

# Rav's Pesach Story

## From Serving Idols to Spiritual Liberation

# מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה

**1. As we noted** above, the Haggadah offers two versions of the Exodus story. The Talmudic Rabbi, Shmuel, emphasized political enslavement (“We were slaves in Egypt”). Now we turn to his colleague, Rav, to hear about spiritual servitude.

**2. Rav's version** is drawn from Joshua's farewell speech to the nation of Israel. Joshua feared that the new Israelis might assimilate to the local pagan cultures. So he told them the story of Abraham's liberation from idolatry.

**IN THE BEGINNING** our ancestors were idol worshippers. But now God has brought us near to serve Adonai.

*The leader:*

**JOSHUA** said to all the people: “Thus said Adonai, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors including Terach, father of Abraham and Nachor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshipped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan and multiplied his offspring. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau . . . Then Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.”

“Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and brought plagues on Egypt after which I freed you — I freed your ancestors — from Egypt. Now, therefore, serve Adonai with undivided loyalty . . . Or, if you are loath to serve Adonai, choose this day other gods to serve. But I and my family will serve Adonai.”

*All:*

**IN REPLY**, the people declared, “Far be it from us to forsake Adonai and serve other gods! For it was Adonai our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage, and who performed those wondrous signs before our very eyes . . . Now we too will serve Adonai, for Adonai is our God.” (Joshua 24:1-18)

מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו,  
ועכשיו קרבנו המקום לעבדתו, שנאמר:

”וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל כָּל הָעָם:  
כֹּה אָמַר יי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל –  
בְּעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר יָשְׁבוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵעוֹלָם  
– תֵּרַח אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאָבִי נַחֲוֹר –  
וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים.  
וְאֶקַּח אֶת אֲבִיכֶם, אֶת אַבְרָהָם, מֵעֵבֶר הַנָּהָר  
וְאוֹלַךְ אוֹתוֹ בְּכָל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן;  
וְאַרְבֵּה אֶת זְרַעוֹ וְאֶתָּן לוֹ אֶת יִצְחָק.  
וְאֶתָּן לְיִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת עֵשָׂו.  
וְאֶתָּן לְעֵשָׂו אֶת הַר שְׁעִיר לְרִשְׁתּוֹ, אוֹתוֹ,  
וַיַּעֲקֹב וּבָנָיו יָרְדוּ מִצְרָיִם.”



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Spiritual  
Slavery

## Rav's Story of Spiritual Liberation

RAV'S STORY states that our ancestors were idol worshippers. Abraham's father was an idol worshipper, of course. But we wonder: "What are you talking about? Who needs to know on Pesach whether my ancestors were idol worshippers?" I always wonder to myself, "What fools! Who would want to worship sticks and stones." To make sense of Terach's faith and of Abraham's religious revolt, I have to tell my children about the appeal, the seduction of idolatry, *avodah zarah* (strange worship). They have to be told about their great grandfather who began in idolatry and who discovered a liberating worship. They must discover Abraham's childhood, and must grasp the lonely man of faith, Abraham *ha-ivri*. The midrash says that *'ivri*' ("Hebrew," also "side") means that the whole world was on one side and Abraham was on the other, alone. The child must learn the pain of loneliness that the convert has to bear. This is the story for Rav.

Abraham's conversion is an act of freedom. Jewish identity is saturated with freedom. Passover does not introduce a racist ethnic tribe; it brings to the fore a covenantal people of choice. "Are you prepared to listen how your grandfather was alone and struggled against false beliefs?" That is what the home has to say. After the child is told, then there can be a free embracing of who one is. That is the significance of singing Hallel on Passover night. Here

is a singing towards personal identity. One rejoices at this self-definition: "I am a *ger*, a convert. I am who I am out of conviction. I am free and I choose to praise Adonai who liberated me."

(David Hartman, Jerusalem philosopher)

## Alienation from Ourselves

THE DIFFERENCE between the slave and the free person is not merely one of social class, that the slave just happens to be enslaved to another, and the free person is not enslaved. One can find a cultured and learned slave whose spirit is filled with freedom, and conversely, a "free" person whose spirit is that of a slave. Real freedom is that **noble spirit** by which the individual and indeed the whole people are elevated to become loyal to their inner essential self, to the image of God within them. Through this characteristic they can perceive their lives as purposeful and worthy of value.

This is not true regarding people with the **spirit of a slave** — the content of

their lives and their feelings are never attuned to the characteristics of their essential self, but rather to what is considered beautiful and good by the others. They are ruled by all sorts of constraints, whether they be formal or moral.

(Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook,  
first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in Israel, 1921-1935)

## Abraham the Iconoclast

ICONOCLAST IS A WORD which has come almost unchanged from the Greek *eikon* (image) and *klastes* (a breaker). Literally one who shatters sacred images, it has come to mean anyone who scoffs at our treasured beliefs.

The spiritual liberation from false gods begins, according to Rabbinic interpretation, with Abraham's critical search for truth. It culminates in a full scale rebellion against his own father, Terach the idol maker. The struggle for truth can threaten family solidarity and undermine tradition, yet it is still a value to be cherished, especially on Pesach.

## Jews-by-Choice

Abraham and Sarah were Jews-by-choice who as mature adults made daring spiritual choices. Today many of us are really Jews-by-choice (whether as converts or as born Jews). For we continuously reflect on our life choices. To be

a contemporary Jew requires a positive decision about what kind of a Jew to be and how central Judaism will be in our daily lives. Ask several people to share their personal journey as Jews. What choices and what ongoing hesitations shape their relationship to Judaism?

(continued from page 75)

I brought the food offering to them as usual. Then one god insisted: "Me, first." Another responded angrily: "No, me first!" Finally the biggest of them took his staff, smashed the rest and took the offering all for himself.

Terach stared at his first born Abram in disbelief and rage: "What kind of a joke is this? Don't mock me! None of these gods have the power you attributed to him."

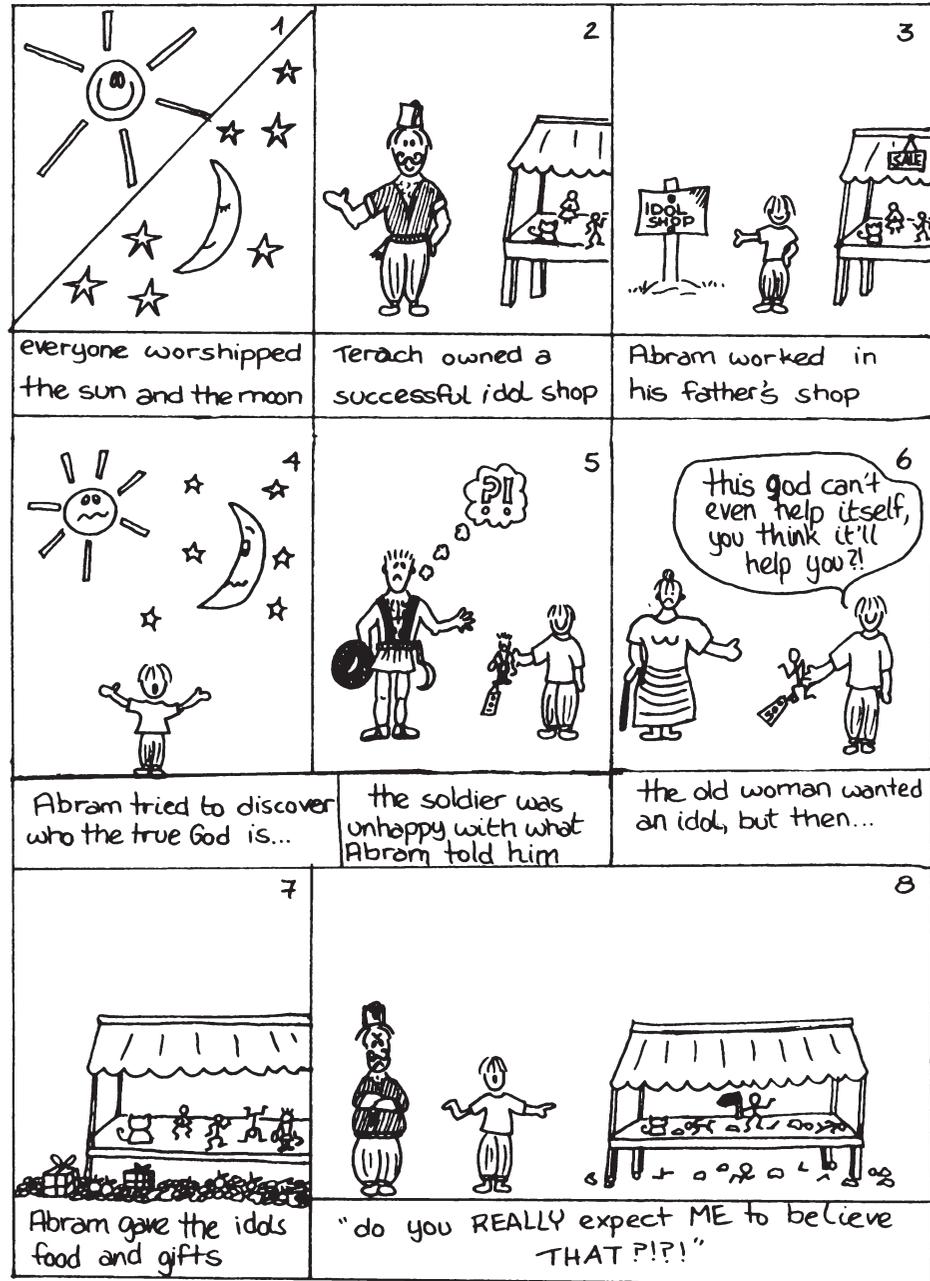
Then Abram reasoned gently with his father: "Please, just let your ears hear what your mouth just said."

(Freely adapted from Philo, Maimonides, Nachmanides and Rabbinic midrashim)

## A Debate: 'Is Abram a Wicked Child?'

After reading our adaptation of the Rabbinic story of young Abraham you may wish to stage a short debate. Divide the table down the middle into roughly equal constituencies, arbitrarily assigning the role of pro and con to debate the following proposition: **"Abraham is a rebellious son whose outrageous treatment of his parents' and his society's most cherished beliefs should be censured."** Begin with one short "pro" statement, then shift back and forth between pro and con sides of the table for 5 minutes.

At the end, put the question to a vote.



