

**When the Cup of Wrath Doth Overflow:
Violence, Vengeance, Vitriol and the New Anti-Semitism**



Sarajevo Haggadah 1350

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The Jewish Center
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Part I: Opening

Questions and background

In the year 1522, a young German Jew named Antonius Margaritha converted to Christianity. And from that point on, he devoted a good portion of his life to ridiculing Jewish practice and Jewish ritual. In 1530 he wrote a book called *Das Gantz Juedisch Glaub* which scholars actually believe was influential in shaping the hateful ideology espoused by Martin Luther in his book *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

Having grown up in a rabbinic household, Margaritha had first-hand knowledge of the lived tradition. And I share with you one excerpt from his description of the Pesach Seder.



1 Antonius Margaritha, *Der Gantz Juedisch Glaub* (Leipzig, 1531)

They have a short prayer called, “Pour out thy wrath,” immediately after whose recitation they open the door thinking that Elijah will come through it. On this occasion they curse all the nations, especially the Christians, for they hope the Messiah will wreak their vengeance on all the nations.

It's of course disconcerting that an apostate would turn our own liturgy into a source not only of scorn and derision, but ultimately anti-Semitic sentiment. And whether or not his allegations were true, it's worth noting right away that if the text of שפוך חמתך makes us a little uncomfortable, it's with good reason. Five hundred years ago it was already providing fodder to our enemies and emboldening those who aimed to portray Jews – not just as outsiders – but as anti-Christian activists whose very theology included a prayer for the destruction of Christendom.

And yet this section of the Haggadah has not only survived, it seems to have thrived: From Ashkenaz to the Levant; from England to Italy. (It's like the Maxwell Haggadah.) It's is everywhere.

Pour out Your wrath upon the nations that do not acknowledge You, and upon the kingdoms that do not call upon Your Name. For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation. Pour out Your indignation upon them, and let the wrath of Your anger overtake them. Pursue them with anger, and destroy them from beneath the heavens of the Lord.

2 הגדה של פסח

שפוך חמתך אל הגוים אשר לא ידעוך
ועל ממלכות אשר בשמך לא קראו.
כי אכל את יעקב ואת נוה השמו.
שפוך עליהם זעמך וחרון אפך ישיגם.
תדריך באף ותשמידם מתחת שמי "

So the question is this: Is Margaritha's allegation really true? At the moment of great Jewish triumphalism on Seder night, are we really asking Hashem or his agent to rain down fire and brimstone on non-believers? This is a night of celebration. How would such an appeal comport with the ethos of the evening?

Remember the beautiful tradition that developed around the recitation of the plagues? When we mention the Makot that decimated Egypt, we go out of our way to spill drops of wine to demonstrate that our celebration is incomplete in the knowledge that our salvation came about at the expense and suffering of others.

And it's not just that we have sympathy for our oppressors; once we get to the end of the Seder, we broaden the entire lens of our redemptive perspective and start thinking about the redemption in universal terms.

The fourth cup of the evening is devoted to Hallel.

On the fourth cup, one completes the recitation of Hallel and recites the blessing of the song. What is the blessing of the song? R. Yehuda said, "All your works shall praise you..." R. Yohanan said, "The soul of every being..."

3 פסחים קיז:-קיה.

רביעי גומר עליו את ההלל ואומר עליו ברכת השיר. מאי ברכת השיר? רב יהודה אמר יהללוך ה' אלוהינו [כל מעשיך], ורבי יוחנן אמר נשמת כל חי.

Either way: There's a universal quality to this cup. It's the cup upon which everyone – every creation – is singing Hallel. (See also **רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה ח"י**)

4 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Days of Deliverance 77

And on Passover night, after we speak of Jewish redemption over the first three cups, we recite the great universal hymn of "Nishmat kol hai," of the salvation of mankind, of every living soul. A Jew is not satisfied with his redemption unless everybody will be redeemed with him; the Jew feels the beat of the heart of the universe. The Jew prays even for the cosmos. Once a month, he prays that God shall restore the diminution of the moon. The Jewish experience is all-inclusive, all-embracing, sympathetic to all. What the poet Virgil keenly described as the "tears for what men bear" (*lacrimæ rerum*; *Aeneid* I.462) is transformed into "light and gladness and joy and honor" (8:16).

And just to refresh your memory of the Seder, this is all happening right after שפוך חמתך. We sit down and we sing Hallel. So what would it mean to ask God to destroy the gentiles in one breath and then ask Him to redeem them in the very next?

If שפוך חמתך means what we think it means, how is it possible to reconcile this tension?

But I have more questions:

According to the stages of the Seder, right after ברכת המזון we should proceed directly to הלל. And if you look in the Haggadah of the Rambam, for instance, that's exactly what you'll find.

Recite grace after meals over the third cup and then drink it. Then pour the fourth cup and complete the Hallel....

5 רמב"ם הלכות חמץ ומצה ח:י
ומברך ברכת המזון על כוס שלישי, ושותהו. ואחר כך מוזג כוס רביעי, וגומר עליו את ההלל; ואומר עליו ברכת השיר, והיא יהללוד ה' אלוהינו כל מעשיו

There's no mention at all of שפוך חמתך. And yet in our Haggadot, the Seder is interrupted not just by the recitation of שפוך חמתך, but a whole ceremony:

- We pour the cup of the Elijah;
- We open the door;
- We sing.

