

Introduction to the Seder- The Missing Fifth¹

The number four is a major theme at the Seder. In fact, at first glance there seem to be four sets of four at the Seder: the four questions, the four sons, the four cups of wine, and the four expressions of redemption. The truth is that there is a fifth set of four, which we can perhaps call the “missing fifth,” which is that the essential section of Maggid, in which we expound upon the Midrash’s understanding of the retelling of the exodus story, also contains a four, namely four verses.

Rabbi Sacks contends that, in fact, each of these groups really contains what he calls a “missing fifth.” And the four that are present symbolize our celebration of redemption from Egypt, but the missing fifth represents that part of the redemption that we are still missing, as we continue to live in exile without the Beit HaMikdash and peace in the world.

There is actually a debate in the Rishonim as to whether there should be a fifth cup of wine at the Seder, and our custom is to compromise; we pour the fifth cup, but do not drink it. This is what we call the Kos Shel Eliyahu, or the cup of Elijah. It is a glimpse of the ultimate redemption, which we can already begin to see, but cannot yet fully taste.

The four expressions of redemption also seem to have a fifth to the set, as when one looks at their source in the Torah one notices that right after G-d promises that He will take us out, save us, redeem us, and take us as a nation, He then promises that He will takes us to the land of Israel, “V’heiveiti.” This too is a reference to the full redemption in Israel, which is not fully present at the Seder.

Even the Mah Nishtana has a fifth question that is missing. When the Mishna (Pesachim 10:4) lists the four questions, it includes that “on every other night we eat meat that is cooked, boiled, or roasted, but on this night we only eat roasted meat.” This is a reference to the Korban Pesach, which again is something that we are missing when we celebrate Pesach during times without a Beit HaMikdash.

The four verses that we expound in the Haggadah are also followed by a fifth (in Devarim 26:9), which states, “He brought us to this place [Israel] and gave us this

¹ Based on essay entitled “The Missing Fifth” from The Jonathan Sacks Haggada, page 129

land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” This is another reference to a future time when the Jewish people will be rooted in Israel around the Beit HaMikdash.

Who is the fifth son? The Lubavitcher Rebbe says that the fifth son are the Jewish people who aren’t even at the Seder. As a result of our lengthy exile, some Jews have gotten lost or become completely unaffiliated.

It is our hope and prayer that all Jews return the Seder, and ultimately all Jews return to Israel and to the Beit HaMikdash.

Karpas - כרפס

The first food that we eat at the Seder is the karpas, a fresh vegetable. The Mishna on Pesachim 114A teaches that the karpas should be dipped prior to being eaten, but it doesn’t clarify what the dip should be. In fact, the Rambam (in Chametz U’Matza 8:2) writes that it should be dipped in Charoset:

He begins and recites the blessing “borei pri ha’adama,” takes the vegetable, dips it in Charoset.

מתחליל ומברך בורא פרי האדמה ולוקח ירק ומטבל אותו בחרושא.

However, the Shulchan Aruch (in Orach Chaim 473:6) follows the opinion of the majority of Rishonim that the karpas should be dipped into vinegar:

And he takes from the karpas less than a kezayit, and dips it into vinegar, and makes the blessing of “borei pri ha’adama,” and eats it.

ויקח מהכרפס פחת מכךית ומטבילו בחומץ ומברך בורא פרי האדמה ואוכל.

Later Poskim, including the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (in 119:3), add that anything that tastes sour or salty can be used, thus leading to the common practice of using salt water.

Question: Why do we have to dip the karpas at all? Why is dipping an important theme of the Pesach Seder? Why do we start our Seder with dipping?

Answer: R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, explained that the dipping at the Seder is deeply symbolic. For when one dips one food into another, he is negating some of the taste of the first food in order to add to it the taste of the second. He is, in essence, acknowledging that his first food is imperfect or lacking, and he therefore covers part of it up with something else that makes it more whole.

