ambiguous, independent tale that aims to have a strong rhetorical impact. In lieu of a one-to-one correspondence, the *mashal* only implies its teaching *(nimshal)*; every listener must come to her own conclusions. Above all, the bridge between the parable and its message is a two-way street. Thus, the Torah too can be read as a parable about the desire for connection described throughout the Song of Songs.

Which is to say, the Song of Songs is not only the ultimate *mashal*, the parable; it is also the *nimshal*, the teaching.

Encountering the Song of Songs on Pesaḥ reminds us that Torah, the story of God redeeming Israel, is itself a collection of interrelated mini-parables about desire, love lost and found, and the struggle for relationship.

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4 Translation from Chana Bloch and Ariel Bloch, *Song of Songs* (New York: Random House 1995).

Haroset

This delicious haroset recipe, a staple of Bill and Judith Kates' seder, comes from the Luzzatto family of Venice. Members of the Luzzatto family have been in Venice since at least 1541. The recipe is taken from Joan Nathan, *The Jewish Holiday Kitchen* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1988), 177. Bill, the maker of this haroset, suggests the following modifications: After removing stems from the figs and cutting the dates in half, freeze the dates, figs, and apricots. Then use a Cuisinart to chop up the frozen fruit.

1 ½ cups chestnut paste
10 ounces dates, chopped
12 ounces figs, chopped
2 tablespoons poppy seeds
½ cup chopped walnuts
½ cup chopped almonds
½ cup pine nuts
Grated rind of 1 orange
½ cup of white raisins
¼ cup dried apricots
½ cup brandy
Honey to bind

Combine all the ingredients, gradually adding just enough brandy and honey to make the mixture bind.

Makes about 4 cups.

Contributors

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Tom Kates

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