

Pardes Companion to the Haggadah
By Pardes



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Nirtzah

Nirtzah

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Mike Feuer in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

All night long we have been reliving the story of the Exodus, striving to awaken our present consciousness to redemption. Moments ago the wave of the past finally broke over us, sweeping away the boundary between then and now as we burst into the praises of Hallel. Redemption was transformed from a story about our ancestors into the here and now and given life through our song. But in the midst of our excitement, a question arises. The past is gone forever, and as deep as our present joy may be, it is fleeting. Where is this feeling of freedom taking us?

Now is the time to know that our service tonight has found favor in the eyes of the Redeemer. Nirtzah is not a prayer which attempts to fix what was, or even a joyful offering to God of what has just come to be. Nirtzah is an assertion of hope. It is the confidence that the true fruit of our service tonight will be a redeemed future. The power of Nirtzah lies in our knowledge that we have succeeded in telling a story of our past which now infuses our present with joy. And that our rejoicing in freedom has planted within us the seeds of our future. May our present joy become the fertile ground out of which a truly redeemed future will grow – l'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalayim habenuyah!
Next year in the Jerusalem of which we dream!

appropriate ways to free ourselves of the internal hametz that prevents us from achieving spiritual freedom.

Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth is the Director of the Pardes Center for Judaism & Conflict Resolution .Rabbi William Friedman is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University

This makes our eating not an act of satisfying a growling stomach, rather a glorious meal of gratitude. Thanksgiving dinner, you might say. A sanctified expression of extolling God.

It is not for us, God! It is not for us, rather for Your honorable reputation!" begins the second part of the Hallel, the Great Hallel, which follows our festive meal.

Is anyone listening? Is anyone still awake at this late hour? Are most people at the seder chatting by now, or cleaning up the kitchen? One year at our seder when I saw people nodding off, and losing steam, I ran to the toy box and pulled out big colorful pom poms for all the children and a few adults to shake crazily while we sang the Hallel .

In preparation for Hallel, a few good Yoga stretches might be in order after the meal to jumpstart people for the grand finale, because singing the Great Hallel could be the climactic moment of the entire night!

It is for me.

On this night I attempt to identify with the pain and tortures of the darkest nights of history. On this night, in contrast, I feel more a deep connection to my modern reality in which I am SO blessed to be living, no matter how great the daily challenges around us and within me.

What are we aiming to accomplish in the Hallel? Hallel literally means PRAISE. It weaves verses and psalms of thanking praise with praising praise. In parts of Hallel we are THANKING God with all our heart and soul for taking our families out of Egypt, and for redeeming us from our narrow straits and stuck places, our own personal egypt. Singing Hallel in this case becomes a resounding TOAST of gratitude to the living God who performed spectacular signs and wonders and miracles on behalf of our ancestors – so that we can be here today.

But in other parts of Hallel we are not thanking, rather PRAISING God. Which is greater - praising or thanking? When I thank someone, I am recognizing and acknowledging what they have done for ME. But when I praise someone, or when I commend them on an action, an attitude or a character trait unrelated to me, I am seeking out and seeing them more fully for who they

Hallel Hallel

Contributed by **Pardes**

Source: Tovah Leah Nachmani in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-hagadah/>

Praising as a spiritual practice

How is this Hallel on seder night different from all other Hallels? What are we aiming to accomplish in this Hallel of seder night?

Unlike every other holiday Hallel, the Hallel of the seder (and in synagogue) is sung at night. Unlike other Hallels, it is sung without an introductory blessing, and it is recited sitting down. Unlike every other Hallel, this Hallel is divided into two parts by eating!

Why is Hallel sung at night? Perhaps because the miracle of the Exodus began at night with the first Passover meal, and the killing of the firstborns in Egypt. And perhaps because on other holidays there is no immediate miracle involved, whereas on this night we are not only retelling but reliving the night where our nightmare ended and our glorious national future began.

On seder night we don't need to be told, "Praise now!" And we don't need to stand up. In this Hallel we are spontaneously cheering the miraculous moment when Pharaoh in pajamas shouts to Moshe that every last Israelite should leave his country. We are rooting for God Who made it happen back then, on this very date and time of night. We are rooting for God Who is making it happen in perhaps less overt ways, today.

The Jerusalem Talmud claims that this Hallel is not "recited", rather it is belted out in the kind of song which suits a miraculous moment of reclaiming our lives after a national near-death experience. It is a current, relevant, real singing of salvation, said by Jews worldwide, every year.

The first part of the Hallel is sung joyously straight after recounting the painful and bitter experiences of affliction which morphed into freedom to leave our oppressive reality.

