



Passover

IN **60** MINUTES (OR LESS)

BY RABBI ELAZAR MEISELS

The Month of Nissan

This month should be to you the beginning of the months; it should be first to you for the months of the year.

– Exodus 12:2

- Nissan is the Month that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt.
- On the fifteenth of Nissan the angels visited Abraham and informed him of the impending birth of Isaac
- On the fifteenth of Nissan the Patriarch, Isaac, was born
- On the fifteenth of Nissan the Persian ruler Achashverosh suffered insomnia which led to the beginning of the salvation of Purim
- The Patriarch Jacob obtained the coveted blessings, instead of Esau, from Isaac, during this month.
- Nissan is the month that the Messiah is destined to come.
- The Month of Nissan is considered the first month of the Jewish calendar in the sense that it marks the first month that the Jewish people became a nation. In contrast, Elul, the month that Rosh Hashanah occurs, marks the moment of the creation of the universe.

Month of Redemption

”רבי יהושע אומר בניסן נברא העולם בניסן נולדו אבות בניסן מתו אבות בפסח נולד יצחק... בניסן נגאלו בניסן עתידין ליגאל.”

מסכת ראש השנה דף יא/א

“Rabbi Yehoshua said, ‘In Nissan the world was created. In Nissan the Patriarchs were born, in Nissan the Patriarchs passed on. On Passover Isaac was born... In Nissan they [i.e. the Jewish people] were redeemed, in Nissan they will be redeemed again in the future.’”

Tractate Rosh Hashanah 11a

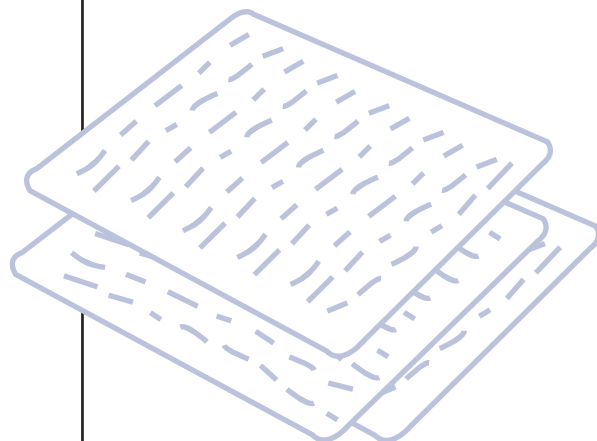
”אמרו ישראל לפני הקב”ה רבש”ע אימתי אתה גואלנו, אמר הקב”ה לכשתרדו במדרגה התחתונה אותה שעה אני גואל אתכם” ילקוט שמעוני.”

הושע פרק יד-רמו תקלג

Another name for the month of Nissan is “Chodesh Aviv” — the month of Spring. The word Aviv can be separated into two words, Av-Yud Beit: The father of all twelve [months].

The month of Nissan is the first month because of its great significance. It reminds us about our miraculous departure from Egypt which was a clear demonstration of the oneness of G-d and His dominion. Pharaoh worshipped the kid and relied on it for his success, counting on the protection of the month of Nissan, which has the astrological sign of the kid. Instead, he was defeated during this month by the Jewish people who offered the Paschal Lamb, using a kid, illustrating that it is Hashem who is the Master of heaven and earth. It is He who controls all, and Whose divine providence shapes our lives. No other entity possesses such all-encompassing power.

Aruch HaShulchan
(Orach Chayim 429:1-2)



Our sages taught,

“The Jewish people said to the Almighty, ‘Master of the Universe, when will You redeem us?’ The Almighty responded to them: ‘When you descend to the lowest level — at that moment, I will redeem you.’”

Yalkut Shimoni Hoshea, 14:533

“We find that when Isaac [the Patriarch] was born, everyone remarked, ‘A child has been born into servitude, for the Almighty told Abraham that his children will be slaves in a foreign land.’ In reality, Isaac became the father of a nation of liberated and free people. Similarly, when Isaac lay on the Altar prepared to offer his life, it appeared as if all offspring of Abraham were about to be eradicated from the earth. Instead, this event was soon transformed into a moment from the merit of which Isaac’s children would extract profound benefits for all generations. The Almighty used this merit to grant them life and eternity. Similarly, when Jacob donned the garments of Esau and entered Isaac’s room in an attempt to deceive him into giving him the coveted blessings, Jacob feared that Isaac would discover his ruse and curse him instead of blessing him. He departed instead with blessings for himself and all his generations. This is the case with all misfortune and hardships that Jacob’s children undergo throughout the generations. What initially appeared grim and insurmountable later evolved into salvation and illumination; the light revealed was as intense as the darkness it replaced.”

“This too, is a model for the future redemption which will burst forth and emerge from the darkest of circumstances, during a period in which every heart will tremble, saying, ‘All hope has been lost.’ Behold, at that very moment, the glory of Hashem will shine upon you. When will this happen? In the month of Nissan which G-d has designated for redemption for all generations. All darkness and suffering which occurs to the Jewish people during this month, it is definitely nothing more than the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption...”

Sefer HaTodaah, Chapter 18

Passover Personalities

Abraham – The first person to promote ethical monotheism to the masses, he entered into a covenant with G-d at the age of 75, in which he was promised the Land of Israel, and children who would inherit it and be as numerous as the stars. However, this would not occur until his children were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, after which time they would leave with great wealth, and the Egyptians would be soundly judged.