In fact, the Hebrew word for dipping is טיבול. Scramble around those letters and you arrive at the word, ביטול, meaning nullification or negation. Every dipping is a small act of ביטול.

We remind ourselves right at the outset that there is much in the world that doesn't make sense. Even amidst the celebration of our exodus from Egypt, we don't understand why there had to be centuries of suffering prior. Why did so many people have to be killed? Why were babies murdered? Why were we stuck in slavery for so long? So we dip our food, symbolically demonstrating that whatever knowledge and understanding we have is incomplete. We defer to the infinite wisdom of Hashem, as we dip our own thoughts into the reservoir of Torah.

Why do we dip into salt water? Perhaps it's not a coincidence that we take something fresh and pleasant, like karpas, and dip it into something sour, and then later, take something bitter, the Maror, and dip it into something sweet, the Charoset. The lesson is that sometimes there are moments in life that we think will be or should be sweet, and sadly they end up bitter. And sometimes there are times that we expect to be difficult or unbearable, and yet they end up bearing fruit and leading to joy. Either way, the message is the same: we remind ourselves that alone we are incomplete, and the best way to begin the Seder is to dunk ourselves in the well of Torah.

Maggid - מגיד

Question: Generally, before performing a given Mitzvah, we say a blessing. We make a blessing before drinking each of the four cups of wine, before eating Matza, and before eating Maror. Why is there no blessing before beginning the Mitzvah of "sippur yetziat Mitzrayim," retelling the story of the exodus from Egypt?

Answer #1: The Pri Megadim says that minimally one can fulfill this Mitzvah with thought alone (this is debated by other Poskim), and we generally do not make blessings on thoughts. Of course, we all discuss the story of the exodus, and don't merely think about it, but to fulfill the basic Mitzvah, thought alone would suffice.

Answer #2: The Pri Chadash says that minimally one can fulfill this Mitzvah by saying Kiddush, which includes the words "zecher li'yetziat Mitzrayim," remembering the exodus from Egypt. And since one can fulfill the Mitzvah with Kiddush alone, no blessing is necessary for all of the additional learning and discussing we do throughout the Seder.

Answer #3: The Gemara on Megillah 18A says:

Beyond this (the text of Shemoneh Esrei) it is prohibited to declare the praises of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Rabbi Elazar said: What is that which is written: "Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can declare all His praise?" (Psalms 106:2)? For whom is it fitting to utter the mighty acts of the Lord? For one who can declare all His praise. Rabba bar bar Ḥana said that Rabbi Yoḥanan said: One who excessively declares the praises of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is uprooted from the world, as it is stated: "Shall it be told to Him when I speak? If a man says it, he would be swallowed up" (Job 37:20). Rabbi Yehuda, a man of Kefar Gibboraya, and some say he was a man of Kefar Gibbor, taught: What is that which is written: "For You silence is praise" (Psalms 65:2)? The best remedy of all is silence. When Rav Dimi came,	מכאן ואילך אסור לספר בשבחו של הקב"ה דא"ר אלעזר מאי דבריב (תהלים קו, ב) מי ימלל גבורות ה' ישמע כל תהלו למי נאה למלא גבורות ה' למי שיכל להשמע כל תהלו. אמר רבה בר בר חנה א"ר יוחנן במספר בשבחו של הקב"ה יותר מדא נערן מן העולם שנאמר (איוב ל, ב) היסופר לו כי הדבר אם אמר איש כי יבלע. דרש ר' יהודה איש כפר גבורי ואמרי לה איש כפר גברUIL מהי דבריב (תהלים סה, ב) לך דומה תהלה סמא דברה משתווקא כי אתה רב דימי אמר אמרו במערבא מלה בסלע משתווקא בתרין.
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he said: In the West, they say: If a word is worth one *sela*, silence is worth two.