Tanya Zion, 1995



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Terach's  
Idol Shop

## Abraham Discovers God

### A Rabbinic Children's Story

Long, long ago it was generally agreed that the gods were the heavenly lights — the sun, the moon, and the stars. For example, in the days of the Exodus Pharaoh believed in the sun god Ra and he bore the name Ra-meses — son of Ra. Idols of clay and wood were fashioned to embody the power of the heavenly lights. No one dared to disagree.

In those days in the city of Ur in Babylonia (today's Iraq) there lived a man named Terach, who was a skilled idol maker. His family prospered by selling these gods in the market.

Yet Terach's oldest son, Abram (later to be called Abraham), did not follow in his father's footsteps. From an early age Abram took nothing of his father's tradition for granted. Perhaps he was too inquisitive, too much an independent thinker. Terach considered Abram a rebellious son and worried that nothing good would come of him.

Once little Abram began to wonder: "Who really created the sky and the earth and me? Seeing the brilliance of the warm sun he worshipped it all day. But when the burning sun set in the west and the cool moon rose in the east surrounded by a thousand twinkling stars, he thought, "I must have been mistaken about the sun. It must be the moon with all its ministers — one for every nation on earth — that created the sky and the earth and me." All night long he worshipped the moon. However Abram was perplexed when next morning the cool moon set and all his

servants disappeared and the burning sun rose again. "How" he wondered, "can either the sun or the moon be the supreme creator? Each is eclipsed in turn by the other!" Abram concluded that God was beyond all the physical forces, the Creator of all these processes. So he resolved in his heart to worship this invisible God alone.

## The Idol Salesman

ONCE ABRAM'S FATHER, Terach, asked him to take over the idol shop in the market. Perhaps he hoped Abram would take an interest in the family business. An experienced soldier came to buy an idol to protect his new home.

*Soldier:* "Do you have a good idol?"

*Abram:* "What kind of god?"

*Soldier:* "Well, since I am a great soldier, give me a god like myself." Abram gave him the fiercest looking idol in the shop and the soldier paid full price.

*Soldier:* "By the way, are you sure this god is as fierce as I am?"

The lad could not contain himself.

*Abram:* "How old are you?"

*Soldier:* "I am fifty years of age, and have been a soldier for more than thirty years," was the answer.

*Abram* laughed: "You are fifty, whereas this idol was carved by my father only last week. And though you are a seasoned warrior, you seek protection from it!" Startled, the man took his money back and left the idol in the shop. An old woman entered next: "My house has been robbed, and my god was stolen from me. Sell me another," she said,

putting the money on the counter.

*Abram* smiled: "Your idol could not protect even himself, yet you wish to buy another!" The woman retrieved her money and ran out angrily.

## The Broken Idols

THE REST OF Terach's children ran to their father: "Abram will never make a salesperson. Let's make him a priest."

*Abram* asked: "What does a priest do?"

*Terach's sons:* "He stands before the gods serving them, washing them, and feeding them." Though doubtful, Abram agreed to try.

*Abram* prepared some tasty food and drink and told the gods: "Please help yourselves, take something to eat, take a drink, and please be good to the people who are giving you these gifts."

However, not one of the gods took any of his dinner. Abram began to make fun of the idols.

*"They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear; noses, but cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot touch; feet, but cannot walk; they can make no sound in their throats. Those who fashion them, all who trust in them, shall become like them."* (Psalm 115: 5-8)

Then he took a stick and smashed every idol except the largest one. Carefully he placed the stick, like a scepter, in the hand of the remaining idol and placed the food before him.

When Terach arrived he was shocked: "Who did this to our gods?"

*Abram:* "It was unbelievable!"

# Keeping the Promise

**After recalling** Abraham's spiritual journey to God (p. 72) and his **ascent** to Eretz Yisrael, the Haggadah will recount the **descent** of his great grandchildren to Egyptian slavery ("The

*The leader:*

BLESSED is the One who keeps the Promise to Israel.

The Holy One calculated the end of our exile and acted just as promised to Abraham our Father at the Covenant between the Pieces. (Genesis 15: 7-17)

"And God said to Abram: You must know, that your seed will be strangers in a land not theirs; the people (of that land) will put them in servitude and afflict them for four hundred years. But as for the nation to which they are in servitude — I will bring judgment on them, and after that (your seed) will go out with great wealth." (Genesis 15: 13-14)

# בְּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַבְּטָחוֹתוֹ

Wandering Aramean," p. 78). But first the Haggadah reassures us, as God did to Abraham, that there is a Divine pledge to Jewish continuity whatever the ups and downs of history.

בְּרוּךְ שׁוֹמֵר הַבְּטָחוֹתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרוּךְ הוּא. שֶׁהַקְּדוֹשׁ  
בְּרוּךְ הוּא חָשַׁב אֶת הַקֶּץ, לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּמָה שֶׁאָמַר לְאַבְרָהָם  
אָבִינוּ בְּבְרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:  
"וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם: יָדַע תֵּדַע, כִּי גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ, בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא  
לָהֶם. וְעַבְדוּם וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם – אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה. וְגַם אֶת  
הַגּוֹי, אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ, דָּן אֲנִי. וְאַחֲרַי כֵּן יֵצְאוּ בְּרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל."

(בראשית טו, יג-יד)



Kadesh

Urchatz

Karpas

Yachatz

Maggid

Keeping  
the  
Promise

# Standing Up For Us

1. Cover the matza, raise your cup and sing together, acknowledging God's commitment to our survival.

❖ **THIS PROMISE** has stood for our parents and for us in good stead.

For not just one enemy has stood against us to wipe us out.

But in every generation there have been those who have stood against us to wipe us out.

Yet the Holy One keeps on saving us from their hands.

וְהִיא שְׁעֵמְדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. V'hee she-am-dah, la-a-vo-yei-nu v'la-nu.  
שֶׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּהּ, She-lo eh-chad beel-vad,  
עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, amad alei-nu l'cha-lo-tei-nu.  
אֶלָּא שֶׁבְּכָל דּוֹר וְדוֹר, Eh-la she-b'chol dor va-dor  
עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, om-deem a-lei-nu l'cha-lo-tei-nu.  
וְהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, V'ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu  
מִצְיָלָנוּ מִיָּדָם. ma-tzee-lei-nu mee-ya-dam.

# וְהִיא שְׁעֵמְדָה

2. Afterwards, set the cup down and uncover the matza for the continuation of the Maggid.

## A Rabbi's Memoir of Berlin, 1933-1937

RABBI JOACHIM PRINZ recalls that in Nazi Germany Jewish holidays assumed a new importance:

No longer were they perfunctory observances of the day. They became part of the context of danger, fear, death and hope in which we lived. Passover was now the great day of hope for delivery from our own Egypt. The whips which beat the naked bodies of Jewish slaves in Egypt were the very same that struck our bodies. Slavery was no longer an abstract term, foreign to the world of the twentieth century. We could now identify with the slaves for we, ourselves, were third-class citizens, and therefore slaves. Those people who had been taken from their homes and whom we no longer saw, but about whose fate we knew, illustrated the Haggadah in colors much more telling than those of the most graphic illustrations we had ever seen.

The Passover slogan, **'From slavery unto freedom,'** became the song of our lives. If the slaves of Egypt could be delivered from their fate, so would we. All the songs at the seder table were sung with new emphasis and new meaning and great religious fervor. When we read that *'in every generation one is obligated to see oneself as one who personally went out from Egypt'* and *'it was not only our ancestors whom God set free from slavery,'* the identification was complete. It was not historic memory. It was not history at all. It was the reality of every day and the hope of every person. Some day, we said, we shall be free.



*Abraham's Descendants will be like the Stars (Genesis 15)*

*Ephraim Moses Lilien*

But the greatest identification came when we read: *'Not merely one persecutor has stood up against us, but in every generation they persecuted us to destroy us, but The Holy One saved us from their hands.'* What more did we want? How much deeper could Jewish identification with the people go? Here it was. The

persecution was upon us. But some day we would be saved.

I did not then know that I was later to sing *'We shall overcome some day'* with Martin Luther King. But when I did, I remembered the songs of the seder table under the Hitler regime.

# ‘Arami Oved Avi’

## The Wandering Jew

On Pesach each of us retells our story of wandering and homecoming, as did the farmer bringing the first fruits to

# אַרְמִי אֲבֵד אָבִי

Jerusalem. Let the leader read the narrator’s role and the others respond in unison as each Jew used to do in the Temple.

## The Torah: A Tale of Persecution and Homecoming

### Narrator:

When you enter the land that Adonai your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and settle on it, then you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil. Put it in a basket and go to the place where Adonai your God will choose to establish His Name. You will go before the *cohen* (priest) in charge at that time and say to him:

❖ I will tell Adonai today how I have come to the land Adonai swore to our ancestors to give to us: . . .  
“MY ANCESTOR was a wandering Aramean. He descended to Egypt and resided there in small numbers. He became a nation — great, powerful and numerous. The Egyptians treated us badly. They persecuted us and put us under hard labor. We cried out to Adonai, the God of our ancestors. God heard our voice. God saw our persecution, our toil and our oppression. God took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with awesome power, signs and wonders. God brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land of milk and honey. Now I have brought the first fruits of this soil, which you, God, gave me.” (Deut. 26:1-10)



Prague, 1526

“אַרְמִי אֲבֵד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֵד מִצְרַיִם, וַיָּגֵר שָׁם  
בְּמִתֵּי מְעוֹט, וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, עַצּוֹם וְרַב.  
וַיִּרְעוּ אֶתְנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ. וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ  
עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה.  
וַנִּצְעַק אֶל יי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע יי אֶת  
קִלְנוּ, וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנֵינוּ וְאֶת עַמְלָנוּ וְאֶת  
לְחִצָּנוּ.  
וַיּוֹצֵאנוּ יי מִמִּצְרַיִם, בְּיַד חֲזָקָה, וּבְזֵרַע  
נְטוּיָה, וּבְמַרְא גָּדוֹל, וּבְאִתּוֹת וּבְמִפְתִּיּוֹת.  
וַיְבִיאנוּ אֶל הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה, וַיִּתֵּן לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ  
הַזֹּאת, אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ.” (דְּבָרִים כו, א-י)



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Wandering  
Jew

## 'My Ancestor Was a Wandering Aramean'

**May a Convert say: "God of my ancestors"?**

**QUESTION:** I received a question from Ovadia, the wise and learned convert, may the God of Israel, under whose wings he sought cover, reward him for his work. You ask me if you, too, are allowed to say in the blessings and prayers: **"Our God and God of our ancestors," "You who have brought us out of the land of Egypt," "You who have worked miracles for our ancestors."**

**RESPONSUM:** Yes. In the same way as every Jew by birth says his blessings, you, too, shall pray . . . For Abraham our Father taught the people, opened their minds, and revealed to them the true faith and the unity of God; he rejected idols and abolished their adoration; he brought many children under the wings of the Divine Presence. *"For I have known (Abraham) to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of Adonai, to do righteousness and justice."* (Gen. 18:19). Ever since then whoever adopts Judaism and confesses the unity of the Divine Name is counted among the disciples of Abraham our Father.

