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CHILDREN AND THE SEDER¹

Introduction

The Torah's Passover narrative and instructional commandments provides a background to understand the prominent role of children in the Seder. Their role in the Seder is examined from the perspective of Classical Rabbinic Literature.

All the directors of Atlanta's Jewish agencies attended a full day seminar a few years ago. At that seminar, the visiting scholar asked the participants the following question: what is your earliest Jewish memory? All agreed that it was the Seder. Why does the Seder have such a powerful effect on children? In order to suggest an answer to this question, it is necessary to examine: the Torah's² narrative of the Jewish experience in Egypt, the Haggadah's reading of the Torah's narrative, the Torah instructions or commandments to observe the holiday of Passover, and some of the Seder's legal requirements and practices.

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¹Seder is a Hebrew word meaning "order" and order refers to the order of events that occur on the first two nights of Passover in each Jewish Diaspora home. This order is outlined and described in the Haggadah, a book which is read and studied on these nights and means "telling" in Hebrew; it tells of G-d's deliverance of the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

²The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) are called Torah (the Law). The word means "teaching," "instruction."

The Torah's Narrative

Exodus begins with the descent of Jacob's family to the land of Egypt. There are seventy family members. Living in a land with abundant food and security, the Israelite population exploded. Exodus 1:7 tells us:

בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְּמֵאֵד בְּמֵאֵד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם

"The children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased and became strong—very very much so, and the land became filled with them."³ After Joseph dies, the Pharaoh becomes concerned about the increase in the Israelite population. He is concerned that they might join an enemy in time of war, as in Exodus 1:10:

וּלְמַעַן כִּי־תִקְרָאנָהּ מִלְחָמָה וְנִסְתַּף גַּם־הוּא עַל־שָׂטָנָיו וְנִלְחַם־בָּנִי

"...it may be if a war will occur, it [the Israelite nation] too may join our enemies and wage war against us..." Therefore, Pharaoh initiates a policy of enslavement. The text does not explicitly tell us how this policy will reduce the Israelite population and prevent them from joining with a future enemy. This is explained below.

As the narrative proceeds, it is quite clear that the policy of enslavement does not work. Exodus 1:12:

וּכְאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנֶה אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּשְׂצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

"But as much as they would afflict it [the Israelite nation], so would it increase and so it would spread out; and they [the Egyptians] became disgusted because of the children of Israel."⁴

³Bible translations are from Nosson Scherman, ed., *Tanach* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1996).

⁴Ibid.

Since the policy of enslavement did not work, Pharaoh therefore commands the midwives, who deliver the Israelite children, to kill the male babies

וְרֵאִיתֶן עַל-הָאֲבָנִים אִם-בֵּן הוּא וְחַמְטוּ אֹתוֹ⁵

The text tells us that the targets of the Pharaoh's oppressive policies were the children. It is the *children* Pharaoh wants killed; he doesn't order anyone to kill the parents or other adult males. It is the children, especially the males, who may join the army of Egypt's future enemies, who are to be eliminated; it is their existence that initiated enslavement.

Using the midwives to kill the male children also did not work. Exodus 1:18:

וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם לְמֵלֵדוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מִדּוּעַ עֲשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְתַחַיֶּינָן אֶת-הַיְלָדִים: יֵט וְתֹאמְרֵן.

"The king of Egypt summoned the wives and said to them, 'Why have you done this thing, that you have caused the boys to live?'"⁶

Finally, Pharaoh issues a command to all his people: Exodus 1:22:

פֶּרֶעַה לְכָל-עַמּוֹן לֵאמֹר כָּל-בֶּן הַיְלֹוד הַיֵּלֹוד תִּשְׁלַכְהוּ וְכָל-בַּת תַּחַיֶּינָן.

"Pharaoh commanded his entire people, saying, 'Every son that will be born-into the River shall you throw him! And every daughter shall you keep alive.'"⁷ It appears that object

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid. Exodus 1:16 "and he [Pharaoh] said [to the midwives], 'When you deliver the Hebrew woman, and you see them on the birthstool; if it is a son...'"

