

# GASHMIUS



5784

HAGGADAH  
COMPANION





# Introduction

Welcome to the first Gashmius Haggadah Companion. Inside you'll find a selection of Jewish sources – classical and contemporary, from a wide variety of Hasidic and other Jewish traditions – that we've selected in the hopes of adding meaning to your seder this year. Besides the primary sources, most of the other content for this release comes from the growing community of artists and writers who have previously contributed to Gashmius Magazine. Though you should, of course, feel free to interact with these diverse sources in whatever ways you see fit, we are imagining that the shorter readings here can be helpful additions to your actual seder — deepening and enriching the traditional haggadah, while spurring new questions and ideas — and the longer pieces might stimulate deeper reflections around the values of Passover in the modern world that will reverberate even after seder night.

In this holiday of liberation, we hope and pray that these sources can help us all to find freedom from our own personal Egypts, and that our journeys out of bondage can play a small part in the redemption of this beautiful and broken world.

-Gwynn, Danny, Jonah and Eva



Henry Rosenberg

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# Beginnings

## Setting the Table

*R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczner was an innovative 20th century Hasidic thinker who founded one of the largest yeshivot in interwar Warsaw. The following excerpt comes from a book he published in 1932 to support his youngest students' spiritual development.*

### *Chovas HaTalmidim, Introduction.*

והנער שמתרגש בליל פסח מנקיון החדר, מן רבי הנרות, ומן השלחן המסדר יפה, גם כן טוב הוא, כי גופו מתרגש מזה ונפשו פנימה מבצבצת ומתרגשת באמירת ההגדה לאמרה מעט בהתלהבות לד' אף שאינו יודע מה זה ועל מה זה.

...And it is also good for a child to be excited on the night of Passover [merely] by the cleaning of the room, the many candles, and the beautifully arranged table. Since their body is excited from it, even if they don't know what is going on, their inner spirit [will] bubble up and [also be] excited by the reading of the Haggadah — even if they say it with only a small fervor for G-d.



We have all been — and in some ways will always remain — this child, stumbling over an archaic liturgy, wondering how and why anyone finds it meaningful. When you find yourself in this situation, consider this text from Rabbi Shapira to be granting you permission to embrace this moment of incomprehension. There's nothing wrong with having no clue what's going on. As you're setting the stage for this experience, take a moment to pause and look around you — what are some tactile pleasures you can find in the rituals and settings of the seder itself?

What are some embodied, sensory experiences you can tap into— the smell of herbs, the taste of saltwater, the crunch of matzah, the glow of candles— to ground yourself in the simple, holy delights of bodily experience?



# Beginnings

## Sensing God's Presence

*This is a radical Talmudic re-reading of the beginning of the Exodus story. In defiance of the Pharaoh's order to kill all Israelite boys, Moses' mother has hidden her newborn son for as long as she can. Now she places him in a basket on the Nile river, praying for his redemption. His older sister, Miriam, watches from the banks of the river to see what will happen...*

### Sotah 11a

"וַתֵּצֵב אֶחָתוֹ מֵרְחוֹק", אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: פְּסוּק זֶה כּוּלּוֹ עַל שֵׁם שְׂכִינָה נֹאמֵר: "וַתֵּצֵב" — דְּקָתִיב: "וַיָּבֵא ה' וַיִּתְיַצֵּב וְגו'". "אֶחָתוֹ" — דְּקָתִיב: "אָמַר לְהַקְדָּמָה אֶחָתִי אֶת". "מֵרְחוֹק" — דְּקָתִיב: "מֵרְחוֹק ה' נִרְאָה לִי".

With regard to Miriam's deed the verse states: "And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him." (Exodus 2:4) Rabbi Yitzhak says: each phrase of this verse alludes to the Shekhinah watching over Moses. For example, "And his sister stood" is connected to the verse "And the Lord came and stood" (I Samuel 3:10) ...



This Talmudic passage reads Miriam as a literal embodiment of the Divine Presence: when Miriam follows her brother along the riverbank, she is the Shekhinah (the feminine indwelling presence of God) watching over him, just like the Shekhinah follows Israel into exile and watches over us.

What does it feel like to imagine the Divine Feminine watching over us like an older sibling?

Have you ever had an experience in which the care of a human being felt like the care of God?

# Urchatz/First Washing

*Meditation by R. Jill Hammer*

Like Moses in the Nile  
We float on the great waters.  
Like Pharaoh's daughter,  
We bathe in the river of life.  
Like Miriam in the reeds,  
We wait for a sign.



