

Memory's Anniversary:

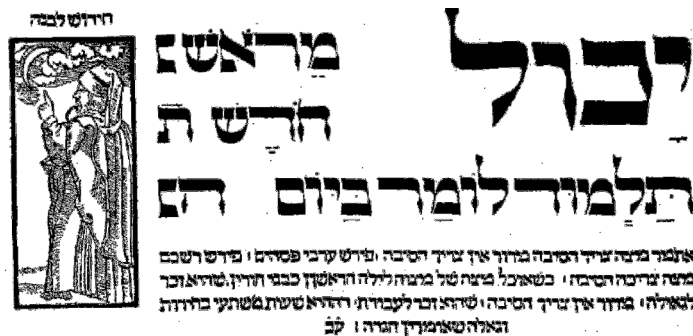
From Cairo's Jewish Quarter to New York's Jewish Center



שבת הגדול תשע"ח

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Jewish Center Day

Rabbi Yosie Levine



Prague Haggadah

A family was hosting a very large group of guests on Seder night. After welcoming everyone, the hostess announced: There are two things you need to know about our Seder. The first is that the children are the most important people at the table and the second is that questions are more important than answers. Then she turned to her six-year-old daughter and said: "Sweetie, why don't you start us off by asking a question."

"But I don't know what to say," the little girl said meekly.

"Well then just say one of the questions you've heard mommy say," the woman responded.

Her daughter thought for a moment and then said, "My God: Why did I invite all these people to the Seder?"

The Seder is our time to ask questions. And there are three in particular that I've been thinking about this year:

The first comes from the text of the Haggadah.

יכול מראש חודש 1

May one start [telling the story of Pesach] on Rosh Chodesh [Nissan]? That is why the Torah writes, *On that day*. If the obligation is *on that day*, perhaps one can begin the Seder during the day? The Torah therefore writes, *because of this*. One cannot say *because of this* except at a time when Matzah and Maror are set out before you.

1 נוסח ההגדה

יכול מראש חדש, תלמוד לומר ביום ההוא, אי ביום ההוא יכול מבעוד יום, תלמוד לומר בעבור זה - בעבור זה לא אמרתי אלא בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מנחים לפניך.

It's only at a time when you're able to point to the Matzah and Maror in front of you that you can fulfil the mitzvah of sippur yetziat Mitzrayim.

At first glance, this has to strike us as odd. Would we think about putting up a Sukkah two weeks early and trying to fulfil the Mitzvah of Sukkah? Pesach has a date. Why would we entertain the possibility that the holiday could be observed at any other time?

2 Remembering and Recounting

There's an old question about the difference between sippur and zechira: We have a mitzvah to remember the exodus every day of the year. We fulfil that Mitzvah by reciting Shema. So what's special about the Seder? We have a mitzvah called Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. Of course we

understand that it's a much broader mandate and there's something more involved. I want to ask a slightly different and maybe unanswerable question: Why do we need both? If I'm an observant Jew, I'm already thinking about the Exodus every day of the year?

3 Who Knows One?

At the end of the Seder we sing a series of songs. One of them is called *אחד מי יודע* – Who knows one? And it's bizarre. It seems like a kind of nursery rhyme or lullaby. Here we are having completed the most elaborate Jewish ritual of the year. We sit in the rarefied air of those who have made it to the end. We occupy this exalted spiritual state. And then we sing a ditty? What are we doing singing a children's song at the end of the Seder?

The Rambam

What I'd like to propose is that imbedded within a cryptic formulation of the Rambam are the answers to all of our questions and a message that is especially and uniquely relevant to the people in this room today:

It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, as [Exodus 13:3] states: "Remember this day, on which you left Egypt," just as [Exodus 20:8] states: "Remember the Sabbath day."

From where [is it derived that this mitzvah is to be fulfilled on] the night of the fifteenth? The Torah teaches [Exodus 13:8]: "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: 'It is because of this... [implying that the mitzvah is to be fulfilled] when matzah and maror are placed before you.

2 רמב"ם הל' חמץ ומצה ז:
מצות עשה של תורה לספר בנסים ונפלאות שנעשו לאבותינו במצרים בליל חמשה עשר בניסן שנאמר זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים כמו שנאמר זכור את יום השבת, ומנין שבליל חמשה עשר תלמוד לומר והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך. ואף על פי שאין לו בן, אפילו חכמים גדולים חייבים לספר ביציאת מצרים וכל המאריך בדברים שאירעו ושהיו הרי זה משובח.

What's the connection to Shabbat? We just said a moment ago: Sippur is different from Zechira. Why would the Rambam invoke the mitzvah to remember Shabbat here? It's the furthest thing from what he's trying to explain.

And if you go back to the pasuk that Rambam cites and its classic interpretation, the problem gets even worse.

Remember in an ongoing sense.... Pay attention to constantly remember that day of Shabbat: Should you chance on a [prized] article [during the week], set it aside for Shabbat.