The second and longer part of the Hallel is sung an hour or more later – after we are stuffed with food and drowsy from three cups of wine!

Introduction

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Contributed by **Pardes**

Source: <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-hagadah/>

Pesach is a time of inclusion.

On seder night, there are two moments where we metaphorically open our doors and invite others in. One is at the opening of the Magid portion of the seder, when we say, "All who are hungry come and eat." There is a beautiful message here: we were once slaves; poor and hungry, and we remember our redemption by sharing what we have with others.

The other, comes towards the end of the seder, when we have the custom of pouring a fifth cup of wine, which we claim is for Elijah the Prophet. This is a statement of faith, a statement that says that although we are a free people, our redemption is not yet complete, and we believe that it will come.

From the most down-trodden to the most celebrated, the message is clear: everyone is welcome and everyone is necessary. Why is it that we go out of our way to include all at our seder table? Perhaps it is because when we make room for others, we have the opportunity to make room for ourselves as well. In fact, the Mishnah (Pesachim 10:5) teaches us that:

דַּוְרָאן אַיִן וְלִי אִינְיָן וְלִי אִינְיָן דַּוְרָאן אַיִן וְלִי אִינְיָן

generation a person is obligated to see themselves as if they left Egypt

The seder presents us with the obligation of identifying with the generation that left Egypt and internalizing that experience. And through that internalization, we come to feel the redemption as if it was our own as well to - וְלִי אִינְיָן. Further, the reliving of the story of the Exodus affords us the opportunity to see one's true self. It is only when we are able to see ourselves clearly, that we are able to be redeemed. But perhaps the only way we are able to see ourselves, is when we are truly able to see those around us. This message of inclusion is Pardes's message too, and our hope is that this Hagadah Companion which offers something for everyone, will add new meaning to your seder and help bring the Jewish people a little closer together.

What do you think?

Rabbi Dr. Howard Markose teaches Bible and Biblical Hebrew Grammar.

The seder opens with kiddush (the sanctification over wine). This is certainly unremarkable after all, kiddush is the opening act of every shabbat and holiday meal. But kiddush – a ritual .sanctification of time – has an intimate and unique connection to Pesach's central theme: freedom. How so?

As Israel was about to be released from slavery, God instituted a new calendar: "This month shall (mark for you the beginning of months; the first of the months of the year for you." (Exodus 12:2) Why is this the first mitzva (commandment) communicated to a free nation?

A slave's time is not his own. He is at the beck and call of his master. Even when the slave has a pressing personal engagement, his taskmaster's needs will take priority. In contrast, freedom is the control of our time. We determine what we do when we wake up in the morning; we prioritize our day. This is true for an individual, but also for a nation. God commands Israel to create a Jewish calendar because, as an independent nation, Israel should not march any more to an Egyptian rhythm, celebrating Egyptian months and holidays. Instead Israel must forge a Jewish calendar, with unique days of rest, celebration and memory. Controlling and crafting our time is the critical first act of freedom.

Kiddush says this out loud. We sanctify the day and define its meaning! We proclaim this day as significant, holy and meaningful. We fashion time, claim ownership of it, and fashion it as a potent .contact point with God, peoplehood and tradition. This is a quintessential act of Jewish freedom. Today, we often feel short of time; that time controls us. Kadesh reminds us that true freedom and self-respect is to master and control time for ourselves, to shape our life in accordance with our values.

Rabbi Alex Israel teaches Bible and is the Director of the Pardes Community Education Program and the Pardes Summer Program

Immediately following birkat hamazon (grace after meals) we drink the third of four cups of wine. We pour the fourth cup which will be for the upcoming completion of Hallel. We also pour a fifth cup that is situated in the middle of the table called Kos Shel Elijah (Elijah's Cup).

This cup is left undrunk until such time as the halakhic question is answered: Do the Jews in Israel drink the fifth cup which corresponds to the fifth redemptive expression in Exodus, "And I will bring you into the land..." (Exodus 6:8), or must every Jew be in Israel before that fifth cup may be drunk? There is a belief in the talmudic world that Elijah, who did not die in the manner of all human beings, will return to this world and will be the one to settle this kind of halakhic conundrum. We then open the door and recite a series of Biblical verses which all contain one theme: The hope that God manifest His anger towards those who reject the Divine, such as Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the villains of the Pesach story. We begin by proclaiming, "Pour out your fury on the nations that do not know You, upon the kingdoms that do not invoke Your name. For they have devoured Jacob and desolated his home" (Psalms 79:6-).