Where did these practices come from? Are they in fact related to one another? And theologically – or philosophically – what are they all about?

And as long as we're asking, let me make things even worse.

Sometimes people at the Seder like to be a little extra מחמיר – a little extra stringent. They use a Kiddush cup that's a little bigger; they eat a little more matzah; they recline a little more horizontally. Some people were more מחמיר about שפוך חמתך. A text with four lines about the destruction of the gentiles wasn't enough for them.

In the British version of the Haggadah, here we have a text with our four lines and then 12 additional lines!

6 הגדת עץ חיים לר' יעקב מלונדון
שפך חמתך אל הגוים אשר לא ידעוהו ועל ממלכות אשר בשמך לא קראו. כי אכל את יעקב ואת נהוה השמו.
שפך עליהם זעמך וחרון אפך ושיגם. תרדף באף ותשמידם מתחת שמי יי. שפך עליהם זעמך; וחרון אפך, ושיגם.
תרעם, בשבט ברזל: ככלי יוצר תנפצם. תהי טירתם נשמה; באהליהם, אל-יהי יושב. תרדף באף ותשמידם, מתחת שמי יהוה. תרעם, בשבט ברזל: ככלי יוצר תנפצם.
ימחו, מספר חיים; ועם צדיקים, אל-יכתבו. תנה-עון, על-עונם; ואל-יבאו, בצדקתך. תתן להם מגנת-לב, תאלתר להם. תן-להם כפועלם, וכרע מעלליהם כמעשה ידיהם, תן להם; השוב גמולם להם. הביא עליהם יום רעה, ומשנה שברון שברם. חרבם, תבוא בלבם; וקשתותם, תשברנה.
תחשכנה עיניהם, מראות; ומתניהם, תמיד המעד.
יבשו ויבהלו עדי-עד; ויחפרו ויאבדו.

Where did all of this come from and what is it doing at our Seder?

Part II: Halacha and Zugot:

Two old-timers were life-long friends and life-long baseball fans. They made a deal with one another that the first one to die would report back to the other and let him know if there was baseball in heaven. Sure enough Herb gets a call from his friend Izzy just a few days after he passed away. I've got good news and bad news he says. The good news is that there *is* baseball in heaven. The bad news is that you're scheduled to pitch on Monday.

Sometimes the answers we get are hard to accept, but that doesn't make them any less true. And so I hope you'll indulge me in a brief foray into the enigmatic world of Talmudic superstition for just a few moments.

And it requires a leap into a world of demons and demigods; a world in which religious piety was felt so strongly that people walked around worried that their moral missteps could actually trigger the release of dark and dangerous forces into the world. (A rabbinic fantasy-land!)

I have to confess that this isn't my field of expertise – in my rabbinate I deal more with golems and dibbiks – so bear with me if you will.

The concept that's going to be important for this brief excursion is known in Talmudic parlance as Zugot – which can best be translated as pairs or even numbers. And the idea – roughly speaking – was this.

Dualistic theology was no small matter in the ancient world. The members of the Dead Sea cult believed in forces of light and forces of darkness. The Manicheans subscribed to a similar worldview. In Zoroastrianism good and evil were considered cosmic forces within the universe. At some point over the course of Judaism's evolution, we developed an allergy to anything that may have smacked of dualism.

The idea [behind the prohibition against pairs] is this: To create distance between a dualistic theology and a monotheistic theology. In order to accentuate in one's heart the notion of monotheism as opposed to dualism.

7 רבינו בחיי, שלחן של ארבע
ועוד טעם אחר להרחקת השניות שהם הנפרדים מכה
האחד והזוגות מכה שניות, וכדי לקבוע בלב ענין אחדות
והתרחק מאמונת השניות.

And it wasn't just that doing things in pairs was prohibited, it was thought to be dangerous. If I drink two cups of water, I'm going to unleash some kind of divine force that's going to put my life in danger.

So with this in mind, let's learn a Gemara together:

One may not drink fewer than four cups. But how could the rabbis require something that puts one in danger? For have we not learnt: A person may not eat in pairs, drink in pairs.... Said R. Nahman: The Torah calls this a night of watching – we are guarded on this night from those who would harm us. Rava said: A cup of blessing can be counted toward something positive, but not something negative. Ravina said: These four cups that were ordained by the rabbis must be drunk in the spirit of freedom; thus each one must be considered independently.

8 פסחים קט:
ולא יפחתו לו מארבעה. היכי מתקני רבנן מידי
דאחי בה לידי סכנה? והתניא: לא יאכל אדם
תרי, ולא ישתה תרי, ולא יקנה תרי, ולא יעשה
צרכיו תרי. אמר רב נחמן: אמר קרא ליל
שמרים - ליל המשומר ובא מן המזיקין. רבא
אמר: כוס של ברכה מצטרף לטובה, ואינו
מצטרף לרעה. רבינא אמר: ארבעה כסי תקינו
רבנן דרך חירות, כל חד וחד מצוה באפי נפשה
הוא

We don't deal in pairs. And if one does – as we'll see in a moment – he takes his life into his own hands.

This is actually quite amazing. This superstition was so ancient and so universally accepted that when the rabbis came along and ordained the four cups, the ordinance required justification! The presumption was that it would be prohibitively dangerous to drink an even number of cups. How could we, the Talmud wondered, put ourselves in this position? So moved were the sages by this question, that the Talmud suggests no fewer than three solutions. They were really worried that drinking two pairs of cups might put their lives in danger.

