



THE SEDER COMPANION

2022/5782

A Project of NCSY's
International Teen Board
and the NCSY Alumni
Judah Fellowship

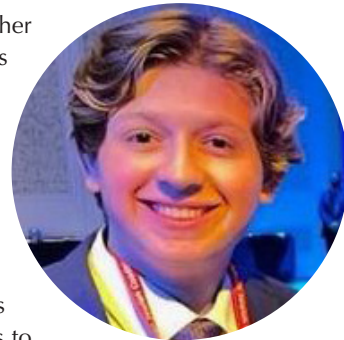


NCSY is the international
youth movement of the OU

Introduction

Why Moshe Isn't Mentioned in the Haggadah

What an honor to write for the Haggadah companion along with all the other amazing teen contributors. As a child, when I first learned the story of Pesach I was impressed by Moshe: how he was saved from the river to become the redeemer of the people of Israel. What an incredible story of a hero! It wasn't until I became bar mitzvah that I noticed the fascinating, and purposeful, omission of Moshe from the Haggadah. Cup after cup, one page after another—and yet no Moshe to be found. How can it be that the great redeemer of Israel is not mentioned even once?



One possible explanation for this omission that I have often heard is that we don't mention Moshe because to mention him is to reduce the Exodus to an historical event of redemption. As it is written in the Haggadah, every Jew in every generation should see himself/herself as having been personally redeemed from the bonds of slavery. Thus, this is not something that only happened long ago; but rather, it is an ongoing event in our lives. In essence, we are all on our own personal journey of redemption. Every day, every choice we make is an opportunity to break free from the bonds of slavery in Mitzrayim.

Another explanation points directly to Moshe's own modesty. Moshe was an amazing person. There was no one more humble or endowed with greater prophecy. The greatest tzaddikim still pale in comparison to our awe of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Bach writes, at the end of the first chapter of tractate Sotah, that the reason we don't know where Moshe is buried is that if we would daven at his kever we would get whatever we requested, because of the greatness of who he was. Yet in spite of his awe-inspiring greatness, and the magnitude of his accomplishments, he was only a man. To frame Moshe as the main protagonist is to fall short of the fact that Moshe was an emissary of Hashem.

Yes, he was amazing, but he was amazing because Hashem made him so. He granted Moshe many gifts, and pushed him to be the amazing person he was. We don't mention Moshe as a way to discount his greatness, but as a conscious choice to recognize that it was Hashem who freed us from the Pharaoh. It is a reminder to each of us in our own lives that all of our achievements, however great, are not ours alone, but rather as a credit to Him and His greatness. As we all work to overcome our own struggles, with each battle we should be aware of Hashem's help along the way, and remember to be grateful for it, and emulate Moshe's humility in success.

As we read the Haggadah this year at our seder table with our loved ones, let us be mindful that the fight for Redemption is ongoing in our time, as it was in the time of the Exodus, and let us be grateful that Hashem is still leading us as He has always done.

Chag Pesach Kasher v'Same'ach.

Idan Malka
National President, NCSY
Las Vegas, NV

Nina Bober

New Jersey NCSY
University of Pittsburgh

Kadesh

What is Kiddush? Kiddush is a Jewish prayer that is recited with a cup of wine. The Kiddush is recited immediately before the meal of a holiday or Shabbat.

The Kiddush is something that acknowledges and celebrates the importance and beauty of the day. This recitation, usually in song or chanting, is most likely to be performed by the head of the household. It can involve several or all members of the family, and it is a special moment to connect everyone together.

The Kiddush of the synagogue follows the ancient custom from when wayfarers slept in synagogues. Some of them would recite the Kiddush at the end of the Friday night service.

The Kiddush at home is a biblical commandment to sanctify Shabbat and Yom Tov over a glass of wine. After the Kiddush is recited, the seder can start. People come together to eat and spend quality time together. The Kiddush initiates this joyous gathering of people coming together to eat, laugh, learn, and spend time together as a whole.

It is a tradition for the Kiddush to be recited on Friday night and at Shabbat lunch (in two different versions). Other variations of the Kiddush are recited on holiday eves and days. On Friday night, the Kiddush is sung over a full cup of wine (or grape juice) before sitting down for Shabbat dinner and before saying Hamotzi, the blessing over the challah. After the Kiddush is recited, the cup is passed around so that everyone can take a sip out of it.

Many families have a special cup, called a Kiddush cup, just for this purpose! On Saturday morning, the Kiddush is said after Shabbat morning services and before lunch. The Kiddush acts as a bridge between the ending of one thing, and the start of another, like a nice big meal!!



Idan Malka

West Coast NCSY
Las Vegas, NV

Kadesh

When it comes to Jewish meal staples, I would say people tend to think of matzah ball soup and gefilte fish, to name a couple. Personally, I would say it's the Kiddush. Before most festival and Shabbat meals, we Jews recite Kiddush in order to sanctify the meal. The word Kiddush, in Hebrew, quite literally means "the act of sanctifying." I would like to dig deeper and mention a Sefardi tradition. (My mother is Ashkenazi and my father is Sefardi.)

During the seder, when my family lists the ten plagues, two things occur. The first is that everyone, other than my father and I, dips their finger in grape juice and puts a drop on their plate while reciting the ten plagues. That is my mom's Ashkenazi custom that we adopted. But while they're doing that, my father and I are pouring water and wine into a bowl for every plague. Whenever I tell my non-Sefardic friends about this custom, they think it sounds strange and random. Why pour water and wine into a bowl?

The answer is really interesting and can be found in the Hebrew words for water and wine. In Hebrew wine is yayin and water is mayim. You can find that in the word for judgment, din, the word yayin (wine) is found within it. Similarly, within the word rachamim or mercy there is the word mayim (water). We pour the water and wine into a bowl to dilute the din (judgment) with rachamim (mercy).

Whose judgment are we trying to dilute? The obvious answer: Hashem's. We'd like for Hashem to judge us favorably. The judgment we should be trying to dilute is our judgment of other Jews.

There is a popular joke that if the Moshiach came now, he wouldn't know whether he should wear a shtreimel, a black velvet kippah, or a black hat. There are so many different Jews and we tend to judge one another for not being "our type" of Jewish. If you are Ashkenazi and I am Sefardi, it doesn't matter. K'ish echad b'lev echad—We stood together to receive the Torah, united at Mount Sinai, "like one man with one heart" (Rashi on Shemos 19:2)



All of our Yiddishkeit is grounded in Hashem, regardless of your choice of head covering. We all want to connect and become closer to Hashem. We are all chelek Elokai mi'maal—a part of Hashem from above (Job 31:2). In order to become closer to Hashem, we need to become closer to one another. We need to learn to be tolerant without judgment and without giving into our principles. But we also need to learn to love another Yid.

Let this Pesach be one of peace and of people coming together.

Rebecca Yaminian

New York NCSY
CUNY Queens College

Urchatz: Washing with No Berachah

Urchatz is the section of the seder when we wash our hands without saying a berachah. In my family, this is when two of the younger kids bring out two bowls, one filled with water and the other empty, with a washing cup and a towel, and walk from elder to elder so the elders can wash their hands to fulfill this step of the seder. As little children, we would ask our parents why we would wash our hands without a berachah, as the act seemed a bit unusual. We normally wash our hands with a berachah before we eat bread; but here, we are not eating bread, and we are careful not to say a berachah. So the big question is: Why do we wash our hands without a berachah?

To answer this question, we have to look at urchatz in its context and placement in relation to the neighboring steps of the seder. Coming after kadesh, urchatz is the second step of the seder, and karpas follows right after. Karpas is the eating of bitter herbs. It is interesting that karpas follows urchatz because it seems as though when we wash our hands during urchatz, we are preparing for the eating of bitter herbs. But why do we wash hands for bitter herbs when we normally wash for bread? Our sages teach us that this practice comes from the time of the Beit Hamikdash, as Jews during that time not only washed their hands before they ate bread, but also before they ate vegetables that were in direct contact with liquids. One might logically think that washing for bitter herbs is not a practice we do every day, so why do we do it on Pesach? During our Pesach seder, we specifically perform this practice (of washing for bitter herbs, which was done during the times of the Beit Hamikdash) to integrate our hope and desire that the Beit Hamikdash should be rebuilt soon and that redemption should come speedily in our days.



As we answer this question, it is important to acknowledge that this lack of clarity and consequent asking of questions is embraced during Pesach, especially for the little kids. Incorporated throughout the seder, the act of asking questions is repeated, especially when the little children sing the Mah nishtanah, which means, “Why is tonight different from all the other nights?” As we encourage the little children to ask questions, we realize that asking questions is Judaism at its core. Asking questions inspires growth and understanding, both of which we need in order to preserve our practices, customs, and ultimate love for Judaism onto future generations. Even when we grow older, we must never stop asking questions.