Why do we open the door at this point in the seder? Have we been sitting too long, and could we use a bit of fresh air to enable us to continue the proceedings? Is it to offer our hospitality to Elijah who is invited at that moment to resolve a halakhic dispute, and if he can be enticed to come, will it mean that he is heralding the coming of the Messianic era and a better world? Is it to declare to those inside our home and outside it, that with our faith in God who, as described by the verses will protect us, we are not afraid to implore God to defeat our enemies – enemies who in the past were known to be standing outside, listening, intending to find reasons to turn us over to the authorities? Or, as we recite these vindictive verses, do we simply wish to make sure that 'the coast is clear'? Perhaps, like so much of Judaism, it is a combination of reasons which have come together over time, responding to historical, psychological and sociological factors that create both custom and the complicated rationale behind those customs.

Urchatz

Urhatz

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Hayim Leiter in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

They say that cleanliness is close to Godliness. This couldn't be closer to the truth, Jewishly speaking. We are all about preparation. It is well known that holiness is all in the details. The preparation on Friday is what imbues shabbat with its kedusha (holiness). Urhatz (washing) is our first step in the preparation for the seder. It is both a physical and a spiritual cleansing. We are in a sense, washing away the last spiritual crumbs of hametz in preparation for our first taste of matza (unleavened bread) in, at least, thirty days. Much like Israel's first rain which washes away the top layer that has collected since the last rainy season, Urhatz washes away our layer of spiritual 'build-up'. Similarly to the tumat meit (impurity of sleep) that resides in our fingertips when we wake up in the morning, Urhatz is a wash of our fingertips alone.

The Rabbis decreed that a ritual wash be done without a blessing before eating vegetables such as those we eat for Karpas because they could become ritually unfit if touched by impure hands. This type of washing was common in Temple times. Urhatz, along with the kittel (white robe) that many wear on seder night, all hark back to an earlier time. To a time when each person who went to the Temple to make the Passover offering was considered a Kohen (priest) for the day. So in effect, we're now going through a process that helps us become Kohanim. This is our day. Our time to do the Temple service. So, wash away your individual past, so we can relive our collective past.

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Tzafun

Tzafun

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Michael Hattin in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

Tzafun from the Hebrew root צפן, means "hidden" and refers to the afikoman. This piece of the matza, ceremonially broken earlier in the seder, is consumed at the conclusion of the meal in memory of the paschal sacrifice of Temple times. Early on, the custom developed to hide this matza away in order to maintain the younger participants' interest during the lengthy proceedings, as they would attempt to find it in order to earn a prize.

While we no longer are able to offer the paschal sacrifice with our Temple in ruins, the practice of the afikoman reminds us of former days. In a similar vein, the ceremonial washing for the karpas, or dipped vegetable that takes place early in the seder is also a vestige of ancient Temple laws this time relating to ritual tuma (impurity) and tahara (purity). Foods were regarded as susceptible to tuma if they had come into contact with certain liquids and this necessitated (especially for the priests consuming teruma or "priests' due") a special ritual hand washing.

It seems, therefore, that the seder is not just about the Exodus from Egypt but also about the Temple at Jerusalem. As we retell the ancient story of our ancestors' ascent from slavery we also consciously trace the long arc of that journey. It was a divinely-orchestrated trek that brought Israel from a place of acute vulnerability to one of safety and permanence in their own land. Sitting at our own seders in such uncertain times as these, we are strengthened by those ancient memories that saw us overcome helplessness in order to dream of triumph! Next year in rebuilt Jerusalem.

Rabbi Michael Hattin teaches Bible and Jewish Law.

2. Serve lots of fresh salad including fruit salad for dessert. Fruit and vegetables are kosher for Pesach, do not increase in price at this time of the year, and are healthy.

3. Some people have the custom of serving an expanded karpas with lots of cut up veggies and leaving the vegetables for people to crunch during the meal. This way you are not ravenous when it comes to the food and you can eat and drink responsibly. There are halakhic issues with doing this, so do learn the issue if this is not your custom.

4. Mention some of the ideas above and encourage people to eat slowly as a spiritual act. Aim to chew food a certain number of times and make sure to enjoy the experience. Or have some of the meal in silence, really savoring the flavors.

5. Most importantly – while the meal is traditionally the time to discuss who went bankrupt last year, who should win the elections, and why Aunt Sylvia refused yet again to come to seder there are better discussion items. One can share insights into the seder. It's a good time to play a game with kids and adults (When I left Egypt I took...), discuss seders past or share hopes for what the world will look like next year.

Rabbi David Levin-Kruss teaches Mishnah, Talmud, and Jewish Thought, and is a life coach for students.