# Karpas

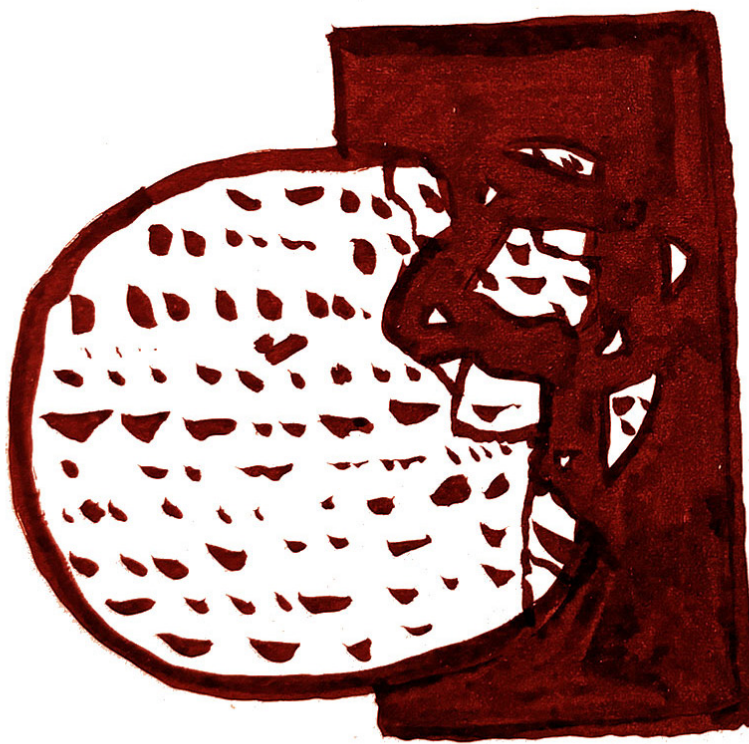


*Saltwater* by Hannah Altman

# Yachatz

*R. Itche Meir Morgenstern is a contemporary Hasidic rebbe living in Jerusalem.*

“**Yachatz**– the breaking of the matzah... is the opening of the doors. We open the door so that the Creator can come and enter into our dwelling-places, even into our darkest and lowest moments and places.”



Discussion Prompts:

What are some dark and low moments you have felt since last Passover?

Looking back on them, can you see any aspect of divinity, any presence of the Creator, however tiny or fleeting, in those difficult experiences?

What are some ways that you can choose to intentionally open the door to the Creator in your dark and low moments?



# Maggid

## Liberation Beyond Binaries

*Vort by R. Jericho Vincent*

Every year in the Passover seder, in the traditional liturgy, we say

הַשָּׂמָא עֲבָדֵי, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין

“This year we are slaves, may we be free next year,” and then at another point in the seder we say

לְפִיכָךְ אֲנַחְנוּ תְּיָבִים לְהוֹדוֹת... הוֹצִיאָנוּ מֵעֲבָדוֹת לְחֵירוֹת

“We are obligated to give thanks to the Divine because they freed us from slavery.”

So which is it?

Are we free or are we slaves?

The truth is, it's not a binary.

Even when we've been freed, there are parts of us that still remain trapped in slavery, trapped in the most traumatic and painful moments in our lives, and we continuously have to do the work of locating those parts of ourselves and helping them move towards liberation.

And even when we are enslaved, in the worst seasons of our lives, the most traumatic, the most painful, even then, there are always moments of true freedom waiting for us to find them.

*Ken teheye ritzona*

May it be so.

# Maggid

## Four Questions

### Three Answers

(To Four Questions)

*Poem by R. Mark Elber*

Tonight, around a table of surprise quests  
there is one vacant seat  
there are ghost-white hard-boiled eggs, potatoes that invoke the fields of Poland

a seared shank bone, the too familiar taste of salt water  
song to soften the silence –  
a table green with celery, an evening filling with night

and what does my mother see?  
the empty seat across from her, the years it was filled  
the unleavenedness of the bread, Elijah's cup always unsipped

and the Seder is built around questions –  
what is more bitter than unexpected death? why is God blind  
to the blood on the doorposts?  
when will the lamb cease being sacrificed?