Logan Draluck

Southern NCSY
Cocunut Creek, FL

Urchatz

The second step of the Pesach Seder is Urchatz. Urchatz, coming right after the 1st Cup of wine, is when we wash our hands without a blessing to prepare us for the food we will be eating in upcoming steps. However, there is a lot more significance to the step of Urchatz than just that. Throughout our lives we are constantly striving to remove the negativity from both ourselves and anything that affects our lives. We can work to do exactly that by pouring the water over our hands. Hands represent judgment and negativity, as they can be used to commit negative actions. When we use a cleansing agent as powerful as water, the action of washing our hands can destroy any looming negativity in our lives.



Additionally, in the word Urchatz, there is an extra letter, Vav. This extra Vav can show us how

important it is here to physically wash our hands, instead of just meditating on it. One of the most effective ways to connect to Hashem is through our physical actions. Here, we must follow through completely by taking part in the action of washing our hands. In the step of Urchatz, actions speak louder than words in the sense that washing our hands will immediately wipe away any negativity surrounding us, something that just thinking about it, could not do. So, as you wash your hands at this time, focus on taking any problem in your life that is bringing you down as a person, and use the water to find inner clarity on a solution to improve your life as a whole. Chag Sameach!

Bat-Tzion Atik

New York NCSY
Queens, NY

Dipping the Karpas

When the Torah instructs us to retell the story of yetziat Mitzrayim at the seder, it phrases the commandment as a hypothetical conversation between parent and child. The rabbis thus understand that the telling over of the story of yetziat Mitzrayim is meant to be in a question and answer format. Therefore, the sages instituted a number of rituals during the seder for the sole purpose of prompting questions from the child.

One of these rituals is the dipping of the karpas. We take a vegetable that would normally only be eaten as part of the meal, dip it, and eat it before the meal, thus prompting the child to ask why we are doing things differently. The common custom is to dip the vegetable into salt water, symbolizing the tears of the Jews.

Dipping food is also an act of negation, in that some of the food's own taste is negated in order to receive the taste of the dip. The Hebrew word for "dipping," tibul, is an anagram for the Hebrew word bitul —"nullification" or "negation."

Conversely, the act of dipping food demonstrates that one is a connoisseur who understands that the food on its own is lacking and knows just what to add to get the right flavor. However, the dipping on the night of the seder is "different from all other nights." For on this night, even our act of dipping is a sign of negation and humility.

Although we are celebrating our freedom, we are simultaneously celebrating our birth as a nation in service of Hashem. And as we celebrate our Exodus from one exile, we pray for our Exodus from this one as well.



Maya Steinberg

New Jersey NCSY
Rutgers University

Yachatz

An interesting part of the seder that has always stood out to me is yachatz, the breaking and hiding of the matzah. The seder itself is filled with so much symbolism and history, but this component of the seder does not tell or prepare for the story itself. Breaking the middle matzah in half and placing the larger half (the afikoman) in a bag may seem strange when the rest of the seder directly correlates to the pain and suffering that came before the Jews escaped Egypt. So why do we have the afikoman, and why is it integrated into our seder every year?

One reason for hiding the afikoman is to pique children's curiosity. Everyone can recognize that the story of Pesach is long and filled with so many hardships, so it can be difficult to follow, especially for children. The seder is built on the foundation of asking questions. We have the Four Questions, and questioning why we have the six seder plate items: essentially, the whole seder is built from questions and storytelling. Hiding the afikoman was implemented so that children stay alert and ready to ask questions, as we delve into the next part of the seder, maggid (the telling of the Pesach story).

Another reason why we hide the afikoman is because we are still anticipating redemption through the Moshiach. The matzah represents when the Jews were redeemed from Egypt, but we can argue that we are still in exile, as we are still anticipating the Moshiach today. When we hide the afikoman, we demonstrate our faith that Moshiach will one day come and redeem us.



Therefore, during the seder, when we get to yachatz—which may have seemed to be unrelated to the story of Pesach—we come to see that it is actually one of the most important parts because the breaking and hiding of the afikoman represents our hope and faith in the future of the Jewish people.

Emily Seligson

Northeast NCSY
Stamford, CT

Yachatz

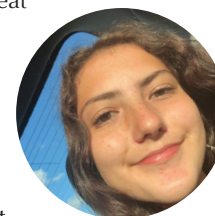
When I was in tears stressing to my teacher about my essay, two tests, and a project I had to complete—all within three days—he shared a thought that changed how I meet my goals. He asked, “How do you eat an elephant (assuming it was kosher, of course)? Well, you can’t stuff it all in your mouth at once, it’s too big. You have to eat it one bite at a time.”

Rabbi Mitch Mandel and Elliot Katz from Aish HaTorah (“Seder for the Soul,” aish.com) share the idea that yachatz teaches us to take challenges one step at a time. During yachatz we take the middle matzah, break it in two, and put the bigger half away to save for the afikoman. The bigger half symbolizes “the bigger picture.” We hide it away because we don’t want to see it and be overwhelmed by the end goal; we want to take the seder step-by-step and be able to see the step right in front of us until it’s complete.

Yachatz may initially seem like an insignificant, unnecessary part of the seder. It’s not maggid, where the story of Egypt is retold. It’s not maror, where we eat maror to signify the hardship in Egypt. Yachatz is simply breaking the middle matzah. However, it is a vital step in completing the seder. Without yachatz, there wouldn’t be an afikoman, and the seder wouldn’t be complete. It symbolizes that every step—or bite—toward an end goal is important and builds you up toward that goal.

As we move on to the next step of the seder, maggid, it can be easy to get distracted and hungry because it takes so long. Instead of dreading the thirty pages you have ahead of you, take it one page at a time.

Big accomplishments can only come from small steps. Don’t be discouraged by focusing on everything you have to do at once, but rather focus on the step, or bite, in front of you. Your goals and workload will go from seemingly impossible, to possible.



Shore Goldberg

Northeast NCSY
Binghamton University

The Significance of Splitting the Matzah

I dislike the taste of matzah. Especially gluten-free matzah. I remember that, at my family seders when I was younger, I would always try to run away when it came time to eat it. I never really understood the significance of the mitzvah. Sure, we eat because it reminds us of how our ancestors couldn’t bake their challah long enough for the dough to rise.

However, to me, that never really felt right. First of all, that didn’t explain why we always split the matzah. Second, not every mitzvah is designed to be about replicating what our ancestors went through; it’s about remembering. Our ancestors didn’t eat maror: we eat it to remember the bitterness of those days. To that same point: our ancestors didn’t break up their matzah into multiple pieces and hide one of them for the children to find.

So, this begs the question: What is the spiritual significance of splitting the matzah?

As with most things in the Jewish world, this question doesn’t just have one answer, so let’s just focus on two of them. The first one is something that I read about in middle school when reading the commentary in the Haggadah. (It also appears to be the most common answer I can find.) The splitting of the matzah represents the splitting of the Red Sea. When we sit at the Passover seder, we are re-creating the events that happened at the story of Passover, so, once we get to the splitting of the matzah, we are at the part where Moshe splits the sea.

A second answer, provided by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky at Chabad.org, is that the matzah also represents redemption.



It represents the redemption of the Jewish people leaving Egypt, the barriers that we've overcome. And part of why we continue to eat the matzah is a reminder that we still have barriers to overcome, and as a symbol for redemptions meant to come.

Leeat Goldstein

Southern NCSY
University of Florida

Is It Really Called the Four Questions, or the Four Statements?

During the Passover seder, the children at the table recite the Mah nishtanah, which is known as the Four Questions. The question is: "Why do we call this the Four Questions?" If you look at the text closely, we are asking one solid question which is "Why is this night different from all other nights?" The answer to this is simple: On all other nights we eat chametz (leaven) or matzah, but on this night we only eat matzah. On all other nights we eat all types of vegetables, but on this night we only eat maror (bitter herbs). On all other nights we are not required to dip even once, but on this night we dip twice. On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night we all recline.

We have an answer to this question which includes four parts. Matzah—which is flat, tasteless and full of itself—represents humility. Humility is known as a prerequisite for learning and growth. Someone who is full of themselves is not open to changing themselves for the better. If we are open to learning and growing, we develop as people, which ties into the concept of humility. On this night, we also eat maror, which signifies people who are closed off to spirituality. We eat the maror to remember the bitterness of slavery that our people experienced, and to recall our own bitterness: our bad habits and the darker side of our personality. On other nights, we remain apathetic and avoid the feeling of pain, but on this night we remember all of these bitter times. Therefore we eat the maror.