Moses — The youngest child of Amram and Yocheved, the leaders of the Jewish community in Egypt. He was discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter, Basya, who rescued him and raised him in the palace as Pharaoh’s grandchild. He advocated on behalf of the Jews and was forced to flee for his life. He encountered the Divine Presence in a burning bush and was instructed to lead the people out of Egypt through a combination of advocacy and devastating plagues. He suffered from a speech impediment which hampered his ability to converse effectively but this was overcome through the use of his brother Aharon as his spokesman.

Aharon — The older brother of Moses, he led the people prior to Moses’ arrival, and he became Moses’ spokesman and enthusiastic collaborator. He accompanied Moses on his visits to Pharaoh and oversaw the execution of a

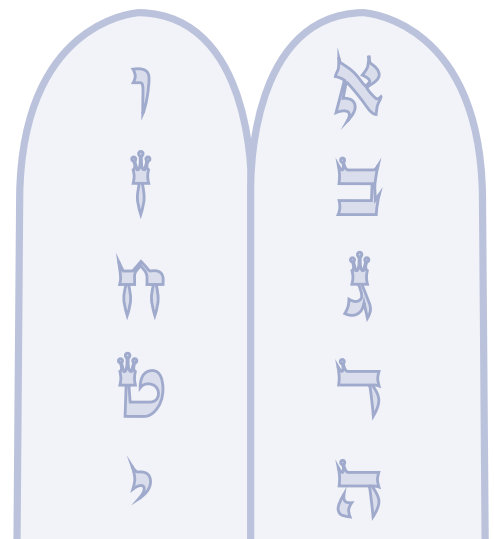
Although the original covenant called for Abraham’s descendants to spend 400 years in Egypt, in reality they only spent 210 years there, eighty of which consisted of hardship and enslavement. Our sages explain that the Egyptians overstepped their mandate and treated us far more cruelly than the Almighty had intended. Thus, in the 210 years we spent in Egypt, we endured the equivalent of 400 years of suffering.

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Although we were supposed to be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, we were released after only 210 years. This is because Pharaoh, in an effort to increase our suffering, decreed that we must work days and nights. This effectively doubled our workload and we fulfilled our quota in 210 years.

R’ Heshel

Moses’ upbringing in the palace was more than just a delicious bit of irony. It served him well later on when he was forced to negotiate with the powers of Egypt, and his knowledge of the inner workings of the palace aided him greatly in this regard.



Yocheved's son Aharon became the first High Priest and Miriam married Caleb, a descendant of Judah. Among her descendants were Betzalel, who constructed the Tabernacle, and King David.

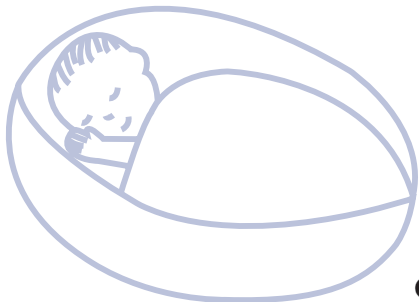
Basya was stricken with Tzaraas [a form of skin affliction.] Upon making contact with Moses' basket the affliction was miraculously healed. For this, she was grateful to Moses and decided to take pity upon him.

Medrash Shmos Rabbah 1:23

Pharaoh consulted three advisors to determine whether to enslave the Jewish people; Bilaam, Job, and Yisro. Bilaam who voted in favor of the plan was eventually killed. Job who remained silent, neither agreeing nor protesting, was punished with severe tribulations. Yisro who fled in protest merited offspring who served on the High Court.

Talmud, Tractate Sotah 11a

We might add that another group deserves mention as well: the women. Pharaoh deliberately arranged the work schedule of the Jews in such a manner as to dissuade and discourage them from engaging in marital relations. This, he hoped, would eliminate the threat of Jewish dominance in a more benign fashion. The holy women of Egypt refused to accept this decree and at great risk to their lives and the lives of their children, took extra measures to attract their husbands' attention. G-d rewarded them with prodigious broods and the copper mirrors used to adorn themselves in Egypt were later used to construct the wash basin for the Priests in the Tabernacle.



number of the Plagues. He had a knack for earning the respect and trust of the Jewish people and utilized that to unify them and promote peace and harmony. He eventually became the first High Priest and his descendants are the family of Kohanim for all generations.

Pharaoh — This was a generic term used to denote the ruler in Egypt. His real name may have been Seti, Ramses or Ramses II. He greatly feared the Jewish ascent to power in Egypt and afflicted them for 210 years. He portrayed himself as an all — powerful deity before his people and strove to deny the existence of a monotheistic G-d, never quite learning his lesson in spite of all the plagues sent against him and his nation.

Yocheved and Miriam — The mother and sister of Moses, respectively. They were the leading midwives for the Jewish people in Egypt, and they were instructed by Pharaoh to commit infanticide upon all Jewish male babies. At great risk to their own lives, they disobeyed his orders and were greatly rewarded for their heroism by the Almighty.

Basya — Daughter of Pharaoh and the foster mother of Moses, whom she rescued from the Nile. He received the name Moses from her, and it is the only name utilized to refer to him throughout the Torah. Our sages tell us that her reason for visiting the Nile that morning was to immerse herself as part of the conversion process, for she disdained the idolatrous culture of Egypt.