In summary, one must be very careful when praising Hashem, as too much is inappropriate. However, the Marasha qualifies this rule. He explains that this limitation is only true within the context of a blessing. But outside the context of a blessing, a person is free to praise Hashem as much as he'd like.

R. Dovid Oppenheim says that this is the reason that we don't have a blessing on telling the story of "yetziat Mitzrayim." For right at the beginning of Maggid, the Haggadah teaches:

Anyone who elaborates to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt is praiseworthy.	וְכָל הַמְרֻבָּה לְסֹפֶר בִּצְיָאַת מִצְרָיִם הַרְיָה מִשְׁבָּח.
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The goal of Pesach night is to not feel limited at all! We should tell the story at length, discuss in detail, and praise Hashem as much as we can! Therefore, to avoid the concern of the Gemara in Megillah, the Rabbis decided not to institute a blessing on this particular Mitzvah.

Answer #4: The Maharam Shif says that we don't make a blessing on a story where our enemies got slaughtered (see "Korech" section below for more on this).

Answer #5: R. Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, the first Rosh Yeshiva of the Ponevitch Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, says that this Mitzvah is a subcategory of the daily Mitzvah of Torah study. So since we already made a blessing in the morning on Torah study, a new blessing on this unique form of Torah study is not required.

Answer #6: The purpose of a blessing is to help us be conscious and aware of our actions, and to guide us towards recognizing Hashem in them. Most Mitzvot require a blessing, because without one, we wouldn't even think about what we're doing, or appreciate it. But the Seder night is not just one of learning or remembering, but one of re-experiencing, as the Haggadah instructs us:

A person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt.	חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאיל והוא יצא ממצרים.
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Since we are so involved in this experience, and we hope to reach the point where we can actually feel the sweetness of redemption, a blessing is not necessary to draw our attention or kavana to what we should be thinking about. We are already there!

We Were Slaves to Pharaoh – עבדים קיינו

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the L-rd, our G-d, took us out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm. If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all of us knowing the Torah, we would still be obligated to discuss the exodus from Egypt; and everyone who discusses the exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.

עבדים קיינו לפרקעה במצרים, יוציאנו יי' אל'הינו משם ביד חזקה ובראע בטובה. ואלו לא הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אבותינו ממצרים, הרי אנו ובנו ובנו בנים משבדים קיינו לפרקעה במצרים. אפילו כלנו חכמים, כלנו בובנים, כלנו זקנים, כלנו יודעים את התורה, מצוה علينا לספר ביציאת מצרים. וכל הפה רבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משבח.

Question: How can we honestly claim that if Hashem hadn't taken us out of Egypt we and our descendants would still be enslaved to Pharaoh? Surely by now we would have gotten out!

Moreover, Hashem had promised Avraham that we would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years (see Bereishit 15:3). So Hashem would have been bound by His own promise to make sure that after 400 years we would no longer be slaves!

And He (G-d) said to Abram, "You shall surely know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years.

ויאמר לאברהם ידע תדע כי גור יהוה צרע הארץ לא להם ועבדום ועמו אתם ארבע מאות שנה:

Answer #1: R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, explained as follows. In ancient times, even when a Jewish slave was freed from the bondage of his Jewish master, he could choose to remain in servitude. The Torah (in Shemot 21:5) states:

But if the slave says, "I love my master, my wife, and my children. I will not go free."

וְאִם אָמַר יֶשְׁעָר הַעֲבָד אֶחֱבָתִי אֶת אֲדֹנִי אֵת
אֶשְׁתִּי וְאֶת בָּנִי לֹא אֵצֵא חָפֵשִׂי.

Why would a slave ever actively choose a life of servitude? Potentially, a slave could become accustomed to the life that he is living, as routine and empty as it might be. His basic needs are cared for, he has good job security, and he avoids some of the stresses that one who is in control of his life might encounter. Remaining a slave might just seem like the simpler option. But, of course, he is missing the point! When the time comes for freedom one should embrace these new opportunities! As daunting as this new stage of life might seem, we hope and expect that this slave would jump at the opportunity to make his own decisions, plan his own day, and live a life of growth and ambition.