3 רש"י שמות כ:ח
זכור לשון פעול הוא, כמו (ישעיה כב יג) אכול ושתו, (שמואל ב ג טז) הלוח ובכה, וכן פתרונו תנו לב לזכור תמיד את יום השבת, שאם נזדמן לך חפץ יפה תהא מזמינו לשבת:

The Rambam is trying to argue that there's a discrete and specific Mitzvah to tell the story of the Exodus on Seder night? The Mitzvah of remembering Shabbat is almost the opposite: The obligation is to remember it always!

So let's return for a moment to our first question:

The Haggadah's suggestion of starting two weeks early may seem a little extreme, but every year without fail someone asks me if they can start the Seder early. And in principle, there's a very strong case to be made:

Unquestionably the most important line of Seder night is והגדת לבנך. The whole purpose is to educate the children. And everything is about the kids.

He should make changes on this night so that the children will see and will [be motivated to] ask: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" until he replies to them: "This and this occurred; this and this took place." What changes should be made? He should give them roasted seeds and nuts; the table should be taken away before they eat; matzot should be snatched from each other and the like.

4 רמב"ם ז"ל

וצריך לעשות שינוי בלילה הזה כדי שיראו הבנים וישאלו ויאמרו מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות עד שישב להם ויאמר להם כך וכך אירע וכך וכך היה. וכיצד משנה מחלק להם קליות ואגוזים ועוקרים א השולחן מלפניהם קודם שיאכלו וחוטפין מזה זה מיד זה וכיוצא בדברים האלו....

And it's so crucial and so indispensable that we spend the whole night trying to keep the children awake. We need them. The whole night belongs to them and we want to do everything in our power to keep the awake and engaged.

- We ask questions
- We pour cups of wine that we don't drink
- We play games
- We dip more than usual
- We lean
- We hide the Matzah
- We give out prizes

There is no other event on the Jewish calendar that calls on us to jump through so many hoops – all for the sake of making sure the children don't fall asleep.

And in codifying the timing of the Seder, the Shulhan Arukh is acutely aware of all of this:

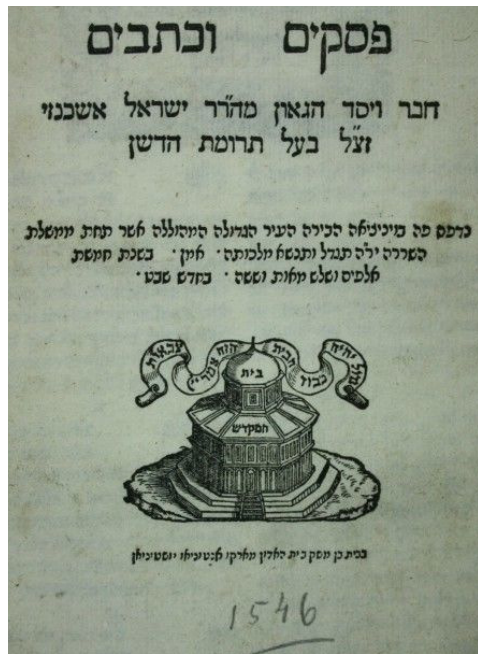
One's [Seder] table should be set from earlier in the day so that one may begin the Seder as soon as it's nighttime. Even if one is in the study hall, he must pick himself up for it is a Mitzvah to hurry and eat so that the children do not fall asleep. But one may not make Kiddush before nightfall.

5 ש"ע תע"ב סעיף א

יהיה שלחנו ערוך מבעוד יום, כדי לאכול מיד כשתחשך; ואף אם הוא בבית המדרש, יקום מפני שמצוה למהר ולאכול בשביל התינוקות שלא ישנו, אבל לא יאמר קידוש עד שתחשך.

So how about a much simpler solution? Rather than starting the Seder at 8pm, why not start the Seder at 5pm? Or even better – why not do it at noon?

R. Israel Isserlein, who was the chief rabbi of Vienna in the 15th century, wondered about this question. Nightfall in Vienna in mid-April is about 830pm. So as a general matter they would daven Maariv early. His question was: Can you start the Seder before it's dark outside?



6 תרומת הדשן ס' קלז

שאלה: בע"פ כשיוצאים מבהכ"נ בערבית עדיין יום הוא, שרי לקדש על הכוס ולהתחיל הסדר מבעוד יום או לאו?
תשובה: יראה דלא שרי למיעבד הכי, דהתוס' ומרדכי ואשירי ריש ע"פ כתבו בשם הר"י דאורלינ"ש, דאין מצות מצה ומרור אלא בלילה ממש. וא"כ אע"ג דקודם שיסיים האגדה/ההגדה/ויגיע לאכול מצה ומרור יהיה לילה ממש, מ"מ כוס של קידוש שהוא אחד מד' כוסות גם אכילת שאר ירקות ויתר שינוי דעבדינא כדי שישאלו התינוקות, וכ"ש האגדה עצמה בעי נמי דליהוי בשעת שראוי לאכול מצה ומרור, דכל הני אמצות מצה ומרור שייכי, וגמרינן ודרשינן והגדת לבנך כו' בעבור זה לא אמרתי אלא בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך. ר"ל בשעה שראוי לאכול מצה ומרור, דהא מבעוד יום נמי היה יכול להניח לפניו. וא"כ ע"כ אין לומר האגדה/ההגדה/קודם הלילה ממש, והשינוי נמי אין כאן דרך כדי שישאל הבן ויגיד לו האב. וקידוש נמי הואיל וכוסו בכלל ד' כוסות מן הרמוזים בלשון גאולה במצה שהיא זכר לחירות, א"כ כולו צריכין שיהא לילה ממש.