Therefore, you shall pray, **"Our God and God of our ancestors,"** because Abraham is your father. **No difference exists between you and us,** and all miracles done to us have been done as it were to us and to you.

## Torah and Midrash

**O**n seder night we do not stick to the facts of the Biblical story. Taking our cue from the five rabbis of B'nai B'rak who went on all night, we are urged to expand on the Torah's version of the Exodus in the style of rabbinic commentary called midrash. The Mishna specifies the task at hand: *Expound the whole section of "My father was a wandering Aramean."* (Deut. 26:5-8; Mishna, Pesachim 10:4) This famous narrative recounts the story of a wandering people, exploited in Egypt, who finally came home to their own land in Israel. In the days of the Temple, beginning on Shavuot, the wanderers-turned-farmers would bring an offering of their first fruits balanced in a basket on their shoulders and recite their story of rags-to-riches, of wandering-to-rootedness in the land. Every Jew knew this narrative saga by heart.

This concise narrative is a jumping off point for midrashic commentary, associating the words of the Biblical text with larger themes. The Rabbis recommended that each family begin to expatiate on it, phrase by phrase. The Haggadah includes one classic version of this rabbinic art of interpretation, but the door is open to innovations. We have brought you a rich menu of Torah and Midrash organized thematically:

1. The Torah: Deuteronomy 26: 1-10,
2. The traditional Rabbinic Midrash of the Pesach Haggadah,
3. Our contemporary commentary on the issues raised by the Midrash.

**Know that our ancestors, when they came out of Egypt, were mostly idolaters;** they had mingled with the pagans in Egypt and imitated their way of life, until the Holy One sent Moses our Teacher, who brought us under the

wings of the Divine Presence, us and all converts, and gave to all of us one Law. **Do not consider your origin as inferior.**

*(A Letter from Moses Maimonides, 12th century, Egypt, philosopher, Talmudist, court physician, and head of the Jewish community)*

# The Classic Rabbinic Midrash on the Exodus

## צא ולמד

### 'The Wandering Aramean'

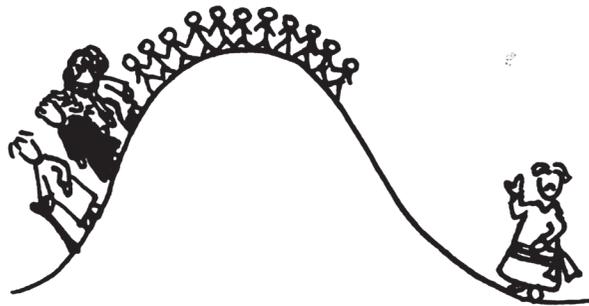
*Read and study:*

**GO AND LEARN** what (awful) plans Lavan the Aramean had for Jacob our Father:

(When Jacob migrated to Aram, he intended to stay with his uncle Lavan for only a few months. However, he fell in love with his cousin Rachel and was entrapped by his wily uncle Lavan the Aramean whose epithet also means “the cheat” — *ramai*. Jacob became his indentured servant and escaped with his wives and children only after 20 years of hard labor. Even then Lavan and his armed men pursued Jacob intending to do bodily harm, perhaps even to kill him but at least to enslave him again. Had God not appeared miraculously in a night vision to stay Lavan's hand, there would have been no people of Israel.)

**THUS WHILE** Pharaoh intended to kill only the boys, Lavan sought to uproot the whole of Jacob's family, the children of Israel.

**THIS IS** the hidden meaning of the verse, “the wandering Aramean” — the Aramean sought to exterminate my father — that is, Jacob.



צא ולמד, מה בקש לבן האַרְמִי לַעֲשׂוֹת לַיַּעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ?

שְׁפָרְעָה לֹא גָזַר אֱלֹא עַל הַזְּכָרִים, וְלָבוֹן בִּקֵּשׁ לַעֲקֹר אֶת-הַכֹּל, שְׁנָאָמַר:  
“אַרְמִי אֵבֶד אָבִי.” (דברים כו, ה-ז)



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Rabbinic  
Symposium

## There is No Freedom Without First Fruits

WHY DOES the Pesach Haggadah's central midrash focus on the story of the first fruits, which is associated with Shavuot?

Perhaps the point is that Pesach is not only about the move from slavery to freedom, but from economic dependence to productivity, from the vulnerability of the alien to the security of the citizen.

## The Aramean Who's Who

THE MIDRASH on Lavan the Aramean who was "worse than Pharaoh" is an outrageously forced reading of the Biblical text. However Rabbinic midrash felt no compunction about twisting the text to make an eyebrow-raising point. Perhaps they wanted to take a jab at their contemporary enemies — the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem (70 C.E.) and later forbade the teaching of Torah (135 C.E.). Coincidentally the name "Roman" (*Romi*) in Hebrew has the same consonants as Lavan the "Aramean" (*Arami*). For sermonic purposes the Rabbis typically exploit a Biblical text which itself is unclear.

The "wandering Aramean" of the Torah may also be **Abram** the Hebrew, who lived in Aram and crossed the Jordan. The name Hebrew (*ivri*) means the one who crossed over (*avar*). (*Rashbam*) Or perhaps he is **Jacob**, who wandered first to Aram and later to Egypt, where his grandchildren were enslaved. (*Ibn Ezra*)

## Selecting a Topic for a Symposium

**T**he Rabbinic treatment of the "Wandering Aramean" story raises several provocative themes for debate. You may wish to choose just one theme. Read the Rabbinic midrash and the contemporary sidebars and then open the topic to discussion.

### 1. *Assimilation and Identity* (see page 82)

Did the Jews succeed in resisting assimilation to Egyptian culture?  
How does a minority preserve its identity?

### 2. *Anti-Semitism and Prejudice* (see page 84)

How do antisemitic stereotypes function both in the minds of the oppressors and on the self-image of the Jews?

### 3. *Ancient Egyptian Oppression* (see page 86)

What was the historical nature of Egyptian slavery?  
How did the Rabbis conceive of spirit-crushing "harsh labor"?

### 4. *From Resignation to Resistance* (see page 88)

What is the turning point at which slaves wake up to their fate and begin to hope?

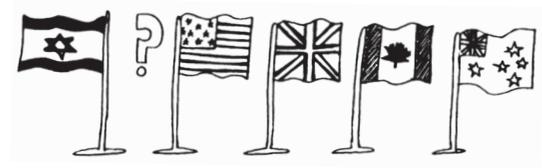
### 5. *Sexuality and Liberation* (see page 90)

How is sexual oppression related to the struggle for political liberation?

### 6. *Suffering and its Lessons* (see page 95)

Does suffering make us more empathetic to others?  
When does it make us vengeful or insensitive or apathetic?

# Assimilation and Identity



“ISRAEL (JACOB) DESCENDED TO EGYPT, RESIDED THERE IN SMALL NUMBERS, AND BECAME THERE A NATION — GREAT, POWERFUL AND NUMEROUS.” (Deut. 26:5)

“ISRAEL DESCENDED” compelled by the divine word, to fulfill the prophecy of God to Abraham that “*your descendants will be strangers in a land not their own, where they will be enslaved and persecuted . . . .*” (Gen. 14-13)

“ISRAEL RESIDED THERE” (Deut. 26:5) temporarily. Jacob our Father never intended to settle permanently in Egypt. Jacob’s family made that clear from the onset. “*They said to the Pharaoh (who reigned in the days of Joseph): we have come (merely) to **reside** in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants’ sheep. For the famine in the land of Canaan is very heavy. Therefore, please permit your servants to stay in the land of Goshen (within Egypt where grazing is good).*” (Gen. 47:4)

“IN SMALL NUMBERS” (Deut. 26:5) Jacob arrived in Egypt. Moshe reminds us that: “*with only seventy persons, your ancestors descended to Egypt. Yet now Adonai, your God has made you as numerous as the stars of the sky.*” (Deut. 10:22)

“THERE ISRAEL BECAME A NATION” (Deut. 26:5) — recognizable, distinctive, standing out from the others.

“אַרְמֵי אֲבֹד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם, וַיְגַר שָׁם בְּמֵתֵי מְעוֹט. וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, עַצוּם וְרַב.”

“וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם.” אָנוּס עַל פִּי הַדְּבָרָה.

“וַיְגַר שָׁם.” מְלַמֵּד שֶׁלֹּא יָרַד יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ לְהִשְׁתַּקֵּעַ בְּמִצְרַיִם, אֲלָא לְגוֹר שָׁם, שְׁנֹאמַר (בראשית מ"ז, ד):  
“וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵל פַּרְעֹה, לְגוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ בְּאֵנוּ, כִּי אֵין מְרֻעָה לְצֹאן אֲשֶׁר לְעַבְדֶּיךָ, כִּי כֶבֶד הָרֶעֶב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן. וְעַתָּה, יֵשְׁבוּ נָא עַבְדֶּיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן.”

“בְּמֵתֵי מְעוֹט.” כְּמָה שְׁנֹאמַר (דברים י, כב): “בְּשִׁבְעִים נִפְשׁוּ, יָרְדוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ מִצְרַיִם. וְעַתָּה, שְׁמֹךָ יי אֱלֹהֶיךָ, כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לְרַב.”

“וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי.” מְלַמֵּד שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְצִינִים שָׁם.



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Symposium:  
Assimilation

## 'In Small Numbers'

### **How Big is Israel?**

Pharaoh's unfounded fears of the Jewish minority's power and size bring to mind the following incident. The Israeli Foreign Ministry sends high school juniors to represent Israel to their non-Jewish age-mates worldwide. In England in 1995 the presentation began with the following question: "How big would you say Israel is compared to England?" Most English high school students answered: "Oh, perhaps ten times as big but at least twice as big." They were shocked to learn that it was only one-tenth the size of Great Britain, equivalent to Wales. (Perhaps the inordinate press coverage devoted to Israel with 300 resident international journalists contributes to the exaggerated estimates).