Karpas

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Meir Schweigter for <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

Karpas is the vegetable eaten as an appetizer before the telling of the story and before the meal. Some scholars claim that it comes from the Persian karpas, meaning parsley; others claim that it derives from the Greek word karpas, meaning "fruit of the soil." Parsley and celery are commonly used, but potatoes, radishes and even lettuce are customary as well. Early medieval commentaries (Tosafot Pesachim 114a) note the custom of dipping the karpas in either saltwater or vinegar. Interestingly, the Talmud (ibid. 114b) does not mention the word karpas and does not mention what is used for the dip; but it does highlight this act as something which was done to stimulate the children to ask questions, leading into the telling of the story.

Several commentaries explain that in ancient times it was customary for wealthy people to eat appetizers before their meals to whet their appetites for the delicacies to come, whereas poor people would fill themselves with these appetizers in lieu of a sumptuous meal. If so, what makes this act so unusual? My explanation is that this is a deviation from normative ritual practice. On shabbat and festivals, we make kiddush, wash our hands, immediately eat bread and begin our meal. But at the seder, we delay the eating of the meal – we eat the matza only after we have told the story! The dipping of the karpas is the catalyst which alerts the children that tonight's ritual – meal is not like any other ritual meal. It is the first step that introduces the telling of the story which will give meaning to the meal and all of its components, and thereby enable us to re-enact the experience of the Exodus.

Commentaries link the "dippings" with two events in the Torah:

1. When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, they dipped his tunic into goat's blood and deceived their father into thinking that Joseph was devoured by a wild animal. The letters of the word **וַיִּמָּצוּ** (the tunic kuttonet pasim), (the multi-colored garb that Jacob gave Joseph). The tunic and its dipping led to Joseph's enslavement and ultimately to the

enslavement of the Jewish people.

2. Before the Exodus from Egypt, God commands the Jewish people to take a cluster of hyssop, dip it into the blood of the Pesach offering and smear the doorposts and lintels of their home as a sign to the “destroyer” not to enter their homes and kill the firstborn. This act of dipping and smearing was a sacrificial rite done in service of God, breaking with Egyptian culture and values and thereby consecrating the Jewish people. Just as the process of our going down to Egypt began with an act of dipping, which is associated with slavery, so did our departure contain an act of dipping which symbolized our freedom. If the karpas dipping reflects our enslavement, the maror (bitter herbs) dipping symbolizes our movement to freedom.

Rabbi Meir Schweiger teaches Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, Jewish Law .Prayer and Interpersonal Relat

Shulchan Oreich

Shulhan Orekh

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi David Levin-Kruss in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

Who can possibly imagine Pesach seder without brisket, chicken, kugel, tzimmes, matzo ball soup and a sweet fattening dessert? Well, I can (except, perhaps, for the matzo ball soup). While “when do we eat?” is probably the most often asked question at the seder, it has often struck me”as strange that after eating copious amounts of matza, haroset, maror and karpas we sit down to a full meal. For many the meal is the highlight of the seder, but is this ideal?

The Rama (Rabbi Moses Isserles, 1520-1572), in Orach Chaim 476:1, says that one should not eat or drink excessively at the Pesach meal. This is so that one does not eat the afikoman in a בל (vulgar) way. The Mishnah Berurah defines this as eating the afikoman when one has no desire at all to eat. Later, the Mishnah Berurah comments that if one is so full that he/she is nauseated by eating even if one pushes oneself to fulfill one’s obligation, this is not regarded as eating. This reminds me of the statement in Pesachim 108b, where Rava says that if one drank undiluted wine (in those days water was added to wine) one has discharged one’s duty of drinking wine but has not discharged one’s duty of symbolizing freedom.

What these comments share is that eating and drinking to excess diminishes or even destroys the mitzva one is performing. People with addictions echo this idea when they share that it is as if the substance they are addicted to controls them. Part of being a free person is being in control of one’s food and drink intake. Thus, by eating in an ordered way at the seder, Shulhan Orekh can become a moment of liberation. In fact, it is the first opportunity to show whether all the words said before have had any effect on one’s psyche or if they are just words.

A few ideas on how to do this:

1. Leave out a course and instead eat some of your favorite Pesach dishes during the week. If you’re having two seders, have first course and dessert at one, soup and main course at another.

the Pesach sacrifice the food of redemption, through an act of combining – the korekh. Only the harmonious merging of a variety of components produces the true redemptive experience

Leah Rosenthal teaches Talmud

Yachatz
Yachatz

Contributed by **Pardes**

Source: Rabbi Levi Cooper by <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-hagadah/>

At this stage in the seder, the middle of the three matzot is broken and the larger half designated for the afikoman at the end of the meal. In one of many attempts at the seder to keep children attentive and interested, young participants are encouraged to stealthily steal the afikoman. The source for this custom, which seems to be counter-educational, is a passage in the Talmud which says that we grab (hotfim) the matza to make sure that the children do not fall asleep (B. Pesachim 109a).