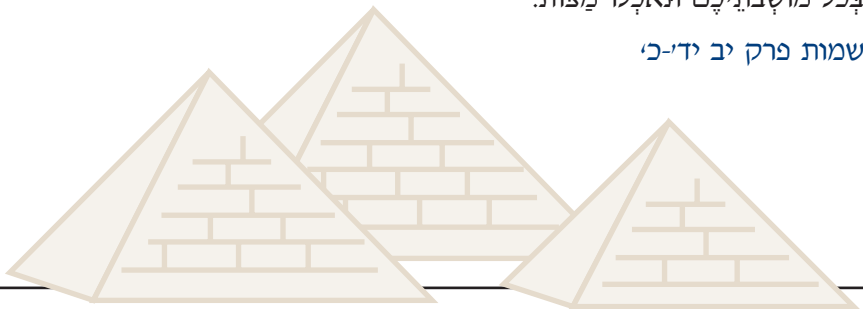
Yisro — Father-in-law of Moses who married his daughter Tzipora. He had served as an advisor to Pharaoh but was forced out of power because he protested the enslavement of the Jews. At the time of Moses' meeting with his daughters, he was in a state of excommunication for having rejected all forms of idolatry. Moses introduced him to monotheism and he eventually became a strong supporter of Moses and may have even formally converted to Judaism.

Passover in Scripture

THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN PRIOR TO THE EXODUS:

וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן וְחֻגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חֵג לַיְדוּד לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻגַת עוֹלָם תִּחְגְּלוּ. שְׁבַעַת יָמִים מִצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ אֹךְ בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן תִּשְׁבְּבוּתוֹ שְׂאֵר מִבְּתֵיכֶם כִּי כֹל אֵכֶל חֶמֶץ וְנִכְרֵתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן עַד יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי: וּבַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לְכֶם כֹּל מִלְאֲכָה לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶם אֹךְ אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל לְכֹל נֶפֶשׁ הוּא לְבַדּוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה לְכֶם: וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם אֶת הַמִּצּוֹת כִּי בַעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת צְבָאוֹתֵיכֶם מִצְרָיִם וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻגַת עוֹלָם: בְּרִאשׁוֹן בָּאֶ-רַבְעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב תֹּאכְלוּ מִצַּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֶשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב: שְׁבַעַת יָמִים שְׂאֵר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבֵתֵיכֶם כִּי כֹל אֵכֶל מִחֻמָּצַת וְנִכְרֵתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַדְתִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ: כֹּל מִחֻמָּצַת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֵתֵיכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ מִצּוֹת.

שמות פרק יב יד-כ



This day must be one that you will remember. You must keep it as a festival to G-d for all generations. It is a law for all time that you must celebrate it. Eat matzah for seven days. By the first day, you must have your homes cleared of all leaven. Whoever eats leaven from the first day until the seventh day will have his soul cut off from Israel. The first day shall be a sacred holiday, and the seventh day shall [also] be a sacred holiday. No work may be done on these [days]. The only [work] that you may do is that which is needed so that everyone will be able to eat. Be careful regarding the matzah, for on this very day I will have brought your masses out of Egypt. You must carefully keep this day for all generations; it is a law for all times. From the 14th day of the first month in the evening, until the night of the 21st day of the month, you must eat [only] matzah. During [these] seven days, no leaven may be found in your homes. If someone eats anything leavened, his soul shall be cut off from the community of Israel. [This is true] whether he is a proselyte or a person born into the nation. You must not eat anything leavened. In all the areas where you live, eat matzah.

Exodus 12:14-20

וְיִהְיֶה מִקֵּץ שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וָאַרְבַּע מְאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיְהִי בַעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יֵצְאוּ
כָּל צְבָאוֹת יִדְּוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: לַיִל שְׁמֵרִים הוּא לַיְדוּד לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם הוּא הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה לַיְדוּד שְׁמֵרִים לְכָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדוֹרֵתָם.

שמות פרק יב מא, מב

At the end of the 430 years, all of G-d's armies left Egypt in broad daylight. There was a night of vigil for G-d, [preparing] to bring them out of Egypt. This night remains for the Israelites a vigil to G-d for all generations.

Exodus 12:41,42

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ בֵּין הָעֲרֵבִים פֶּסַח לַיְדוּד: וּבַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר
יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה חַג הַמַּצּוֹת לַיְדוּד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מַצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ: בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן
מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֶשָׁה לַיְדוּד
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ כָּל מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ:

ויקרא פרק כג ה-ח

The afternoon of the 14th day of the first month is [the time that you must sacrifice] G-d's Passover offering. Then, on the 15th of that month, it is G-d's festival of matzah, when you eat matzah for seven days. The first day shall be a sacred holiday to you, when you may not do any service work. You shall then bring sacrifices to G-d for seven days. The seventh day is a sacred holiday when you may not do any service work.

Leviticus 23:5-8

שָׁמֹר אֶת חֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב וַעֲשִׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַיְדוּד אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בַחֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב
הוֹצִיאֲךָ יְדוּד אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה: וְזָבַחְתָּ פֶּסַח לַיְדוּד אֱלֹהֶיךָ צֹאן וּבָקָר
בְּמִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְדוּד לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שֵׁם: לֹא תֹאכַל עָלָיו חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת
יָמִים תֹּאכַל עָלָיו מַצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בַחֲפֹזוֹן יֵצְאֶת מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן
תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ: וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שָׂאֵר בָּכֶל
גְּבֻלְךָ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְלֹא יִלֵּן מִן הַבֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר תִּזְבַּח בְּעֶרְבַּ בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן



Why were the Egyptians chosen to serve as the oppressors of the Jewish people? Because at that time they were the most powerful nation in the entire civilized world and they were submerged in sin to such a degree that no nation was as sullied by idolatry and sexual immorality as the Egyptians. (*Tanna D'bei Elyahu Rabbah 7*). Maharal explains that the slave experience was designed to allow the Jews to reject immorality in favor of ethical monotheism. This could best be accomplished by exposing them to the full gamut of immoral behavior so that their rejection of it would be as thorough and complete as humanly possible.