When adults in England were asked for the percentage of Jews in their country, they guessed between 10-20%, even though the Jews comprise less than ½%. Worldwide the Jews were 250,000,000, they guessed, when in fact they are only 13,000,000 and shrinking towards 12,000,000 by 2020.

## 'Israel Resided There and Became There a Nation'

### **Did They Assimilate in Egypt? Two Views**

According to the Haggadah's midrash, Israel maintained its cultural distinctiveness in Egypt by holding on to some basic facets of their national identity:

"Israel was redeemed from Egypt through the merit of four things: they didn't change their names, they didn't forget their native language, they didn't reveal their secrets, and they didn't cease circumcision."

*(Midrash Shocheh Tov 114)*

However, not all the Rabbis agreed on this point. According to another midrash, it was the very desire of the people of Israel to assimilate which aroused the anger of the native peoples. The midrash explains that when Joseph died (*Ex 1:6*), Israel stopped circumcising their sons. They said, "Let's be like the Egyptians!" As soon as they did this, God allowed the affection with which the Egyptians had held Israel to turn into hatred, as it says: "He changed their hearts to hate His people." (*Ps. 105:25*) So Pharaoh acted as "one who did not know Joseph." (*Ex. 1:8; Ex. Rabbah*)

## They Did Not Change Their Apparel

A HASSID of Rabbi David Moses of Chortkov came to the rabbi dressed in a short jacket and wearing a regular hat, unlike the custom of the Hassidim. The rabbi looked at him sharply and asked: "Why did you change your dress?"

The Hassid apologized: "I moved to one of the large cities of Western Europe, and there, among the non-Jews, who do not like Jews, it is very difficult to walk about with the traditional Hassidic garb."

The rabbi sat engrossed in thought for a time and finally exclaimed to the Hassid: "Nu, now that you have changed your clothes and you dress like one of them — do the non-Jews like you?" (*Menachem HaCohen*)



*Captain Alfred Dreyfus, falsely accused of treason and exiled in 1895 to Devil's Island*

## 'There Israel Became a Nation — Distinctive'

### **What's in a Name?**

"They did not change their names." Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism, said: "A person's name is part of his spiritual essence. When one touches any part of a person's body, the entire body feels it. Similarly, when one calls out a person's name, even if he is asleep, he awakens. As the Jews did not change their names in Egypt, when they heard their original names being called, they immediately awakened and were ready to be redeemed." (*Menachem HaCohen*)

# Antisemitism and Prejudice

## “A NATION — GREAT AND POWERFUL” (Deut. 26:5)

emerged at an incredible pace. *“The children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed, they multiplied and became very, very powerful. The whole land was filled with them.”* (Exodus 1:7)

## “A NUMEROUS NATION” (Deut. 26:5) also means “full-grown”

(*rav*). The prophet captures God’s nurturing of Israel in Egypt with graphic imagery. *“I let you grow like the plants of the field. You continued to grow up until you attained womanhood, until your breasts became firm, and your hair flourished. Yet you were still naked (spiritually).”* (Ezekiel 16:7)

## “THE EGYPTIANS TREATED US BADLY, THEY PERSECUTED US AND IMPOSED HARD LABOR ON US.” (Deut 26:6)

## “THE EGYPTIANS TREATED US BADLY” (Deut. 26:6)

means they “bad-mouthed” our loyalty. Pharaoh set the ominous tone in speaking to his people: *“Let us outsmart them so that they may not increase. Otherwise, in the event of war, they will join our enemies, fight against us and expel us from the land.”* (Exodus 1:10)

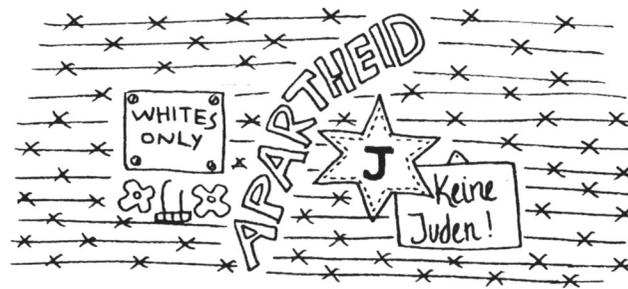


“גָּדוֹל עָצוּם.” כְּמָה שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שמות א, ז): “וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ, וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ, בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד, וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם.”

“וְרַב.” כְּמָה שְׁנֹאֲמַר (יחזקאל טז, ז): “רַבָּה כְּצֶמַח הַשָּׂדֶה נִתְתִּיקָה, וַתִּרְבִּי, וַתִּגְדְּלִי, וַתִּבְאֵי בְעֵדֵי עַדְיִים. שִׁדִּים נִכְנֹו, וַיִּשְׁעֲרֶךְ צִמְחָה, וְאֶת עֵרֶם וְעֲרִיהָ.”

“וְאָעֵבַר עָלֶיךָ וְאָרְאֶךָ מִתְבוֹסֶסֶת בְּדַמְיֶךָ וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדַמְיֶךָ חַיִּי וְאָמַר לְךָ בְּדַמְיֶךָ חַיִּי.”

“וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים.” כְּמָה שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שמות א, י): הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ. פֶּן יִרְבֶּה, וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה, וְנוֹסֵף גַּם הוּא עַל שְׁנֵאֵינוּ, וְנִלְחַם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ.”



Kadesh  
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Yachatz  
Maggid

Symposium:  
Antisemitism

## Beware of the Fifth Column

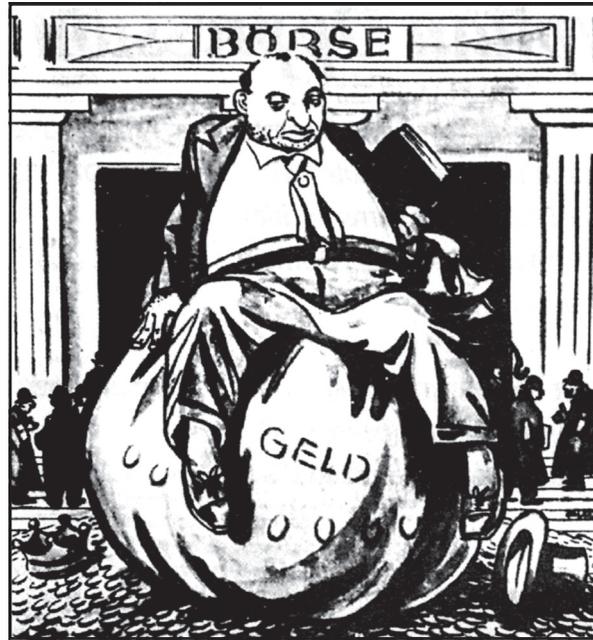
ERNEST HEMINGWAY deserves credit for having established “*fifth column*” as a term for secret subversives working within a country. The phrase was first uttered by General Mola, who said, during the Spanish Civil War, that he was commanding five columns in the assault on Madrid, four converging on the city from various directions “and the fifth column within the city.” But Hemingway made the phrase famous in a play called *The Fifth Column*.

## The Egyptians ‘Bad-mouthed’ Our Loyalty

DON ISAAC ABRABANEL (a Spanish and Portuguese statesman and later refugee from the Spanish Expulsion, 15th C.) explained: “The Egyptians thought badly of us. They suspected us of being spies, and conspirators plotting a revolt against their rulers.” Pharaoh himself created and manipulated this public image of the Jews in the eyes of his own people. He outsmarted his own nation.

## Prejudice and I

Recount a story in which you were involved in unjust discrimination whether as a victim, a witness or a perpetrator. How do these examples compare to Egyptian persecution of strangers?



Nazi caricature of a Jewish stockbroker

## A Rabbi Combats the Nazi Image of the Jew

OUTSIDE THE SYNAGOGUE in the ghetto, that is, in the newspapers, on the radio, in the speeches of the government people, wherever Jews listened, on the propaganda placards of the Nazi regime, in the cartoons of the anti-Semitic papers, the Jews were depicted as non-persons — ugly, immoral, uncreative, cowardly, useless and inferior. I had to tell the Jews from the pulpit in every single sermon that to be a Jew is to be beautiful, great, noble, and that we have every right to feel superior. (For this reason, Afro-Americans in the 1960’s emphasized that “black is beautiful.”)

It was most important for me to

demonstrate to the people that I was not afraid of anything. It is difficult to imagine now how important it was to Jews sitting in the pews to listen to someone expressing himself freely and often brutally against the Nazi regime, in spite of the fact that two Gestapo men were always sitting in the first row. I especially remember preaching a sermon against *Der Stuermer*, the most violent anti-Semitic paper whose editor Streicher was later hanged after the Nuremberg trials. I took a copy of the paper with me to the pulpit. I opened it to a page on which were printed some of the vicious caricatures of Jews, and I said in my sermon: “Is this what we really look like? Look at yourselves and look at each other. Is this the true picture of Jews?”

(Rabbi Joachim Prinz, Berlin 1933)

# Ancient Egyptian Oppression

**“THEY PERSECUTED US.”** (Deut. 26:6) *“They put task masters over Israel to conscript their labor in order to persecute them with their burdens. They built for Pharaoh the garrison cities of Pitom (House of the god Atum) and Ra-meses (Domain of the Son of the Sun god).”* (Exodus 1:11)

**“THEY IMPOSED HARD LABOR ON US.”** (Deut. 26:6) *“The Egyptians worked the children of Israel harshly (be-farech),”* (Exodus 1:13) degrading us with back-breaking and spirit-crushing labor.