In 1946, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (Ramash, 1902-1994) prepared a haggadah that meticulously recorded Lubavitch Passover practice. In this work, he noted that the custom in the Rebbe's home – referring to his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneerson (Rayatz, 1880-1950), who was the leader of the Lubavitch Hasidim at the time – was not to steal the afikoman.

By way of explanation, Ramash added a succinct reference to a talmudic passage: Even someone who steals from a thief, tastes the flavor of larceny (Berakhot 5b). Ramash, it appears, was speaking to the educational costs of encouraging theft, even if the practice was confined to the seder night.

It is unclear how far back this afikoman custom goes, and we should note that it is not confined to Lubavitch: other Hasidic groups also avoid this ritual. It appears, however, that it was not always accepted Lubavitch practice to avoid stealing the afikoman. In his writings, Ramash recorded that in 1935, while in Warsaw, Rayatz related the following episode. Rayatz's grandfather, the fourth Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson (Maharash, 1834-1882), wanted his children to steal the afikoman. The children, however, did not dare. One seder night, his oldest daughter, Devora Leah, plucked up the courage and grabbed the afikoman – and her father, Maharash, gave her a pearl necklace as a reward.

What began as a practice in the Rebbe's home – apparently born from respect and awe – has become standard Lubavitch custom. Ramash

justified the Lubavitch practice on pedagogical grounds. Most homes, however, encourage the stealing of the afikoman – also on educational grounds: a creative attempt to hold the attention of our children as we commemorate the history of our People.

Koreich

Korekh

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Leah Rosenthal in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

After performing most of the central mitzvot of the evening (telling the story of the Exodus eating matza and maror, etc.) and just before we are about to enjoy the festive holiday meal, the haggadah structures a moment in which we symbolically repeat the practice of Hillel the Elder who would “wrap” his portion of the paschal offering with matza and maror and eat it as a type of sandwich, in literal fulfillment of the verse “it shall be eaten on matzot and maror”. We too prepare a combination of matza and maror (and haroset) and eat in remembrance of this practice and of the Pesach tradition during the time when the Temple still stood.

Let us pause a moment to consider the character of Hillel, a central and formative personality within the pantheon of Rabbinic figures, and to consider why, perhaps, the haggadah asks us to spend a moment recreating Hillel’s personal practice of eating the Pesach sacrifice.

Hillel, founder of the great and influential Beit Hillel, is well known for his personal qualities of tolerance, humility and pursuit of peace. Many of the tales of Hillel and his teachings reflect this characterization. This is expressed in famous citations such as: “Hillel says: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and drawing them near to the law.” The quality of being a rodef shalom (pursuer of peace) requires the ability to recognize the value of different perspectives and the skill of unifying conflicting truths into a harmonious whole. It requires the recognition that single individuals perceive only a portion of the complete truth. Hillel says: “If I am not for myself, who is for me? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”

The Rabbis of the Talmudic world joined Hillel in this understanding, promoting this view and ruling that Halakha (Jewish law) should follow Beit Hillel as “...they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of Beit Shammai (Hillel’s halakhic opponent), and were even “...so [humble] as to mention the actions of Beit Shammai before their own.” Appropriately, the haggadah depicts Hillel as requiring the consumption of

– Four Questions

Why is this night different?

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rahel Berkovits for <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-hagadah/>

מה נשתה ומה נאכל

Rahel Berkovits

How are our questions different from the original questions?

One of the main purposes of the seder is to recount the Exodus story to our children for generations[1]. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10) which outlines the structure of today's seder, opens the section describing Magid by saying, "here the child asks the parent" and further explains that if the child does not know how to ask, the parent teaches him or her Ma Nishtana. For generations since young children memorize those words and recite them proudly at the beginning of the seder.

The strange thing about these four questions, is that two of them are never actually answered in the text of the hagadah. The first two questions regarding hametz and matza, and maror instead, of regular vegetables are discussed, while the last two questions, regarding dipping and leaning never seemed to be addressed. What is the purpose of the child's questioning if s/he is to be ignored?

If one examines the text of the Ma Nishtana as it appears in the printed volumes of the Mishnah 10:4, one immediately sees that the last two questions are different than what appears in our hagadah. It states: "That on all other nights, we eat meat roasted, stewed or boiled, on this night we eat] only roasted [meat]. That on all other nights, we dip [vegetables] once, on this night, we] dip twice." There is one question about the korban pesach (paschal offering) and a very similar one with slight variations in language about dipping.