Now that we have such a firm grasp on the topic, let me share with you a suggestion of Rashbatz, Shimon ben Zemah Duran (1361–1444).

He's wondering why שפוך חמתך appears where it does:

Therefore we recite [Shefoch] and declare that on this fourth cup (with which we normally would have associated the fear of zugot) we have no fear of retribution and that God should pour out his wrath on the heathens. Not on us. And hence the connection [to the succeeding line] *lo lanu*.

9 מאמר חמץ לרשב"ץ
ונ"ל טעם יותר מחייב היותו בזה הכוס [הרביעי] יותר מהאחרים לפי שהוא כוס רביעי. והשותה כפלים מתחייב בנפשו. ובגמ' (פסחים קט ב) הוצרכו לתת טעם למה תקנו חכמים דבר שיש בו סכנה. אם מפני שכל אחד מארבעה כוסות הוא מצוה בפני עצמו ואין מצטרפין להיות זוגות. אם מפני שכוס של ברכת המזון מצטרף לברכה ואינו מצטרף לפורענות. וכאלו הן שלשה ואחד ואין כאן זוגות. או מפני שנאמר (שמות יב, מב) ליל שמורים. (למה שהוא) [ליל] משומר מן המזיקין. לכן אנחנו אומרים שאין לנו בזה הכוס הרביעי דאגה מפורענות. והשם ישפוך חמתו על הגוים. לא עלינו. ולזה הוא נקשר. לא לנו ה' לא לנו. שפוך חמתך על הגוים.

“Don't be upset at us; we're not dualists! Pour out your wrath on them – the ones who reject a single God.”

To the extent that there's danger, it should be poured out on them, not us. We confirm we're protected on this special night.

And the Rashbatz has a great textual argument. We think of שפוך חמתך as a four-line paragraph. But, in fact, the three lines (or 15 lines, as the case may be) that follow were probably later accretions. The original version likely had only one line!

See for instance Machzor Roma (1560)

10 מחזור רומא (1560)

ומוזגין כוס רביעי ואומר
שפוך חמתך על הגוים אשר לא ירעדו ועל הפסלכות אשר בשמך
לא קראו
לא לנו
לא לנו כי לשמך תוקבור על חסדך על אמתך
לפני יאסרו הגוים איתגא אלהים ואלדינו
בשמים כל אשר תעין עשה. עבדיהם בסיוחך בעשה יי אדם

Or have a look at the Title page from the Sarajevo Haggadah (1350). Here there were just two lines of שפוך. Who knows if the illustrator had this in mind, but there's literally a straight line between שפוך and לנו!

Pour out your wrath on them – לא לנו – not on us. It's as if there's a kind of zero-sum game. Someone has to be the recipient of divine wrath. Because Seder night affords us a special kind of protection, we're sure it's not us.

And this would explain why we open the door:

The rabbis taught: One who drinks in pairs – his blood on his [own] head. Said R. Yehudah: When is this so? In a context in which [he drinks the cups consecutively and] does not see the marketplace [in the interim]. However, if he does see the marketplace in the interim, he has permission [to drink in pairs].

11 פסחים קי.
תנו רבנן: שותה כפלים - דמו בראשו.
אמר רב יהודה: אימתי - בזמן שלא ראה
פני השוק, אבל ראה פני השוק - הרשות
בידו.

On this reading, we're not opening the door for the Messiah. We're opening the door because doing so constitutes a הפסק. Halachically, you've created a discontinuity between the cups of wine, thus obviating the entire issue of Zugot.

And even though the Gemara didn't suggest it, the 5th cup would fit perfectly with this thesis. We know our obligation is to drink 4 cups – so we can't drink 5. But in case anyone is still worried that even numbers are problematic, we pour a 5th cup to skirt the issue entirely.

And if we've stumbled onto an operative theory of what's happening here, this could also explain the evolution of Nirtzah – songs like אחד אני יודע. The idea is to reinforce the notion of a belief in a single God.

The idea of שפוך חמתך is not about cosmic vengeance. To the pietists who were forever worried that they had transgressed, here was an affirmation that on this night of many Mitzvot and many halachic challenges, they had done their best to fulfil every jot and tittle of what was expected of us. Think of חסל סידור פסח כהלכתו. It probably comes from the same pietistic school of thought: They were sensitive to every halachic expectation; they were confident that they had navigated the inherent tension of drinking an even number of cups of wine. Hashem, they said – You have no reason to be upset at us. We've acted faithfully. If someone has to be an object of your wrath, it certainly shouldn't be us.

Part III: The Historical Evolution of the Coda between Barekh and Hallel

Now I suppose if we were devotees of esotericism and the occult, we might find this approach compelling. Accepting the terms of its internal logic, the argument is cogent enough. The problem is that most of us living here in the rational world of the 21st century aren't really able to assimilate this kind of thinking. And what's more, if the problem of Zugot was already top of mind in the days of the Talmud, why don't we find any mention of שפוך חמתך until the 12th century?

Either way, this first approach relegates שפוך חמתך to a kind of vestigial status – the remnant of an ancient past in which we were combatting the adherents of a dualistic theology that's all but vanished from our world.