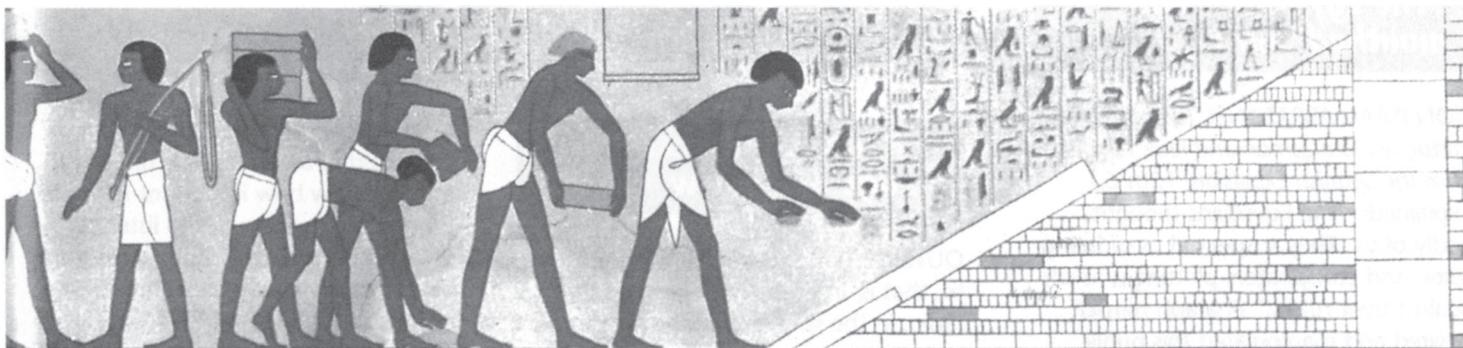
**“וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ.”** כָּמָה שְׁנָאָמַר (שמות א, יא) : **“וַיִּשְׁימוּ עָלֵינוּ שָׂרֵי מִסִּים, לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוּ בְּסַבְלָתָם. וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה, אֶת פִּתּוֹם וְאֶת רַעַמְסֵס.”**

**“וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבָדָה קָשָׁה.”** כָּמָה שְׁנָאָמַר (שמות א, יג) : **“וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ.”**



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Symposium:  
Oppression



Egyptian slaves making mud bricks mixed with straw and water, dried in wooden frames

Tomb of Rekhmire, 18th Century B.C.E.

## Rameses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.)

### **The Great Builder and the Greater Ego**

Ruling the united kingdom of Egypt for 66 years was Rameses the Great, whose name means “born of (*meses*) the sun-god (*Ra*).” Using many Semitic laborers, he completed the temple of Karnak, and constructed the obelisks now located at the Place de la Concorde in Paris and in three squares in Rome.

The enormous statues of Rameses II which he constructed in Luxor epitomize in stone what the Egyptologists say of his character: “inordinately vain and ostentatious, the greatest of Egyptian boasters.” Among his one hundred children, his thirteenth son, Merneptah (1224-1212 B.C.E.) later inscribed a stone stele, the first extra-Biblical evidence of the existence of the nation of Israel. There he boasts — prematurely it seems — that Israel has been conquered and wiped out forever.

*(Moses and Egypt: Documentation for the movie The Ten Commandments, Henry Noerdlinger)*

## Midrash: Filling in the Gaps

WHILE THE BIBLE is short on concrete details, the Rabbinic midrash imaginatively reconstructs the daily pain and indignity of slavery from the hints in the text.

1. **Why** does the Torah use the rare term “*be-farech*” to describe the Egyptian harsh labor?

Rabbi Elazar explained: Don’t read “*be-farech*” — “with harshness” but “*be-fe-rach*” — “with soft speech,” with a silvery tongue. Pharaoh had already declared that the Egyptians must “outsmart” Israel. So he gathered all the children of Israel and gave them this “pitch:” “Please do me a favor today and give me a hand.” Pharaoh took up a rake and a basket and began to make mud bricks. Everyone who saw him did likewise. Israel worked with him enthusiastically all day. When it grew dark, Pharaoh appointed task masters over them to count up their bricks. “That,” he announced, “will be your daily quota!” (*Tanhuma Buber, BeHaalotcha*)



*Rameses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.) with the snake crown and the royal scepter (Karnak, Egypt)*

2. **What** does the Torah mean when it says, “*Moshe went out to his kinsfolk and saw their burdens*”? (*Ex. 2:11*)

Moshe saw a big burden on an old person and a small one on a young healthy person, a woman’s task assigned to a man and a man’s task assigned to a woman. He began to cry and say, “Oy! I feel so bad for them. I would give my life for them.” So he would leave his royal retinue and go join his brothers and sisters. While pretending to be executing Pharaoh’s orders, he rearranged the burdens, helping each and every slave.

Seeing they had no time to rest, he went to plead their cause before Pharaoh: “Any slave owner knows that if his slave doesn’t rest one day a week, then he’ll die.” Pharaoh replied: “Go and take care of this problem!” So Moshe enacted for them a weekly day of rest — Shabbat.

3. **Why** did God choose Moses?

Once, while Moses, our Teacher, was tending [his father-in-law] Yitro’s sheep, one of the sheep ran away. Moses ran after it until it reached a small, shaded place. There, the lamb came across a pool and began to drink. As Moses approached the lamb, he said, “I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. You are so exhausted!” He then put the lamb on his shoulders and carried him back. The Holy One said, “Since you tend the sheep of human beings with such overwhelming love — by your life, I swear you shall be the shepherd of My sheep, Israel.”

*(Exodus Rabba 2:2, [1:129])*

# From Resignation to Resistance



Ben Shahn, The Alphabet of Creation  
© Estate of Ben Shahn/Licensed by VAGA, NY, NY

“וּנְצַעַק אֶל יי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע יי אֶת קִלְנוֹ,  
וַיֵּרָא אֶת עֲנִינּוֹ, וְאֶת עֲמָלּוֹ, וְאֶת לַחֲצִנּוֹ.”

“וּנְצַעַק אֶל יי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ.” כִּמָּה שְׁנָאָמַר (שְׁמוֹת ב, כג) :  
וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הֵהֱם, וַיָּמַת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם, וַיֶּאֱנָחוּ  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעֲבָדָה וַיִּזְעֻקוּ. וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל  
הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הָעֲבָדָה.”

“וַיִּשְׁמַע יי אֶת קִלְנוֹ.” כִּמָּה שְׁנָאָמַר (שְׁמוֹת ב, כד) :  
“וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם, וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ,  
אֶת אֲבְרָהָם, אֶת יִצְחָק, וְאֶת יַעֲקֹב.”

“WE CRIED OUT TO ADONAI, THE GOD OF OUR  
FATHERS, GOD HEARD OUR VOICE, HE SAW OUR  
PERSECUTION, OUR TOIL, AND OUR OPPRESSION.”

(Deut. 26:7)

“WE CRIED OUT TO ADONAI.” (Deut. 26:7)

This was the turning point. “After many, many days,  
the king of Egypt died. The children of Israel groaned from  
under the labor and cried out in protest. Their cry for help  
rose up to God from their labor.” (Ex. 2:23)

“GOD HEARD OUR VOICE.” (Deut. 26:7)

Just as it says in Exodus: “God HEARD their moans and  
God remembered the Divine covenant with Abraham and  
Isaac and Jacob.” (Exodus 2:24)



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Symposium:  
Resistance

## 'We Cried Out' — The Power of a Groan

THE HASSIDIC Rebbe of Gur says:  
The sigh, the groan and the crying out  
of the children of Israel from the slavery  
was the beginning of redemption. As  
long as they did not cry out against their  
exile they were neither worthy nor ready  
for redemption.

*(Menachem HaCohen)*

## Hope is Saying 'No!'

PRESIDENT HAVEL of the Czech  
Republic (playwright and former  
prisoner in communist Czechoslovakia):

"Hope is saying 'no' to the world  
immediately experienced. Optimism is  
the belief that things will be different,  
will be better."

## Internal Exile

THE MAGGID OF ZLOTSHOV said:

"When the Jews are in exile, the exile  
enters into them and they refuse to leave  
the exile and be redeemed. It was for  
this reason that the Holy One had to  
make Pharaoh a cruel king so that *'with  
a strong hand he would expel them from  
his country.'* (Ex. 6:1) This is what we say in  
the Haggadah: 'Had the Holy One not  
taken our fathers out of Egypt, we and  
our children, and our children's children  
would have been enslaved' — to this  
very day we would have been living by  
the fleshpots of Egypt."

## 'Our Oppression': Slavery and Patience

### Waitings

The waitings which make up the life of a slave:  
first he waits for a spokesman  
and for plagues  
to plead his cause,  
then he waits for the waters  
to open before him,  
then he waits for the desert storms  
to name themselves,  
then (being a slave) he asks in his heart:  
why did I wait for the parting of the waters?  
why did I wait for all this uproar and these burnings?  
then (being a slave) he waits for answers.

*Stanley Chyet, Professor of American Jewish History, HUC*

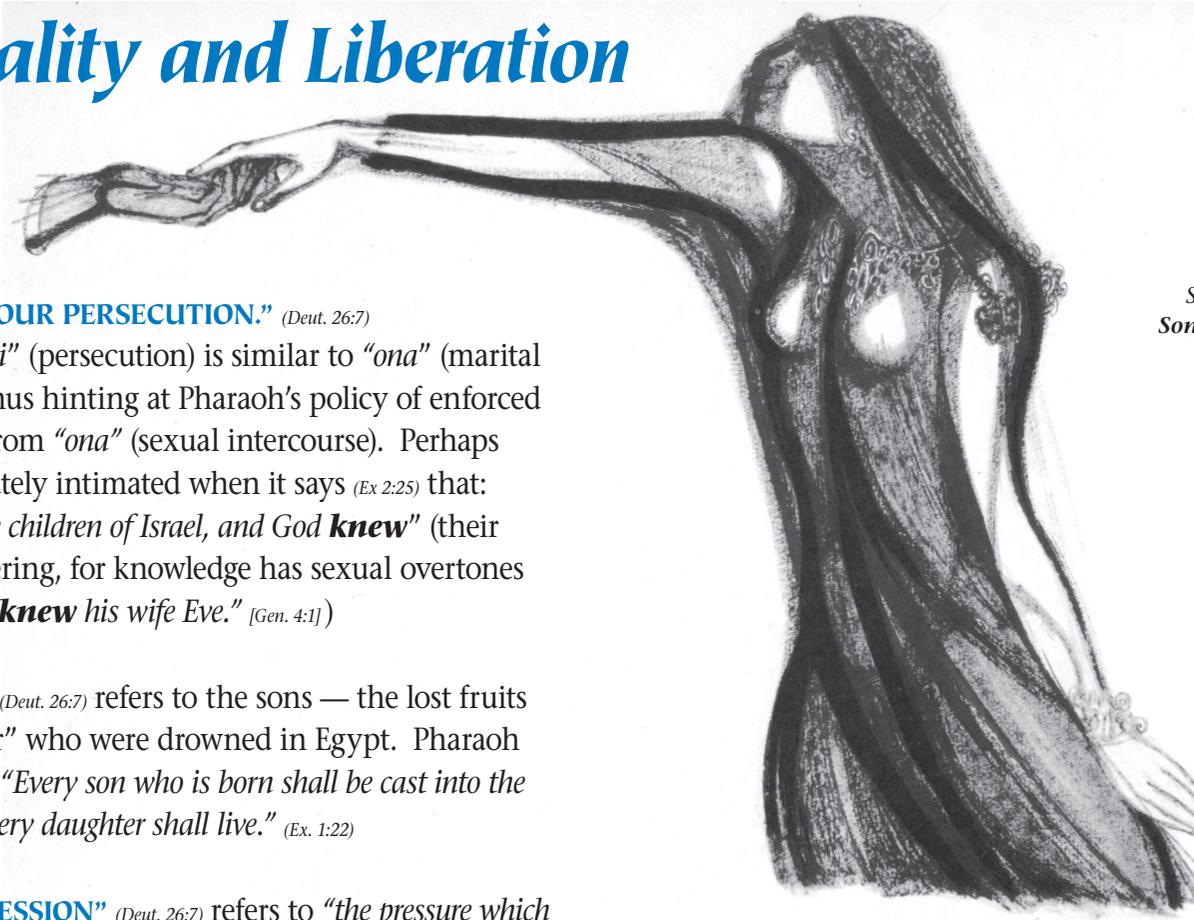
**R. Hanoch-Henich of Alexander** added:  
"This was the real meaning of the exile  
of Israel in Egypt: they learned to toler-  
ate the evil decrees, and became accus-  
tomed to Pharaoh." *(Menachem HaCohen)*