and I cannot let my people go  
I cannot stop uprising and uprising  
for I am Warsaw and Vilna and the teenaged orphan painting out of memory  
voiceless screams on a smuggled scrap of paper

and I am plagued  
by those who think we've said enough – it's over, it's history, it never happened  
and I say no, because after millennia in one wilderness or another, the goat will outlive  
even the angel of death

and so I say yes to the stalks of young wheat yellowing under the April sun  
I say yes and water the seedling whose fruit will never sweeten my throat  
and on this full-mooned night, I open the door and say yes,  
yes to the intoxicating spring





Henry Rosenberg



# Maggid

## Four Children

*This is another source from Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczner, this time from a selection of sermons that were discovered and published posthumously.*

### *Esh Kodesh, Pesach 1941.*

ולפי מצבנו אפ"ל כי נודע הדיוק במפרשי ההגדה הא שאותו הפסוק שמרומז בו התשובה לכן הרשע מרומז בו לשאינו יודע לשאול בעבור זה עשה ד' לי בצאתי ממצרים,

וא"כ למה דורשין בהרשע לי ולא לו [ולא בשאינו יודע לשאול].

אבל איש הישראלי אינו פרטי לעצמו, רק לכל הכלל ישראל הוא שייר, כשאחד לומד תורה ועובד את ד' אז מאיר בזה לכל ישראל, ויחיד ששב מוחלין לו ולכל העולם כלו כמ"ש בגמרא (יומא דף פ"ו ע"ב), לכן כשאומרים לשאינו יודע לשאול "לי", אז הוא גם לו, משא"כ להרשע שהוציא א"ע מן הכלל אז נעשה לי ולא לו, ואפשר שזהו גם עניו הקהה את שיניו, כי איתא במס' ב"ק כ"ז ע"ב בן בג בג אומר אל תכנס לחצר חבירך ליטול את שלך שלא ברשות, שמא תראה עליו כגנב אלא שבור את שיניו ואמור לו שלי אני נוטל, ופרש"י שבור את שיניו, כלומר קח בחזקה, שרואין בזה שכדי ליטול את שלו מיד חבירו אומרת הגמרא לשון שבירת השניים, וזה הקהה את שיניו שהוא הי' יכול ליקח את חלק שלו ממך בחזקה, כיון שגם בעבודתך יש לו חלק שלו, וכיון שהוציא א"ע מן הכלל, לכן כנגד זה הקהה את שיניו וכו' עשה אתה להיפך והחזק בשלו אשר תחת ידך, ואמור לו לי ולא לו.

A well-known question comes up in many commentaries on the Haggadah. Every child of the Four Children has a quotation from the Torah addressed to them. But both the Wicked Child and the Child Who Does Not Know How to Ask receive the same verse: "It is because of this, that God did for me, when I came out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:8)

This raises the question: Why do we say, when commenting on this for the Wicked Child, "God did for me," — suggesting an exclusion, me and not for them — while in commenting on the same verse for the Child Who Does Not Know How to Ask, we do not suggest any exclusion.

No Jewish person is a separate entity unto themselves. Every Jew is part of the whole community of Jewish people. Therefore, when somebody studies Torah and prays, they illuminate all Jewish people. And we learn in the Talmud (Yoma 86b): "On account of an individual who repents, the sins of the entire world are forgiven." Because of this, we say to the Child Who Does Not Know How to Ask that "God did this for me," which includes this child. But this is not for the Wicked Child, who has separated himself from the community.

#### Discussion Prompts:

How can the same statement be inviting to one person, and alienating to another?

Have you ever been in a situation where those around you were drawn in by something, but you were repulsed? How did that feel? What about the opposite? How did that feel?

# Maggid

## Plagues

*R. Aharon Shmuel Tamares was a 19th-20th century Lithuanian orthodox rabbi and anarcho-pacifist. Disillusioned by the Zionist movement that he originally supported, he spent his time writing political essays in the woods around the small city of Milejczyce, where he served as rabbi.*

*We are grateful to Dr. Shaul Magid for his translation of this section of Tamares' 1906 essay "Herut."*

### **R. Aharon Schmuel Tamares, "On Vengeance and Becoming the Aggressor"**

All of [the story of the Exodus] can be used to explain the final plague in Egypt, in which God executes death [to the first born of Egypt]. This judgment was deployed by Godself as the Haggadah explains "I passed over the night, I, and not an emissary." This seems odd as God could have enabled the Israelites to wreak vengeance on the Egyptians. However, God did not want to even show the Israelites how to use the power of the fist, even in a moment of defending themselves against the evil ones. This is because at that moment, while they would indeed be defending themselves against the aggressors, in the end they would have become aggressors.

