

Parshat Pesach 5780

Nowadays, apart from Kiddush, only two special Torah ordained mitzvot remain for the seder service -Matzah and **ספור יציאת מצרים** -relating the story of the Exodus . All the others specific seder service mitzvot eg Maror and Hallel are Rabbinic. Chazal formulated the Seder and Hagadah to ensure we successfully observe all the evening's mitzvot in the manner they instituted (eg Child asks , Father responds) often based on the Torah's instructions. Rambam defines the Mitzvah of **ספור יציאת מצרים** as **To relate the miracles and wonders that were done for our forefathers in Egypt –on the night of 15 Nissan.** At the outset, the Hagada informs us observing **ספור יציאת מצרים** *properly*, requires us to expand and expound to the best of our ability and tells us our sages discussed till dawn. Hence, simply following the text of the Hagada ensures we tick all the boxes for style and content but it's far from the ideal for those capable of more – For **ספור** ,*Quantity matters* .

Further the Hagada instructs," Even if we all know the Torah, it is still a Mitzva to relate " So even if everyone present knows a particular fact and nothing new is being learnt , simply verbalising it is adds to this Mitzva - For **ספור** *Speech matters*

In practice, staying firmly focussed on **relating the miracles and wonders that were done for our forefathers in Egypt** is hard. Besides seasonal distractions like new outfits and long lost cousins, the Seder itself triggers many topics normally worthy of discussion. Further ,many Hagadot offer interesting Divrei Torah and children bring home folders full of illuminating ideas but very often , these are not about The Exodus itself but about the seder, hagada , matza, chametz etc and are *not ספור יציאת מצרים* as defined - For **ספור** *Content matters*

So what were the miracles and wonders? Pirkei Avot (5,4) says "Ten miracles were wrought for our forefathers in Egypt " Bartenura explains this refers to the Jews being saved from the Ten Plagues . So it is not surprising that the wine dipping recitation of the Plagues and not the actual departure from Egypt provides the climax of the Hagada's narrative. Hence further discussion of the Makkot on Seder night appears to be a basic topic in fulfilling **ספור יציאת מצרים** properly. The Rambam explains that the Makkot , like all the major events of the Exodus were witnessed by the entire nation and those experiences were intended by G-d to form the bedrock of our faith . Hence by the time they stood at Sinai every person had clearly seen and *knew* not only that G-d existed ,but also that He is One ,He is omnipotent ,He interacts in world affairs ,He metes out punishment , there is prophecy etc. Thus

the First Commandment starts with "I am the Lord your G-d ", but continues "Who brought you out of Egypt". This second phrase expanded the commandment and required them to add all they had seen and *knew* of G-d into our belief system. Our 13 Principles of Faith are actually 13 'facts 'every Jew knew from first hand experiences gained between Moshe's arrival till Mount Sinai. However , if the Makkot are so pivotal it is difficult to imagine they are simply 10 random nasty punishments and unsurprisingly Chazal and later commentators grappled with questions like Why these Makkot ? Why in this order ? Why 10 ? The Midrash itself brings various ideas including that each different Makka directly corresponded to and punished a particular form of suffering inflicted on the Jews and it elaborates what these were.; and that the makkot were 10 consecutive acts a king would do in waging war eg Blood= stop the wells , Darkness =Imprison the rebels , Makkat Bechorot =Execute leaders

It is not possible here to quote all of the other ideas the commentators offer, but as an example, this insightful analysis is suggested by R' Shimshon Refael Hirsh . Noting that R' Yehuda splits the Makkot into 3 sets **עד'ש דצ'ך באח'ב** he places them in a grid

	1	2	3
דצ'ך	Blood	Frogs	Lice
עד'ש	Wild Beasts	Livestock plague	Boils
באח	Hail	Locusts	Darkness

He suggests four matters needed attention

1. Pharaoh arrogantly asked Who is G-d ? G-d's response came in the plagues . **דצ'ך** showed His mastery of the earth and lowly creatures , **עד'ש** He rules the living world , **באח** Mastery of the skies. Further all the Egyptians needed correction for suffering they caused in 3 distinct arenas. **2.** **גרות** Treating Jews as strangers. Column 1 plagues corrected an underlying presumption ie they had a right to the land which they denied the Jews .After first smiting the Nile their god and symbol of national pride, He sent wild animals and giant hailstones preventing them from even walking the land and showing them their ownership was illusory. **3.** **עבדות** They enslaved the Jews. To enslave one either has to either believe one is intrinsically superior or believe one's wealth conferred the right to enslave. Column 2 plagues: having their homes and bodies overrun by loud lowly frogs showed they were not even superior to a frog and their subsequent loss of livestock in the plague and crops by the locusts destroyed their wealth. **4.** **ענוי** They afflicted the Jews for sport . Column 3 plagues came with no warning. They were up-close personal, very uncomfortable and painful.