### Tears to Hide Our Tears

ONE OF THE TROUBLES in Egypt was  
that we could not cry and complain, for

we were surrounded with enemies look-  
ing for an excuse to harm us. But when  
the king of Egypt died and everyone  
lamented his death in processions all over  
the city, then we could safely cry over our  
own troubles. We groaned and wept  
with the Egyptians. While they thought  
we were mourning the death of the king,  
no one could accuse us of wrongdoing.  
Yet God knew the true reason of our  
tears. *(Mei-am Loez)*

# Sexuality and Liberation



Shraga Weil,  
*Song of Songs*,  
© 1968



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Symposium:  
Sexual  
Liberation

## “GOD SAW OUR PERSECUTION.” (Deut. 26:7)

The root “oni” (persecution) is similar to “ona” (marital intimacy), thus hinting at Pharaoh’s policy of enforced abstinence from “ona” (sexual intercourse). Perhaps that is delicately intimated when it says (Ex 2:25) that: “God saw the children of Israel, and God **knew**” (their marital suffering, for knowledge has sexual overtones as in “Adam **knew** his wife Eve.” [Gen. 4:1])

“OUR TOIL” (Deut. 26:7) refers to the sons — the lost fruits of our “labor” who were drowned in Egypt. Pharaoh proclaimed: “Every son who is born shall be cast into the Nile, while every daughter shall live.” (Ex. 1:22)

“OUR OPPRESSION” (Deut. 26:7) refers to “the pressure which the Egyptians applied to them.” (Ex. 3:9)

“וַיֵּרָא אֶת עֲנִינֵנוּ.” זוֹ פְּרִישׁוֹת דְּרָדָּךְ אֶרֶץ. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר  
(שמות ב, כה) : “וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. וַיַּדַּע  
אֱלֹהִים.”

“וְאֵת עֲמַלְנוּ.” אֵלּוּ הַבָּנִים. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שמות א, כב) :  
“כָּל הַבֶּן הַיְלֹוֹד הַיְאָרָה תִּשְׁלִיכֶהוּ, וְכָל הַבַּת תַּחְיֶינָה.”

“וְאֵת לַחֲצֵנוּ.” זֶה הַדַּחֲק. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שמות ג, ט) :  
“וְגַם רָאִיתִי אֶת הַלַּחֲץ, אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם לַחֲצִים אֹתָם.”

## ZPG — Zero Population Growth

THE MIDRASH COMMENTS that Pharaoh's decree — throwing the male babies into the Nile — demoralized the Jewish leadership. Amram, future father of Moses, leader of his generation, divorced his wife Yocheved, and declared that all couples should now refrain from marriage because there was no point any more in bearing children. The midrash says that Amram was opposed by his young daughter Miriam. We give here a free adaptation of their midrashic dialogue:

**Miriam:** Where are you going with those leaflets?

**Amram:** We're holding the founding meeting of the Jewish ZPG society. All Jews must stop having babies.

**Miriam:** But you always said you wanted a big family? Look how much we all love my baby brother Aaron!

**Amram:** That was before Pharaoh issued these horrible decrees. He says that all baby boys must be thrown into the Nile. I'm not going to bring a baby into the world to suffer such a horrible fate! Even if he somehow escapes — what kind of life does this world offer him other than endless slavery and indignity?

**Miriam:** But you're worse than Pharaoh!

**Amram:** How dare you make such an accusation!

**Miriam:** But it's true! Pharaoh has only decreed against the male children. If your efforts are successful, not even female babies will be born!

**Amram:** But what good are females without the males?

**Miriam:** That's what you and that stupid chauvinist Pharaoh think! But in God's eyes all represent the image of God. Perhaps through the merit of righteous women we will be redeemed. At any rate we have to keep on making Jewish babies no matter how dark the prospects — and leave the rest up to God.

**Amram:** You know, that makes sense. I'm going to call off the meeting. Go tell Mommy we'll be drinking our best wine at dinner tonight.

## Sexuality and Liberation

THE EGYPTIANS' express purpose in enslaving Israel was to drastically cut their birth rate. The hard labor in the fields exhausted the slaves physically and spiritually. According to a Rabbinic midrash, it was the women who resisted the intent of the decree. They used their sexuality to arouse their husbands, and so re-ignite the fundamental will to life:

"When Israel performed hard labor in Egypt, Pharaoh decreed that the men must not sleep in their homes, so that they would not engage in sexual relations. Rabbi Shimon bar Halafta said: What did the daughters of Israel do? They went down to draw water from the Nile and God would bring little fish into their jars. They cooked some of the fish and sold the rest, buying wine with the proceeds. Then they went out to the fields and fed their husbands. After eating and drinking, the women would take out bronze mirrors and look at them

with their husbands. The wife would say "I'm prettier than you," and the husband would reply, "I'm more beautiful than you." Thus they would arouse themselves to desire and they would then "be fruitful and multiply."

Years later, when God told Moses to build a tabernacle in the desert, all Israel came to volunteer beautiful things. Some brought gold and silver. The women said, "What do we have to donate to the tabernacle?" They took their bronze mirrors and brought them to Moses.

At first, Moses became angry and refused to accept the mirrors since their function is to arouse jealousy and sexual desire. God said to Moses: "Moses, do you dare scorn these mirrors? They are more precious to Me than all the other donations, because through these mirrors the women gave birth in Egypt to all these multitudes. Take them and make them into the bronze basin, with which the priests will purify themselves."

*(Tanhuma Pikudei 9)*

## The Bedrooms of Israel

PHARAOH HAD ENTERED the bedrooms of Israel. The birthing beds of Hebrews were matters of state. The Hebrew womb had fallen under the heel of Pharaoh.

*(Moses, Man of the Mountain, by Zora Neale Hurston, Afro-American novelist, 1920's)*

## Discrimination

**Discuss:** Are women still oppressed in contemporary society? What should liberation mean today?

## The Ten Plagues

### God's Strong Hand, His Outstretched Arm, and His Little Finger

**1. The main ceremony** of removing ten drops of wine for the Ten Plagues is on page 98. (Some may wish to skip directly to that climax of the lengthy Rabbinic discussion of the Ten Plagues).

**2. The Rabbis** debated about the Ten Plagues: On the one hand, they were a necessary instrument of liberation and a just punishment for Egyptian cruelty. Yet, on the other, they involved the suffering of fellow human beings. The meaning of suffering and its lessons for the victim and the oppressor are explored here.

“GOD TOOK US OUT OF EGYPT WITH A STRONG HAND, AND AN OUTSTRETCHED ARM, WITH AWESOME POWER, SIGNS AND WONDERS.” (Deut. 26:8)

“GOD TOOK US OUT” (Deut. 26:8) — **Not** by the hands of an angel, **Not** by the hands of a seraph, **Not** by the hands of a messenger, **But** The Holy One Himself in His own Glory. Just as it says, “I will pass through the land of Egypt, and I will strike down every first born in Egypt, both human and beast, I will execute judgment on all the gods of Egypt, I am God.” (Ex. 12:12)

“WITH A STRONG HAND” refers to an epidemic of animal disease (*dever*) — the fifth plague. “The **hand** of Adonai will strike your livestock in the fields — the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep — with a very severe disease.” (Ex. 9:3)

“וַיִּצְאָנוּ יי מִמִּצְרַיִם, בְּיַד חֲזָקָה, וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה, וּבְמַרְאָ גָדוֹל וּבְאֵתוֹת וּבְמוֹפְתִים.”

“וַיִּצְאָנוּ יי מִמִּצְרַיִם.” לא על ידי מַלְאָךְ, וְלֹא עַל ידי שָׂרָף. וְלֹא עַל ידי שְׁלִיחַ. אֲלֵא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכַבּוֹדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ. שְׁנֵאמַר (שְׁמוֹת יב, יג):  
 “וְעַבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּלִילָה הַזֶּה, וְהִפִּיתִי כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, מֵאָדָם וְעַד בְּהֵמָה, וּבְכָל אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי יי.”

“וְעַבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּלִילָה הַזֶּה” – אֲנִי וְלֹא מַלְאָךְ. “וְהִפִּיתִי כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם” – אֲנִי וְלֹא שָׂרָף. “וּבְכָל אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים” – אֲנִי וְלֹא הַשְּׁלִיחַ. “אֲנִי יי” – אֲנִי הוּא וְלֹא אַחֵר.

“בְּיַד חֲזָקָה.” זוֹ הַדְּבָר. כְּמָה שְׁנֵאמַר (שְׁמוֹת ט, יג):  
 “הִנֵּה יַד יי הוֹיָה, בְּמִקְנֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה, בְּסוֹסִים וּבַחֲמֹרִים בְּגַמְלִים, בְּבָקָר וּבְצֹאן, דְּבַר כְּיַד מֵאֵד.”