When we leave the synagogue on the night of Pesach after Maariv and it's still light outside, is it permissible to make Kiddush and begin the Seder while it's still day? It appears that it is not permissible to do so.....

But it wasn't just the desire to accommodate the kids that gave rise to this question. What's amazing to notice is that the *locus classicus* for when to tell the story of the Exodus is wildly ambiguous. Have a look at the next source. It's on *that day* that we're commanded to tell the story, but exactly when that day is remains something of a mystery.

3 And Moses said unto the people: 'Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place; there shall no leavened bread be eaten. **4** This day ye go forth in the month Abib. **5** And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite, which He swore unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month. **6** Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the LORD. **7** Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee, in all thy borders. **8** And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.

7 שמות פרק יג

ג) ויאמר משה אל העם זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים מבית עבדים כי בחזק יד הוציא יקנוק אתכם מנה ולא יאכל חמץ:
ד) היום אתם יצאים בחדש האביב:
ה) והיה כי יביאך יקנוק אל ארץ הכנעני והחתי והאמרי והחוי והיבوسی אשר נשבע לאבותיך לתת לך ארץ זבת חלב ודבש ועבדת את העבדה הזאת בחדש הזה:
ו) שבועת ימים תאכל מצת וביום השביעי חג ליקנוק:
ז) מצות יאכל את שבועת הימים ולא יראה לך חמץ ולא יראה לך שאר בכל גבלך:
ח) והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה יקנוק לי בצאתי ממצרים:

When the Exodus actually began is an open question. So all kinds of possibilities emerge:
Maybe we should start 30 days before Pesach.

One should start exploring and explicating the laws of Passover 30 days prior to Passover.
Rabb Simeon ben Gamliel says: Two weeks [before Passover].

8 פסחים ו.
שואלין ודורשין בהלכות הפסח קודם הפסח שלשים יום,
רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר: שתי שבתות.

Maybe we should start, as the Haggadah suggests, on Rosh Chodesh. After all, there's a perfectly plausible case to be made that it was on Rosh Chodesh that the redemption began.



"Yes, yes, but is it Kosher for Passover?!?!"

9 העמק דבר שמות לד:יז
כי בחדש האביב יצאת ממצרים.... ומכאן למדנו לעסוק
בעניני פסח מראש חדש כדי שיהיה זה העסק מועיל
להשריש אמונה, וכדמסיק בפסחים ד"ו בהא דפסח מדבר
שהזהיר משה לישראל מראש חדש, ואפילו לחכמים
דרשב"ג דשלשים יום לפני הפסח שואלין ודורשין
בהלכות פסח, מכ"מ מ"ח יש לעסוק יותר, והיינו
דאמרינן בהגדה יכול מראש חדש כו', הרי דס"ד
דמצות ספור ממש בא מראש חדש, והוא מהאי קרא
שבא לאחר העגל להוסיף הכנה לזכירת עניני פסח,
ובשביל זה התכלית כדי לחזק האמונה ויראת ה' בלב.
For in Chodesh ha-Aviv you left Egypt.... So
we might have thought, based on this verse,
that the obligation to tell the story of the
Exodus could have begun on Rosh Chodesh....

Or maybe it should be on Shabbat Hagadol. The original preparation for Korban Pesach took place on the 10th of Nissan – which in the year of the Exodus – was on Shabbat:

Tell all the congregation of Israel that **on the tenth day of this month** every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.

10 שמות יב:ג
דברו, אל-כל-עדת ישראל לאמר, בַּעֲשֹׂר, לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה:
יִקְחוּ לָהֶם, אִישׁ שְׂוֹה לְבֵית-אָבִתּוֹ--שְׂוֹה לְבֵית

There is custom to so recite the Haggadah in the afternoon [of Shabbat Hagadol], from the words "We were slaves," through "to atone for our sins" [following dayeinu].

11 רמ"א ס' תל הלכות שבת הגדול
המנהג לומר במנחה ההגדה, מתחלת
עבדים היינו עד לכפר על כל עונותינו.

[By the way: It's a good thing the Sephardim don't have this practice. Given what I learned from my experience at Shearith Israel two weeks ago, I'm not sure where they would find the time....]

Or maybe the right time is Erev Pesach, the 14th of Nissan:



I could have concluded that one should start telling the story **on Erev Pesach, the 14th of Nissan**, for that is when the service of the [Korban] Pesach began. Namely, that is when it was slaughtered as the verse states: On

the day after the Pesach the Israelites left Egypt with a mighty hand. That is to say, on the day after the slaughter of the paschal lamb – on the 15th – they left....