So, the Rebbe explains, if Hashem hadn't taken us out in such a dramatic and inspiring fashion, "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm," then we might have even chosen to remain slaves to Pharaoh. The time would come to leave, and we would ask to stay. But when Hashem led us out of Egypt with miracles and glory, he was forcing us to take the opportunity to create lives for ourselves, and to live in freedom!

At the Seder we are not simply celebrating the end of slavery, but also the opportunities offered by being free, and the ability to spend our lives striving for ambitious goals and heights!

Answer #2: R. Chaim Soloveitchik (in Haggadah Shirat HaLeviim) explains that we are not actually claiming that had G-d not redeemed us, we would still be slaves to Pharaoh. Rather, we would still be משעבדים to Pharaoh, which doesn't mean enslaved, but indebted or subjugated to him. Of course, by now we would have left Egypt, but we would have felt forever grateful and indebted to Pharaoh, or to whoever redeemed us. What G-d took us out of Egypt, it wasn't merely saving us,

but it ensured that we would always recognize that it was G-d Himself who took us out, and therefore G-d Himself to whom we are forever indebted and grateful.

מעשה ברבי אליעזר - Five Rabbis Study All Night (1)

It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarphon were reclining [at a Seder] in Bnei Brak. They were discussing the exodus from Egypt all that night, until their students came and told them: "Our Masters! The time has come for reciting the morning Shema!"

מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא ורבי טרפון שהי מأسبון בבנין ברק, וכי מספרים ביציאת מצרים כל אותן היללה עד שבאו תלמידיהם ואמרו להם: רבותינו, הגיע זמן קראת שמע של שחרית.

Question: Is there any significance to who these Rabbis were? Why does the Haggadah specifically make the point of mentioning all of their names?

It's possible that the Haggadah merely wants to emphasize that these were five world-renowned Torah scholars. In the previous paragraph, we read:

And even if we are all wise, learned, elderly, and knowledgeable in the Torah, it is a Mitzvah upon us to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt.

ואפילו כלנו חכמים, כלנו בוגרים, כלנו זקנים,
כלנו יודעים את התורה, מצוה علينا לספר
ביציאת מצרים.

Therefore, the Haggadah wanted to show an example of how this commandment was actually fulfilled. Five great Rabbis, who probably fit into every one of the listed categories (wise, learned, etc.), spent their entire night recounting and studying the story of "yetziyat Mitzrayim."

However, there is an additional reason, which also attributes particular significance to each individual Rabbi. R. Avigdor Nevenzahl, the Rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, explains as follows. R. Akiva descended from converts (as the Gemara on Sanhedrin 96A teaches); R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua were Levites (as Tosafot on Sotah 21B mentions); and R. Tarfon and R. Elazar ben Azarya were Kohanim (as in Pesachim 72B). What is the common denominator of all three of these groups? None of their ancestors was enslaved in Egypt. R. Akiva's ancestors weren't Jewish,

and even the others' who were, all came from the tribe of Levi, who didn't suffer the same servitude as the rest of the Jewish people.

One would think that if anyone would gloss through the Haggadah at a quick pace, and not pay full attention to its depth and significance, it would be those whose ancestors hadn't even suffered the full brunt of the oppression. And yet, the Haggadah goes out of its way to list these names, and to teach that no matter who you are or where you come from, if you are a member of the Jewish people, this is a night that is meaningful for you. Each and every person fully participates, and should fully appreciate, the centrality of the Pesach Seder in the Jewish experience.

מעשה ברבי אליעזר - Five Rabbis Study All Night (2)

It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarphon were reclining [at a Seder] in Bnei Brak. They were discussing the exodus from Egypt all that night, until their students came and told them: "Our Masters! The time has come for reciting the morning Shema!"