Therefore, God took great pains in order that the Israelites not enact any vengeance against the evil ones— so much so that God prohibited them from even witnessing it. Thus this act was deployed "in the middle of the night" in the darkest hour of the night. God also warned the Israelites not to leave their houses all in order to separate them from this destructive act, even to witness it passively.

We can now explain the [Talmudic teaching] on the verse, "And all of you should not leave your houses until the morning." (Ex 12:22) R. Yosef taught that, since permission was given to kill, "there are no distinctions [between the good and the evil]." This seems to contradict what is written in the Passover Haggadah, "I [will kill the firstborn], Me and not an emissary."

How can the [Talmud] say that since permission was given to kill, there are no distinctions [between the good and the evil]? [That is, if God is doing the killing, certainly God can distinguish between good and evil.]

...Thus, we can explain R. Yosef: in fact, God did so in order to not enable the violence that is within Israel to be released. Because once that violence is released there is no longer the ability to distinguish between the righteous (the innocent) and the evil (the guilty), and the one who is the defender (the recipient of violence) will become the aggressor (the perpetrator of violence).

"And all of you should not leave your houses until the morning" (Ex 12:22) ... that you should not become the Destroyer. This means that by distancing oneself from participating in the vengeance against Egypt one is prevented from unleashing the Destroyer (violence) that is within you.

#### Discussion Prompts:

Have you ever felt yourself, in an argument or conflict, turning from a defensive to an offensive position? What are the risks of that transition? How did you justify or understand it?

How does this reading of the plagues affect your understanding of the lessons of Passover in general?









*Wild Beasts Plague* by Rosabel Rosalind



# Motzi Matzah

*R. Menahem Nahum Twersky of Chernobyl was an 18th century Hasidic master. The forebear of all Ukrainian Hasidism, he was one of the only students of both the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid of Mezeritch.*

## *Me'or Enayim, Parshat Tzav*

דהקדושה נקרא בשם מצה והקליפה נקרא בשם חמץ  
ואין חילוק ביניהם רק המשהו שבין חי"ת לה"א והנה  
חי"ת ...

והענין הוא דזה אינו מצוי שהיצר הרע יסיתנו לעבירה  
ידועה כי מי ישמע לו רק שמראה לו שהוא מצוה  
ומחליף לו בין חי"ת לה"א

וזהו שאמרו רז"ל הבא ליטהר מסייעין אותו והבא  
ליטמא פותחין לו ולכאורה אינו מובן הבא ליטמא  
פותחין לו שמשמע שעושין לו דבר שיוכל ליטמא ואם  
כן הרי מסייעין אותו

אבל הפירוש הוא להיפך הבא לטמא שהיצר הרע  
מראה לו שהוא מצוה ומחליף לו בין חי"ת לה"א  
פותחין לו ומראין לו שה"א צריך להיות פתוח למעלה:

Holiness is represented by "Matzah" (מצה) and evil is represented by "hametz" (חמץ— "leaven"). The only difference between the two words is [the little space that is the difference] between a het (ח) and a heh (ה)...

The evil inclination can't convince us to do a known sin, because who would listen to that? It therefore makes the sin appear as if it's a mitzvah, which is the difference between the het (ח) and the heh (ה).

And this is what our rabbis meant when they said "if a person seeks purity, they are aided. But if a person seeks defilement, the path is opened for them." (BT Shabbat 104a) This appears difficult to understand: why is "the path is opened for them" since they are going to do something to defile themselves? If this is true, aren't they being aided?

But the explanation is the opposite: "the path is opened" for one who "seeks defilement" [who is only acting that way because the evil inclination made it appear as a mitzvah by switching the the het (ח) and the heh (ה)] through being shown that the top [of the letter] needs to be opened [to reform] a heh (ה).

### Discussion Prompts:

If hametz represents evil, why do you think we spend all year eating it, and only designate seven days a year to eat matzah, representing holiness?

What is a time when you thought you were doing matzah, but realized it was hametz?

What might it mean in your life to "let the light in" by opening the het into a heh?