12 פירוש הריטב"א על ההגדה

והגדת לבנך יכול מר"ח וכו'. פ"א אין זה מתשובת שאינו יודע לשאל, אלא כיון שתפס התנא המקרא דורש אותו. ולזה שאינו יודע לשאל ראוי לדרוש פירוש הפסוק הזה יותר אימתי הוא זמן ההגדה הזאת. ואמר אילו אמר הכתוב סתם והגדת לבנך ולא אמר ביום ההוא הייתי יכול לדרוש כי שמא מר"ח ניסן אנו חייבים לדרוש זה, כדרך שדרש משה רבינו ע"ה לישראל במצרים, ועוד לפי שאמר למעלה (שמות י"ג) ועבדת את העבודה הזאת בחדש הזה, לכך הוצרך הכתוב לומר ביום ההוא דמשמע בעיצומו של יום, ואפילו אמר ביום ההוא הייתי יכול לומר שנתחיל להגיד כן מבעוד יום, שהוא יום י"ד, לפי שבו מתחלת עבודת הפסח שהיא שחיטתו כמו שאמר הכתוב (במדבר ל"ג) ממחרת הפסח יצאו בני ישראל ביד רמה, שר"ל ממחרת שחיטת הפסח שהיא ביום ט"ו יצאו, ולפיכך אמר כאן יכול מבעוד יום שהוא זמן העבודה וזמן שחיטת הפסח חייב בהגדה, ת"ל בעבור זה, לא אמרתי לך לספר אלא בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך על השלחן שתוכל להראות אותם באצבע שאתה אומר מצה זו מרור זה.

So as much as we would love to start early, we cannot. The Haggadah goes out of its way to insist that the proper – and exclusive – time to perform the mitzvah of יציאת מצרים is on the 15th of Nissan. The question is why.

If the goal is just to have visual aids at our disposal to enhance the story-telling experience, we could've added the visual aids any time. Why does the Mitzvah have to be done at such a specific moment?

Now let's return to our perplexing Rambam. Remember the problem? Why the comparison to Shabbat?

What's the Rambam's source for the connection between Pesach and Shabbat? It's an obscure Midrash that apparently escaped the attention of the super-commentaries on the Rambam.

Advise the Jewish people: Just as I created the world and said to them to remember the day of Shabbat as a remembrance of the work of creation as it is written: *Remember the day of Shabbat....* So, too, do they remember the miracles and wonders that I performed for you in Egypt. And you must remember on the day that you went out from there. For it is written: *Remember this day that you left Egypt....*

13 שמות רבה פרשת בא יט:ו

וזהוה לישאל כשם שבראתי את העולם ואמרתי להם לישראל לזכור את יום השבת זכר למעשה בראשית שנאמר זכור את יום השבת, כך היו זוכרים הנסים שעשיתי לכם במצרים וזכרו ליום שיצאתם משם שנאמר זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים....

The Torah commands us to tell the story of the Exodus. The question is: Why does it matter when I do it? When it comes to the basic mitzvah of remembering the Exodus, I do it every day!

Why should the singular Mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim be any different? Let's pick a time to sit down and devote four hours to the project. We'll use all the symbols; we'll follow the text of the Haggadah. Think of the Mitzvah of Tzeddakah. Who cares when I do it? As long as it gets done, the timing should be irrelevant.

To remember Shabbat is to carve out what Abraham Joshua Heschel called, "a sanctuary in time." And that time matters. It can only be accomplished on Shabbat, the Midrash reminds us. So, too, the mitzvah of recounting the story of the exodus. It can only happen on the 15th of Nissan.

What the Rambam is telling us is that **anniversaries matter**. What we learn from Shabbat is that the remembrance of the event has to take place on the day of the event of itself. In the case of Shabbat, the day of the week matters; in the case of Pesach; the day of the year matters.

This is what the Rambam refuses to take for granted. To our 21st century sensibilities, it may sound obvious, but in fact it's anything but obvious. When it comes to the date on which we perform this sacred Mitzvah, there's no margin for error. There are a hundred reasons why we might have thought we could do this Mitzvah at a different time. The Rambam reminds us right from the get-go that we cannot. Shabbat has to be observed on its specific anniversary; and Pesach has to be observed on its specific anniversary.

And parenthetically, R. Jacob Emden went even further. He objected to the practice of reading the Haggadah on Shabbat Hagadol. It would be like eating Matzah on Erev Pesach. It's too soon. It's not time for the Mitzvah....