לְבַקֵּה: לֹא תוּכַל לְזַבַּח אֶת הַפֶּסַח בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר יָדוּד אֱלֹהֶיךָ נִתֵּן לָךְ: כִּי אִם אֶל הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְדוּד אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכְנֵי שְׁמוֹ שָׁם תִּזְבַּח אֶת הַפֶּסַח בְּעֶרְבֹ כְּבוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מוֹעֵד צִאתְךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם.

דברים פרק טז אי"ו

Safeguard the month of standing grain so that you will be able to keep the Passover to G-d your Lord, since it was in the month of standing grain that G-d your Lord brought you out of Egypt at night. In the place that G-d will choose to be dedicated to His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover offering to G-d your Lord [along with other] sheep and cattle. Do not eat any leaven with it. As part of [the celebration] you shall eat matzah for seven days. This shall be hardship bread, since you left Egypt in a rush. You will then remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life. No leavening shall be seen with you in all your borders for seven days. Do not let the flesh that you sacrificed in the evening of the first day remain overnight until morning. You may not slaughter the Passover offering in any of your settlements which G-d your Lord is giving you. The only site where you may sacrifice the Passover offering is in the place that G-d will choose as a site designated in His name. There you shall sacrifice it in the evening, as the sun is setting, at the time of year that you left Egypt.

You shall cook it and eat it in the place chosen by G-d your Lord, and then you may turn around in the morning and return to your tents. For six [additional] days you shall then eat matzah, with the seventh day as a retreat dedicated to G-d your Lord, when you may not do any work.

Deuteronomy 17:1-6

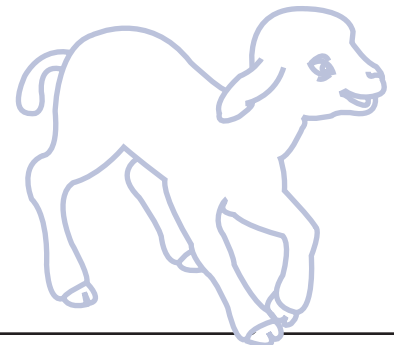
The Laws of Pesach Sheini

דָּבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי יְהִי טָמֵא לִנְפֹשׁ אוֹ בְדַדְךָ רַחֲקָה לָכֶם אוֹ לְדוֹרֹתֵיכֶם וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לִידּוֹ: בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם בֵּין הָעֲרָבִים יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ עַל מִצּוֹת וּמִרְרִים יֹאכְלֵהוּ: לֹא יִשְׂאִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד בֹּקֶר וְעִצֵּם לֹא יִשְׂבְּרוּ בוֹ כְּכֹל חֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ.

במדבר פרק טז י"ב

Speak to the Israelites, saying: If any person is ritually unclean from contact with the dead, or is on a distant journey, whether among you [now] or in future generations, he shall still have the opportunity to prepare G-d's Passover offering. He shall prepare it on the afternoon of the 14th of the second month, and shall eat it with matzos and bitter herbs. He shall not leave any of it over until morning, and not break any bone in it. He shall thus prepare it according to all the rules of the [regular] Passover offering.

Numbers 9:10-12



The Seven Days of the Exodus

Thursday, 15 Nissan: The Jews departed Egypt in the morning after a night of eating Matzah and the Paschal Lamb and which saw the demise of every firstborn in every Egyptian household. They arrived in Sukkot on this day and were encircled with seven protective and illuminating Clouds of Glory.

Friday, 16 Nissan: Journeyed to Etham at the edge of the wilderness.

Shabbat, 17 Nissan: They remained in their place and did not travel.

Sunday, 18 Nissan: Preparations were made for further journeying. Pharaoh's messengers urged them to return to Egypt but they refused. A battle ensued and many of the messengers were injured. The Jews travelled backwards toward Egypt to appear as if they were returning to Egypt and withdrew to Pi-HaChiros — a journey of 1 ½ days.

Monday, 19 Nissan: Pharaoh's messengers returned to him with the news that the Jews had fled.

Tuesday, 20 Nissan: Pharaoh mobilized his forces to pursue the Jewish people and reached them that evening encamped by the sea near Pi-HaChiros.

Wednesday, 21 Nissan: The eve of the 21st the Jewish people descended into the Red Sea which split and allowed them passage. They emerged at daybreak on Thursday. The Egyptians, who followed them into the sea, met a raging body of water that drowned them all and the Egyptians no longer threatened the Jewish people. The Jews joyously sang a Song of Praise to the Almighty.

The Seventh Day of Passover

The seventh and final day of Passover is a day upon which numerous miracles were performed for our ancestors at the Red Sea. On that day, we reached the Red Sea with the Egyptians in hot pursuit and nowhere to run. The Sea parted and allowed us to pass safely, whereas the Egyptians who plunged in after us were swallowed by the swirling waters and their entire fighting force drowned. Upon witnessing their salvation and the miracles wrought by the Almighty on their behalf, the Jews, led by Moses, broke out in a joyous Song of Praise known as "Az Yashir."

The entire nation sang this song, even the infant at its mother's breast ceased feeding, while they sang, "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him."

It is customary in some communities to re-enact the events of the splitting of the sea on the seventh night of Passover.