Kadesh

Urchatz

Karpas

Yachatz

Maggid

Symposium:  
Ten  
Plagues

## A Pacifist Interprets the Midnight Plague

### Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamares

(Lithuanian Orthodox rabbi, early Zionist and pacifist, 1869-1931)

**“For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night”** (Ex. 12:12) — **“I and not an intermediary.”** Now obviously the Holy One could have given the children of Israel the power to avenge themselves upon the Egyptians, but He did not want to sanction the use of their fists for self-defense even at that time. At that moment they might merely have defended themselves against evil-doers, but in the end defenders become aggressors.

**“It came to pass at midnight.”** (Ex. 12:29)

The Holy One took great pains to remove Israel completely from any participation in the vengeance upon the evil-doers, to such an extent that they were not permitted even to see the events. For that reason **midnight**, the darkest hour, was designated as the time for the deeds of vengeance, and the children of Israel were warned not to step outside their houses at that hour.

**“... None of you shall go out of the door of their house until the morning ... that there not be in your midst the plague of the destroyer.”** (Ex. 12:22-23)

The language itself is very precise. Your abstention from any participation in the vengeance upon Egypt will prevent the plague of vengeance from stirring the power of the **destroyer** which is in you yourselves.



The Tenth Plague

Leon Baxter

## Egyptology and the 'gods'

**“I will punish all the gods of Egypt, I am Adonai.”** (Ex. 12:12)

By attacking the gods of Egypt and disrupting the cosmic order established on earth by the god **Ra**, the ten plagues delegitimized Pharaoh, who claimed to be the divine king bearing the name “Son of Ra.” Pharaoh’s query — **“Who is Adonai, that I should heed his voice”** (Ex. 5:2) — is answered pointedly by the “hand of God,” an idiom meaning in ancient Egyptian, “a plague.” Many of the plagues strike at the domains particular to Egyptian deities.

One Rabbinic midrash exemplifies this idea: “Why did the first plague turn the Nile into blood? For Pharaoh and the Egyptians worshipped the Nile. So God said: Go and strike their god until he bleeds.” (Tanchuma, Shmot Rabbah 9)

**Hapi** was the Egyptian god of the Nile. The second plague struck at **Heket** the god who took the shape of a frog. The fifth plague, cattle disease, attacked the gods **Hathor** (cow) and **Apis** (bull). The ninth plague, darkness, triumphed over the sun god **Ra**. Finally, the tenth showed the vulnerability of Pharaoh himself, the son of the Sun god. The Torah puns on the name of Egypt’s supreme god “Ra” and calls him “*ra’a*,” the source of evil. (Ex. 10:10)

# An Outstretched Arm

**According to** an Afghani Jewish custom, the leader of the seder raises the bone (**zeroa**) from the seder plate as a symbol of God's outstretched arm (**zeroa**).



## וּבְזָרַע נְטוּיָה

**“WITH AN OUTSTRETCHED ARM”** (*zeroa*) — refers to God's sword (as a metaphor for the plague of the first born) just as it does elsewhere: *“David woke up and saw the angel of Adonai standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand, outstretched against Jerusalem.”* (1 Chronicles 21:16)

(David had sinned and his realm was punished with a plague of death. The verse describes the moment when the plague stopped, and the spot was then consecrated as the site for the future Temple.)

**“WITH AWESOME POWER”** refers to the revelation of God's power to our very eyes. That is just what Moshe tells Israel: *“Did a God ever before attempt to come and extract one nation for himself from the midst of another nation by prodigious acts, by signs and wonders, by war, by a strong hand, an outstretched arm and awesome power, as Adonai your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?”* (Deut. 4:34)

**“WITH SIGNS”** refers to the staff, as God told Moshe: *“Take the staff in your hand to do signs with it.”* (Ex. 4:17)

**“וּבְזָרַע נְטוּיָה.”** זוּ הַחֶרֶב. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דח"א כא, טז) :  
“וְחָרְבוּ שְׁלוֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ, נְטוּיָה עַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.”

**“וּבְמִזְרָא גְדוֹל.”** זֶה גְלוּי שְׂכִינָה. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר  
(דברים ד, לד) : “אוּ הִנֵּסָה אֱלֹהִים, לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לוֹ גוֹי  
מִקְרֵב גּוֹי, בְּמַסַּת בְּאֹתוֹת וּבְמוֹפְתִים וּבְמִלְחָמָה, וּבִיד  
חִזְקָה וּבְזָרוּעַ נְטוּיָה, וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדוֹלִים. כָּל־אִשׁוֹר  
עָשָׂה לָכֶם יי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם, לְעִינֵינוּ.”

**“וּבְאֹתוֹת.”** זֶה הַמַּטֵּה, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שמות ד, יז) : “וְאֵת  
הַמַּטֵּה הַזֶּה תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ. אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בּוֹ אֵת הָאֹתוֹת.”



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
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## Giving a Helping Hand

Just as God showed compassion to the Jews when they were strangers in Egypt, so all of us are commanded to imitate God's active concern for the poor, the persecuted and the outsider.

Ask the participants to describe examples of how people have helped refugees, the mistreated and the "other" in society.



Otto Geismar, 1927

## 'Even Harsher'

Ask someone to name a very harsh task and explain why it is so difficult especially for him. Ask the next one to name an even harsher, more embittering, more humiliating task and explain the choice . . . If you were a slave, what would you hate most?

## Suffering and its Lessons

**W**hen we dwell on being victims, then those memories may either corrupt us or help us grow in empathy for others. Consider the negative effects of suffering: self-pity, dreams of vengeance, self-righteousness and self-blame. Often one loses the ability to feel for others since "I suffered much worse."

Yet the Torah seeks to extract positive lessons from our persecution in Egypt: activism, hope, solidarity among victims and empathy for the other, "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Compare and contrast Pharaoh's and God's advice to their children below:

### Pharaoh's Advice

HEARKEN TO THAT which I say to you . . .  
Harden yourself against all subordinates.  
The people give heed to him who terrorizes them.  
Approach them not alone.  
Fill not your heart with a brother.  
Know not a friend,  
Nor make for yourself intimates,  
Wherein there is no end.  
When you sleep,  
Guard for yourself your own heart,  
For a man has no people.  
In the day of evil,  
I gave to the beggar.  
I nourished the orphan.  
I admitted the insignificant,  
As well as him who was of great account.  
But he who ate my food made insurrection.  
He to whom I gave my land, aroused fear therein.

(Pharaoh Amenemhet, 1780 B.C.E)

### God's Advice

WHEN A STRANGER resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him.  
The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens.  
You shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.  
I, Adonai, am your God who freed you from the land of Egypt. (Leviticus 19:33-36)  
You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes. (Ex. 23:6)  
You shall have one law for all of you.  
The same for both stranger and citizen for I, Adonai, am your God. (Lev. 24:22)  
When you reap the produce of your land, you must not harvest the corners of your field nor gather the fallen sheaves. Leave them for the poor and the stranger.  
I, Adonai, am your God. (Lev. 23:22)  
You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers. (Ex. 22:9)

# God's Fingers and the Sixteen Drops

# אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים

**It is a medieval custom** to dip one's finger in the seder's second cup of wine and to remove sixteen drops of wine. As each plague is recited we decrease our own joy, drop by drop, as we recall the enemy's pain. **Besides the ten plagues,** the

extra six drops correspond to the three prophetic plagues mentioned by the prophet Joel — **blood, fire and smoke** — and the three word abbreviation of the ten plagues invented by Rabbi Yehuda — **d'tzach, adash, b'achab.**



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Ten  
Plagues

**"WITH WONDERS"** refers to the plagues of blood, fire and smoke that are recalled by the prophet Joel: "Before the great and terrible day of Adonai comes, I will set wonders in the sky and on earth . . . **blood, fire, pillars of smoke!** *Da-am* (drop of wine) *va-eish* (drop) *v'teemrot ashan* (drop)! The sun shall turn to darkness and the moon into blood." (Joel 3:3)

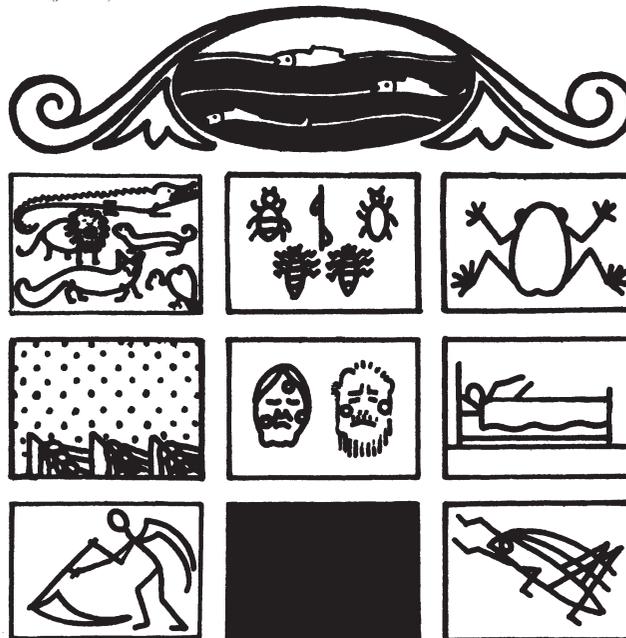
**"וּבְמוֹפְתִים."** זֶה הַדָּם. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (יואל ג, ג):  
"וְנִתְּתִי מוֹפְתִים, בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ."

**דָּם. וְאֵשׁ. וְתִמְרוֹת עֵשֶׂן.**

## Alluding to Ten:

The Rabbis offer an additional midrash on the verse from Deuteronomy 26:8: "God took us out of Egypt with a strong hand, and an outstretched arm, with awesome power; signs and wonders." This midrash allowed them to find allusions to all of the ten plagues:

- "WITH A strong hand" — two!
  - "with an outstretched arm" — two!
  - "with awesome power" — two!
  - "with signs" — two!
  - "with wonders" — two!
- That equals ten.



- דָּבָר אַחֵר. "בְּיַד חֲזָקָה" — שְׁתֵּים.
- "וּבְרִיעַ נְטוּיָה" — שְׁתֵּים.
- "וּבְמוֹרָא גְדוֹל" — שְׁתֵּים.
- "וּבְאִתּוֹת" — שְׁתֵּים.
- "וּבְמִפְתִּים" — שְׁתֵּים.