Henry Rosenberg



# Maror

*Uziel Meizels was a student of the Maggid of Mezeritch and one of the forebearers of Polish Hasidism.*

## *Tiferet Uziel*

### **מצה שאנו אוכלים זה...**

והקשו על מה נקט מצה קודם מרור, הא מתחילה מרור הוא זכר גלות שמררו חייהם, ואחר כך היא מצה זכר לגאולה שלא הספיק [בצקם על אבותינו להחמיץ]. ויש שגרסו להיפך – מרור קודם מצה

ונראה שגירסתנו הוא נכונה. שידוע שאם אדם עובד עבודת פרך אינו מרגיש שבירת אבריו, וכשנח מעבודתו אז הוא מרגיש שבירת אבריו.

והדוגמא היא כן כשישראל היו במצרים והיו עובדין עבודת פרך, לא היו מרגישים שבירת אבריהם וצער של עבודתם שהיו עובדים וומם ולילה ולא היו נחים כלל. וכשיצאו מעבודת הפרך שהיו עובדין, אז הרגישו את שבירת אבריהם וצער עבודתם.

וזה הרמז שמסדר בעל ההגדה: מצה ואחר כך מרור זה...

#### Discussion Prompts:

Have you ever been in a painful situation that you couldn't allow yourself to feel while it was occurring?

What happened when you were finally able to rest and experience what you had been suppressing?

### **This Matzah that we eat... these bitter herbs... (Passover Haggadah)**

Why is matzah explained before maror [in the Haggadah]? First, the bitter herbs recall the bitter life of exile, and after that the matzah recalls the redemption. So, shouldn't the order be reversed and maror explained before matzah? In fact, there are other versions [of the Haggadah] that have the bitter herbs preceding the matzah!

But it appears that our version is correct. For, it is known that when a person is in the midst of their forced labor, they can't sense their brokenness. And only when they can finally rest from their labor are they able to feel their brokenness.

While Israel was in forced labor in Egypt, they couldn't feel the brokenness and sadness of their labor. They were working day and night without any rest. Only when they were brought out of their forced labor did they finally sense their own brokenness and sadness.

And this is why the arranger of the Haggadah put Matzah before Maror: [because only after they had already been freed could they actually let themselves feel their pain.]



# Korech

## What Is the Exodus that God Desires?

*Essay By Aron Wander*

“As a remembrance of the Temple,” [1] we say in the middle of the seder as we eat marror wedged between two pieces of matzah, imitating Hillel the Elder’s ancient practice. Unlike us, though, Hillel would include a piece of the Pesach sacrifice offered up at the Temple in his sandwich. But since the destruction of the Temple, we have not been able to offer such a sacrifice. Without the roasted meat, what we are left with from Hillel’s tradition is the bitterness of marror. The sandwich that once celebrated a successful Pesach offering now serves instead as a reminder of the Jewish people’s many exiles.

But perhaps there is another, more subtle relationship between the Temple and Passover. The Talmud teaches that the First Temple was destroyed because of idolatry, sexual violence, and bloodshed: with total disregard for laws and norms, people gave themselves over to their basest and most vile desires. [2] “[King] Manesseh put so many innocent persons to death that he filled Jerusalem [with blood] from end to end” (2 Kings 21:16), the Rabbis remind us.

By contrast, the Second Temple, Rabbi Yohanan says cryptically, was destroyed because its judges “judged according to the laws of the Torah.” [3] But how could judging by the laws of the Torah be a sin? “Should they have instead judged by the ‘laws’ of thievery?,” [4] the Talmud wonders aloud. It concludes that what Rabbi Yohanan meant was that judges only judged according to the Torah, and refused to go beyond the letter of the law.

It is tempting to read this passage as a merely polemical claim that failing to go beyond a strict interpretation of the law is as terrible as idolatry, sexual violence, and bloodshed. [5] Maybe, though, Rabbi Yohanan was suggesting a more direct and radical parallel: that while the First Temple was destroyed because of wickedness in violation of the Torah, the Second Temple was destroyed because the Torah was twisted to legitimate such wickedness, to permit “villainy within the bounds of Torah.” [6] Perhaps the Torah itself was used to authorize those very sins for which the First Temple was destroyed, and the judges who did not “go beyond the letter of the law” were those who responded to such grotesque violence by merely saying, “What is there to condemn? The law hasn’t been broken!”