Sometimes we can get lost in the moment because we are simply not looking at our surroundings. The significance of dipping twice is allowing ourselves to fully immerse in the moment. We dip twice into the words of the Haggadah so our body and mind will be fully immersed into the seder. On a daily basis, we think of what we can do better and everything that goes wrong in our lives, but we never get the chance to praise ourselves for our right-doings. On this night, we recline ourselves to remind us of the kings and queens we actually are—the royalty: sons and daughters of G-d. When you are reciting the Mah nishtanah at your seder, think about what it really means, and fully immerse yourself in the moment.

Shajar Gonzalez

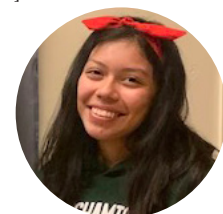
Northeast NCSY
Binghamton University

Asking the Four Questions

On Pesach, the youngest child asks the Four Questions. I have not asked these questions in years, but somehow, I always feel like there are more questions. Also, these questions should be asked by everyone! So why is it the custom that the youngest children ask these questions?

According to the Baal Shem Tov, there are two introductions to the Four Questions: "Father, I want to ask of you . . ." and "Father, I will ask of you . . ." Although these are different in meaning, they both begin with "Father." The Torah refers to the Jewish people as the children of Hashem. Hosea 11:1 states, "For Israel is a youth, [therefore] I love him," as if comparing Hashem's love for us to the love a parent has for their child.

When children are little, all they know is their love from their parents. For the first couple of years of life, we know nothing except the love of our parents, and that is 90% of our personality. The love for young children is stronger and clearer, since it is not obscured by conditional love. As they get older, they begin to develop their own judgment, their own character, their own opinions, the way they care for themselves and others.



Regardless, though, their parents will love them no matter what. My mom gave me life. I am her flesh and bones. I am my mother's daughter and that will never change under any circumstances.

The love that parents have for their young children is unconditional since they expect nothing in return. When we

ask these Four Questions on Pesach, we are reminded that Hashem loves us as parents love their young child. This unconditional love that He has for us will never be lost and our bond will never be broken. We share the same essence as Hashem, and he knows there is so much more for us.

The children ask the Four Questions and are looked at by their parents with love and affection. Their love is still pure for them. Hashem's love for us is the same way: pure, everlasting, and unconditional.

Dahlia Belfer

Canada NCSY
Carlton University

Maggid

This is our third pandemic Pesach. For a third year we can't be hugging our family the same way or singing with the same number of voices. It seems as though we should be sad, or disappointed, or even angry. Why shouldn't we be? This pandemic has taken so much from so many people. It has taken a chance for events, a sense of normalcy, but most importantly COVID has taken lives. This situation is far from ideal, and there is no other way to describe it.

However, this night is different from all other nights. All of the reasons we list as to why this night is different boil down to one thing: how we frame it. So tonight we are going to try and reframe this struggle, and any others we have faced in our lives, and find out how to grow.

There is a story I love written by Karen Talavera, it goes like this. A young woman went to her mother and was telling her about her life. She went on and on about how difficult her life was, and how she didn't know what she was going to do with herself. Her mother then brought her to the kitchen and showed her a carrot, an egg, and a coffee bean. The mother then went to boil three pots of water. As the daughter watched with confusion, her mother dropped the carrot in one pot, the egg in another pot, and the coffee bean in the last pot. After a few minutes, the mother presented the daughter with the three original ingredients. She then asked her daughter to touch the carrot, peel the egg, and drink and smell the coffee. First the daughter found that the once hard carrot was soft, then she found that the once fragile egg was hardened and grey, and finally she found that the once bitter coffee bean tasted nice. The mother then asked a very important question: "Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?"



Think about that question as I move through this d'var Torah. Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?

Tonight we read the Pesach story, and there is a part I have always loved. When Hashem went to ask Moshe to talk to Paroh to free his people, Moshe argued with Hashem. Moshe argued that he had a speech impediment, and that he has never been a man of words. Moshe tried to convince Hashem to choose someone else, someone more qualified. Moshe was terrified. Do you know what Hashem answered? He answered by asking, "Who made the blind man blind, or the mute man mute, or the deaf man deaf?" What Hashem was really saying here was I see your struggle, and I need you to remember that I am the one who gave it to you.

Hashem was laughing in Moshe's face: He was saying I gave you this problem you're complaining about, because I know you can handle it. Hashem was trying to show Moshe that he needed to choose strength. When reading this I have one question: Why? Why did Hashem give that reminder? Why not just come right out and say "Moshe! This is not the right choice!"?

The answer here is that Moshe needed the opportunity to learn this for himself. We aren't babies, and Hashem has never given us all the answers. We need to figure things out, and sometimes we get it wrong. Sometimes we are ruled by fear. I'm going to tell you a story about a close friend of mine who was faced with a situation that could have caused her to be ruled by fear. We are going to call her Mel. Mel was diagnosed just over four years ago with a few debilitating chronic illnesses. One of her illnesses became so advanced that she couldn't eat. Normally when someone can't tolerate food they eat by using a feeding tube. This is a sustainable way to eat and can be continued for your entire life. Mel couldn't use a feeding tube, so she was put on something called TPN. This means she is fed directly into her bloodstream, directly into her heart. Mel learned that the average lifespan on TPN is ten years; she is now only 20. This piece of news could have shattered her. She could have shut herself in her room thinking about all the pieces of life she could be missing out on. Mel didn't do that. She looked at herself and said that she is going to live her life to the best of her abilities, and that her body has very little to do with whether or not she has a fulfilled life. She decided that she will spend every day doing what she loves. Now Mel is in University to study nutrition, so that hopefully in the future

she can work with children in the hospital who are in the same position as her.

Let's go back to the question that was asked at the beginning. Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean? Now it's time to think about what each represents. The carrot in the beginning seemed strong, but when faced with hot water it became soft. The egg originally seemed very fragile, but when faced with hot water it became grey and hardened on the inside. Finally, the coffee bean, the one that was once bitter, spread into the water creating a rich taste and aroma. Moshe faced a challenging experience with Hashem, in which he expressed a seeming fear of taking on the responsibilities G-d asked him to. Hashem gave him the opportunity to choose strength over fear, and he did. Now we can look at Mel. Mel embodies the idea of the coffee bean, she didn't run scared and soften like the carrot and she didn't become hardened and grey like the egg. Instead, Mel took her situation (her bitter coffee bean) and she turned her adversity into something beautiful. Just like the way the coffee bean turned the boiling water into something delicious, Mel turned her diagnosis into a passion that will lead her to help and inspire many people.

The COVID-19 situation we are facing right now and have been facing for the past two and a half years is definitely scary. Many became scared and ran, many became hardened and grey, but the fact that you are taking the time to read this d'var Torah at your COVID Pesach number 3 despite all the fear, proves that we are creating something great out of our struggle. This is why we shouldn't let ourselves be too sad, or disappointed, or angry. We have grown through this adversity, and we are spreading our joy to each other all over the world. I am in Ottawa, Canada: Where are you having your seder tonight? We are spreading our strength to each other from all different countries, cities, neighborhoods, and houses. We should all be proud that we are a coffee bean.

Nathan Ginsburg

Atlantic Seaboard NCSY
Potomac, MD

Maggid

Maggid may be the fifth step to the seder, but it is, arguably, the most important part. I've always wondered why it doesn't come first.

By the time we start maggid, people have already started to fall asleep and wonder when dinner is. You may be waiting for the meat and potatoes for dinner, but maggid is the meat and potatoes of the seder!

The story we read is not a story of an event that happened to our great-great-grandparents: it's a story of us. We exhibit the same things in the story, yearning for freedom, and once you feel like you're in the home stretch, there's another challenge thrown at you. Just as the Jews left Egypt—when they thought they were out in the clear—they had to get through a sea and a desert!

While reading over the story in the Haggadah you don't have to be limited to only reading what's on the page. One of the main parts of maggid is the Four Questions. A core element of our survival as a nation has been the concept of asking questions and learning from the answers. The Torah, in Parshas Bo (Shemos 12:26–27), highlights the questions children ask. This is the first appearance of the questions of the Four Sons, which we read so diligently in the Haggadah.

Just as the Four Sons ask their four questions, NCSY/JSU allows us to ask our questions. Judaism allows us to have the freedom to ask as many questions as we want, and if your rabbi does not have the answer he'll ask his rabbi, and the chain will keep going until you get that answer. The ability to ask questions is the truest expression of freedom.



Shira Kramer

Atlantic Seaboard NCSY
Baltimore, MD

Maggid

Maggid is the longest and main portion of the seder. While it may start out as a fun reading with everyone at the table taking turns, by about halfway through, most people lose interest. There are so many different sources, ranging from the Gemara to Midrashim and everything in between, that it is hard to focus on the main goals of maggid.