The Haggadah

According to Jewish tradition the Haggadah was compiled during the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, although the exact date is unknown. We do know that many of the compositions found in the latter half of the traditional Haggadah were not part of the original text and were composed and added to the text hundreds of years later. The word haggadah means to tell, or to relate. The Haggadah is a vivid narrative which chronicles the story of how the Jewish people began as a few righteous individuals and metamorphosed into a great nation that would change the course of history. Although it deals primarily with the events in Egypt which led from slavery to liberation, it also covers the entire period from the life of Abraham to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

According to the opinion of Rav Chanina bar Papa, eighty-one years earlier, the infant Moses was placed in the Nile on the 21st of Nissan. The ministering angels protested to the Almighty that he was needed to sing the Song of Praise when the Jews would be saved by the Red Sea and Moses was spared a terrible fate.

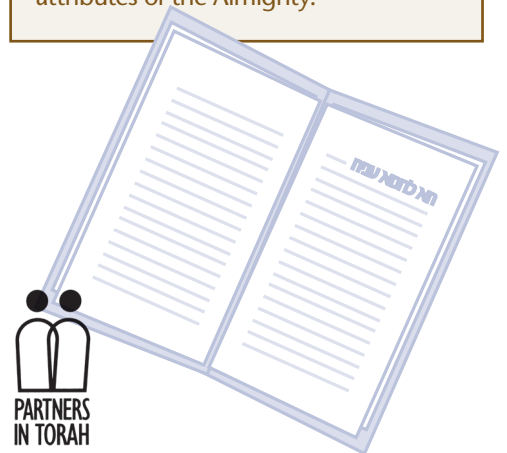
Sotah 12b

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

When the people witnessed the Divine Presence through the miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea, it was like a bridegroom meeting his bride prior to the wedding. Shavuot, when the Jews received the Torah, was similar to the wedding itself.

R' Simchah Bunim of Pasischa

Typically, whenever the Torah instructs us to celebrate the first days of Passover, it explains that we were freed from Egypt and this is worthy of celebration. Strangely, when instructing us in the celebration of the seventh day of Passover, it omits all mention of the miracles at the Sea in which the Egyptians were decimated and the threat to our lives was finally lifted. How do we understand this omission? The answer is that although the destruction of the Egyptians was a necessity, it is hardly a reason to rejoice. When a person sins and must be punished, it gives no joy to the Almighty, Who created all of mankind. In fact, the angels were not permitted to celebrate the Egyptians' downfall since they hadn't suffered at their hands and lacked a full appreciation for the salvation. Only the Jews who experienced the thrill of salvation could sing a song of praise, the focus of which is not on the devastation of the Egyptians, but on the wondrous attributes of the Almighty.



FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"It is amazing," said R' Simchah Bunim of Peshischah, "When the Jews stood boxed in between the Sea and the Egyptians, they hoped and prayed that the Almighty would come to their aid in one way or another. Perhaps he would cause the Egyptians to have a change of heart. Perhaps he'd empower the Jews to vanquish them. Perhaps it would thunder and scare away the Egyptians. That the Sea would split and allow the Jews safe passage?

That thought never occurred to them for one single instance. So it is with most of the salvations affected by the Almighty. We envision a natural means by which He can save us, but His ability extends far beyond our own imagination and He finds a means of doing so that is undeniably His handiwork."

The physical world was created in six days and a spiritual dimension was added to it, the seventh day. The number eight begins the spiritual realm beyond this world. Through the performance of certain mitzvot, one can connect the physical and spiritual realms and this is symbolized by the number 15 [7+8=15] Thus, the number 15 represents a synthesis of heaven and earth.



The Seder

Maharal explains that the Seder has 15 parts, corresponding to the fifteen steps upon which one ascended to the Temple. Our Sages say that our table is like an Altar, and this is particularly true on Seder night, when our family table is a means to achieve new spiritual heights. Similarly, just as the Temple helped the Jewish People sense the Divine Order in the world, so too, the Seder, the Hebrew word for order, is a reminder that G-d guides world history.

THE FIFTEEN STEPS OF THE SEDER ARE:

1. **Kadesh** — Reciting the Kiddush over wine in the manner in which we begin all festivals
2. **Ur'Chatz** — Washing the hands without reciting the blessing
3. **Karpas** — Eating the vegetable [potato, radish etc.] dipped in salt water to arouse the curiosity of the children
4. **Yachatz** — Breaking the middle matzah and hiding the larger piece for afikomen
5. **Maggid** — Relating the story of the Exodus from Egypt through the recitation of the Haggada
6. **Rohtzo** — Washing the hands for matzah and reciting the blessing of Al Netilat Yadaim
7. **Motzi** — Reciting the blessing of HaMotzi over the matzah.
8. **Matzah** — Eating the matzah
9. **Marror** — Eating the bitter herbs
10. **Korech** — Eating a sandwich combining bitter herbs and matzah
11. **Shulchan Aruch** — Partaking of the festive meal
12. **Tzafun** — Eating the afikomen
13. **Barech** — Reciting the Birkhat HaMazon
14. **Hallel** — Reciting the second half of Hallel
15. **Nirtzah** — Singing the supplemental songs of praise

The Essential Mitzvot of the Seder

MATZAH

This scripturally ordained obligation to eat matzah reminds us of our enslavement and redemption. It is eaten in haste to recall the haste with which we were redeemed once the appropriate moment arrived. It also represents freedom from the shackles of the Yetzer Harrah [evil inclination] who is compared unfavorably to the yeast in bread.

The Law: *The Matzah must be Shmurah* — guarded against fermentation and designated for the sake of the mitzvah beginning from the harvest of its grain. A portion the size of at least one sheet of Matzah [two Kzaysim] should be eaten. Men must recline while eating the Matzah, women are exempt from this obligation.



MAROR

The Maror reminds us of the embitterment of our lives at the hands of the Egyptians. It is dipped in Haroset, a sweet mixture of apples, wine, and nuts, which recalls how the Jewish people sweetened their bitterness with anticipation of the redemption.