מעשה ברבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה ורבי עקיבא ורבי טרפון שהיה מסבון ברכך, והוא מספרים ביציאת מצרים כל אותן הלילה עד شبאו תלמידיהם ואמרם להם: רבותינו, הגיע זמנו קראית שמע של שחרית.

Question: Why is it significant that this discussion took place in Bnei Brak? Would the story not have been equally important if it took place elsewhere?

Answer: R. Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the great Steipler Gaon, prefacing his explanation with two questions. Firstly, R. Eliezer and R. Elazar ben Azarya were of the opinion that the Mitzvah of discussing the exodus story ends at midnight. So why were they engaged in it all the way until the morning?! Secondly, the law is that a student should not lean (perform Heseibah) in the presence of his teacher, as that is considered to be disrespectful. Yet, R. Akiva was a student of R. Eliezer, and the Haggadah seems to say that all of the Rabbis were leaning, including R. Akiva!

The Steipler answers that it's for this reason that we are told that this particular gathering took place in Bnei Brak. For who was the Rabbi of the city of Bnei Brak? R. Akiva. And R. Eliezer (who was the Rabbi in Lod) understood that when you are

in another city, you defer to and honor the leader of that city, even if he is your student. So R. Eliezer agreed to study well past midnight, in fact all night, as that was R. Akiva's opinion regarding the length of the Mitzvah. And he also instructed R. Akiva to lean at the Seder, because even though R. Akiva may have been his student, Bnei Brak was his home.

One sign of a true leader is one who is able to engage in civil and respectful discourse and discussion. As confident as R. Eliezer was in his own opinions, he was perfectly happy to defer to the contrary opinions of others, when the time or place dictated as such.

ארבעה בנים ברוך המקום - Blessed is the Omnipresent & The Four Sons

Blessed is the Omnipresent One, blessed be He! Blessed is He who gave the Torah to His people Israel, blessed be He!
The Torah speaks of four children: One is wise, one is wicked, one is simple and one does not know how to ask.

ברוך המקום, ברוך הוא. ברוך שפטנו תורה.
לעמו וישראל, ברוך הוא.
בנגד ארבעה בניים דברה תורה. אחד חכם,
אחד רשע, אחד טם, ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול.

Question: What is the connection between these two paragraphs? Why are they juxtaposed?

Answer: R. Chaim Soloveitchik offered the following beautiful insight. Regarding secular wisdoms, a novice and a scholar study very different texts and ideas. For example, a 5th grade Biology class would never use the same textbook that would be used by graduate students in medical school. The Torah is unique in that we all study the same Torah, the same text. A 5th grader uses the same Chumash that is used by the greatest Torah scholars in the world. No matter how wise, wicked, simple, or unaware any child or adult may be, we all learn the same Torah, and we can all contribute in our own, unique way!

צא ולמד – Go Forth and Learn

Go forth and learn what Laban the Aramean wanted to do to our father Jacob. Pharaoh had issued a decree against the male children only, but Laban wanted to uproot everyone - as it is said: "The Aramean wished to destroy my father...

צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו. שפרעה לא גזר אלא על הזכרים ולבן בקש לעקור את הפל, שנאמר: ארמי אבד אבי....

Question #1: Pesach is the holiday on which we celebrate our redemption from slavery under Pharaoh. After years of suffering under his evil regime, we were finally victorious and free. Why, in this paragraph, do we seem to be minimizing Pharaoh's decrees? Why do we emphasize that as bad as Pharaoh was, at least he wasn't as bad as Lavan?

Question #2: Why did Pharaoh only decree to kill Jewish male babies? If he hated the Jews so much, why did he let the baby girls live?