Prior to the beginning of his seders, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik would explain the mitzvah of maggid to his guests by asking the following question: It appears (from the Gemara in Berachot 12b) that there is a mitzvah of remembering our

departure from Egypt every day. Therefore, it seems that there is no less of an obligation on this seder night than on any other day. What makes the mitzvah of remembering our departure from Egypt different on the seder night?

According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, there are three elements that distinguish the mitzvah of zechiras Yetzias Mitzrayim—remembering on Pesach our departure from Egypt, as distinguished from our remembering it on any other day.



1. The obligation to tell others
2. The obligation to relate the chain of events
3. The obligation to explain the reasons behind the mitzvos.

We understand that on every other day of the year, zechira, or “reminding oneself” suffices. On the other hand, on the seder night, there is a mitzvah to remind one’s self and also a mitzvah to tell others in a question and answer format (See Shemos 13:8, 14). Additionally, if a person has no one to relate the story of our departure to, he should tell it to himself as if he were telling others. Remembering alone, even aloud, does not suffice on this night, as it would the rest of the year.

As NCSYers, we know that learning and exploring alone is great. However, when we learn with our peers and advisors, it is so special. When you learn in a group, you can hear ideas and thoughts that you might never have thought of. This year, I challenge you to learn with others and make a commitment to expanding your Jewish learning in whatever ways feel comfortable!

Yaki Liebesman

Central East NCSY
Columbus, OH

Maggid

Throughout the yearly cycle of Jewish holidays, Pesach and its signature sedarim stand out as a period of time for families to convene and celebrate the gift of freedom. This most notably takes place as we discuss the intricacies of our beloved holiday in the question-provoking highlight of the Haggadah blockbuster, maggid. Often overlooked for being just the longest step that sends our holiday meal deep into the night, maggid is truly the most important step of the seder and provides an insight into the significance of Pesach as a whole.

One of the more familiar questions that is asked by people of all ages is why we emphasize the bitter slavery so much in a holiday that is in actuality supposed to recall the freedom we gained. Another layer is added in support of this question when we analyze one of the foundational elements of the seder: our discussion of the Pesach offering, the matzah, and the maror. Each one of these items is symbolic of a piece in the puzzle to the Pesach story. The lamb symbolizes freedom and the maror our slavery, while the matzah represents both. One could reasonably conclude that it would be most logical to begin with maror, our slavery, and follow the natural order of our journey, culminating in the Pesach offering, our freedom. Yet we do the opposite.



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks presented a beautiful idea addressing this topic, which answers the underlying question of why we discuss slavery and symbolize it in the reverse order through the foods we eat if we truly intend to celebrate our freedom. He answers that only a free person understands how bitter slavery is. That is, only those on the outside are able to notice the bonds of slavery and thus appreciate their freedom. Conversely, those who are enslaved often find that they have a hindered ability to notice the amazing capacity a free life provides. This is because “the worst exile is to forget that you are in exile.” (Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, “A Pesach Message,” *outorah.org*)

So, as we take the korban Pesach and acknowledge the freedom it symbolizes, we must make sure to remember that it also provides us the gift of recognizing our unique good. We must also be aware that it symbolizes a freedom from the treacheries we are enslaved to even today. This lamb shank serves to create an awareness of the modern-day technologies that so easily enslave us without our realizing it. Whether it be Netflix or Tik Tok, so many of us forget how great life is when you escape their realms.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. We have the korban, which reminds us that, no matter our circumstances, we can

always find freedom and strive for it. All we have to do is begin to seek understanding of what freedom and slavery mean for each of us in our own lives. This year, may we live in a state of awareness to recognize both the freedoms we have and the hidden enslavers we fall prey to.

Rachel Girard

Northeast NCSY
University of Maryland

Rachtzah

The sixth part of the seder is called rachtzah, which instructs participants to wash their hands before eating takes place. This is the second time in the seder where handwashing washing takes place; the first is called urchatz. Rachtzah, however, differs from urchatz because after washing our hands the second time, we say the following berachah, with the eating of the matzah in mind:

Blessed are You, Lord, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning washing of hands.

Washing our hands is significant in this part of the seder because, prior to eating, we are reminded of how our hands are the physical instruments that we serve Hashem with. Taking part in eating matzah with our hands, after saying the berachah, is a metaphor for using these very hands in physical activities. Such activities may be materialistic, selfish, or harmful.

However, washing our hands grounds us and allows us to wash away these materialistic impurities. This act serves the purpose of spiritual preparation for the rest of the seder. Rachtzah ensures that our hands are pure, used for good and for creating a better world.



Ethan Comrov

Midwest NCSY
Chicago, IL

Rachtzah

The second washing of the hands during the seder, rachtzah, comes as a transition from maggid. The conclusion of the formal telling of the Passover story would usually lead into the celebratory meal (shulchan orech), but there is a need to once again wash our hands to prepare ourselves. Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum explains that in Judaism, a good meal together with friends and family is itself a sacred act (“A Family that Eats Together . . .” Chabad.org). So we prepare for it just as we prepared for our holiday ritual, recalling the way ancient priests once prepared for service in the Temple: by pouring three times on the right hand and then three times on the left hand, and reciting the short blessing afterward. One is then able to continue on with the seder.

The question remains: How come we wash twice? How is the significance of washing tonight for bread different from regular Shabbatot? On the night of the seder, the main show is maggid. The retelling of the Passover story is the lengthiest aspect of the Haggadah, and most of the reader’s attention is focused on the intensive reading that maggid asks of the reader. When one finishes maggid, they realize that shulchan orech is around the corner and they rush to complete motzi matzah so they can eat. Rachtzah comes as a buffer and a reminder between those steps.

Although our hands touched the water earlier during tonight’s seder, this time is different. There is a deeper step than that now. This act of washing our hands is accompanied by a blessing, for in this moment we feel the Jewish People’s story more viscerally, having just retold it during maggid. Now, having re-experienced the majesty of the Jewish journey from degradation to dignity, we wash our hands in holiness, remembering once again that our liberation is bound up in everyone else’s.

Each step we take together with others toward liberation is a blessing, and so we recite the prayer for washing, in an effort to remind ourselves that while we want to continue with the seder and eat our meal, we have to be cognizant of the Passover story on a deeper level before we enjoy Hashem’s gift of food.



Yael Polotsky
Southwest NCSY
Denver, CO

Matzah

At this point in the seder, there is quite a bit of anticipation of the meal. We have just finished the wonderful journey of maggid and washed for our matzah. Matzah is THE food that Pesach is about. We have matzah ball soup, matzah pizza, matzah brei, and so much more. Why is this odd bread such an important part of our holiday?

One question many people wonder about is whether matzah is a representation of good, or of bad. Compared to soft and fluffy bread, matzah has a hard and crunchy exterior and, therefore, it may represent a “bad” representation of our historical narrative. The pesukim also refer to matzah as lechem oni, “the bread of affliction” (Deuteronomy 16:3). This shows that matzah is meant to be a reminder of when we were slaves and were going through much hardship. However, at the seder we discuss the fact that we eat matzah to represent the positive aspect of our being freed from Egypt and not having enough time for our bread to rise. These two representations are a study in contrasts, so how is it possible that matzah represents both?

To answer this question I thought about a topic discussed in my Tanach class last year: Who is holier—humans, or angels? At first almost the entire class argued that since angels are on a closer level to Hashem, they must be holier. They do only acts of purity and kindness for Hashem. Humans, on the other hand, do bad things all the time! Even Adam and Eve, the first humans to ever exist, made life-changing mistakes almost immediately after they were created.



We then learned that the biggest difference between angels and humans is free will. Angels do not have free will. They do everything Hashem says and will always do the good path. But because humans have free will, at every choice in one’s life there is a chance that they will pick the wrong option. The yetzer hara, our congenital inclination to do evil, is an everyday temptation for every human.

From this, one could think that angels are holier. But in reality, our ability to choose the wrong path makes us the holier beings. Although there are times when we succumb to our yetzer hara, there are also many times in which we select the good path. When we choose to do this, we get extra nachas because we could have chosen to do bad things. Since we can do bad things, our potential zechut (merit) for goodness is so much higher. In Bereshit, before Hashem creates humans, he describes his creations as tov: “good.” After humans are created, Hashem refers to his creations as tov me’od: “very good.” (Genesis 1:31). Ramban explains that the extra “tov” is our yetzer hara. Because when we do good, we are actively not doing bad things.

This lesson can relate back to our question of matzah, because we learn that we need both the good and bad in the world. Without the bad, goodness would not exist. So our famous matzah can be a representation of the goodness of leaving slavery AND the negative aspects of being slaves. Life cannot always be good. Without hardships and pain, life could not truly happen. If everyone is happy all the time, happiness would not exist. So, during Pesach—while we are eating each meal—we need to be reminded that we were in slavery but we were also freed by Hashem, and both are important and necessary parts of our histories.