So what do we do? How can we explain in rational terms what it is and we're doing and saying at this point in the Seder? And how can we appreciate its relevance to our contemporary moment?

Now, there is a school of thought that says we simply have to understand the context of the time period in which a prayer like this emerged:

12 Daniel Goldschmidt, Kiryat Sefer p. 120 n. 82

The attacks against the Gentiles are well understood in light of the situation of despair in which the Jews found themselves in the Middle Ages in the Christian countries, and they could not respond to the continuous persecutions by means of an army or power, but turned to their Heavenly Father that he repay their persecutors in kind, and take Israel out of the slavery and darkness. Such harsh expressions as found here are a spontaneous reaction to all the ill they suffered, a reaction based upon broken-heartedness and bitterness of soul, fitting to the deep (if somewhat primitive) piety of their authors. One who expresses surprise at their sharpness and cruelty, must not forget in what period and under what conditions they were written.⁸⁴

Of course this is all possible, but it certainly doesn't explain the specific context of שפוך חמתך. So I want to go back to the source and present a radical alternative to our first theory – one that has nothing to do with Zugot – and one that I hope will ultimately speak to some of the challenges we face today.

But by way of background, let's learn a little Christian theology together.

In the next source, I have an excerpt from the book of Matthew. Of course it's a translation from the Greek; but I've provided a Hebrew translation alongside the English translation to highlight a stunning parallel.

13 Matthew xxvi

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the

26 ויהי באכלם ויקח ישוע את-הלחם
ויברך ויפרס ויתן לתלמידים ויאמר קחו
ואכלו זה הוא גופי 27 ויקח את-הכוס
ויברך ויתן להם ויאמר שתו ממנה
כלכם 28 כי זה הוא דמי דם-הברית
החדשה השפוך בעד רבים לסליחת
חטאים 29 ואני אמר לכם לא אשתה

vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

מעתה מפרי הגפן הזה עד היום ההוא אשר אשתה אתו עמכם והוא חדש במלכות אבי :

שִׁפּוֹךְ חֲמַתְךָ אֶל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעוּךָ וְעַל מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁמֶךָ לֹא קָרְאוּ

This is the source for the doctrine that eventually became known as transubstantiation. This was the Pesach seder and Jesus was telling his disciples that by drinking the wine, they would be drinking his blood – the blood of his new covenant.

The doctrine of transubstantiation came about as the result of a theological dispute that started in the 11th century and was finally committed to writing at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

So in the 11th and 12th century, all of this was brewing.

Guess when we find the first reference to the recitation of שִׁפּוֹךְ חֲמַתְךָ at the Seder? The earliest source of שִׁפּוֹךְ חֲמַתְךָ is Machzor Vitri (student of Rashi, c. 1100)

One pours the fourth cup for Hallel. Then he recites "Pour out Thy wrath on the heathens." The great Hallel [follows].

14 מחזור ויטרי

מברכין ברכת המזון ושותין ומברכין על הגפן ועל פרי הגפן. ומוזגין כוס רביעי להלל. ויאמר שפוך חמתך על הגויים. הלל הגדול. המלך. נשמת כל חי....

So now here's the thought exercise. If you were a Jewish leader living through this period and you wanted to offer a counterpoint to the Christian theologians of your day, what would you do?

To put it differently: If you had all of תנך at your disposal and you had to pick one line to refute the prevailing theological zeitgeist, you know what it would be:

שִׁפּוֹךְ חֲמַתְךָ אֶל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעוּךָ וְעַל מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁמֶךָ לֹא קָרְאוּ

Follow the bolded words in source 13: If the doctrine of transubstantiation was beginning to take hold around this time, here was a brilliant, thinly veiled polemic against it. We're not drinking a remnant of *spilled* blood; we're asking God to *spill* out a cup of wrath! And we're not professing belief in the *kingdom* of the Christian savior; we're professing our belief in the God who strikes down false *kingdoms*! We invert the metaphor: Let Hashem take his cup and pour it out on those who fail to recognize the one true God.

On this reading, שִׁפּוֹךְ חֲמַתְךָ is not a call for retribution; it's a clever turn of phrase that captures the sentiment of anti-Christian polemicism. To your deviant doctrines, we object in the strongest possible terms.

A burglar breaks into a house one night. He starts to look around for valuables, when suddenly he hears a disembodied voice: "Jesus is watching you."

He pauses for a moment and then returns to the task at hand.

And then the voice comes again: "Jesus is watching you."

The burglar shines his flashlight this way and that. Finally, in the corner of the room, he spots a parrot in a bird cage. "Did you say that?", he asks.

"Yes," the parrot says. "I'm just trying to warn you."

"Warn me?" the burglar says, "Who are you?"

"Moses," says the bird.

"Moses?" the burglar laughs. "What kind of people would name their bird Moses?"

"The same kind of people that would name their Rottweiler Jesus."

But I want to go even further. If שפוך חמתך inverts the Christian doctrine of transubstantiation, the כוס של אליהו represent its own veiled inversion.

For Medieval Christians, the chalice always held a special place. And until the Reformation, it was always the province of the clergy. It was the vessel from which god's blood was drunk at mass, but only by a priest. Catholic practice forbade the laity from drinking the wine; they were allowed only the wafer. (See Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* p. 149.)