⁷Ibid., Exodus 1:22.

of Pharaoh's various policies was to kill the male Israelite children. Slavery thus seems to be one of the methods Pharaoh used to prevent the increase in Israelite male children. When it did not accomplish its intended goal, Pharaoh resorts to direct action: he directs the midwives and then the entire Egyptian nation to kill the male children. Since Pharaoh's actions were primarily against the male children, it is not surprising that male children, and by extension all children, occupy a prominent place in the celebration of Passover.

The Haggadah's Reading of the Torah's Narrative

The Haggadah itself provides a Rabbinic interpretation of the Exodus narrative. It quotes the four verses of Deuteronomy 26:5-8 and explains each phrase of each verse. Only two of these four verses are examined. The Haggadah explains Deuteronomy 26:6 as describing the stages of oppression. It explains each phrase of the verse by referring to another verse in the Torah that describes the same subject. The verses together produce a complete picture.⁸

The whole verse, Deuteronomy 26:6, reads: "**The Egyptians caused evil to us [harm us]; and afflicted us; and imposed hard labor upon us.**"⁹

The first phrase, "**The Egyptians caused evil to us**" *as it is said* [in] Exodus 1:10: "Come let us outsmart it [the Israelite

⁸The Rabbis see verses in the Torah that differ from one another as complementary. When the verses are viewed together thus, the complete meaning appears. In our context, the verses in Deuteronomy can be thought of as an executive summary and the other verses as an elaboration of the summary. In any case, a full meaning can only be ascertained by viewing the verses as complementary.

⁹The verses the Haggadah explain are in bold.

nation] lest it become numerous and it may be that if a war will occur, it too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and go up from the land.”¹⁰

The implicit question of the Haggadah is: to what evil or harm is this verse in Deuteronomy referring? The Haggadah answers that the harm referred to in Deuteronomy is described in Exodus 1:10: The Egyptians label the Israelites as the enemy and provide a rationale for classifying them as such. This provides a pretext for possible governmental action. This first stage of the oppression consists of labeling and developing a rationalization, without any evidence, for future action.

The second phrase describes the second stage of oppression: “...and [they] afflicted us;...” *as it is said* [in] Exodus 1:11: “So they appointed taskmasters over it [the Israelite nation] in order to afflict it with their burdens; it built storage cities of Pharaoh, Pithom, and Raamses.”¹¹

The question posed by this phrase is: how did they afflict us? The Haggadah answers by quoting Exodus 1:11 that describes the enslavement of the Israelites.

The third phrase of our verse also describes the third stage of oppression: “...and imposed hard labor upon us” *as it is said* [in] Exodus 1:13: “Egypt enslaved the Children of Israel [with] crushing harshness.”¹²

The question posed by this verse is: what does the phrase “hard labor” tell us that the previous phrase “they afflicted us” did not already tell us? If “they afflicted us” means that the Israelites were afflicted with the burdens of building the stor-

¹⁰Nosson Scherman, *The Family Haggadah* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1990), 33.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 34.

¹²*Ibid.*

age cities, to what more could the phrase “imposed hard labor upon us” refer? The answer is in Exodus 1:13. The “crushing harshness” is worse than hard physical work. It is work whose purpose is to break the spirit of the workers.¹³ The previously mentioned “burdens” had a positive purpose: to build store cities. The “crushing harshness” was work designed to destroy the spirit of the workers.

With a single verse the Rabbinic commentators describe the three stages of oppression: labeling the Israelites as evil and developing a rationale for oppressive action, imposing physical controls on the oppressed group, an imposing measures designed to destroy the spirit of the oppressed group.

Deuteronomy 26:6 describes the enslavement policy from the Egyptian point of view. Deuteronomy 26:7 describes the effects of the enslavement policy on the Israelites. The whole verse reads: “And they cried out to HASHEM,¹⁴ the G-d of our forefathers, and HASHEM heard our voice and saw our affliction, our travail and our oppression.”

The first phrase is cited: “And they cried [called] out to HASHEM, the G-d of our forefathers...” Exodus 2:23: “During these many days, it happened that the king of Egypt died and the Children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out [for help]. Their outcry because of their work went

¹³The Hebrew verse reads: וַיִּצְרְפוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפֶרֶד

The Hebrew word בְּפֶרֶד comes from a root which means “to break.” Thus, this verse describes work that is destructive. Normal work is constructive. Since building Pharaoh’s cities requires constructive work, the work in this verse must be destructive in a way that does not inhibit the continued building of Pharaoh’s cities.