Isabella Kushner
Atlantic Seaboard NCSY
University of Maryland

Maror

Maror, or bitter herbs, are on the seder plate in two different places. The first pile, at the center of the plate and eaten first, is known as maror. The second pile, at the bottom of the plate, is known as a chazeret. Maror is eaten once during the seder by itself and once again with matzah. The Mishnah lists the five herbs that could be used as maror during the seder. This includes romaine lettuce, horseradish, and escarole. As in all parts of the seder, there is a specific way we eat maror. First, we take the kezayit (a measurement of about the size of an olive) of maror, dip it in charoset, and shake it off. Then, we make the blessing of al achilat maror and eat the maror (ideally in one mouthful).

As a child we learn that maror represents the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. As in life, we must taste the bitterness to be able to appreciate the sweetness of freedom. Maror used to be considered the preparation for the paschal lamb, and the bitterness led to an appreciation for the lamb. Unfortunately, as we currently don't have the temple and cannot eat from the paschal lamb, we eat maror in remembrance of the Temple.

Still, we can use this time to appreciate the bitterness of our lives today. This past week, I was part of a learning discussion about the difference between a bad experience leading to a positive experience and a bad experience being the actual good experience. An example of the first scenario is if someone got stuck in a long checkout line at the grocery store, but because of that, barely missed getting into an accident on the car ride home. An example of the second scenario would be someone having a terrible first date at a restaurant, and a year later, having a first date with their future partner in the same restaurant.

In eating the bitter herbs, we recognize the bitterness of the experiences of our ancestors, but how can we reflect on the bitterness we've experienced in our lives? How has this bitterness either led us to sweetness or ended up becoming the sweetness? Take this time to remember the Temple, and be grateful for the result of the struggles of our ancestors. Finally, take this time to be grateful for your own struggles—no matter how big or small—and reflect on where they led you or what they became.



Judah Hafter

West Coast NCSY
Las Vegas, NV

Maror and Charoset

My nostrils burn as I call forth the memory: the seder after I turned ten. Like any 10-year-old boy, I wanted to prove how macho I was—obviously. I waited all day in anticipation, not for Kaddish, not for maggid, but for maror. This was the year I was going to do it: eat a whole entire, gigantic, colossal, heaping spoonful of the grated white “horseradish.” (I put horseradish in quotes—well, air quotes really—because there is absolutely no way that maror is the same stuff that you put on gefilte fish. I still refuse to believe it.)

Anyway, in 2014, Pesach started on a Monday night, which meant that I did not have school from the previous Friday until the following Thursday. How could this go wrong? I'll tell you. Waiting an entire day for the seder is one of the most challenging tasks you can give a ten-year-old. Picture this: You put a child in a room with a marshmallow in front of them. Before you leave the room, with the child alone with the marshmallow, you tell them, “If you don't eat the marshmallow until I come back, I will give you another.” Most children don't understand the concept of delayed gratification. They will probably just eat the marshmallow. I didn't understand delayed gratification. For the entire day, I was surrounded by wonderful aromas, exotic foods, and a zealous feeling floating in the air. I couldn't wait any longer.

Little-by-little, I began to sneak some of the food being prepared for shulchan orech—I mean, what else was I supposed to do? However, there was one food that I did not dare approach: maror. I was going to wait until I had my chance at the seder table to accomplish the feat.

Finally, the time came. I was more excited than I should have been to fill my plate with maror in a lunch-lady-like fashion. I scooped a heaping spoonful of the menacing maror onto my matzah . . . CRUNCH!

That's not too bad, I thought. No, no, oh wait. That's bad!

It was really bad. My runny nose cleared in flames. My bloodshot eyes streamed tears. My reddened ears began to ring. Everything started to burn. In reality, it probably wasn't as bad as my ten-year-old, hypochondriac self had made it out to be; however, any traumatic experience instills terrible memories in your mind.

I look back and reflect: that's the point. We're supposed to feel the burn, the pain, the distress that our ancestors did in Egypt. My relationship with maror has gone from one built on fear to one built on understanding. The point of maror is to get us to understand the bitterness of the reality of Mitzraim.



The beautiful thing about maror is that we are supposed to dip in it charoset. Charoset is sweet—it is one of my favorite Pesach foods. However, despite its sweetness, charoset is supposed to remind us of the mortar used in the hard work and labor that the Egyptians forced upon us. Although I've always had a hard time connecting the two, I find a much more meaningful connection with the bitterness of the maror and the sweetness of the charoset. We aren't supposed to drown the maror in charoset, we have to put just enough that we can taste a minuscule amount. Even though maror is intended to remind us of the harshness of Mitzrayim, the sweetness of the charoset counteracts that; it shows that we can always find a small sliver of light in anything we experience.

Im yirtzeh Hashem, we will all be able to find the light in the dark situations in our lives.

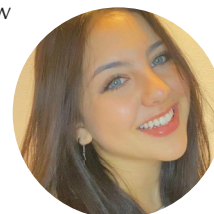
Julia Malove

Southern NCSY
Aventura, FL

The ninth step at the Pesach seder is korech, which comes after completing the mitzvah of eating matzah and maror. We take two pieces from the bottom matzah, some maror—the bitter herbs from the previous step, and some lettuce.

Why do we make a sandwich of the two things we've just eaten? We've just made blessings on each one individually: What's the significance or combining the matzah and maror and now eating them together?

One of the many insights on this idea is that we know that nothing in life happens without the will, partnership, and supervision of Hashem. The combination of matzah and maror serves as a reminder of this. Unfortunately, it's all too easy to allow Hashem's existence to have a minimal impact on our daily lives. We often forget the importance of our role in the most important partnership we have. Eating the korech would not be a mitzvah without both components. So too, building a relationship with Hashem is not a one way street.



From the step of korech at the Pesach seder, we can learn to unite our physicality, represented by the maror, with our spirituality, represented by the matzah, to form a proactive, healthy and loving relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Just as the maror is enhanced by the matzah, we should all strive to do better at holding Hashem's helping hand. We should make sure our lives never go without the vital partnership of Hashem, and strive to never live solely as maror.

Leona Teten

New York NCSY
New York, NY

Shulchan Orech

Shulchan orech is the tenth of the fourteen sections of the Pesach seder. At this point, everyone is ready for the meal, and hardly anyone really pauses to consider the meaning of it. Upon further examination, a few things are off about shulchan orech, compared to a traditional Yom Tov seudah.

Most glaringly, it does not include Kiddush, netilat yadayim, or Hamotzi, which typically directly precede a seudah. Here, they have already been taken care of in previous sections of the seder.

It is also rare to see roasted meat on the table, out of respect to the korban Pesach that we can no longer do. Aside from a longing for salad and pot roast, these things are of little consequence.

The oddest thing about shulchan orech is its timing. Along with other sections of the seder, it interrupts the recitation of Hallel. Much of Hallel is said during maggid, and the rest during barech. Shulchan orech, along with rachtzah, motzi matzah, maror, and korech, falls squarely in between those two. Notably, these are all eating or eating-related sections. Additionally, we don't say the traditional blessing before Hallel.



Rav Hai Ga'on believes that just as the seder is no ordinary night, this Hallel is no ordinary Hallel. Rather

than being a formal recitation, it is a spontaneous celebration of G-d's might in taking us out of Egypt. It is Hallel b'sha'at ha'ens,ki'ilu hu yatzah miMitzrayim, as if we are just now emerging from Egypt. In saying our Hallel without a berachah, without thinking about it first, we are truly allowing ourselves to be swept up in the glory of the miracle of yetziat Mitzrayim.

Emma Zalzman

New York NCSY
Valley Stream, NY

Shulchan Orech

The shulchan orech portion of the seder is the regal banquet. The Vilna Ga'on specifies that the table should be set in the finest silver and table linens. While on any other night we may not show all of our precious table ornaments, as we are in perpetual mourning of the Beis Hamikdash, on the night of the seder we can set aside our mourning and rejoice in the miracles of the night.

The meal itself should be eaten in comfort and joy. We enjoy a festive meal which may contain time-honored favorites such as the chicken soup and gefilte fish. While everything eaten prior to the meal had a ritual significance, the festive meal itself fulfills the mitzvah of enjoying the holiday.

Shulchan orech is the tenth step of the seder. This is indicated by drinking the third cup at the completion of the meal. The meal is what sustains us in the present, and in the present, we must be positive and garner energy for the future.

The third matriarch of the Jewish people is Rachel. She was buried on the border of Israel and not in Israel-proper, as she is the mother that remains with the Jewish people in Israel itself, and she prays and cries for our success. Rachel can also represent the shulchan orech, which prepares us to enter the next step of the seder, Hallel: the future.