It was such potential abuses of the Torah that Aharon Shmuel Tamares, a 19th-20th century Lithuanian orthodox rabbi and anarcho-pacifist, had in mind when he warned that those seeking to legitimate domination might “snatch the ‘Torah,’ stick it in [their] coat[s], and turn the Torah itself into an instrument of destruction.” [7] Tamares was aware that the Torah was liable to be abused for the same purposes any other idea or technology might be – power and domination – and that it could as easily be an elixir of death as of life. [8]

What guarantee could there be against the Torah being put to such ends? In Tamares’ understanding, it is the Exodus that belies any such attempt:



The vision of punishments that God exacted from the Egyptians, those wicked false ones; the vigorous protest God demonstrated before the eyes of the entire world against the awful lie of the domination of one person by another, through blood, fire, and pillars of smoke [during the Ten Plagues] — [this] was the best possible introduction to the giving of the Torah, ensuring that scoundrels not snatch the Torah in order to use it to jump on the heads of their fellows and shove their dignity in the dust. [9]

God's unequivocal opposition to Egyptian domination is the prism through which all of the Torah must be read; it is both Torah's foundation and that which lies "beyond its letter." Only a Judaism whose starting premise is the idea that "the domination of one person by another" is an "awful lie" can secure the Torah against those who would make it "an instrument of destruction." For Tamares, the first commandment — "I am YHVH your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2) is not to be read as the debt by virtue of which the commandments must be accepted, but rather as the spirit with which they must be imbued. [10] All of Torah must be understood in light of God's commitment to liberation.

At the same time, Tamares is careful to emphasize that God's violence does not legitimate, but rather precludes, human violence. Only God can use violence to end domination without thereby replicating domination. Humans who attempt to do so only perpetuate the systems they seek to undo. This is the very reason that God punishes the Egyptians Godself rather than allowing the Israelites to engage in violence; otherwise "the manner of the fist would have spread throughout the world, and they [the Israelites] would have gone from defenders to pursuers." [11]

There is no doubt that Tamares would have therefore unambiguously condemned Hamas' horrific massacre on October 7th. A true Exodus, for Tamares, cannot be brought about through human violence, let alone the wanton killing of civilians. But it is just as clear that he would have adamantly condemned Israel's Pharaoh-like response: killing more than 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza, the vast majority of them civilians, destroying most of Gaza's buildings, and displacing more than a million Palestinians, all while willfully ignoring the Israeli settlers (often hand-in-hand with soldiers) ethnically cleansing the West Bank.

Of course, the violence in Israel/Palestine did not begin on October 7th: from the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948 (known to Palestinians as the Nakba — "catastrophe"), through the military rule over Palestinians within Israel's borders, the occupation, and the blockade of Gaza, domination of Palestinians has been critical to Israel's ability to establish a Jewish-majority state in a land with a Palestinian majority. "Lest they multiply" (Ex. 1:10), the threat by which Pharaoh convinces his people to enslave the Israelites, has ever been the watchword of statist Zionism and every other ethnonationalist movement, for whom minorities are always a "demographic threat."

Tamares would not only have been horrified by the extent of such violence; he would also have been heartbroken and enraged by the ways in which the Torah and the rabbinic tradition have been conscripted to provide legitimacy for it. What greater betrayal of the Exodus could there be than enlisting the Torah in the service of Pharaonic oppression instead of divine liberation? Even the actual description of the Exodus itself has not been safe from such abuses. As the Palestinian liberation theologian Naim Ateek writes, "The events of the biblical Exodus from Egypt... have been transposed by many Jewish religious Zionists and Christian fundamentalists into the twentieth century... [such that] Palestinians appear to represent the old Canaanites who were in the land at the time and who at God's command needed to be

dispossessed.” [12] What more wicked turning of the Torah into “an instrument of destruction” could one imagine?

But Tamares surely would have been disturbed by a more subtle betrayal, too: those who do not recruit the Torah to serve domination but simply detach it from the Exodus’s commitment to liberty. How many *shiurim*, *divrei Torah*, and lectures have there been in the past five months that have spoken about Jews’ moral mission, the ethical debates of Talmud and halacha, or “Jewish values” without once addressing the immoral horror being perpetrated by the Jewish state in the name of (and with the backing of) a significant portion of the Jewish people? This, too, is a refusal to go beyond the letter of the law, for it makes Jewish moral discourse into a mere abstraction, dead letters with no relation to the living Jewish body politic. Can one imagine the Biblical Prophets waxing poetic about justice and liberty without addressing the corruption of the society around them? Most dangerously, a moral discourse that does not address the actions of its actual subjects implicitly accedes to them. What begins with abandoning the Exodus inevitably becomes condoning Pharaoh.