¹⁴The word HASHEM is a Hebrew word meaning “The Name.” The name referred to is the four lettered name of G-d, known as the Tetragrammaton.

up to G-d.”¹⁵

The Haggadah’s implicit question about Deuteronomy 26:7 is: when did the Children cry out? Exodus 2:23 provides the answer by telling us that the calling out occurred after the policy of infanticide had been in effect and after the Pharaoh who instituted it died. The calling out consisted of groaning and crying out for help.

The second phrase is cited: “... Hashem heard our voice...” *as it is said* [in] Exodus 2:24: “G-d heard their moaning, and G-d remembered [God’s] covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob.”¹⁶

Here the Haggadah’s implicit question is: why was “our voice” heard? The reason is explained by Exodus 2:24. Although their “crying out” was not prayer, G-d heard them because G-d remembered the covenant in which G-d promised Abraham that G-d would redeem G-d’s offspring from slavery.

Up to this point, the Rabbinic exposition of Deuteronomy 26:7 confirms that Pharaoh’s enslavement of the Israelites had a crushing effect. But did it really stop the Israelites from having more children? The third phrase of this verse addresses that question.

The third phrase is cited “...and saw our affliction...” *this [affliction] refers to the disruption of family relations as it says* [in] Exodus 2:25: “G-d saw the children of Israel, and G-d knew.”¹⁷

Here the Haggadah explicitly explains that the word “affliction” refers to a disruption of family relations. The Haggadah then cites Exodus 2:25 as the source for its explanation. How does Exodus 2:25 serve this source? It is saying that G-d saw

¹⁵Scherman, *The Family Haggadah*, 34.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

two things. "G-d saw what was done to them [the children of Israel by the Egyptians]. G-d also saw the things that humans, in general, cannot know. What are these things? They occur in private. It is about these things that occur in private and create affliction—the disruption of family relations—to which the verse alludes when the verse says only "G-d knew."¹⁸

The Haggadah is telling us the disruption of family life was the result of the crushing enslavement. Thus, the Haggadah is suggesting that as the slavery continued it disrupted family relations and reduced the number of children by couples.

The fourth phrase is cited "...our travail..." *this refers to our sons as it is said [in] Exodus 1:22: Every son [that] will be born-into the River shall you throw him! And every daughter shall you keep alive!*¹⁹

Here the Haggadah explains that the phrase "our travail" refers to meaningless hard work.²⁰ However, since Isaiah 65:23 connects the idea of meaningless work with giving birth,²¹ this implies that the children born in Egypt were considered meaningless work. Why, implicitly asks the Haggadah, are children born in Egypt considered thus? Exodus 1:22 explains that giving birth in Egypt is a meaningless activity because "Every son will be born—into the River shall you throw him!..."²²

The fifth and final phrase is "our oppression": *This is the pressure as it is said [in] Exodus 3:9: "...I[God] have also seen*

¹⁸See Adin Steinsaltz, *The Passover Haggadah Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Karta, 1980).

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰See Job 4:8, 15:35, 16:2.

²¹"They will not struggle [work] in vain nor produce [give birth] for futility."

²²This explanation follows Baruch Halevi Epstein, *Baruch Sheamar: Passover Haggadah Hebrew* (Tel Aviv: Am Olam Publishing Company, 1965), 40.

the oppression which the Egyptians oppress them."²³

The Haggadah explains the phrase "our oppression" as meaning pressure. However, the word oppression, which in Hebrew literally means pressure,²⁴ can refer to physical pressure created by a lack of food or drink as in I Kings 22:27. It can also refer to the pressure of stress or distress created by suppression. Thus, the Haggadah implicitly asks: which meaning of the word pressure applies to our context? It answers that "oppression" refers to the pressure created by stress and distress and cites Exodus 3:9 where "oppression" means distress.²⁵

The Rabbinic commentator Abarbanel points out "affliction," "travail" and "oppression" described in Deuteronomy 26:7 are all forms of mental and emotional anguish. This stands in opposition to the physical rigor referred to in Deuteronomy 26:6, the preceding verse."²⁶

In summary, both the Torah text and the Haggadah's description of Pharaoh's policies agree that children were a target of Pharaoh's policies. The Torah's description, presenting Pharaoh's point of view, sees the destruction of the children as Pharaoh's main goal. The Haggadah eloquently describes the purpose of enslaving the Children of Israel; it was to eliminate the birth of Jewish children.