But in the 15th century, something happened. There emerged a man named Jan Hus. He was a Bohemian philosopher, was a very early reformer (100 years before Luther) and anti-clericalism was at the top of his reformist agenda. He believed members of the clergy should have no special authority.

Eventually Hus was excommunicated, condemned to death by the Council of Constance and burned at the stake. But he became a kind of martyr to his followers, who were known as Hussites. And because he had insisted that both lay people and clergy could take communion and drink the wine, the symbol of their movement became the chalice.

An Israeli scholar named Tal Goitein noticed that the first image of Elijah's cup appears in a Bohemian Haggadah in the 15th century.



15 Erna Michael Haggadah, Bohemia 1400-1420 (Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

The gentleman seated is holding two cups. One is his cup of wine; and one is the much larger cup of Elijah. Why would this cup pop up just at this time and just in this locale?

Goitein has a fascinating theory. She suggests that it has everything to do with the Hussites.

16 טל גויטיין מזיגת כוס לאלהו הנביא: תיאור לא מוכר של המנהג מהמאה החמש עשרה בהגדת ארנה מיכאל מחקרי ירושלים בפולקלור יהודי, כט תשע"ה, עמ' 79-102

The Jews certainly rejected the central metaphor of the mass, but at the same time internalized the process of creating the ceremony and insisted that the coming of Elijah the Prophet – and not Jesus – would impel the scattered Jews to repent and then redemption would follow. From then on, the special large cup of wine symbolized the coming redemption. Thus, it was appropriate to prepare a cup of wine for Elijah who heralds the coming of the messiah.

שנגזרו מכך הוא שבמהלך המיסה כל באי הכנסייה שתו מכוס היין ולא רק הכמרים כוס היין קיבלה אפוא משמעות חדשה עבור ההוסיטים היהודים דחו בוודאי את המטפורה המרכזית של המיסה אך בו בזמן הפנימו את תהליך יצירת הטקס וקבעו כי בואו של אליהו הנביא ולא ישוע יביא את כל נידחי ישראל לעשות תשובה ובעקבותיה תבוא הגאולה מכאן שכוס היין הגדולה המיוחדת מסמלת את הגאולה שתבוא ולכן לאלהו מבשר בואו של המשיח יש להכין כוס יין דאפילו עניי שבישראל מגיע כוס יין

It all fits together: In conjunction with a prayer-based polemic against Jesus, the false messiah, we add a physical symbol: Elijah's cup.

But it gets even better. It's not just they have cup of Jesus so we replace it with a cup of Elijah. Have a look at the next sources. How do you fill the cup of Elijah?



Washington Haggadah 1478

17 פסח מעובין אות קפב, חיים בנבנשתי (-1603) (1673)

Pesach Meuvin (1997), p. 124, #182.

We place an empty cup at the center of the table and fill it with the remnants [of wine] from the four cups so as to ensure that they are not defective.

מניחין כוס ריקה בתחילת הסדר וממלאים אותה משירי היין של ארבע כוסות שלא תהיינה פגומות.

ויגד משה

After the third cup we pour a little wine from the cups of the Seder participants into the cup of Elijah.

אחר כוס ברכת המזון מוזגים קצת יין מכוסות המסובים לכוסו של אליהו.

The כוס של אליהו inverts the narrative of the laity taking communion from the chalice. Here we have a chalice from which no one drinks! In fact: We do exactly the opposite. Everyone pours wine *into* the cup!

We take nothing from Elijah's cup. Our Messiah has not yet arrived! We open the door in eager anticipation of his coming in the future.

And let me take it one step further.

When we start to see images appearing alongside שפוך חמתי in illustrated Haggadot, it's little wonder that the illustrators inverted yet another symbol of the Christian messiah.



18 A medieval rendering of the Palmesel.



19 Prague Haggadah (1560)

20 Joseph Gutman, Messiah at the Seder, Sefer Raphael Mahler (1974), p. 37.

It was customary, especially in medieval Southern Germany, to have procession on Palm Sunday, in which sculptured wooden figures of Christ and his messianic ass (Palmesel) were carried on carts, and wheeled to the gates of a mock Jerusalem.

As part of the procession on Palm Sunday, there was a Palmesel – a life-size wooden statue of Jesus triumphantly riding his donkey to the gates of Jerusalem. So Jewish illustrators inverted the image. Our messiah has not yet come. And he will only come once Elijah has heralded his arrival.

So virtually all of our questions answered.

What we have between the stages of Barech and Hallel is a set of practices that consciously polemicized against contemporary Christian doctrine and practice.

- We invert the notion of transubstantiation by asking God to spill out his wrath in rejection of the belief that one could drink the spilled blood of the savior.
- Rather than have everyone drink from a chalice of communion, we have everyone contribute to a cup that will not be drunk.
- We envision a messiah that has not yet come rather than one who has.
- And we perch open the door to a reaffirm a belief in a messianic future.

Part IV: Vengeance as the necessary pre-condition for redemption

Now that we have a reasonable understanding of how שפוך חמתך and its attendant practices came about, what about our original question? How do we reconcile the tension between שפוך חמתך on the one hand and נשמת כל חי on the other? Just who is it that we're hoping will be the target of divine retribution?