Shira Gabriel

Canada NCSY
York University

Shulchan Orech

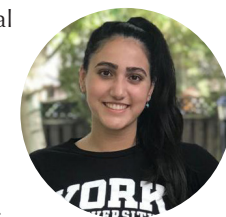
After a long waiting night, it is finally time for the shulchan orech. The shulchan orech is, arguably, one of the most exciting parts of the seder for most people. We have spent the whole night going through the story of the Exodus from Egypt, and now we can finally eat! The term shulchan orech means "the table is arranged." This means that the table is now to be arranged with the main meal.

This tradition starts with eating the hard-boiled egg that sits on the seder plate, dipped in salt water. The hard-boiled egg is a symbol of mourning. It symbolizes the korban chagigah (festival sacrifice) that was offered in the Temple in Jerusalem. We do this to remember to mourn for the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. Although it is a festive meal and we are celebrating thanking Hashem for our freedom from slavery, our happiness is not complete because we are still in exile, and do not have a Beit Hamikdash.

This meal is an opportunity to express our freedom. This is one reason that the meal itself has a siman (Hebrew for "symbol") on the seder night: shulchan orech, not just another Yom Tov meal. It is in fact part of the uniqueness of the night. We have escaped Egypt, yet we are not free, though we are reaching a higher level. While we enjoy this meal, it is a mitzvah to recline back and remember that we are now in a higher state and continuing our journey as the Jewish people in this world.

The meal is what sustains us in the present, and in the present, we must be positive and garner energy for the future.

The third matriarch of the Jewish people is Rachel. She was buried on the border of Israel and not in Israel-proper, as she is the mother that remains with the Jewish people in Israel itself, and she prays and cries for our success. Rachel can also represent the shulchan orech, which prepares us to enter the next step of the seder, Hallel: the future.



Rachel Khusid

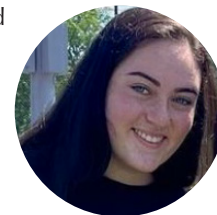
New Jersey NCSY
University of Maryland

The Afikoman: From Yachatz to Tzafun

The afikoman is a piece of matzah that is placed on the seder table during Passover. It is broken into two pieces, a process known as yachatz, and the bigger piece is placed in a napkin and hidden somewhere in the house. Some view this as a symbol of redemption from suffering, while others view it as a reference to the Passover sacrifice.

It is then the job of the children to find the hidden afikoman. The children are in charge of this because the adults want them to stay involved and interested in the seder. Once it is found, the child is rewarded and the piece of matzah is brought back to the table for everyone to have a bite as the last part of the seder meal, also known as the tzafun.

The tzafun is the twelfth step of the seder, and the word tzafun means “hidden” or “concealed.” The afikoman plays an important role in the seder and allows for the children to have fun as well.



Nate Sussman

Northeast NCSY
Albany, NY

Matzah and True Purpose

After finishing the meal, the last thing we eat is the matzah. We do this not because we are hungry or because it tastes good (we all know it doesn't), but because Hashem commanded us to. Although physical pleasure is an important part of our lives, sometimes it's important to focus on more important things.

The rabbis in the Talmud explain it like a horse and its rider. The horse's job is to help take us where we need to go. But on its own, the horse will start wandering off and do its own thing. The rider, however, is there to direct the horse and make sure it goes where it is supposed to go. We too, just like the horse, need a reminder of what's important and what our goals in life are. By concluding the meal with matzah, we are able to refocus ourselves from any distractions and remember the true purpose of the seder.



Jordan Adler

Southern NCSY
University of Florida

Afikomen

If you ask any child what their favorite part of the seder is, you will often hear them sharing many stories about finding the afikoman over the years. For those who don't know, during the beginning of the seder, the leader is supposed to take the three pieces of matzah and break the one in the middle. They then take the bigger half of the broken matzah, called the afikoman, and set it aside for the children to find later on and to eat as dessert. Finding the afikoman has always been such an exciting part of the seder for both children and adults. However, many people don't actually know the meaning behind the afikoman and why we hide it and eat it.

The word afikoman actually comes from the Greek word, epikomon meaning “that which comes after.” There are many different ways to interpret this. In one case, the three pieces of matzah each have a different meaning. The top piece means “heavenly realm,” or “pure spirit”; the bottom piece means “earthly realm, or pure physicality”; and the middle piece means “the human story,” or “the bridge that humans hold between Heaven and earth.” We break the middle piece and put aside the larger half, meaning that the bridge is broken. When children go to find the afikoman, they are looking for something that is inaccessible, something that represents complete and ultimate freedom.



However, as soon as we eat this missing piece, the afikoman, we are putting back the broken pieces of humanity back together inside of us.

Another interpretation of the afikoman is that it represents the Jews' liberation from Egyptian exile. However, in this case we don't believe that was our final redemption; we believe that we are still looking for it with the coming of Moshiach. When we set aside the larger half of the matzah, we are reminding ourselves that the best and real redemption is still coming hidden in the future.

Finally, a simpler explanation of hiding the afikoman is so that children do not fall asleep at the end of the seder. People believe that hiding the afikoman—and having the children bargain for a gift—keeps them engaged toward the end of a very long evening.

Now, the next time you hide or eat the afikoman, you will understand some of the significance associated with this tradition.

Lucy Schneider

Central East NCSY
Cincinnati, OH

Barech

Barech means “bless.” When we reach barech in the seder, it is time to thank Hashem for the meal we just had. We also pour and bless our third cup of wine and open the door for Elijah, the prophet. Although these are steps in the seder (order), we can all take time to further understand what we are thanking Hashem for. We learn all about the order and what we do in each step, and we focus on the stories. But it is time to take a deeper look into what exactly we are thanking Hashem for.

Giving thanks after eating the meal shows the confidence we Jews have in Hashem. We are not just thanking Hashem for the delicious meal, we are thanking Him for the life full of opportunity that we have experienced so far, and for what lies ahead of us. When we bentsh we sing out loud, with joy, in a confident tone. Our energy is loud and exciting, inviting Elijah to come in. This confidence has been shown since the beginning of Jewish history.

Why do miracles happen? Because we had the confidence, the trust in Hashem. There are numerous examples in the Torah and in Jewish history in which we see our people trusting in Hashem. A few examples include leaving Egypt where the Jews were slaves and suddenly picking everything up to go to Eretz Canaan. Or when the Maccabees won against the Greeks, the Red Sea split, Sarah had a baby, and so on. Those who did not believe in Hashem witnessed plagues, danger, and disappointment. We had confidence Hashem would let everything be okay, and we continue to do so when we give thanks.

Another way to look at barech is connected to the Four Cups. The Four Cups correspond to the four redemptions in Exodus: our physical removal from Egypt; our escape from Egyptian bondage; the creation of an inherently free people, immune to any future possibility of enslavement; and our election as G-d's chosen people at Mount Sinai.

But barech is a time where the fifth cup, the cup for Elijah, shows a fifth redemption. This promise is the promise to bring us, the Jews, to the land of Canaan. This is different from the rest because the first four cups are ones we can drink ourselves and pursue. We have the ability to overcome these four redemptions and overcome the limitations that enslave us. But the fifth cup represents what we cannot do ourselves—what only Hashem can do when Moshiach comes. That goes beyond human activity. It is out of our hands.

We do not drink this cup on our own. We need Elijah's help to finish the fifth cup. We can only provide the cup of wine for Elijah and say berachos to have him come—just as we do with Moshiach today. We do mitzvos and commit to our covenant with Hashem to bring Moshiach. We await the ultimate Redemption.

During barech, all Jews open their doors to Hashem, to allow Elijah to come in, and we are given the opportunity to be passed over to allow more opportunity and fulfillment in life. We are confidently giving thanks to Hashem for all the blessings he has given us and for the wonderful lives He allows us all to live. We are not just thanking Him for the meal we have just eaten, but for everything before, after, and in between.



Aaron Baron

New York NCSY
New York University

Hallel

Hallel is a prayer of praise composed of Psalms 113–118 and is recited on major and minor Jewish holidays. These Psalms are especially uplifting in nature and are thus meant to be recited in a united, joyous manner. According to the Talmud, the prophets established the singing of the Hallel in order to “commemorate times of national deliverance from peril.” The Psalms represent five fundamental pillars of Judaism: “the Exodus, the Splitting of the Sea, the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, the future Resuscitation of the Dead, and the coming of the Messiah.”

During the Passover seder, the Hallel is recited when we praise G-d for bringing us out of Egypt. The themes of the Hallel directly mirror the elation that each Jew should feel when reflecting on our peoples’ exodus from Egypt. These lines remind us of the blessing that can meet us when we put immense faith in G-d. With the misfortune that surrounds us in the world, it is crucial to reminisce in our blessing during a cheerful recitation of the Hallel.