The Torah's Instructions to Have a Seder

The Rabbis understand that the Torah contains, in addition

²³Ibid.

²⁴In Hebrew the word is: **לחץ**. As Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Bible` Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer Publishing House, 1990), 598, points out this word has two meanings:

1 **עוני, דוחק**

2 **נגישה, דיכוי**

²⁵Exodus 3:9 is describing distress because Exodus 3:7 already described physical pressure when it used the word **עוני** "affliction."

²⁶Don Isaac Abarbanel, *Passover Haggadah* (Tel Aviv: Leon Litho-Offset, 1962), 71.

to the narratives, 613 instructions or commandments. These establish the framework for Jewish life and observance. Two of these commands instruct the Jewish people to have a Seder during which they recount the story of the Exodus.

Moses Maimonides in his great code of Jewish law, *The Mishnah Torah*, describing the first commandment, states: "It is a positive command from the Torah to recount the miracles and wonders that were done to our fathers in Egypt on the fifteenth day of Nissan²⁷ as it was said: 'Remember this day on which you departed from Egypt. . . ' (Exodus 13:3). It was similarly said: 'Remember the Sabbath day [to sanctify it]' (Exodus 20:8)."²⁸

The second commandment is in Exodus 13:8: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying 'it is because of this that HASHEM acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.' " On this verse, Rabbi Aaron haLevi of Barcelona explains that the expression "your son" does not mean specifically one's male son but "actually means any person."²⁹ The Mechilta of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai (an ancient commentary on Exodus) explains this verse:

²⁷The fifteenth day of the month of Nissan is the day on which Passover begins and the first Seder is celebrated.

²⁸Moses Maimonides, *Book of Times: Holidays, Chametz and Matzah, Shofar, Sukkah, Shekels, Sanctification of the Month, Fasts, Purim, Chanukah*, ed. Nathan Zvi Friedman and Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, 2 vols., *Mishnah Torah*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha Rav Kook, 5717). [Maimonides, 5717, #24] 433 Chametz and Matzah 7:1. The translations of the biblical verses are taken from [Scherman, *The Family Haggadah*, 1996, #3]. The reason Maimonides brings the Sabbath verse is to clarify a grammatical problem. Since the word "remember" (Exodus 13:3) is an infinitive, why is this verse considered a commandment? The answer is in the second verse, 20:8, where "remember" also has an infinitive form but is followed by the action "to sanctify it [the Sabbath], thus indicating that the Torah in giving a command uses the infinitive form of "remember."

²⁹Rabbi Aaron haLevi of Barcelona, *Sefer ha Hinnuch The Book of Education*, trans. Charles Wengrov, vol. 1 (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1978), 129.

“And it shall be, when your son asks you in the future... [Exodus 13:14] one might conclude that if [your son] asks, you must tell him, and if not, you need not tell him. But we have the verse, ‘And you shall tell your son.’ [Exodus 13:8] – [This means, you shall tell him] even if he does not ask you. [From this verse Exodus 13:8], I learn only about the situation when one has a son. How do I know that one must tell about the Exodus even when alone with oneself, or to others [besides his son]?... ‘Remember this day...’³⁰

Each of these two verses is required because each instructs the Jewish people about a unique aspect of the commandment. From “And you shall tell your son,” we learn there is a special commandment to tell one’s children about the Exodus from Egypt. The verse “Remember this day” instructs the community that even when one does not have children, one is still obligated to tell about the Exodus.³¹ This implies that telling children about the Exodus is the primary purpose of the Seder. Thus the Bible commands the parent to recount the Exodus at a Seder so that the children, **both boys and girls**, are primary learners. These commandments logically follow from both the Haggadah’s interpretation of the enslavement in Egypt and the biblical narrative itself. Both make children the central target of Egyptian oppression.

³⁰Yosef Zevin, *The Festivals in Halachah: An Analysis of the Development of the Festival Laws*, 3 vols. (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1982), 163.