The reason it was ordained to recite “Pour out thy wrath” on the fourth cup is because the four cups are arranged to correspond to the four cups of tribulation that the Almighty will serve to the nations of the world. On this final cup we declare, “The time has come to give them to drink....” And what’s more, the principle redemption is dependent upon the destruction of their kingdom as it says in the Midrash: *After 2300 evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary shall be cleansed* (Daniel 8:14). Said R. Yitzhak: When night falls upon the kingdom of the other nations, then the sanctuary will be cleansed....

21 הגדה של פסח לריטב"א

מה שתיקנו לומר על כוס רביעי פסוק שפוך חמתך על הגוים, הוא מפני כי לפי שקיימנו מצות ד' כוסות כנגד ד' כוסות של פורענות שעתיד הקב"ה להשקות לאומות העולם, אנו אומרים על כוס האחרון שיגיע אותו הזמן שישקה אותם ה' כוס חמתו הוא כוס התרעלה כדכתיב (איכה ד') שישי ושמחי בת אדום וכו' גם עליך תעבור כוס, ולא עוד אלא שעיקר גאולתינו תלויה בחורבן קרן מלכותם כדאמרינן בבראשית רבה (פרשה כ"א) עד ערב בוקר אלפים ושלוש מאות ונצדק קדש (דניאל ח'), אמר רבי יצחק כשיעשה ערב בקרן של אומות העולם אז ונצדק קדש, וכן הנביא אומר (ישעיה ס') כי הנה החשך יכסה ארץ וערפל לאומים ועליך יזרח ה' וכבודו עליך יראה במהרה בימינו אכי"ר.

Before the fourth cup – the cup of universal redemption – we say שפוך חמתך because before that redemption can come, the world first needs to be purged of our enemies. When we say Pour out Thy Wrath we don't have in mind non-Jews writ large. We have in mind a very specific group of people who are bent on our destruction.

Just read the line that follows שפוך חמתך:

כִּי אָכַל אֶת יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת נֹוֹהוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם.

It's because you've devoured Jacob – it's because you've stood on the wrong side of history – that we pray for your overthrow.

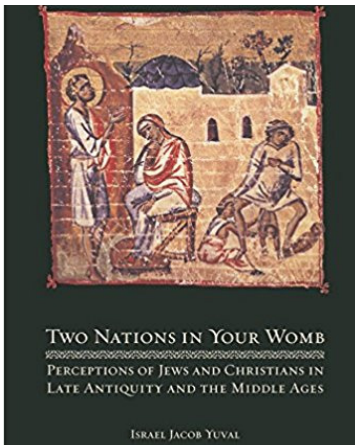
One doesn't need to be a student of Jewish history to know there are bad actors in this world. As long as they're around, the ultimate redemption won't be possible. And so we make a plea that the Almighty pave the way for that גאולה.

It goes all the way back to the pasuk in Devarim. We're not rooting for God to take vengeance on Gentiles with a capital G. We're waiting for him take vengeance against His enemies.

Make the lot of His people a happy one, O you nations. For He will avenge the blood of his servitors. **22 דברים לב:מג**
הֲרַנִּינוּ גוֹיִם עִמּוֹ, כִּי דָם-עֲבָדָיו יִקּוּם; וְנָקָם יֵשִׁיב
לְעָרְיוֹ, וְכִפֹּר אֶדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ. וְנָקָם יֵשִׁיב לְעָרְיוֹ, וְכִפֹּר אֶדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ.
And vengeance will fall back on **His enemies** and His people will bring atonement to His world of men.

22a רמב"ן דברים לב:מג
וישוב ויתנחם ויפרע מן האויבים בחרבו הקשה והגדולה והחזקה ויכפר על חטאתינו למען שמו אם כן השירה הזאת הבטחה מבוארת בגאולה העתידה על כרחן של מינין וכך

22b ישעיהו סג
א-מִי-זֶה בָּא מֵאֲדוֹם, חֲמוּץ בְּגָדִים מִבְּצָרָה, זֶה הַדּוֹר בְּלִבוֹשׁוֹ, צֹעָה בְּרֵב כַּחוֹ; אֲנִי מְדַבֵּר בְּצִדְקָה, רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ. ב-מְדוּעַ אֲדָם, לְלִבוֹשׁוֹ; וּבְגָדֵי, כְּדֹרֶךְ בָּגַת. ג-פִּוּרָה דְּרָכָתִי לְבָדִי, וּמַעֲמִים אֵין-אִישׁ אֶתִּי, וְאֶדְרָכֶם בְּאִפִּי, וְאֶרְמָסֶם בְּחֲמָתִי; וְזִנְיָתֶם עַל-בְּגָדִי, וְכָל-מַלְבוּשֵׁי אֲגָלָתִי. ד-כִּי יוֹם נָקָם, בְּלִבִּי; וּשְׁנַת גְּאוּלָּי, בָּאָה. ה-וְאֶבִּיט וְאֵין עֶזֶר, וְאֶשְׁתַּוֵּם וְאֵין סוּמָךְ; וְתוֹשָׁע לִי זָרְעִי, וְחֲמָתִי הִיא סִמְכָתִנִּי. ו-וְאֶבּוֹס עַמִּים בְּאִפִּי, וְאֶשְׁכַּרֶם בְּחֲמָתִי; וְאֶזְרִיד לְאֶרֶץ, נִצְחָם.