The Law: Grated horseradish or lettuce is used for Maror and one should eat a portion the size of at least 1.1 fluid ounces. It is dipped in Charoses before eating. One does not recline while eating the Maror.

FOUR CUPS OF WINE

Our sages obligated us to drink four cups of wine which represent many things, among them, the four stages of the redemption: **1)** freedom from the bitterness of enslavement, **2)** independence from any form of servitude, **3)** the mighty and crushing blows the Almighty dealt the Egyptians to disable them from further persecuting the Jews, **4)** the taking of the nation by the Almighty to be His nation. The cups also represent the four matriarchs, Sara, Rivka, Rachel, Leah, in whose merit we were worthy of redemption.

The Law: Each cup should contain a minimum of 3.3 fluid ounces. One should drink no less than a majority of this amount. Red wine is preferable, but white wine is acceptable too, as is grape juice. When these are not available or are unacceptable, coffee, tea, or even milk, are also acceptable. While drinking, men must recline; women are exempt from this obligation.

HAGADDAH

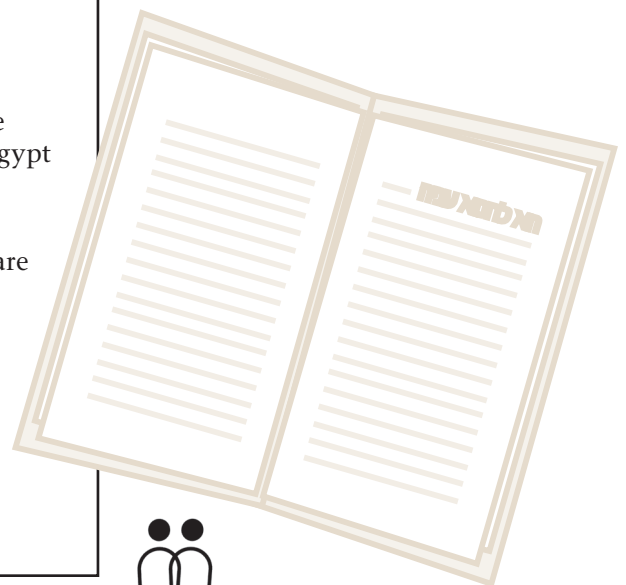
There is a scripturally ordained obligation to recount the story of the Exodus in a question and answer format. Even those already knowledgeable of the events are obligated to discuss the exodus in detail. This ensures that the events and their attendant lessons will be transmitted from generation to generation and our commitment to the Almighty will not wane due to the passage of time.

The Law: Ideally one should follow the format of the Hagaddah rather than creating an independent style. The Seder Plate remains on the table throughout the recitation. One must recall the following three subjects to fulfill the obligation: Pesach, Matzah, and Maror.

HALLEL

A collection of Psalms recited to recall great miracles performed on our behalf, the night of the Seder is a particularly suitable time to recite the Hallel in recognition of the hundreds of miracles performed for us in Egypt and subsequently.

The Law: Although Hallel is normally recited while standing, this recitation takes places while sitting. If three or more people are participating in the Seder, the parts of Hallel usually said in responsive fashion shall be recited thus at the Seder, too.



On the night of Passover, every firstborn, whether from his father or mother's side, perished. Thus, the immoral and adulterous culture of Egypt was revealed for all to see as husbands and wives began to discover children born to their spouses from partners outside of marriage.

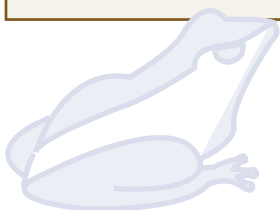
The plagues were consistent with the strategy of an attacking army laying siege to a city. The plague of blood is similar to the poisoning of the water supply; the deafening frogs, to the trumpeters who sow fear among the inhabitants; the lice, to arrows shot into the city; the wild animals to mercenaries who are sent in.

Medrash Tanchuma

"Rabbi Yosi the Galilean said that although in Egypt they were smitten with ten plagues, at the Red Sea they were dealt fifty plagues...Rabbi Eliezer said, At the sea they were dealt two hundred plagues. Rabbi Akiva said that at the sea they were dealt two hundred fifty plagues." – Hagaddah

The commentators explain that all three agree on what happened. They differ only in how to break down the events. Rabbi Akiva focused on every minute detail of each plague and considered it a separate plague, Rabbi Eliezer utilized a broader perspective, and Rabbi Yosi preferred to view them as packages.

The Ten Plagues were meant not only to punish the Egyptians, but also to educate the Jews about the all-encompassing power of the Almighty whom they would now be expected to worship exclusively. Each plague served as one lesson and after completing the ten-part course, they were primed to accept the Ten Commandments at Sinai which required the understanding gained in Egypt through witnessing the Ten Plagues. The commentators teach that the Ten Plagues were brought upon the Egyptians in the merit of Abraham's triumph over the Ten Trials he endured to prove his loyalty to the Almighty.



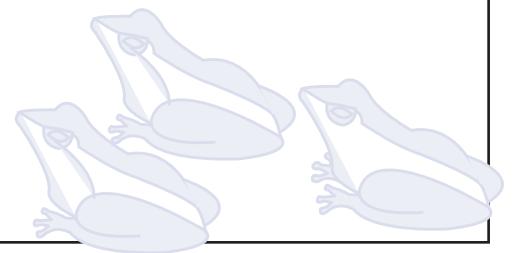
TIME FOR THE SEDER

Although on Shabbat and festivals it is permitted to begin celebrating the day by commencing earlier, the holiday is different in this respect. The obligation to eat Matzah belongs essentially to the night for it is associated with the Paschal Lamb which was also eaten at night. The other mitzvot of the Seder, are also related to the mitzvah of Matzah and should also be performed after nightfall. At times this poses hardship on some for it has become customary for entire families to join together for the Seder and beginning at a late hour may be inconvenient. Regardless, a Seder begun before nightfall is lacking an essential element and every effort should be made to begin the Seder after that time, even if it will mean shortening the program somewhat.