³¹Ibid.

Children and the Seder

Since the Torah specifically commanded parents to tell their children about the Exodus, how is the Seder designed for the children to learn about the Exodus? It is a perfect lesson, consisting of the fifteen stages, and provides motivation by provoking questions of which some act as advance organizers. The Seder lesson provides different modalities of learning. There are both objects on the table and actions to **see**. There are the questions and answers to **hear**. There are special foods to **taste**. And, finally, there are objects and foods to **touch**. If that were not enough, the Seder also has a treasure hunt, a counting song, and a nursery rhyme song.

The idea that the Seder is to provoke questions is suggested by the Torah's command to tell your children about the Exodus. This command appears in four different forms³² in the Torah. In three of the four occurrences the telling about the Exodus is triggered by a child's question. "It shall be when your children say to you 'What is this service to you?' "... [Exodus 12:26] "It shall be when your son shall ask you at some future time: 'What is this?' you shall say to him, 'With a strong hand HASHEM removed us from Egypt from the house of bondage." [Exodus 13:14] "If your child asks you tomorrow, saying, 'What are the testimonies and the decrees and the ordinances that HASHEM, our G-d, commanded you?' You shall say to your child, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and HASHEM took us out of Egypt with a strong hand.' " [Deuteronomy 6:20-21] Thus, in the Torah's paradigm, the telling of the Exodus is provoked by children's questions. Examining the fifteen steps in the Seder's lesson plan will reveal how children are involved.

³²The fourth occurrence is in Exodus 13:8.

The first step of the Seder is קדש (kaddesh), meaning sanctify.³³ The community is commanded to sanctify the day: "Blessed are You, HASHEM, Who sanctifies...Israel and the festival seasons." The sanctification is done over a cup of wine. Although the sanctification is said on every Sabbath and holiday, for Passover there are unique rules. It may not be delayed to make sure that the children will be awake to hear it, as rules the Talmud.³⁴ The Shulchan Aruch, the most accepted code of Jewish Law, says: "His [a person's] table shall be set during the day [before the beginning of Passover which begins in the evening] in order to eat [begin the Seder] immediately when it becomes dark... because it is a Mitzvah to hurry to eat for the children lest they fall asleep."³⁵

The second step in the Seder is ירחץ (urechatz), to wash. This washing, done by all Seder participants, was originally designed to eliminate "ritual" impurity before eating food dipped in liquid. Since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the laws of purity are not in use; therefore, no blessing is said before this washing occurs. As a matter of fact, washing before eating food dipped in liquid has fallen into disuse. Thus, this washing provides children with an opportunity to ask: why do we wash? Why is there no blessing said before we wash? Note the learning modalities. This step involves touching. The water touches the hands.

The third step is called קרפס (carpas), vegetable. During this step, each participant dips a vegetable, usually parsley, in salt water and eats it. Since it is highly unusual for people to eat

³³The names of many of the steps of the Seder are commands. In this first step, the leader and the participants are called upon to sanctify Passover.

³⁴T. B. Pesachim, 109a.

³⁵Shulchan Aruch, chap. 472:1.

parsley dipped in water before a meal, the children will notice and ask questions.³⁶ Once again we see that surprising actions motivate questions. Note the learning modalities. This step involves tasting since the carpas is eaten. It also involves hearing the blessing recited before the carpas is eaten.

The fourth step is **יָהַצַּתְּ** (yahatz), the breaking of the middle matzah.³⁷ The middle matzah is broken at this point. Part of the broken matzah is returned to the plate containing the other two whole pieces of unleavened bread. The source for this practice is found in the Talmud.³⁸ This behavior is bizarre. Normally, a blessing is said before breaking "bread" (matzah) and then the bread is eaten. Here the bread is broken but no blessing or eating has occurred! Now the part of the broken matzah returned to the plate will not be used until the meal is served. The meal will be served at least an hour later. Thus, we have an unusual action that cries out to the children to ask for an explanation. Note the learning modalities. This step involves seeing and touching, as the participants see the leader's action, and the leader touches the matzah when breaking it.