23 Yisroel Yuval: Two Nations in Your Womb (2005) p. 95

The dominant view in Ashkenaz saw the annihilation of the [heretical] Gentiles as a principal component of the messianic vision. This is a notion that wishes to correct history retroactively, assigning to vengeance the role of correcting the past before a new world order can be established.

But clearly that wasn't just the view in Ashkenaz; the Ritva was writing in Spain. There's a straight line between the divine retribution and the coming of the Messiah.

24 דרכי משה אורה חיים תפ

והמנהג לומר קודם לא לנו שפוך חמתך וכו' וכן כתב הר"ן ריש ערבי פסחים (יט. ד"ה ערבי) משום דארבע כוסות נגד ארבע כוסות התרעלה שעתיד הקב"ה להשקות את האומות (עי' ירושלמי פ"י ה"א). כתב מהר"י ברין דנוהגים לפתוח הדלת כשאומרים שפוך משום דאיתא באור זרוע (ח"ב סי' רלד) שלא לנעול דלתות הבתים בליל פסח דליל שמורים הוא (עי' שמות יב מב, פסחים קט ב) וזהו אמונה בהקב"ה ובהבטחתו ובזכות הבטחה זו אנו נגאלים ולזה פותחים בשפוך הדלת כלומר על ידי זה ראוי לבוא משיח.

The practice is to recite "Pour out Thy Wrath" prior to Hallel... for the four cups correspond to the four cups of retribution that God will cause the nations to drink in the future.... We open the door for this is a guarded night and we demonstrate our faith in the Almighty and his promise. And in the merit of our faith, we will be redeemed. And this is why we open the door at "Pour out your wrath," as if to say 'in this way we are worthy to merit the coming of the messiah.'



The whole ceremony is part of this same context. This is the season of redemption – not just historically – but eschatologically. So we do whatever we can to move the needle.

It's actually quite amazing. We want God to pour out his wrath on our oppressors, because that's the last step in the process. In the great hope of universal redemption – in a world in which gentiles will be redeemed, too, we first need to expunge the enemies of Hashem and his people.

It's stunning to notice the extent to which שפוך חמתך has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. It's not a general call for vengeance; it's a specific prayer for the elimination of those enemies that serve as obstacles on the ultimate path toward redemption.

And so we've come full circle. What – on its face – looked like a prayer that pits our people against the nations of the world – is nothing less than our prayer for the ultimate redemption of those very nations.

What a great irony that Antonius Margaritha seized on שפוך חמתך to highlight our antipathy. It was actually a special antipathy reserved for apostates like him – individuals who were responsible for the persecution and death of countless Jews! With peace-loving monotheists we certainly had to quarrel. In the same breath that we pray for our own redemption, we pray for theirs, too.

Part V: Conclusions

These are fraught times. And whether the statistics will validate the sentiment or not, it certainly feels to many of us that anti-Semitism in the last few years has been both more frequent and more intense.

What I'd like to suggest is that – if we take a step back and think about the bigger picture – the narrative of shefoch chamatcha has something important to teach us about how we should be reacting to the anti-Semitism of our day. So allow me to share with you three observations that emerge from the learning we've just done together.

First, unpleasant as it may be to hear the vitriol and invective spewed by our enemies, it behooves us to listen. The Haggadah is able to respond to the doctrines it opposes because its authors were sensitive listeners. They weren't students of medieval theology; but they were attuned to what was being said and what was being taught beyond the walls of the Jewish community because they made it their business to know.

Elie Wiesel once said that “the real lesson of the Holocaust is that when someone says they want to kill you, believe them.”

It's on us to take seriously the words of our enemies.

In 21st century America, anti-Semitism has many faces; but I've long believed that one of the ugliest and most menacing of our moment is the BDS movement. And former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said this past week at AIPAC's policy conference that this was his feeling, too.

Too often we fall into the trap of under-appreciating the gravity of this threat. It's not Hizbollah. They don't have missiles trained on Israeli population centers. But their adherents are succeeding in legitimating the narrative of anti-Semitism.

The proponents of BDS hide behind the mask of a political movement; they masquerade as an acceptable form of ideological agitation. But listen carefully, and it's easy to hear the all-too-familiar voices of anti-Semitism whispering behind every hate-filled protest.

As responsible citizens and responsible Jews, part of our mandate is to keep our antennae up – to keep constant vigil over the discourse about Israel and the Jewish people. Yes, we have wonderful organizations committed to this work, but that doesn't exempt the rest of us from doing our part. What people say about us matters; let's not be guilty of turning a deaf ear to challenges of such grave consequence.

Second, the Haggadah insists that we articulate a response.

I got a call recently from a Jewish newspaper in Milan. The reporter wanted to know if people in our community were alarmed by the recent spate of threats and hate crimes. She asked if people were starting to feel unsafe.

And I think she called me, not because I have some special expertise in the topic of anti-Semitism, (my area is really demons and demigods); I think she called me because it was easier for her to conduct the interview in Italian.

Take a look at the final source on your handout. I'm sure many of you are subscribers. This is from the April edition of Il Bollettino della Comunità Ebraica di Milano that came out this past week. What I said very simply was:

“Alcuni dei membri sono preoccupati; Non dobbiamo essere allarmisti.”