Otto Geismar, 1927

## The Little Finger and the Itchy Lice

THE FINGER USED to remove the wine recalls the metaphor used by Pharaoh's magicians who could not rid themselves of the plague of lice. Unable to alleviate the third plague with all their incantations, they acknowledged:

*"This must be the Finger of God."* (Ex. 8:15)

## Games of the Ten Plagues

### 1. Pantomime

Prepare cards with the name or picture of one of the ten plagues. Let ten participants at the seder choose a card out of a hat and present a pantomime of the plague while the others try to guess the name of the plague. (Try using its Hebrew name). You may let the children do the pantomime and the adults guess.

### 2. "The Yuckiest Plague"

Divide the children into three groups. Each group will be given as a theme either blood, frogs, or wild animals (the first, second, and fourth plague). They have five to ten minutes to prepare a short play. The adults may judge and award an Oscar (or better a "Moses") for the most vivid, original, and devastating presentation.

## Pharaoh's Frogs

one morning when Pharaoh woke in his bed,  
there were frogs in his bed, and...

frogs on his nose,  
frogs on his head,  
and frogs on his toes,

frogs HERE ↓ frogs THERE →

frogs were jumping EVERYWHERE!

## The Ecology of Plagues

R. YEHUDA HALEVI, the 12th C. Spanish physician and poet, explained the division of plagues into twos:

**Two** plagues from the water (blood and frogs from the Nile);

**Two** plagues from the earth (lice and wild animals);

**Two** plagues from air-carried infections (plague and boils);

**Two** plagues from air-carried damages (hailstorms and locusts);

**Two** plagues from supernatural acts (darkness caused by an eclipse and the plague of the first born).

## Recount the Plagues

Recount the plagues that have struck this year and for each remove a drop of wine from one's cup of joy. Some families recount ecological plagues at this point.

# The Ten Plagues

❖ The Holy One brought **ten plagues** on the Egyptians in Egypt. These are the ten:



# עֶשֶׂר מַכּוֹת

אלו עֶשֶׂר מַכּוֹת שֶׁהֵבִיא  
הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל  
הַמִּצְרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם, וְאֵלוֹ הֵן:



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Ten  
Plagues

Rabbi Yehuda used to abbreviate them as an acrostic:

D-Tza-Kh (drop) (Da-am/Tzefar-dei-ah/Kee-neem)  
A-Da-Sh (drop) (Ah-rov/Deh-ver/Sh'cheen)  
B'-A-Cha-B (drop) (Ba-rad/Ar-beh/Cho-shech/Makat B'chorot)

רַבִּי יְהוּדָה הֵיךְ נוֹתֵן בָּהֶם סְמָנִים:  
דְּצ"ךְ  
עַד"ש  
בְּאֲח"ב.

## 'Let My People Go'

### An African-American Spiritual

Sing:

When Israel was in Egypt's land,

"Let My people go." (Ex. 5:1)

Oppressed so hard they could not stand,

"Let My people go."

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,

Tell old Pharaoh: "Let My people go."

Thus said the Lord, bold Moses said,

"Let My people go."

If not, I'll smite your first-born dead,

"Let My people go."

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,

Tell old Pharaoh: "Let My people go."

No more shall they in bondage toil,

"Let My people go."

Let them come out with Egypt's spoil,

"Let My people go."

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land.

Tell old Pharaoh: "Let my people go."

## 'Black Moses'

HARRIET TUBMAN escaped in 1849 from her plantation in Maryland with the help of the "Underground Railroad." Soon she became a major "conductor" bringing more than 300 slaves to freedom.

Despite the high price on her head, her faith in God gave her the courage to persist and earn the nickname "Moses of her people."



Tanya Zion  
1996

# Should We Feel Joy at the Downfall of Our Enemies?

בְּאֵבֶד רְשָׁעִים  
רְנָה

**1. The spilling** of the sixteen drops has been understood traditionally in opposite ways. Either it signifies sympathy for the enemy Egyptians who suffered as a result of the painful process of liberating the Jews from Egyptian tyranny; or it reaffirms the righteous vengeance of God's sword exercising judgment against a relentless, cruel and stubborn oppressor.

**2. We have arrayed** contrasting views: on the right, the joys of just punishment and on the left, the need for restraint on vengeful feelings. You may wish to read responsively the contrasting speeches of Shylock (#5) and Yitzchak Rabin (#5).

**3. Discuss** to what extent these statements reflect your feelings about Muslim terrorists, contemporary Egyptians, Nazis, or criminals in general.



Kadesh  
Urchatz  
Karpas  
Yachatz  
Maggid

Ten  
Plagues

## On the One Hand: The Joys of Justice

**1. "When the wicked perish,  
There are shouts of joy!"** (Proverbs 11:10)

### 2. The Song of the Red Sea

"Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea . . . Then Moshe and Israel sang to Adonai: . . . Your right hand, Adonai, shatters the Foe. The Foe said: 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. My desire shall have its fill of them. I will bare my sword' . . . But You, God, made your wind blow, the sea covered them." (Ex. 14:31, 15:1,9-10)

### 3. President Abraham Lincoln

"If every drop of blood drawn by the lash must be paid by one drawn by the sword, still must it be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'" (Psalm 19; Second Inaugural Address, 1865)

### Rabbi Jacob Halevi Moulin

(15th C. Germany, an era of pogroms and expulsions)

"The **sixteen drops** refer to the **sixteen facets** of God's avenging sword."

### 4. Rabbi Shalom from Noitch

On the seventh day of Pesach (the anniversary of the crossing of the Red Sea), one should be sure to add the phrase "the day of our joy" (*simchatenu*) to the Kiddush, for the Egyptians were drowned in the sea.

### 5. Shylock

"My Revenge! He hath disgraced me, and hind' red me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies — and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?

Fed with the same food,  
hurt with the same weapons,  
subject to the same diseases,  
healed by the same means,  
warmed and cooled by the same winter  
and summer as a Christian is?  
If you prick us, do we not bleed?  
If you tickle us, do we not laugh?  
If you poison us, do we not die?  
**And if you wrong us,  
shall we not revenge?**  
If we are like you in the rest,  
we will resemble you in that.  
If a Jew wrong a Christian,  
what is his humility? **Revenge.**  
If a Christian wrong a Jew, What should  
his sufferance be by Christian example?  
Why, **revenge!**  
The villainy you teach me I will execute,  
and it shall go hard but I will better the  
instruction."

(William Shakespeare, "The Merchant of Venice," 1597)

## On the Other Hand: Restraints on Revenge

1. "If your enemy falls.  
Do not celebrate.  
If he trips,  
Let not your heart rejoice."

(Proverbs 24:17)

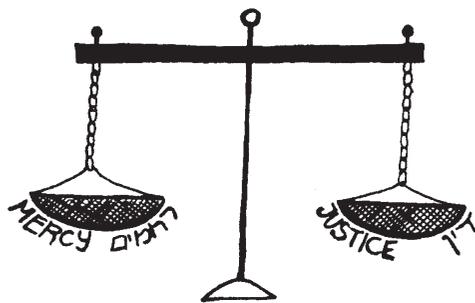
### 2. Rabbi Yochanan

"God is not happy at the downfall of the wicked . . . When the angels tried to sing songs of praise to God at the Red Sea, God silenced them: **'My handiwork, my human creatures, are drowning in the sea and you want to sing a song of praise?'**" (T.B. Megillah 10b)

### 3. Don Isaac Abrabanel

(refugee of the Expulsion from Spain, 1492)

"By spilling a drop of wine, from the Pesach cup for each plague, we acknowledge that our own joy is lessened and incomplete. For our redemption had to come by means of the punishment of other human beings. Even though these are just punishments for evil acts, it says **'Do not rejoice at the fall of your enemy.'**" (Proverbs 24:17)



בְּנִפְל אוֹיְבֶךָ,  
אֵל תִּשְׂמַח

### 4. Rabbi Simcha Cohen from Divinsk

(Lithuanian Talmudist)

"The Torah never mentions 'joy' in relation to the holiday of Pesach as it does for Shavuot and Sukkot. On Pesach — unlike the other pilgrimage holidays — we do not recite all the Psalms of Hallel (except on the first day) because as Shmuel quotes from Proverbs: *In the downfall of your enemy, do not rejoice. We celebrate the Exodus from Egypt, not the downfall of the Egyptians.*"

### 5. Chief of Staff, General Yitzhak Rabin, Six Day War, June 1967

(later Prime Minister of the State of Israel, 1974-77, 1992-95)

"War is harsh and cruel, filled with blood and tears. While the joy of victory seized the whole people, among the community of fighters themselves there is a strange phenomenon: they cannot celebrate wholeheartedly. There is a large measure of sadness, of shock, mixed into their festivities. Some fighters cannot celebrate at all. The frontline soldiers saw with their own eyes — not only the glory of victory, but also its price — their fellow fighters fell at their sides in pools of blood. I know that the price paid by the enemy also touched a deep place in the hearts of many. **Perhaps the Jewish people has never been educated and never become accustomed to the joy of the conqueror. Therefore, our victory is received with mixed feelings.**"

## Bruria and the Hoodlums

A GANG OF HOODLUMS lived in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood and they used to torment him endlessly. Rabbi Meir prayed for their death. His wife Bruria said to him: "How did you reach such a decision?" He replied: "The Bible says, *'Let sins be obliterated from the earth.'*" (Psalms 104:35) She answered: "Is it written 'sinners?'" The verse says 'sins.' Look further to the end of the verse: *' . . . And the wicked will be no more.'* (Psalms 104:35) Since all sins will be obliterated, then of course *'the wicked will be no more.'* Therefore, pray that these hoodlums repent and then they will not be 'wicked' anymore."

Rabbi Meir prayed for them and they indeed mended their ways.

(2nd C. Eretz Yisrael, Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 10a)

## Reflections on Vengeance

"You shall not take vengeance nor bear a grudge against your people. Rather you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am Adonai." (Leviticus 19:18-19)

"Whoever takes vengeance destroys his own house." (R. Papa, T.B. Sanhedrin 102b)

"Don't say, since I have been humiliated; let my neighbor be humiliated also. Know! It is the image of God in your neighbor, you would be humiliating."

(Ben Azzai, Tanhuma Gen. R. 24:7)

"This shall be our revenge! We shall revive what they kill, and raise what they topple . . . This is the banner of our vengeance and its name is Jerusalem."

(Peretz Smolenskin, Zionist, 1882)