ספר מור וקציעה

חלק ראשון

סדר היום

סמור אורה דים

המחבר: הרב יעקב עמדין, מור וקציעה ס' תל
מור וקציעה ס' תל... א"כ מנין להוסיף על המצוה, אפילו
לכשתמצא לומר שלא בא אלא לומר שאינו
חובה. מ"מ מאין הרגלים להקדים. ועוד
מפשוט הלשון משמע שיש קפידא בדבר שלא
לאומרה אלא דוקא בשעה שיש מצה ומרור...
וצ"ע מהיכן יצא מנהג זה ומה טעם יש בו.
שעל כל פנים צריך למצוא סמך למנהג.
וב"כ בפירושו לתורה (דף ל' ב') : "מדומה
אני שהקפידו שלא להקדים אמירת התורה
(על כל פנים בערב פסח ודאי לא שפיר דמי,
כדרך שיש קפידא על אכילת מצה מבעוד
יום, הכי נמי מילתא חדתא חביבא ויהבי
דעתייהו ושמעי, מה שאין כן אם הרגילה
על לשונו מבעוד יום כבר נודקו הדברים
ואין הנפש מתפעלת ממנו כל כך, עם
שבדאי אין לאסור למוד חבנתה מבעוד יום,
אדרבה לדעתי מצוה רבה היא לטרוח מקודם
לירד לעמקה, וכך באה וראוי לכל ירא שמים
באמת לעיין בה תחלה, אך לא יוציאנה
כשפתיו בקריאה ממש כסדרה שתהא שגורה
על פיו, מטעם הנ"ל הברור, בעיני ועוד)
משום דקעבר אבל תוסיף, לכן תמהתי על
מנהג אשכנזים במנהג דשבת הגדול".

באלמנה

החומר

החומר

החומר

On what grounds can one justify starting early?... Certainly on Erev Pesach it's not appropriate – just as there is a prohibition against eating Matzah before the Seder. Here, too, the uniqueness [of the Haggadah] makes it more special and invites listeners to pay careful attention. If they have already read it earlier in the day, the contents will already be stale and no one will be stirred.

14 ר' יעקב עמדין, מור וקציעה ס' תל
מור וקציעה ס' תל... א"כ מנין להוסיף על המצוה, אפילו
לכשתמצא לומר שלא בא אלא לומר שאינו
חובה. מ"מ מאין הרגלים להקדים. ועוד
מפשוט הלשון משמע שיש קפידא בדבר שלא
לאומרה אלא דוקא בשעה שיש מצה ומרור...
וצ"ע מהיכן יצא מנהג זה ומה טעם יש בו.
שעל כל פנים צריך למצוא סמך למנהג.
וב"כ בפירושו לתורה (דף ל' ב') : "מדומה
אני שהקפידו שלא להקדים אמירת התורה
(על כל פנים בערב פסח ודאי לא שפיר דמי,
כדרך שיש קפידא על אכילת מצה מבעוד
יום, הכי נמי מילתא חדתא חביבא ויהבי
דעתייהו ושמעי, מה שאין כן אם הרגילה
על לשונו מבעוד יום כבר נודקו הדברים
ואין הנפש מתפעלת ממנו כל כך, עם
שבדאי אין לאסור למוד חבנתה מבעוד יום,
אדרבה לדעתי מצוה רבה היא לטרוח מקודם
לירד לעמקה, וכך באה וראוי לכל ירא שמים
באמת לעיין בה תחלה, אך לא יוציאנה
כשפתיו בקריאה ממש כסדרה שתהא שגורה
על פיו, מטעם הנ"ל הברור, בעיני ועוד)
משום דקעבר אבל תוסיף, לכן תמהתי על
מנהג אשכנזים במנהג דשבת הגדול".

Psychologists have discovered this, too. They've identified something called the anniversary reaction.

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The anniversary reaction: A meeting of Freud and Pavlov

ABSTRACT: Emotionally invested dates or times may trigger serious emotional, physical, or behavioral responses—anniversary reactions. Freud's concept of the repetition compulsion and Pavlov's conditioned response help to provide an understanding of such phenomena. The authors present illustrative case reports and make suggestions for treatment.

Three of the first four U.S. presidents to die, died on a fourth of July; two of them who signed the Declaration of Independence died on its 50th anniversary. A Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice widely known for his crusade to establish Columbus as the first true discoverer of America, died on Columbus Day.

A young businessman suffered from recurring depressions, always just before Thanksgiving Day. His father had died around Thanksgiving when he was 9 years old, but he did not consciously link this loss with his subsequent depression. When he married and his wife became pregnant, he insisted on an

abortion. Nevertheless, the pregnancy and the child it could have produced continue to live in his mind. He counts the advancing age of his aborted child, who would now be 8 years old.

Although the psychiatric glossary does not include a formal definition for "anniversary reaction," the anniversary phenomenon is often noted in historical anecdotes, on medical wards, in physicians' offices, and in psychiatric units. In general, the anniversary reaction is an emotional, physical and/or behavioral response related to an anniversary of a significant event. Usually, a specific time or event in the present triggers unresolved

feelings related to a traumatic episode of the past. The reaction is nonspecific, and its form is unpredictable, but the anniversary often explains the time of onset—the "Why now" of a symptom, illness, or reaction. The reaction may manifest itself as a heart attack, a nightmare, a spell of depression, or even death. In many cases, the reaction is disguised.

Since the early 1950s, we have been investigating the problem of time-related reactions.¹⁻⁴ What was initially described as an interesting clinical phenomenon is, it has become clear, of great clinical significance. It bridges all branches of medicine.