Now one can understand the question about leaning, which does not appear in the Mishnah. Such a question would never have been asked by a mishnaic child, as all communal meals were eaten leaning, and the seder was nothing

sadness to dominate my mood or trying to ignore it and put it aside altogether. The narrative of the seder refuses this false dichotomy. We don't deny the difficulties and pain, but maybe we can put it into a wider context that includes joy and gratitude. We make room for sadness but we don't let it take over. We eat the maror with the matza.

Another approach emerges from a comment of Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz (1568-1630) in a drasha about Pesach. Commenting on the talmudic requirement to chew the maror as opposed to just swallowing it, he writes that our teeth represent 32 levels of wisdom, and that by chewing the maror with our teeth we sweeten it. As opposed to denying difficulty or sadness we must engage it and reflect upon it. Although I am never grateful for going through the painful moments of my life, I am sometimes surprised at what they teach me about myself and who I am. Both as individuals and as a people, we are products of our challenges as much as our successes; sadness as well as joy. While I cannot deny the hard feelings associated with the difficult or sad moments of my life, I can "sweeten" them by accepting them as an essential part of my story. The suffering in Egypt and the memory of that suffering was part of what made the Jewish people.

Our eating of maror and talking about slavery might also carry with it a lesson about the negative power of shame. I don't like sharing my stories of pain or difficulty. They often feel like stories of failure. It often feels like my pain is a result of my inadequacy in managing my life or lack of success. If I were a better person, more capable, wiser, more powerful, my story would be all about happiness. Sadness becomes associated with failure. By including the pain and humiliation in our national story of birth and redemption we are reminding ourselves that pain, sadness, and difficulty are part of everyone's story. I don't need to paper over it or pretend it's not there. My challenge is to include fully the hard parts of my story, both individually and nationally, and still feel joy and gratitude. Our plates include bitter herbs right next to the matza and the wine.

Rabbi Zvi Hirschfeld teaches Talmud, Halakha and Jewish Thought.

special in this regard[2]. The child instead asked about the korban pesach, the special main dish eaten only at the seder. Once the Jewish people stopped eating the sacrifice, obviously to ask such a question would be irrelevant. Although table manners changed, the leaning practice from the time of the Mishnah was still preserved. However, no formal answer was incorporated into the text of the seder itself, and one needs to informally explain to the children that this is the way wealthy, free people ate in mishnaic times.

Not only did table manners change but eating habits did as well, and with these changes the original meaning of the dipping question was lost. In Babylonia they did not have a starter course of vegetables as was the norm in Israel[3]. When the child in the time of the Mishnah asked: why on all other nights do we start with our usual veggie dipping course but on this night we have another vegetable which we dip?, the child is actually asking about the maror [dipped in haroset fruit-and-nut mortar of the seder plate]. Vegetables as a starter was customary so that is not the child's question. The real question is: what is this special vegetable being eaten with the main course? The question is not about dipping at all, but about eating the bitter herb! Once the dipping question was no longer understood, it lost its meaning about maror and only focused on the act of dipping. A question about maror was subsequently added to the text because its symbolism at the seder is essential to experiencing the going out of Egypt.

Both the question about dipping and the explicit question about maror appear in the printed version of the Mishnah. However, the printed versions of the Mishnah are affected and corrupted by the normative known liturgy of the haggadah. If one examines the manuscripts of the Mishnah and the version of the Mishnah as it appears in the Jerusalem Talmud Pesachim 37b (Chapter 10:4), where it has not been reworked, one will see a fascinating thing. There are only actually three questions asked by the mishnaic child. And now things begin to make more sense. The previous Mishnah explains that the food is brought to the table before the questions are asked. Even a young child can see things are different than the usual meal s/he is used to eating with the family. And so the child is prompted to ask three questions: one about maror, one about matza and one about the korban pesach, the core elements of the seder meal which s/he sees laid before him/her. These different food choices are addressed directly in the next Mishnah and its text

Maror

Maror

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

The question of why we eat maror would at first glance appear to be an obvious one. When I probe a little deeper, however, two questions emerge for me. First, why would I want to evoke pain and suffering on a night when I want to feel celebratory? My second question goes to the ritual itself. How is eating lettuce or horseradish supposed to help me experience or relate to the bitterness of slavery? No matter how much fiery hot horseradish we put in our mouths, it seems to me we are not any closer to understanding the experience of the Israelites in Egypt.