Measure for Measure

The Ten Plagues were not merely the imposition of difficult situations upon the Egyptians. Instead, they were carefully calculated to help them realize their evil ways and contemplate repentance. Unfortunately, they chose to ignore the clear messages inherent in the plagues and continued the oppression with mounting cruelty. Here is a brief description based on Medrash of how each plague mirrored the oppression to which the Jews were subjected.

1. **Water turned to Blood** — They kept the Jews thirsty in the hot sun, now they knew the pain of thirst.
2. **Frogs** [or crocodiles] — The Egyptians forced the Jews to work at night and deprived them of sleep. The frogs raised such a ruckus that no Egyptian could sleep.
3. **Lice** — They forbade the Jews to bathe which caused them to suffer from lice. The Egyptians now enjoyed the very same lice experience.
4. **Wild Beasts** — The Egyptians forced the Jews to hunt wild beasts for them as sport. Now they had an up close and personal encounter with those beasts.
5. **Pestilence among the livestock** — The Egyptians forced the Jews to become cattle-herders under harsh conditions.
6. **Boils all over the body** — The beatings administered by the Egyptians caused the Jews to break out in sores constantly.
7. **Fiery Hail** — The Egyptians took the liberty of stoning Jews. Hailstone rained on their heads in return.
8. **Locusts destroying crops** — They forced the Jews to tend their vineyards and fields.
9. **Darkness** — When the Egyptians held their parties, Jewish slaves had to stand at attention, with torches on their heads, to light up the scene.
10. **Slaying of Firstborn** — The Egyptians, and in particular the firstborn, practiced murderous designs against the Jews. In return, their firstborn were slain.

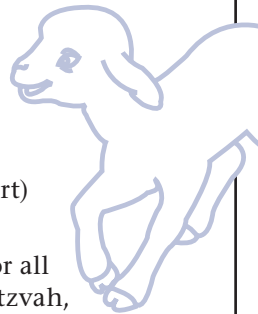


The Paschal Lamb

Lacking sufficient merits to earn passage out of Egypt, the Almighty instructed the Jews to perform a difficult mitzvah that would demonstrate their loyalty to Him and earn them the miracles of Passover. They were commanded to take the lamb which was worshipped as a deity in Egypt, and slaughter it in full view of the Egyptians through an elaborate process which entailed:

1. Acquiring a lamb or goat for every family or designated group.
2. Selecting it on the 10th of Nissan.
3. Tying it to their bedposts for 4 days to check for disqualifying blemishes.
4. Slaughtering it at dusk of the 14th day.
5. Dipping an Ezov grass in the blood and placing it on the door posts and lintel inside the home.
6. Roasting it on a spit over the fire with its head intact resting over the legs and body.
7. Consuming it in its entirety that night.
8. Eating it with:
 - (a) one's belt on
 - (b) wearing shoes
 - (c) staff in hand (i.e., bags packed and ready to depart)
 - (d) in a hurried manner!

This mitzvah, with key differences, became an obligation for all generations. Sadly, nowadays we are unable to fulfill the mitzvah, so we eat the Afikomen instead to remind us of this mitzvah.



FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

"And for the Children of Israel there was light in their dwelling places..." [Exodus 10:23] Deep in the heart of every single Jew rests a small spark of light. Yet, often it is only revealed when they are in their own "dwelling places" among other Jews. One must never judge another Jew when he is in a downtrodden state, for his Jewish spark cannot shine as brightly in such a situation.

R' Yisrael of Rhizin

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Eaten In Hurried Fashion: One who experiences a desire to serve the Almighty, must seize the moment and act upon it with great haste. Once he has successfully trained himself in the service of the Almighty, he may continue in a more patient and deliberate manner. This lesson is evident in the difference between the Paschal Lamb in Egypt which had to be eaten in haste, and the obligation for future generations which did not impose this obligation.

R' Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin

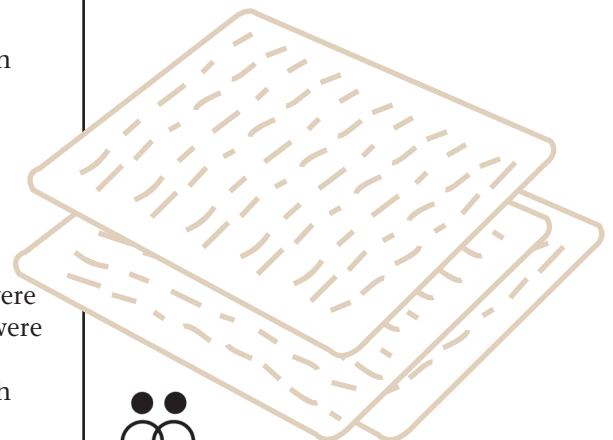
No Jew was permitted to leave his home that evening while the Almighty struck the firstborn of Egypt. This was so that the Jews should not witness the downfall of their enemies and rejoice in it.

Haste Makes Matzah

"Do not eat any leaven with it, for seven days you shall eat matzah. This shall be bread of affliction since you left Egypt in great haste [which did not allow your dough to rise — Rashi] so that you will recall the day you left Egypt all the days of your life."