The unusual isolated observations, some dramatic, some frightening, are gradually being honed into psychodynamic formulations. Yet, no one has been able to explain satisfactorily how anniversary reactions work. The existing literature does not offer much toward a unifying theory or a satisfactory explanation, even though papers have been written from autobiographical, anecdotal, psychiatric,

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Think of post-traumatic stress. We know that sights or sounds or smells can be triggering for people. Old memories or images can come rushing back.

What the Rambam is telling us is that what we know to be true on the level of sensory experience is equally true when it comes to temporal experience.

Sadly we know this all too well from 9/11. Just the date itself conjures up all kinds of feelings and emotions.

But it's not just trauma that can be triggered by a particular date on the calendar; an anniversary can just as easily release a torrent of euphoria.

Certain dates have been seared into our communal consciousness and now they transcend personal memory. Even I wasn't there to experience the original event first-hand, the event has become part of my collective DNA. And retelling the event on the day of its occurrence is unlike the experience of retelling it at any other time.

Question 2: Sippur and Zechirah

But there's a second message that emerges from the Rambam's comparison to Shabbat. And it's this message that points us in the direction of an answer to our second question: Why do we need a mitzvah to tell the story of the Exodus on Pesach when we have a mitzvah to remember the event every day of the year?

What's important to notice is that the goal of remembering Shabbat is not just to remember that God rested on the 7th day; it's to remember what he rested from; it's to remember the God of creation: זכר למעשה בראשית.

By comparing Pesach to Shabbat, the Rambam is insisting that we zoom out.

Every other day of the year, we mention and remember the Exodus, but there's no context. On Seder night, we provide the background. We tell the story.

That's what the Gemara means when it tells us מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח. Unlike the free-flowing, generalized memory of the everyday Mitzvah, Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim is about telling a story with a beginning and an end.

We give the exodus a context.

Two beggars are sitting side by side on a street in Rome outside the Vatican.

One has a cross in front of him; the other one the Star of David. Lots of people go by and look at both beggars, but only put money into the hat of the beggar sitting behind the cross.

A priest comes by and notices what's happening. Everyone is giving money to the fellow behind the cross. And no one is supporting the other beggar.

Finally, the priest goes over to the beggar behind the Star of David and says, "My poor fellow, don't you understand? This is a Catholic country; this city is the seat of Catholicism. People aren't going to give you money if you sit there with a Star of David in front of you, especially when you're sitting beside a beggar who has a cross. In fact, they would probably give more to him just to spite you."

The beggar behind the Star of David listens to the priest, turns to the other beggar with the cross and says: "Moishe, look who's trying to teach the Goldstein brothers about marketing."

Things look different depending on how and where they're situated.

When we think about the larger context, it deepens our appreciation for the specific moment. If, as we discussed, there's something special about celebrating anniversaries, it's not just the historical date or time to which we're returning. In the wedding anniversary analogy, it's not just the moment of the chuppah we recall; it's the first date and the courtship and the engagement and the marriage. We distill it into a single unit on the calendar, but the Rambam is reminding us not to be deceived. Yes – the Exodus itself happened at a particular moment in time – but our obligation is to see and remember a much larger picture.

What we do every day of the year is too abridged. It's the shorthand version. To gain a real appreciation for what happened, we need a story with a beginning, middle and end. That's what we do just once a year: That's the Mitzvah of **סיפור יציאת מצרים**.

Question 3: Transformation

Finally: What's the meaning of the song we sing at the end of the Seder?

By returning us to the mitzvah of Shabbat, the Rambam is signaling something else: We're not remembering for the sake of remembering. Yes, there's a celebratory component to the Seder and an educational component to the Seder. But there's also a higher goal.

Remember the Sabbath Day to make it holy.

16 שמות פרק כ
זכור את יום השבת לקדשו.

Remembrance is not intrinsically valuable; it's instrumental; it's goal-oriented. In the case of Shabbat it's to create a day of sanctity. In the case of the Seder, we have a different objective. It's not a secret. It's just the next pasuk.

You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.

17 שמות פרק יג
ח וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בָּעֶבֶר זֶה, עָשָׂה ה' לִי, בְּצֵאתִי, מֵמִצְרָיִם.
ט וְהָיָה לָךְ לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ, וּלְזִכְרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ, לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת ה', בְּפִיךָ: כִּי בְיָד חֲזָקָה, הוֹצֵאתָ ה' מִמִּצְרָיִם.

You'll tell the story; you'll put on Tefilin. Why? So that the words of Torah will be on your lips.

If the goal were just to educate the next generation, we could hand out textbooks or hire professional educators. But the point is that there's another goal. And that's for us to be moved.

When the students of the rabbis in Bnei Brak arrive, they don't just say the time for telling the story is over. They say **רבותינו הגיע זמן קריאת שמע של שחרית**. It's time to return to the everyday. Now that you've been transformed, go back to the normative with a new sense of perspective.

That's the meaning of the song we too easily mistake for a nursery rhyme at the end of the Seder.