Another Hallel, known as “The Great Hallel,” is traditionally sung at the end of the Passover seder. “The Great Hallel,” comprised of Psalm 136, thanks G-d for his eternal kindness. What makes this Hallel “great” is its praise of G-d for granting miracles for the Jewish people throughout our history. Line 15 in “The Great Hallel” reiterates G-d’s decision to aid Moses in splitting the sea and guiding the Jewish people out of Egypt: “And He threw Pharaoh and his host into the Sea of Reeds, for His kindness is eternal.” During this Passover, it is essential to reflect on the joyous lessons and thanks to G-d presented in the Hallel.



Hana Dolgin

Midwest NCSY
Deerfield, IL

Hallel

Every Passover we read Hallel, a section in the Haggadah that is filled with Psalms that are praising G-d and thanking Him for taking us out of Egypt and thanking Him for all the miracles He has done for us. We do not just read Hallel on Passover; we read it on every Yom Tov. It is always such a joyous moment when we sing it out loud, because we are reliving (not just reciting) the story, so we are singing about salvation!

But what is special about reading it on Passover? Well, on Passover it is split into two sections. Why do we do this? One idea is that when we were taken out of Egypt we were redeemed.

So, in the first half before our seder meal, we are praising and thanking Hashem for helping us leave Mitzrayim. It is sung right after telling a painful story. But then, in the second half, we say it immediately after our meal and after Birkat Hamazon, a.k.a. the thanksgiving prayers for the meal. We are not focusing on the past or the fact that we left Egypt and we’re slaves. Instead, we focus on the present and the future. It highlights the redemption.

It then leads up to the last section of the seder, nirtzah, when we all say together, “Next year in Jerusalem.” Hallel reminds us to remember our past but to not linger on it. We should also be focused on what is happening right now and our bright future, including Moshiach coming.



Shanell Baron

New York NCSY
Touro College/Nassau Community College

Echad Mi Yodea

Having the opportunity to celebrate Pesach every year with my family—along with having a deep connection with the songs that we sing at the end of the seder—truly makes Pesach such a beautiful and special holiday. Pesach is a unique

holiday because this was the time when the Jewish people were finally able to leave Egypt and escape the slavery they were dealing with for so long. As the Jews were fleeing Egypt, they took with them bread and carried it on the way out. While these eight days of escaping took place, this dough turned into a crispy cracker type of food, which is what we now know as matzah. Every year, my family gets our seder table ready with so much matzah and the designated foods we need to make a berachah on.

But I have to say that my favorite part of the whole seder would have to be the ending, where we sing all the songs—especially, Echad Mi Yodea. Even though the tune of this song can appear to be like a children’s song, this song presents such an important message to those sitting at the Pesach table. The main theme of Pesach and the seder revolves around the freedom of the Jews. But, by looking closely and analyzing this holiday and the seder, we have another theme: the spiritual and emotional freeing of G-d’s people to become a united nation for G-d. As ‘Hashem’s chosen people, the Jewish Nation is responsible for relating everything to him and living our lives for him. Thus, it is at this moment, at the end of the Pesach seder, where we sing all the beautiful songs. This song, Echad Mi Yodea demonstrates how everything in life can and should relate to G d. By reciting each sentence, it brings happiness and a deeper connection to what you are singing.



Being able to have two special nights with your loved ones, celebrating the freedom and happiness of the Jewish people, should reassure us that G-d is always with us. And singing these songs at the end of the seder will only bring us closer to him, our heritage, and our connection together as a whole Jewish Nation.

Kayla Rutner

Southwest NCSY
Dallas, TX

Nirtzah

Nirtzah is the final section of the Passover Haggadah and, in most circumstances, typically marks the end of the seder. Some Sefardic and Mizrahi Jews end their seders with the fourth cup of wine at the end of the Hallel section. Kabbalists will end at that point and then recite Shir HaShirim (the biblical Song of Songs). Most Jews, however, have several traditional songs that essentially make up nirtzah. These songs can be used as an incentive for children to stay up until the conclusion of the seder, since most of them are catchy, repetitive, and easy to sing. Despite being entertaining, these songs also carry teachings about the nature of G-d, Jewish history, and Jewish values.



There is a deeper meaning to nirtzah beyond the singing, lessons, and stories. The word nirtzah, in Hebrew, translates to the English word acceptance. In the Haggadah there is no prayer or passage that explicitly states that the seder has come to its conclusion. Rather, we accept all that we have learned and accomplished, and we move on to the next year, hoping that we have improved enough to spend the next seders in Jerusalem.

This message can also be translated to our mission as a Jewish nation. We should constantly be working on ourselves in order to make this world a better place. Nobody is perfect, so there will never be an ending to our mitzvot and good deeds, and there will always be room for improvement. Rather, we should accept the place where we currently are and take it upon ourselves to try to better this world so that we can move on to the next.

Diana Goldfield

Canada NCSY
Queens University

The Meaning of Pesach

As we all know, the word Pesach translates to “Passover” in English. And as most Jewish children learn in school, it is called Passover because the Angel of Death passed over the houses of the Children of Israel as the tenth plague occurred (the killing of the firstborn). Most of us are so accustomed to this explanation that we never stop to think about the deeper

meaning behind the name. We never stop to ask why the holiday is called Passover, of all things. “Passing over” was just one part of one plague that is not particularly essential to the story. Shouldn’t this occasion be called something like “Exodus” or “Freedom,” given that this is really what the entire holiday is about?

To understand why we would want to use the word Pesach as a name of the holiday, we need to look into the meaning of another word: Mitzrayim, which is the Hebrew word for Egypt. Mi means “from,” and tzar means “narrow” or “tight.” If we put this all together, we can see that Mitzrayim means “from narrow straits,” which, to me, encapsulates what real slavery is. Slavery is when oppression is so binding that a person has no room to live as a full human being. As Rabbi Michael Torop says: “In Judaism, Mitzrayim (Egypt) is a metaphor for every human encounter, not just with oppression or persecution, but any kind of limitation on our freedom, our joy, our sense of well-being. Mitzrayim means the place of restriction, a cramped and narrow place, literally ‘the straits’ through which we must all, at some point, pass” (D’var Torah: Passover, www.dailykos.com).

Extending further is the idea that each of us lives in his or her own Mitzrayim. We all experience our own external or physical “narrow straits,” such as financial or health constraints or, perhaps, personal tragedy. But more than that, we also experience various forms of self-imposed “narrow straits,” ranging from the deep unconscious biases we hold to the more obvious and superficial (e.g., phones, video games, etc.). Therefore, Passover leads us to question the values and attitudes we hold and which hold us to those roles. We want to “pass over” or “transcend” these limitations that we put upon ourselves; to escape from the various forms of “slavery” we trap ourselves with.



Through this, we can see the significance of the meaning of Pesach. In the past, we wanted to leave Mitzrayim, or Egypt, and “pass over” from the literal bindings of slavery, from a place of restriction and “narrow straits” to a place of freedom. But in the present, this is still pertinent as we seek freedom in the body and mind—freedom from the attachments we have to technology, to unhealthy habits, to toxic relationships, and to everything else that weighs us down. In this way, Passover is as relevant today as it was 4000 years ago, and the name Pesach means so much more than just a reference to the tenth plague.

Shoshana Abrebaya

Southern NCSY
University of Central Florida

Rosh on Leaning

The Gemara, in Mesechet Pesachim (108a), discusses the Four Cups of wine. Rav Nachman says that you do have to recline and you don’t have to recline. But does this make any sense: to say the opposite of what to do? Do we recline or do we not recline?

The Gemara comes along and says that there’s no problem because one opinion is talking about the first two cups of wine, and the other is talking about the last two cups, but there is still confusion concerning which cups we actually recline for. For the first two cups of wine, we would recline because we are being freed, but for the last two cups we are already freed. The Gemara says to recline for all four because there are legitimate reasons for both.

A question still lingers through the air: What if you forget to recline? Do you go back and do it again? The Rosh brings down an answer. He says that for the first two you would definitely go back, but for the last two he wasn’t sure. For the last two cups there would be reasons for why you would and wouldn’t go back. On one side it would appear as bal tosef. Bal tosef is a law that prohibits anyone from adding to the Torah, so if you go back and repeat the drinking it would appear as if you are adding another cup (or two!). Another question appears: Why would only the last two cups appear as bal tosef, but not the first two? The answer is that the first two are during a meal, so it would seem as if you were drinking it just for the meal. On the other hand, it wouldn’t appear as bal tosef because everyone at the table would realize that you forgot to recline and they will know you aren’t adding—you are just repeating.



The Ramah then comes along and finalizes the deal by saying you go back for the first two and don’t go back for the last two. But the Shulchan Aruch says that you go back for all four. There seems to be an argument, so who do we follow? Ashkenazim follow the Ramah, and Sefardim follows the Shulchan Aruch. Just remember to recline.