Previously it was noted that part of the broken matzah was returned to the plate containing two whole pieces of unleavened bread. What happens to the part not returned? The Seder leader hides it. The children will try to find it. This is the first stage in the treasure hunt. The goal will be to find the matzah not

³⁶T. B. Pesachim, 114a Rashi "until he reaches the desert of the bread [bitter herbs]."

³⁷Matzah is flat unleavened bread baked fewer than eighteen minutes. In setting the table for the Seder, three pieces of matzah are placed, one on top of the other, on the table and covered with a matzah cover. At this point in the Seder, the middle matzah is broken.

³⁸T. B. Brachot, 39b. An explanation of the biblical quotation found in Brachot 39a is in Pesachim 115b.

returned to the matzah plate.

The fifth step in the Seder **מגיד** (maggid), telling. During this stage, the Exodus is recounted. The telling fulfills the Torah commands described above. The sages tell us that the recounting of the Exodus must “begin with degradation and end with praise.”³⁹ [One does this by “midrashically explaining the entire paragraph which begins ‘An Aramean sought to kill my father...’”?]

This step of the Seder is the longest. The Haggadah devotes many paragraphs to the telling of the Exodus story. The comments, on this step, will only refer to those paragraphs that involve or are directed at children.

At the beginning of the Maggid the youngest child asks the following four questions:

“Why is this night different from all other nights?

- On all other nights we eat leavened and unleavened bread; on this night all [bread] is unleavened.
- On all other nights we eat other vegetables; on this night [we eat only] bitter herbs.
- On all other nights we don't even dip once; on this night we dip twice.
- On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining; on this night all of us recline.”⁴⁰

³⁹T.B. Pesachim, 116a.

⁴⁰The writer's translation of the following Haggadah text:

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מקל הלילות?
 שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה. הלילה
 הזה בלע מצה:
 שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין שאר ירקחות הלילה
 הזה קורא:
 שבכל הלילות אין אנו מטבילין אפילו פעם
 אחת. הלילה הזה שתי פעמים:
 שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין ציץ יושבין ובין מסבין.
 הלילה הזה בלענו מסבין:

These questions stimulate the children to focus on the differences described in the questions and to ask why do we behave differently on this night? As a result, they serve as advance organizers, providing focus and structure to the child's learning process. Note the learning modalities. The child asking the questions both hears the words of the question and feels them with his mouth.

These four questions can be divided into two groups of two. The first two questions describe the eating of unleavened bread and bitter herbs depict slave behavior. The last two questions, depict dipping twice and reclining while eating, describe the eating behavior of free Roman citizens.⁴¹ Thus, the first two questions refer to actions done by slaves while the last two questions refer to actions done by free people. Why do we act both as slaves and as free citizens during the Seder?

The next paragraph in the Haggadah provides an executive summary of the answers to the four questions. It reads in part:

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but HASHEM our God took us out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Had not the Holy One, Blessed is He, taken our fathers out from Egypt, then we and our children, and our children's children would still be subservient to Pharaoh in Egypt...⁴²

The reason we eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs is to relive our experience of being "slaves to Pharaoh." The reason we dip twice and recline, like free Roman citizens, is because "HASHEM our God took us out from there with a mighty

⁴¹Don Isaac Abarbanel, *Abarbanel Haggadah* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 34-36.

⁴²Scherman, *Family Haggadah*, 27.

hand and an outstretched arm." Thus, all the unusual behaviors are designed to get the Seder participants, especially the children, to experience the movement from slavery to freedom brought about by G-d's deliverance.

Further on in *Maggid* the Haggadah describes four sons. The Torah commands four times (Deuteronomy 6:20; Exodus 12:26; Exodus 13:14; Exodus 13:8) that parents tell their children about the Exodus. The Haggadah interprets the four commands as referring to four different types of children: a wise son, a wicked son, a simple son, and a son who does not know how to ask. The Haggadah describes how the parents are to explain the Passover to each child differently. Thus the Haggadah is instructing the parents in a basic rule of pedagogy: present the lesson to the student in a manner suitable to **that student**. In addition, since the Haggadah is discussing children, children will naturally be interested.

The Haggadah describes the four sons as follows:

... Concerning four sons did the Torah speak: a **wise one**, a **wicked one**, a **simple one** and one **who is unable to ask**.