I believe that our use of maror at the seder is less about experiencing the hardships of Egypt, but rather an opportunity to experience and reflect how we can meaningfully engage sorrow and pain in both our personal and national lives. Suffering and sadness are part of everyone's story. It is the unavoidable price we pay for being vulnerable and limited. We need tools and opportunities to integrate the hard and painful parts of our lives into our story without allowing them to erase all the joy and gratitude we still want to experience.

The Baal HaTanya (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, 1745-1812) draws a fascinating distinction between two types of sadness. The first he refers to as bitterness, a form of regret or sadness that emerges from a sense that things are broken, or less than ideal. This form of sadness is positive, he says, because it emerges from a place of idealism, hope, and a powerful desire to change. We are "bitter" because we sense that a vital and healthy part of ourselves is not finding expression in the world. It is precisely our capacity for hope and transformation that makes this type of sadness possible. Our sense of loss is informed by our appreciation for a whole. The second type of sadness is depression. This type of sadness "closes our hearts" with despair, numbs our feelings, and blocks out all joy. From this perspective, perhaps we eat maror to explore how to move from a sadness that holds us back to a sadness that can lead to growth and change. When dealing with hard things I often find I am choosing between allowing

commands the people to continue to eat matza, symbol of slavery. This would at first seem to make no sense; why command the nation to commemorate slavery as they are in the midst of living it? Perhaps, God here is sharing an important message even when free, one cannot forget that one was once a slave. One must remember the fact and – learn from it. In the hagadah, we follow the above declaration with an invitation to the hungry to, come and eat. Freedom comes with responsibility; since we know what it was like to be hungry now that we have bread we must share it with others.

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is preserved in our hagadah until today. Rabban Gamliel explains that by eating these foods, each generation throughout history is viscerally experiencing the slavery and redemption anew and fulfilling the commandment to recount it to our children. When these three are the questions asked by the child they are not just something recited by heart, detached from the rest of the seder experience and not addressed in a serious manner, but rather Ma Nishtana becomes the key jumping off point for telling and retelling the story of slavery and redemption from Egypt to the next generations.

– Four Children

The Torah speaks of four children

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Dr. David I. Bernstein in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

Perhaps no other portion of the haggadah can open up discussion like the section of the four children.

There are many learned interpretations to go to that analyze this part of the haggadah. However while the seder should include learned divrei Torah (words of Torah), it should primarily consist of questions. The Magid section models this for us, beginning with the four questions in Ma Nishtana and moving on to our section. Note that three of the four children ask a question about what we are doing at the seder, and the fourth is the one described as “unable to ask.” The haggadah is instructing us about how a seder should be run, in fine Socratic form: asking and eliciting questions. Sometimes the answers are prescribed; sometimes not.

I would like to suggest four questions (in keeping with the night’s recurring theme of four) to ask at this point in the seder. If you are leading the seder, of course you will ask questions; but if you are not, don’t be the fourth child! Feel free to ask questions, too.

Every seder is different, even in the same family, changing as our children are born and grow. Some of the questions below will be appropriate for one kind of seder, and not for another. Do not feel bound to ask all of them, and do feel free to ask your own!

1. In his haggadah, David Moss illustrates this section with four playing cards, and writes that our children are like a set of cards dealt to us. (Full disclosure: David is a friend and a former Pardes board member.) Do you think that is true? To what extent are children “dealt to us,” and to what extent do we shape/form them?

2. The haggadah divides children into these four categories: wise, wicked, simple, and one who is unable to ask. Why these categories? Can you think of others that do not appear here? If you were writing the haggadah, which four categories would you choose? Which questions might they ask?

Motzi-Matzah

Motzi/Matza

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Neima Novetsky for <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

If asked why we eat matza on Pesach, most would answer, as does Rabban Gamliel in the haggadah, that it is to commemorate the fact that we were chased out of Egypt and our bread had no time to rise; it is a symbol of redemption. This explanation, though, is not so simple. A close read of the verses in Exodus shows that God actually commanded the nation to eat matza for seven days, before they actually left Egypt. Thus, regardless of whether they were chased out or not, the people would have eaten matza!! But, why?

Some suggest that the Israelites in Egypt were idolaters and thus, not really worthy of redemption God wanted them to change their ways and show that they had broken from their idolatrous practices. So he commanded them to kill a lamb, one of the gods worshipped by the Egyptians. Similarly, since idolaters normally sacrificed leavened bread served with honey, God specified that the nation break with that tradition and eat the sacrifice with unleavened bread and a bitter condiment, and so prove their loyalty to Him.