Zach Schwartz

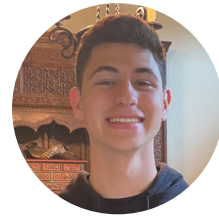
Southwest NCSY
University of Maryland

Darkness and Light

A question that seems to frequently recur in my mind is that if we are the chosen people and we have survived for thousands of years by following Hashem, why do bad things still happen to us? On a more applicable level, all of us Judah Fellows are great people who do amazing things in our lives—maybe a mistake here and there, but nothing so incredibly terrible. Yet we are still subject to the many stresses that life can conjure without any probable cause. Wouldn't people have even more motivation to be great people if they got a break from stress for it?

Like our ancestors in Egypt, we would be slaves if this hypothetical was reality. Everyone would have a clear motivation and no true free will, similar to angels who are only capable of doing the right thing. Life could be reduced to a simple formula: do good and get rewarded. This may be somewhat true in reality, but as we all know, it is much more complicated.

We as human beings are all blessed with the desire to do the wrong thing (the yetzer hara). This can take the form of wanting to cheat on an exam or wanting to eat a cookie when you know you've already had too many. The counterforce to the yetzer hara is the yetzer hatov, which is our desire to do good and sanctify Hashem's name. The catch is, if the yetzer hara did not exist, the yetzer hatov would not exist either, similar to a yin-yang relationship. Without the darkness there is no light, and vice-versa.



Judaism's version of the yin-yang is, in fact, the matzah. The matzah came about in a very crucial time of transition, when our ancestors were finally escaping after 400 years of bondage in Egypt. Among the many things matzah represents, it pertains to a time of perfect balance in between a state of slavery and freedom. If there is no concept of slavery, there is no concept of freedom. Matzah is meant to remind us that, even though no one is immune to the darkness life can sometimes bring, there would be no light at the end of the tunnel without the darkness.

In conclusion, we can't explain Hashem's ways. But the matzah gives us the insight that if negative must exist, positive prevails just as strong.

Dori Jezmir

Midwest NCSY
University of Kansas

Freedom

What does the concept of freedom mean to you? The Oxford dictionary's definitions are "the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint," or "absence of subjection to foreign domination or despotic government," or "the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved." That makes sense, right? We are currently reading the book of Exodus, which describes the story and process of the Jewish people being subjected to slavery and their journey to freedom, with the bravery of Moses, who fought for us.

But, is that all Moses was fighting for? Well, I find freedom in all of these definitions, but it does not take away from responsibility and obligation. Most people know the story of Passover—of Moses going to Pharaoh and demanding (in G-d's words to them), "Let My people go." But, this is an abbreviated version of the verse, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me" (Exodus 9:1).



Yes, G-d was trying to free His people from oppression, but this was not His only objective. Having freedom means that you have an abundance of opportunity, but it does not take away from having responsibly. Our responsibility, with the freedom G-d has provided us and fought for the Jewish people to have, is to serve Him.

The message we can learn and take away from the story of the Exodus is that true freedom is achieved with having many responsibilities and opportunities. G-d gave us the freedom we longed for, and we, as the chosen people, should take advantage of this privilege by serving G-d.

Juju Holzager
New Jersey NCSY
Rutgers University

Chag HaAviv

Passover has a lesser known name, Chag HaAviv, or “holiday of the Spring[time]” in Hebrew.

In the Spring, life returns and there are new beginnings after a period of harsh weather. In the same way we see the seasons change our surroundings from bare to fruitful, the holiday tells the story of the Jews passing through a metaphorical Winter to a time of light, color, and prosperity.

Our time in Egypt acted as our Winter, limiting our religious, social, educational, financial, and overall life experiences. The proof of this connection lies in Pharaoh suffering through the literal storm of fire enwrapped in hail. Of course, the ten plagues eventually finish raining down on Egypt, and Moses is finally able to lead his people to their new beginnings. In traveling to the land of Canaan, the Jews are able to flourish in a more supportive community. Instead of becoming slaves, Moses watches the next generation of children grow and prosper without the whips and chains their parents were raised in.

For the upcoming holiday and for the Spring, consider some new beginnings for yourself. Enjoy the nice weather. You're no longer bound by the bulky fluff of your winter jacket or the snow pile that blocks your car in.

G-d gave us the freedom to celebrate our religious holidays and the ability to escape darker times. We continue to look forward to the future and build on the foundation the Canaanites provided for us.



Max Gutnik
Atlantic Seaboard NCSY
Jefferson University

The Seder Recipe

Generations of people create our history, and these people are what makes each story unique. When looking at a mother teaching her son or daughter how to cook, that child will forever know that specific recipe or recipes.

Now to some, that might not mean anything. To others, they recognize that it's a story, a history, and a background all in one. It's not just a recipe, it's a fundamental element connecting the family to previous generations. It's a story that is passed down each and every time it is told. It is a storyline to a family and its values. It is a symbol of joy, remembrance, and connection to one's culture.

Each recipe has a story, whether it be happy, sad, or silly. These stories are passed down in each generation, and they connect us to who we are.

On this Passover and every other Passover, it is important to hear the story of our Exodus and be reminded of our purpose, value, and uniqueness here on earth. Hearing this does not only reassemble a bond with one's family, but a bond with our Jewish faith. It is one of many things that bring us together and will forever keep the Jewish people united as one.

So on this Passover, and for future ones to come, we embrace the ingredients and recipes of the seder to continue telling our story for generations to come. Be forever grateful for the priceless gift you have been given.



Dennis Vink

New Jersey NCSY
Stevens Institute of Technology

The Passover Haftarah

In Jewish history there is always a pernicious force threatening the Jewish people. Whether it be the time of the Exodus or the time of the evil regime of the Nazis, we are faced with a strong push to separate and splinter at the seams of our bonds. However, all of these negative forces create stronger bonds and identity of the Jewish people. In the haftarah, the prophet foreshadows the messianic times to come, a time of all exiled Jews coming together in the Holy Land. The haftarah further mentions how Judah and Ephraim will join together to defeat our historic enemies. This prophetic talk of facing our evil forces and coming together as a people is what happens time after time in our long history, bringing our people closer to today's time, in which Israel is well established and respected by the world and its leaders. We still have evil forces around us, whether that be anti-semitism or dangerous actors surrounding Israel constantly attacking our Holy Land. As a college student, anti-semitism is a strong force I feel on campus and in my life online. We can all learn from this haftarah and join together to combat these negative forces. That's what we do, day in and day out, acting together as a Jewish fellowship to enlighten those around us and strengthen those bonds: bonds that are tested time and time again throughout our history. It makes me think that—though we are a minority—when we come together, our influence on the world is great. Going into the future, we will continue to have enemies. And what we can continue to do is stay strong together. If we stay connected to each other, we stay strong together.



Matt Friedman

Central East NCSY
Arizona State University, Tempe

Why Do We Have Two Passover Seders in the Diaspora?

As Pesach is coming around again, I have the same question I have almost every year: It's 2022. Why do we still have two seders in the Diaspora? If you didn't already know, in Israel it is only required to observe one Passover seder; but anywhere else, we are taught to observe two. The reasoning behind this is that the Jewish calendar is lunar, meaning that it is based on the twenty-nine-day cycle of the moon. Over 2000 years ago, the Sanhedrin (Ancient Jewish court) would need witnesses in Jerusalem to see the full moon, in order to officially declare a holiday. It took time for the news to spread to cities and countries outside of the area. To ensure that the holidays were celebrated on the correct day, Jewish people outside of Israel would celebrate an extra day to ensure that at least one of the days that they were celebrating was correct.



That was thousands of years ago, though. We now have a fixed calendar and ways of communication. We don't need an extra day to ensure that we are celebrating correctly: we just have to look at the date on the calendar. So the question is raised again: Why do we still have two seders in the Diaspora?

There are a few answers. The first is that we are instructed to do so in the Talmud. In Beitzah 4b, it is written to "Be careful to keep the customs of your forefathers, and keep two days of the festival, for someday, the government may promulgate a decree, and you will come to err." While we have advancements and technologies today, we are meant to follow the Talmud's teachings and learn from it.

The other reason is to serve as a reminder to yourself that you are in the Diaspora. The story of Passover is a story of prosperity and of finally being freed from a land that is not ours. The Jewish people were slaves in the land of Egypt, but fought to be brought back to their homeland, the Land of Israel. Hashem gave the Jewish people the Land of Israel in order to dwell there and to be connected to Him. Now it is thousands of years later, and we find ourselves in the same predicament; some of us are away from our homeland and aren't able to celebrate the chagim in the holy place where they are meant to be celebrated. The Jewish people in the Diaspora need a second day in order to equal the holiness that those in Israel experience in just one day, and the second seder is a reminder that while we are thankful that we are able to live comfortably where we are, we still have that connection to Israel.



לשנה הבאה בירושלים