My friend Rabbi David Wilensky once suggested a solution to this riddle. We sing this song to demonstrate just how far we've come. Our Jewish consciousness has been heightened to such a degree that now all of our associations are Jewish! You say six and I say Mishna. You say 11 and I say Yosef's dream. It's the evidence that the Seder has worked! I've been transformed. The Torat Hashem just rolls off my lips.

The goal in Egypt was the transformation of a people and that remains our goal on Seder night: We begin as outsiders looking back on time through the window of ancient texts and songs; we end as insiders looking ahead at the future through the lens of a renewed Jewish consciousness.

So the Rambam has helped us answer our three questions:

- 1) Yachol MeRosh Chodesh is absolutely the right query. But from Shabbat we learn that anniversaries need to be celebrated in their right moment. Part of our objective on Seder night is to fold ourselves into the story of the Exodus. Sights and smells help us recreate the experience. And on a metaphysical level, so does the date of the original experience.
- 2) Sippur is very different from Zechirah. The idea is not just to recall a particular moment in time, but to recall the context of the moment. Shabbat is code for the story of creation and rest; Exodus is code for the story of slavery and redemption. On any other night of the year we recall a passing memory. On Seder night, we locate that memory within a larger context.
- 3) And finally, the Rambam helps us understand that the process of remembering and re-experiencing is not an end unto itself. There's a larger goal to bear in mind. זכור את יום השבת לקדשו. We're aspiring toward something. And if we're successful, the Seder will leave us transformed. The words of the Torah will be so familiar, they'll have become second nature.

So there's just one question that remains unanswered: Why do we keep talking about Jewish Center Day?

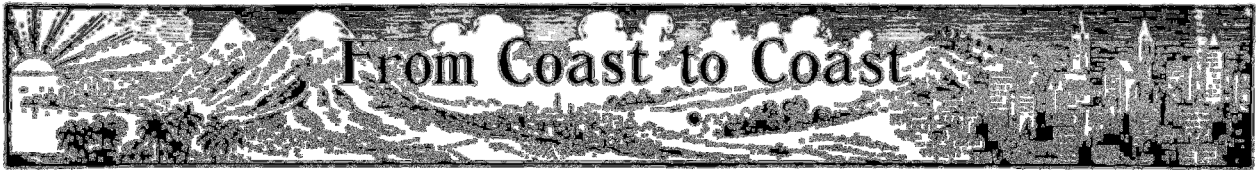
Our ushers are now distributing an extraordinary document.

On March 24, 1918 – exactly 100 years ago to the day – the members of this shul consecrated this sanctuary and ushered in our first century.

And our forebears had the audacity to call it Jewish Center Day. I've reproduced for you the program of the Dedication Exercises and Festivities.

To the best of my knowledge, there are only two original copies of this document that survive. One is housed in the archive at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. The second is on loan to The Jewish Center by the chair of our board, Virginia Bayer Hirt. And you can see it in our archives case on the 1st floor.

It was a major moment in the life of our shul and it was a major moment in the life of the community. *The American Jewish Chronicle* covered the event in its news section.



THE new "Jewish Centre" at 121 West Eighty-sixth Street, at which preliminary opening exercises were held on Saturday night, was formally opened on Sunday with a series of dedicatory ceremonies and celebrations which extended from forenoon until nearly midnight. William Fischman, President of the organization, which has labored for two years to establish the institution as a "centre of Jewish thought, Jewish recreation, and Jewish culture," accepted the custody of the building.

First there was a children's festival in the auditorium of the new structure, which comprised the first presentation by children of "The Land of Akeph Bes," by Samuel S. Grossman, which was described as a "wonder play in eight scenes." Every seat available was occupied by children and grown-ups, and the performance was acclaimed over and over.

Judge Otto Rosalsky presided at the dedicatory exercises proper on Sunday afternoon, which followed the lighter affairs of the morning. With patriotic fervor the audience sang "America" as its initial act in the new synagogue, which is part of the structure. Rabbi M. Z. Margolies in his opening prayer pleaded that all those concerned in the enterprise should devote themselves to making it a real factor in community good. Dr. H. Pereira Mendes performed the act of placing the sacred scrolls in the ark, after which he explained the purposes for which the centre was founded and the uses to which it would be put.

Meyer Vesell, Chairman of the Building Committee, had the distinction of lighting the perpetual lamp over the pulpit, and then, with the synagogue properly opened, L. L. Phillips, Vice Chairman of the Building Committee, presented the keys to Mr. Fischman. In a speech of acceptance Mr. Fischman said he hoped that the Jews of the metropolis would enter fully into the spirit of the founders of the institution and further its aims in every way.

Professor Mordecai M. Kaplan of the Jewish Theological Seminary in making the principal dedicatory address said the Jewish Centre was not intended to be a settlement, nor a community centre, a Young Men's Hebrew Association, or a Young Women's Hebrew Association, nor yet an institution for doing so-called uplift work. "We feel," he said, "that we are in as much need of being uplifted as are they for whose benefit the city is dotted with communal institutions. We must create for ourselves the kind of recreational, cultural, and religious opportunities which we then shall have the right to provide for others."