R. Chaim Soloveitchik suggests the following novel interpretation. Hashem had already promised to Avraham that the Jewish people would live eternally. There was really no possibility of the Jews being wiped off the map. Lavan, who lived a mere one generation after Avraham, was crazy for thinking that he could ignore the promise of Hashem, and act counter His guarantee! His attempt to destroy the Jewish people was futile and foolish. Pharaoh, on the other hand, was very different. He understood, believed, and even accepted Hashem's promise. He was fully aware that destroying every last Jew was an impossibility. So he devised a brilliant, but evil scheme. He decided to kill every baby boy, but let the girls live. Therefore, the baby girls will grow up and want to get married, but there will be no Jewish boys for them! So they'll be forced to marry Egyptian men. Of course, their children will still technically be Jewish, because Jewish law dictates that religion is passed matrilineally. However, their Egyptian husbands won't allow them to raise their children as Jews, and slowly all the remaining Jews will have fully assimilated into Egyptian culture. So Hashem's guarantee will still technically be fulfilled, but for all intents and purposes, Judaism will be non-existent, and Pharaoh would have gotten his wish.

So, in fact, this paragraph is actually emphasizing, not minimizing, the evilness of Pharaoh! Pharaoh wasn't just a crazy man, he was a brilliant, evil schemer. He

thought that he could outsmart G-d! (Of course, his plan was thwarted, and now he is but a memory).

One of the themes of the Pesach story is the haughtiness of Pharaoh, who believed in G-d, but arrogantly thought that he could be stronger, smarter, and more powerful. And Hashem kept on telling Moshe that by the end of this whole saga it will be clear that Hashem is the only G-d, and His power is not even comparable to that of a mere mortal. We all have moments where we think we value our own intelligence more than the wisdom of the Torah, and we must remind ourselves that the wisdom of G-d and His Torah is perfect and eternal.

שְׁפָרֶךָ - Opening the Door

There is a custom to open the door to one's home after drinking the third cup of wine, right before reciting the paragraph of "sh'foch chamatcha."

Question: What is the significance of opening the door, and why do we do it now?

Answer 1: R. Shmuel Rozovski, former Rosh Yeshiva of the Ponevitch Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, offered the following novel explanation. Regarding the Pesach offering, the Torah (in Shemot 12:46) instructs:

In one house shall it (the Pesach offering) be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof.

בַּבָּיִת אֶחָד יִאֲכֵל, לَا-תֹצִיא מִן-הַבָּיִת מִן-
הַבָּשָׂר חֹזֶה; וְעַצְם, לֹא תִשְׁבְּרוּ-בוּ.

Since there is a prohibition against taking the meat from the Pesach offering outside of one's house, during Temple times there was a custom to keep one's home locked during the eating of the meat. This way, if one would absentmindedly head for the exit with some Pesach meat, he would encounter the locked door and be reminded of this prohibition. However, the custom was that at the conclusion of the meal, families would head to the rooftops to sing Hallel together. (Imagine all families gathering together on rooftops in Jerusalem to sing songs of praise and thanks; it must have been marvelous!) To commemorate this custom, after our

meals (and Birkat Hamazon and the third cup of wine), we too unlock and open the doors.

Answer 2: The Torah (in Shemot 12:42) refers to Pesach as “a night of protection:”

It is a night of protection for Hashem, to take them out of the land of Egypt; this night for Hashem will be a night of protection for the Jewish people for all generations.

יל שָׁמָרִים הוּא לְהָ, לְהֹצִיאֵם מִמִּצְרַיִם: הָא-הַלִּילָה הַזֶּה לְהָ, שָׁמָרִים לְכָל-בָּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִדְרָתָם.

Pesach is the time during which we build up our faith, and remember that no matter how dangerous and scary the world sometimes seems, the only One whom we can truly trust for protection is Hashem Himself. And specifically towards the end of the Seder, after a long night of stories, learning, eating, and experiencing, we have reached a point where we can confidently and faithfully open our doors and proclaim our trust in Hashem. Doors, locks, and alarms are all important, but ultimately they are useless without Hashem’s divine protection.