The wise son - what does he say: 'What are the testimonies, decrees, and ordinances which HASHEM, our God, has commanded you?' (Deuteronomy 6:20). Therefore, explain to him the laws of the Passover offering: that one may not eat dessert after the final taste of the Passover offering.

The wicked son - What does he say? 'Of what purpose is this work to you?' (Exodus 12:26). He says, 'To you,' thereby excluding himself. By excluding himself from the community of believers, he denies the basic principle of Judaism. There, blunt his teeth and tell him: 'It is because of this that HASHEM did so for me when I went out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8). 'For me' but not for him—had he

been there, he would not have been redeemed.

The simple son – what does he say? ‘What is this?’ ‘With a strong hand did HASHEM take us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Exodus 13:14).

As for **the son who is unable to ask**, you must initiate the subject for him, as it is stated (Exodus 13:8): You shall tell your son on that day: ‘It is because of this that HASHEM did so for me when I went out of Egypt.’⁴³

At the end of the Maggid portion, the Haggadah explains the meaning of the three objects placed on the Seder table. The first object is the pesach, a shank bone. The second object is the broken middle piece of matzah, unleavened bread. The third object is marar, bitter herbs. When the pesach is explained it is pointed to; when the matzah is explained, the middle matzah is lifted up; and when the maror is explained, it is lifted up. Note the modes of learning here consist of physical actions, pointing or lifting up, seeing the objects pointed to or lifted up and finally hearing the explanation of the objects.

The Haggadah’s explanations are as follows:

“Pesach - Why did our fathers eat a Passover offering during the period when the Temple still stood? Because the Holy One Blessed is He, passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt, as it is written (Exodus 12:27): You shall say: ‘It is a Passover offering for HASHEM, Who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and spared our houses, and the people bowed down and prostrated themselves.’

⁴³Ibid., 31.

Matzah – Why do we eat the unleavened bread? Because the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed is He, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them as it is written (Exodus 12:39). They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into unleavened bread, for it had not fermented, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for the way.

Maror – Why do we eat this bitter herb? Because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt, as it says (Exodus 1:14): ‘They embittered their lives with hard labor, with mortar and bricks, and with all manner of labor in the field: whatever service they made them perform was with hard labor.’⁴⁴

Following these explanations, the Haggadah explicitly explains why the Seder uses many devices to engage the children and the other participants.

In every generation it is one’s duty to regard himself as though he personally had gone out from Egypt as it is written (Exodus 13:8): You shall tell your son on this day: ‘It is because of this that HASHEM did for “me” when I went out of Egypt.’ It was not only our fathers whom the Holy One redeemed from slavery; we, too, were redeemed with them, as it is written (Deuteronomy 6:23): He brought “us” out from there so that He might take us to the land, which He promised to our fathers.’⁴⁵

⁴⁴Ibid., 43, 45.

⁴⁵Ibid., 45.

The Maggid concludes with praise: the recitation of Psalms 113 and 114, a blessing celebrating G-d as Redeemer of Israel and a blessing over the second cup of wine. By this time in the Seder the leader has hidden the part of the middle matzah that was broken off during, yahatz, the fourth step. When the meal is served to the "freed slaves" in step twelve, the children will divide their time between eating and searching for the hidden matzah.

Steps six through eleven all relate to the festive meal eaten during the Seder. They all involve touch and/or taste.

The sixth step of the Seder is **רַחֲצָה** (rachtzah), washing. Each participant pours at least three ounces of water on each hand and makes a blessing for washing.

The seventh step of the Seder is **מוֹצִיא** (motzi), the blessing over the unleavened bread. This blessing is recited over the two and a half pieces of unleavened bread as food.

The eighth step of the Seder is **מַצָּה** (matzah), a second blessing over the unleavened bread. This blessing, which is recited immediately after the preceding blessing, is recited for the fulfilling of the Torah's command to eat matzah on Passover night. After the two blessings, all participants at the Seder eat the unleavened bread. This action makes concrete and immediate the experience of our ancestors whose dough did not have time to become leavened as explained above.

The ninth step of the Seder is **מָרֹר** (maror), bitter herbs. During this step, each participant says a blessing over the bitter herbs and eats the bitter herbs reliving the experience of our ancestors whose lives were embittered by the Egyptians "with hard labor, with mortar and bricks and all manner of

labor in the field..”