Deuteronomy 16:3

- Throughout their years of bitter affliction, the Jews were not permitted to allow their dough to rise. Instead, they were reduced to eating hard matzah which only increased their suffering and hardship. When the time for the Exodus arrived, the Almighty compensated them by bringing about the Exodus in great haste, as well. They did not remain in Egypt even one second longer than they were supposed to. This subtle message has inspired Jews for centuries to patiently await the end of our current exile, secure in the knowledge that the Almighty hasn't forgotten about us, and that the moment we are meritorious enough to be released from our suffering, He will bring it about.
- Just as a servant must attend to his master's needs with haste, so, too, the Jewish people acknowledged that by leaving Egypt they were not merely gaining their freedom to do as they pleased, but they were entering servitude of another kind: serving the Almighty. Proper service of the Almighty is accomplished when one serves Him with



alacrity and enthusiasm. Chametz, the result of allowing dough to sit around until it rises, is a symbol of slothfulness. Matzah, the spartan bread, which takes mere seconds to prepare, is a symbol of zealous and eager service of the Almighty.

- The haste was because our time spent in Egypt, that bastion of immorality, was only in order to accomplish a specific task. Once that task was accomplished, there was no reason for us to remain there any longer. To the contrary, our sages explain that the years spent in that shameful environment had exacted a terrible toll and the Jews were moments away from total assimilation. G-d, therefore, hastened to remove us from Egypt and brought us to the safety of the desert, a place untainted by man and sin. Thus began the cleansing process necessary to receive the Torah.

Laws of Chametz:

Chametz is a product that (a) contains even a minimal amount of one of five types of grains [Wheat, Barley, Spelt, Rye, Oats,] and (b) has undergone fermentation as a result of contact with liquid.

The Torah issued several commandments regarding chametz:

- The positive commandment to remove all chametz from one's home.
- Not to possess chametz in one's domain (i.e. home, office, car, etc.) during all eight days of Passover.
- Not to eat chametz, or admixtures containing chametz, during Passover.

These prohibitions take effect around late morning on the eve of Passover, the 14th of Nissan. Chametz is permitted again at nightfall after the final day of Passover. In practice, the custom is to utilize all three of these options since possession of chametz on Passover is such a stringent prohibition.

Make It Meaningful

If Passover this year is just like all the others in past years, it will not have the same meaning. Here are six suggestions for how you can make this Passover even more meaningful than all the others:

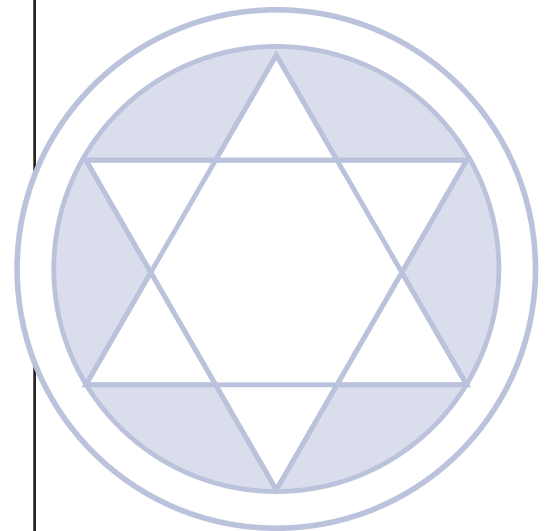
1. **Money well spent:** Don't settle for the free Haggadah that comes with the coffee. Purchase one that features inspiring insights and explanations with which you can spice up the discussion at the Seder. There are hundreds to choose from.
2. **Prepare in advance:** Take some time prior to the Seder to read up on the events and their meaning so that you can share inspiring and meaningful content with the participants.
3. **All kidding aside:** As important as it is to get the kids involved, the adults must be engaged as well. Ask each participant ahead of time to prepare something short to share with the others so the conversation revolves around Passover, not politics.

APPROVED METHODS FOR REMOVAL OF THE CHAMETZ:

Bi'ur: Burning the chametz. On the night preceding the 14th of Nissan, a search of the house known as bedikat chametz ("search for chametz") is conducted by candlelight. The chametz found in this search is burned the next morning.

Bittul: Nullifying the chametz. On the night of, and again on the morning of the 14th of Nissan, the head of the household recites a statement in Aramaic nullifying all chametz remaining in the family's possession. This must be done before the prohibition of chametz takes effect.

Mechirah: Selling one's chametz to a non-Jew. After the holiday, the non-Jew generally sells the chametz back to the original owners, via the selling agent. The selling agent must be someone knowledgeable in the laws of contracts and chametz.



4. **Read the book:** This year, skip the movie and read the book instead. “Let My Nation Go” by Yosef Deutch details the events of the Exodus in a gripping and suspense — filled narrative that remains loyal to traditional sources.
5. **Take your time:** Passover comes only once a year. Make it count by prolonging the Seder instead of ending it in time to get home before dark.
6. **Think of others:** A Seder can be a powerful spiritual experience. Yet, it is best when celebrated with others. Think of the less fortunate among us who may need an invitation and invite them to grace your Seder with their presence.



Points to Ponder

- Is it really so hard to refrain from Chametz for the full holiday of Passover?
- What is the definition of “freedom,” and how can we apply it to make our lives more meaningful?
- Why are we considered to still be in exile when we enjoy religious freedom to such a great extent? Why do so many Jews celebrate a Seder, even the unaffiliated?
- Why was it necessary for an outsider like Moses to lead us to freedom?
- Why couldn’t we accomplish it on our own?
- Are we proud to be the Almighty’s Chosen People? Do we live up to that designation as we should?
- Why can’t someone other than Aunt Bertha make the Matzoh-Ball soup for a change?
- If there’s one lesson to take from the Passover experience, what would it be?