25 Bollettino della Comunità Ebraica di Milano, Aprile/2017 n.04



diverse volte, causando evacuazioni e provocando l'angoscia e la rabbia degli iscritti. Asili, palestre, corsi di cucina per anziani, tutto questo si trova nel JCC, dove gli ebrei statunitensi, spiega la scrittrice Jennifer Weiner sul New York Times, portano avanti da sempre le normali attività della quotidianità ebraica. Infatti, scrive Weiner, i JCC erano stati pensati proprio per facilitare l'integrazione degli ebrei nella società Usa. Il disprezzo antisemita negli Usa non è mai stato così forte dal 1930, ha dichiarato Jonathan Greenblatt, direttore dell'ADL, durante una conferenza a New York intitolata "Never is now" (mai è adesso). «La nostra comunità, non vedeva un tale livello di antisemitismo in politica e discorsi pubblici dal 1930. Purtroppo, questo

tempo il livello di guardia. A febbraio una mail minatoria è arrivata anche al Jewish Center, che ospita una delle sinagoghe di riferimento dell'Upper West Side di Manhattan, quartiere liberal, situato a pochi passi da Central Park. Come ci racconta Rav Yossie Levine, rabbino Modern Orthodox, «alcuni dei membri sono preoccupati, ma nessuno ha ancora cambiato il proprio stile di vita a causa di queste minacce. Non dobbiamo essere allarmisti, - dice Rav Levine. - Non ce n'è motivo e non c'è un solo posto in questo Paese dove finora mi sia sentito in pericolo in quanto ebreo». Levine aggiunge, tuttavia, che non ricorda di aver mai sentito che un cimitero ebraico negli USA sia stato profanato. Finora. Come è invece accaduto il 20 febbraio quando un intero sobborgo

It's amazing how much Italian you can learn from your doormen....

There is, to be sure, a growing camp of alarmists. They see not isolated incidents but a veritable pattern. Danger is lurking everywhere.

And then at the opposite end of the spectrum are those who are nonplussed. They say that anyone who makes comparisons to Germany in the 1930s is overreacting. This is America. And as a people, we're as safe as we've ever been. We can't pay too much attention to the media. It's all hype.

When Sigmund Freud was a little boy, his father once told him a story. He wanted to communicate to his son that things were much better than they had been a generation earlier. Vienna had become a more accepting city. "When I was a young man," he said, "I went for a walk on a Saturday afternoon in the streets of your birthplace; I was well-dressed and had a new fur cap on my head. A Christian came up to me and with a single blow knocked off my cap into the mud and shouted, 'Jew! Get off the pavement!'"

“And what did you do?” asked the young Freud.
“I went into the street,” his father said, “and picked up my cap.”

In retrospect, it was so dispiriting to the little boy that his father felt so inept and so powerless.

We don’t have to put our heads in the sand; but neither do we have to be alarmists.

I want to argue that the Haggadah makes a great plea for a middle ground: We can respond vociferously to our enemies even as we hold out hope for the redemption of the wider world.

Like the authors of the Haggadah, we can invert the narrative of those who conspire against us:

- If we’re up against people who want to divest from Israel, we need to double down and invest in Israel.
- If our detractors create a narrative filled with falsehood, we need to propagate a narrative founded on truth.
- And if they poison our college campuses with hate speech and racism, we need to shout even louder in our denouncements.

But none of this needs to come at the expense of the universalist streak of our Mesorah that insists we say Hallel along with every one of God’s creations. Acknowledging that we have enemies doesn’t have to be synonymous with insularity.

Miroslav Volf, the Croatian Professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, argued in his book, *Exclusion and Embrace* that the belief that God will take vengeance against wrongdoers spares human beings from having to do so.

It’s an arresting perspective. It says that we can carve out a nuanced moral position that’s so absent from our public discourse. There doesn’t have to be a dialectic between tolerance and intolerance; you don’t have to choose between building walls or building bridges. It’s possible to hope and pray in one breath that our enemies will get their comeuppance; and then hope and pray in the next that the balance of our neighbors will be redeemed alongside us.

Finally: While first and foremost the Haggadah demands that we remember the Jewish past; it also insists that we crack open the door, look out into the distance and dream about the Jewish future.

Anxiety and fear have become the watchwords of our day. But those words aren’t part of the Haggadah’s lexicon.

We see ourselves as part of a much larger narrative.

Dualists, inquisitors, Cossacks.... Ours is an ongoing tale of exodus and return; wandering and homecoming; despair and hope. We’ve seen this all before.

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ וְהַקְדּוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מַצִּילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם

We know there will always be people out to get us.

The problem with believing that the messiah has already come is that it strips hope of its meaning. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks put it so well:

“Judaism is the only civilization whose golden age is in the future. This ultimately was the dividing line between Judaism and Christianity. To be a Jew was to reply to the question ‘Has the messiah come?’ with the words ‘Not yet.’”

To be a Jew is to be a beacon of hope in a world perpetually threatened by the pall of despair.

The whole trajectory of the Seder leads us to the final cup of universal redemption. It impels us to see the world through the prism of what it ought to look like, but does not yet.

On this special night of the year, resignation, fatalism, defeatism all bow to the notion of hope – because hope is the very essence of the Seder’s story, the very essence of the Jewish people’s story.

To walk through the valley of the Jewish past is to be reminded that we can see the mountaintops in the not-too-distant Jewish future.

These time may be uncertain, but we can still be certain of this: To be part of the Jewish story is to know that our best days are yet to come.

I wish each and every one of you a chag kasher v’sameach.