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, 1816-1893) offers a different explanation. Comparing the characteristics of bread and matza, he notes that the former requires the intervention of man into nature. Left alone, a flour and water mixture will not rise. Only with the aid of man’s kneading yeast into it does it become bread. Thus, leavened bread symbolizes man’s desire to control nature, and the pride and vanity that accompanies that. Matza, in contrast, represents man’s dependence upon nature and God; it is but a flat piece of bread, symbol of humility. Egypt saw itself as the height of civilization, subservient to none. Through the Exodus, God proved to them and the world that really all are subservient to Him; He alone is in control of nature.

One last approach sees in matza a symbol not of redemption but of slavery. As we say at the beginning of our seders, “This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in Egypt.” At the very moment of their redemption, God

3. Do the questions of the hagadah's four children fit the description of the personalities? If not, how can we understand the rabbis' decision to choose each question for each personality?

4. Who am I among these four children? Could I be in a different category? What would it be?

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Rahitza surely ranks as the most mundane stage of the entire seder. Not only have we already washed our hands once before, but this second hand washing is simply an application of the year-round halakhic practice of washing one's hands before eating bread. Rahitza, then, is the one point at which this night is not different than all other nights.

Nor is the significance of this ritual handwashing redeemed by considering its halakhic development. According to the Talmud, handwashing before meals was originally required only for those partaking of sanctified foods, which had to be consumed in ritual purity. Hence it affected mainly priestly families, who would regularly partake of sacrifices and *terumah* (priestly tithes.) Only as a kind of legislative afterthought did the rabbis expand the requirement to all those partaking of bread, and even then mainly to prevent priestly families from getting mixed up.

Yet as we ponder the banality of this ritual, it is worth recalling that in Temple times, Passover may have been the only occasion in which the original reason for the law actually applied to everyone. At this point in the seder, we would be preparing to eat not only the matza, but with it the paschal sacrifice, the only sacrifice which all Jews were required to eat. For Jews in antiquity, this hand washing *would* be special, as it marked the meal to come as sacred.

From this perspective, the extension of this law to the rest of the year might be thought of as an act of infusing our everyday activities with a touch of holiness, an extension of the rabbinic adage "A table is akin to the altar." Rather than considering Rahitza to be the one ordinary part of the seder, we may think of it as the only part of this extraordinary night that we carry with us into the rest of the year.

Rabbi Daniel Reifman teaches Talmud.

– Exodus Story

They spoke about the Exodus from Egypt all night...

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Dr. Elisha Ancselovits for <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

We ended our first, basic, cliff-notes version of Pesach (“Avadim hayeinu” / “We were slaves”) with an exhortation that a person is increasingly praiseworthy the more she talks about the Exodus. But what are we now supposed to talk about? We already recounted the basic facts. And why should we increasingly talk about the Exodus? We are not going to broaden our intellectual horizons or feed an additional hungry person.

An answer that the haggadah provides at this point, is to avoid these questions. Instead, it tells us an inspirational story of leading sages who spoke collegially in a circle (*hasaba*) and discussed the Exodus through the night so enthusiastically that their students had to interrupt them. The haggadah does not tell us why we should do this. It does not lecture us with lofty or deep messages. It just provides a story that shows that we can do this. Later, it similarly simply models this behavior. It jumps around conversationally between topics without ever staying too long on any one point. And that may be the ultimate answer. We can never understand the impacts of a practice until we practice it, and the most impactful speech is that which we practice as a conversation of shared observations and not as a lecture or a sermon.

Another answer that the haggadah provides is the seder itself. We discuss redemption as we eat the pesach, matza, and maror. The four sons all question and/or are taught about the seder practices. Similarly, in a different version of our story about the sages, the sages do not simply speak about the Exodus all night. Rather, “they dealt with the laws of the paschal sacrifice the whole night” (Tosefta Pesachim 10:12). In other words, the seder teaches us how to discuss redemption.

The wise son asks how these practices are meaningful of redemption as *edot* (holidays), *hukkim* (cultural and ritual practices), and *mishpatim* (societal laws), and we tell him, “hang out and we’ll talk about it.” We hang out as sages and discuss together what we have done. Perhaps we discuss the law

of making sure that the poor have matza-bread and wine to celebrate. Perhaps we discuss the law of inviting the poor (the Biblical *ger*) to join in eating the meat. Perhaps we discuss the law that the rich must tone down their food and eat their quality wheat in the same way that the poor eat their rough barley, as unleavened bread. Who knows? The conversation differs from year to year. Even those comments repeated from year to year take on a different valence in each new conversation. What the haggadah and seder can tell us is that the only way to really talk about redemption is to converse together about what we actually practice.

Rabbi Dr. Elisha Ancselovits teaches Halakha as Practical Philosophy