None of this, to be sure, is unique to the question of Israel’s domination of Palestinians or to Jews. As Tamares himself noted, it is in the nature of oppressive systems to recruit any and all justifications they can — particularly religious ones. [13] Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and every other faith have served (or are currently serving) domineering ends, and each has had philosophers who have insisted on discussing their religion’s “morality” while ignoring the violent ends towards which they have often been used. To the degree that Judaism had avoided such pitfalls, it was simply because, since the destruction of the Second Temple, we had lacked the ability to make the Torah and its laws into an instrument for justifying violence. [14] As Yehuda HaLevi, a leading Jewish medieval philosopher, imagined a foreign king saying to a rabbi, “Your submissiveness is merely imposed upon you. Once you have the ability, you will kill, too.” [15]

The Jewish mystical tradition speaks of the severing of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil from the Tree of Life as the fundamental human sin that, since Adam, humans have committed again and again. [16] Perhaps it refers to this fundamental disposition of those with power to divorce their supposed moral frameworks (“knowledge of good and evil”) from a grounding in liberation (“life”) — a tendency of which the cleaving of the Exodus from the Torah is only one particular manifestation. [17] According to the Kabbalists, such a severing not only harms humanity but also causes a rift within God too, sending parts of God into exile.

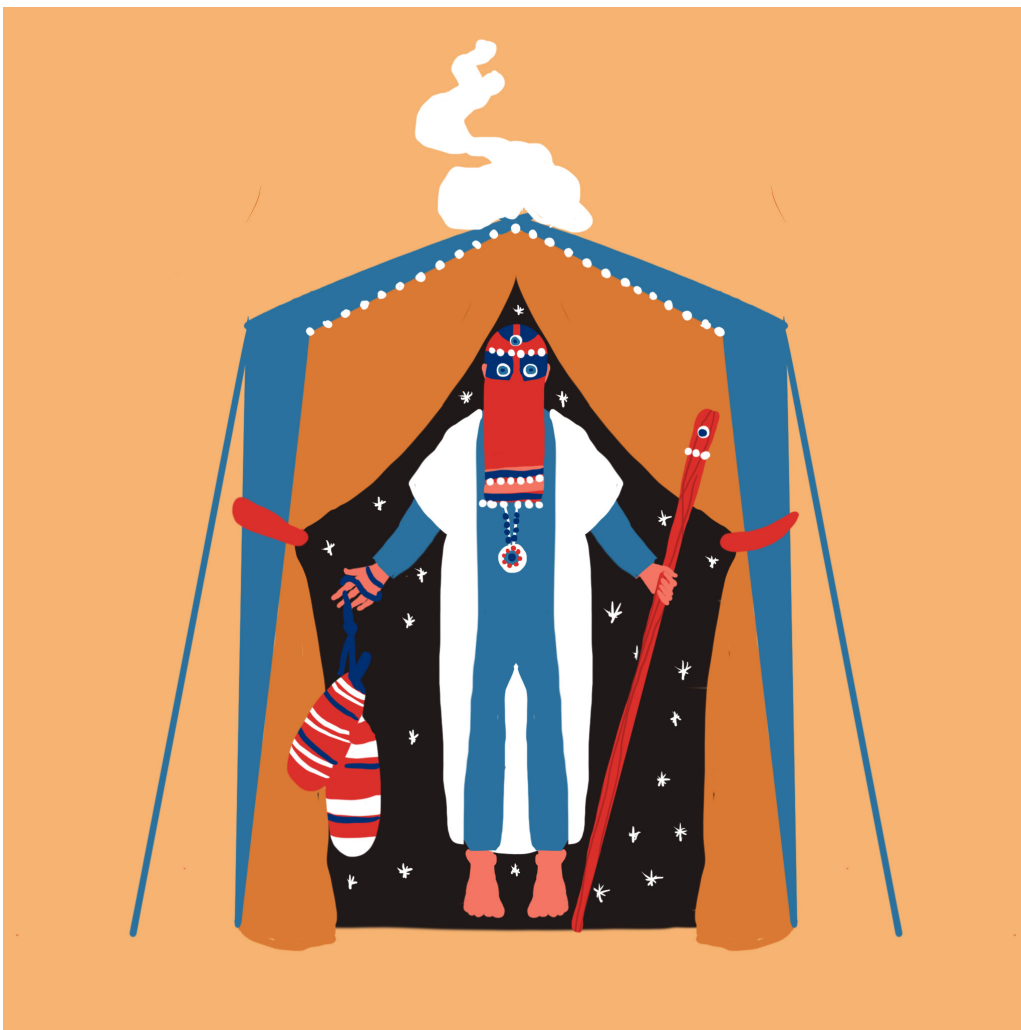
For the Kabbalists, the Jewish people’s own exile was not simply a punishment but rather a task: to find those broken pieces of God and return them to their source. [18] In exile, suffering the violence of empire after empire, the Jewish people knew all too well the consequences of cutting the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil from the Tree of Life and the urgency of a new world order that would rejoin the two, repairing both humanity and God. What terrible irony and sin lie in the fact that in trying to end our own exile, we forced Palestinians into one of their own, severing the two Trees from one another once more. In leaving exile without bringing God with us, we only contributed to God’s brokenness. Now God is suffocating under the rubble of Khan Younis, scraping an empty bowl in Rafah, wailing over the bodies of his parents in Gaza City.