Louis Marshall said that while the people of Europe at this time are engaged in the greatest war in the history of the world, and the Jews of America are busy helping their country to do its share, the Jews yet had found time and energy to erect and dedicate a building to the service of God and the betterment of humanity.

Mrs. Solomon Schechter who spoke on behalf of the women of the Jewish Centre pledged the untiring devotion and support of the women in carrying out the ideals of the founders. Dr. Moses Hymanson then offered the closing prayer.

In the evening the centre was crowded with young men and women who participated in a festival conducted under the direction of Abraham Landa. "The House of the Jew," an allegorical pantomime, by Samuel S. Grossman, was presented with music by A. S. Binder. Mr. and Mrs. Henry R. Gideon sang and interpreted Jewish folk songs. The entertainment closed with dancing.

There's actually a debate about the proper text of the last line. In the original version, it specified simcha dancing. Mordechai Kaplan was very worried that mixed dancing might lead to... mixed dancing.... Or Reconstructionism...

So allow me to conclude by mapping what we've learned from the Rambam about the Seder onto our own Centennial celebration.

What's the significance of Jewish Center Day?

What's supposed to be embedded in the psyche of a Jewish Center member on the 100th anniversary of our institution?

First: As we've gone to great lengths to demonstrate: Anniversaries matter. They give us a chance to travel back in time and become bearers of memory and history that transcend any one of us. How extraordinary to be part of this 100 year-old story.

Second: Of course the moment is significant, but we have to step back and appreciate the wider perspective – not just the moment, but the greater context: In 1918 the Jewish world was splintering. Reform Judaism was on the ascendancy. There were almost no barriers to entry for Jews who were all-too-anxious to become part of contemporary America. Meanwhile, the traditionalists found themselves closing ranks, desperately trying to stem the tide of assimilation.

And so there were two worlds.

- Acculturated Jews who had made the decision that their Jewish identities would play second fiddle to their American aspirations.
- And shtiebel Jews who were committed to the preservation of their Eastern European traditionalism and were utterly unwilling to venture out into the *treife medina*.

We may not have been the first and we certainly were not the only ones to respond. But along came The Jewish Center and suggested that there could be a middle ground – there could be a Center. Here was an institution deeply committed to Tradition and at the same time dedicated to the proposition that its members could be citizens of the world. Our opening program featured a theatrical performance.... and Minchah.

It's staggering to notice how relevant this message remains. How extraordinary to sit in the pews of this same sanctuary 100 years later and recognize that the need to create and maintain an integrated, middle ground for Jews of the 21st century has never been more pressing.

Finally, when it came to the Seder, by comparing Pesach to Shabbat, the Rambam reminded us that remembrance has to be attached to a goal. When we sing *אחד אני יודע* it's the telltale sign that we've achieved a new level of consciousness.

This is an amazing time to be part of The Jewish Center. And we have so much to celebrate.

But we have much larger aspirations.

To paraphrase Rabbi Lamm, our objective is not go through the Haggadah; it's for the Haggadah to go through us.

And so it is with our institution. Of course we want everyone to come every week or even every day. But not for the sake of coming and going; for the sake of coming and leaving transformed.

Jewish Center Day is an opportunity to pause and reflect not just on what we've accomplished as an institution, but to embrace the prospect of being transformed by the institution. To see

ourselves not just as Jewish Center members, but as Jewish Center Jews: Jews who see the world through the lens of all that we stand for:

- An unwavering commitment to tradition coupled with unending intellectual curiosity
- The desire to integrate Torah values and the wider world
- A passion for chesed and social action
- And an abiding love for Israel and her people

At the end of the day, the success of our Seder rises and falls on our willingness to approach the Seder table with an open heart and an open mind. Are we going through the motions or do we permit ourselves to be moved?

And the success of our Jewish lives as Jewish Center members in these next 100 years rises and falls on the same question.

Globally, we've helped build the State of Israel, spirit refugees to safety, advocate on behalf of Soviet Jewry, raise money for victims of terror, and care for the indigent the world over.

Locally, we've made davening decorous, accessible and inspiring; we've created a welcoming and caring community; we've made Torah learning sophisticated and relevant; and the ethic of חסד undergirds all that we do.

We've moved mountains and transformed lives.

The question is: What happens next?

The most tragic of the four sons is not the רשע, but the שאינו יודע לשאול – the one who comes to the Seder with no question – with nothing to ask; nothing to gain. He's the foil for everything we're trying to accomplish.

And so the Haggadah insists: את פתח לו. You start. You make the first move. You ask the first question. You be the one to open up the possibility that something transformative might yet happen.

Once a year – or once every hundred years – it's the responsibility and privilege of an institution and its members to pause and wonder aloud: What's our question? What are our greatest aspirations for our families, for our community and for the Jewish people?

If we are but willing to take the risk of asking, we may discover that we're busy transforming the world over these next 100 years; and maybe ourselves in the process.

I wish each and every one of you a Chag Kasher v'Sameach and a Happy Jewish Center Day.