The tenth step of the Seder is **כֹּרֵךְ** (korech), sandwich. During this step, each participant places bitter herbs dipped into charoset⁴⁶ on matzah and eats the sandwich. The Haggadah explains the reason as follows:

In remembrance of the Temple we do as Hillel did in Temple times: he would combine Passover offering, matzah and marar in a sandwich and eat them together to fulfill what is written in the Torah (Numbers 9:11): They shall eat it with matzos and bitter herbs.⁴⁷

The eleventh step of the Seder is **שְׁלֵחַן עֹרֵךְ** (shulchan orech), the festive meal. The meal is festive because now the participants have been freed from slavery and may eat as free men.

The twelfth step of the Seder is **צַפּוּן** (tzafun), hidden. The word hidden refers to the Afikoman⁴⁸ which has been hidden during the Seder. The Afikoman, during Temple times, consisted of the meat of the Passover sacrifice which was consumed at the end of the Seder meal. The Passover sacrifice has not been offered since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. In its stead, matzah is used. The matzah used for the Afikoman comes from the piece of the middle matzah broken off by the Seder leader during step four, yachatz. This piece was hidden by the leader. This hidden matzah was searched for

⁴⁶This food is made of apples, nuts, and wine. It reminds the participants of the mortar used with the bricks that the Jewish slaves were required to make.

⁴⁷Scherman, *Family Haggadah*, 51.

⁴⁸Afikoman is a Greek word meaning “dessert.” It originally referred to the Passover Sacrifice that was the last food or drink permitted to be consumed that night. Thus, it was the dessert of the meal. Its taste remained in each participant’s mouth until the next morning.

by the children during the festive meal. Since the Seder may not continue without the Afikoman, the leader now negotiates for the Afikoman with the child who found it. The child typically obtains a present, to be received after Passover, in exchange for returning the Afikoman to the leader at this point in the Seder. Having completed the children's treasure hunt, the Seder continues with each participant eating a piece of the Afikoman.

The thirteenth step of the Seder is בָּרַךְ (barech), bless. During this step, the participants recite the grace after meals fulfilling the commandment found in Deuteronomy 8:10: "And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless HASHEM, our G-d, for the good land which [God] gave you."⁴⁹

The fourteenth step of the Seder is הַלֵּל (hallel), praise. During this step, Psalms 115–118 are recited, together with other praises of G-d.

The fifteenth, and final step in the Seder is נִרְצָה (nirtzah), accept. During this step, the participants ask G-d to accept their observance of Passover and send the Messiah speedily.

At this point, the formal Seder is finished but not quite over. The Haggadah contains a number of "fun" songs. Two merit special attention. The first, "Who Knows One?" is a traditional child's counting song. It presents a puzzle that can be answered by children. The song asks, Who knows what the number one stands for? It answers that the number one stands for "Our G-d is one in the heaven and earth." The song concludes with the number thirteen, asking, "Who knows thirteen?" It answers that thirteen refers to the thirteen attributes of G-d described in Exodus 34: 6-7. A purpose of the song is to motivate, entertain and arouse those children who have

⁴⁹Scherman, *Family Haggadah*, 57.

become sleepy.⁵⁰

The second song is called "One Kid." This nursery rhyme song describes in a playful way how a kid goat bought by daddy was eaten by a cat who in turn was bitten by a dog, etc. The last stanza summarizes the entire song:

The Holy One, blessed by He, then came and slew
the angel of death, who killed the slaughterer, who slaugh-
tered the ox, that drank the water, that quenched the fire,
that burnt the stick, that beat the dog, that bit the cat,
that devoured the kid that father bought for two zuzim, a
kid, a kid.⁵¹

This song describes how the different forces attack one another and how each force acquires temporary power. The biblical basis for the song is Daniel 7 and 8, describing four animals that destroy one another. The message is that each evil receives punishment until the end of days when all evil, even death itself, will be removed from the world. The Haggadah, which recounts the redemption from Egypt and ends with the final redemption, ends with a song that is designed for children.

⁵⁰See Steinzaltz, *Passover Haggadah Hebrew*.

⁵¹Scherman, *Family Haggadah*, 92.