Naim Ateek, writing as a Palestinian Christian, states:

[The Exodus] will be reclaimed eventually when Palestinians enjoy their own exodus

and return to their homeland. But my hope is that their exodus and return will not result in conquest, oppression, or dispossession... it is my hope that Palestinians will return to share the land of Israel-Palestine. This is the kind of return that is willed by the... God of justice, mercy, and peace. [19]

Only when the occupation and domination of Palestinians comes to an end, when they have their own Exodus back to Israel/Palestine, might the rift between the Exodus and the Torah begin to heal. Only when this land is shared, whatever form that might take, [20] might it be the first flowering of redemption. And only then might we join Palestinians in bringing God out of exile, too.



*Moses by Jay Smith*





# Beirach

## Elijah at the Seder

*Poem by Judith Baumel*

I'm thinking about what Elijah has to do with themes of our seders.

Captivity/Freedom. Wandering/Home. Redemption/The Final Redemption of Messianic Days.

A few days before we sit down to the seder, on Shabbat ha Gadol we hear in Malachi "Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the Lord."

When Elijah arrives at our seder he gives us a taste of the world to come. My Hebrew School teachers dismissed my childish, technical worries about bodily integrity, what kind of place we'd be in and who would be there. Sometimes I managed to imagine that Snow White, my grandmother's blue and white parakeet would be in the world to come and that it will be a bit like the Land of Cockaigne. Then I'd wonder how I would recognize my relatives if we all came back as young people. And what about those who were not buried with earth from Palestine upon their eyes? In City of God Augustine solves for bodily resurrection by assigning every saved person the age that Christ was when he died. Yes, Augustine sees God as the ultimate AI aging filter for those who die young.

No matter what mood my imagination inhabits, I've understood that Elijah represents the shape and technicality of our individual as well as collective hopes.

These days fears and hopes crowd my head, fuel my all-night doom-scrolling and WhatsApp conversations, toss me toggling through three kinds of Elijah-hope.

Option One: Elijah brings those in exile to a safe home.

Once Upon a Time, The Hebrew Standard published a Passover column in which the author detailed "the menu of the Jewish religious banquet. [It] is: dry matzoh, bitter herbs, eggs with salt water, wine, fish and soup. The eggs in salt water symbolize that we are rolling in the ocean of life, not knowing the why. The bitter herbs remind us of the bitter pills which our brethren and sisters are swallowing right now in Morocco and in 'darkest Russia.'"

The author of the piece wrote in English in New York City in 1908 having lived most of his life in exile. The author is my grandfather's cousin. Naphtali Herz Imber. If you recognize his name it is because he is the poet of "Hatikvah." Imber wrote the poem as a teenager in Zloczow, then within the Hapsburg province of Galicia. Zloczow was Polish when my father was born there and now it is part of Ukraine. Imber won a prize for the poem he called "Tikvoseynu" and with the prize money set out to make his way in the world. He spent time in Eastern Europe, Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, London and eventually the US. His poetry was an early part of the revival of Hebrew as a national language.



Imber's life overlapped, barely, with that of Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian national poet who also worked to build a literary language in service of a national movement. It's clear to me that Imber was influenced by Shevchenko as well as by the Torah.

I'm thinking about my many Ukrainian friends who have spent the last two years in various kinds of wandering and longing. They are singing their national anthem, "The Glory and Freedom of Ukraine Has Not Perished" (sounds a bit like עוֹד לֹא אֲבָדָה תְּקוּתָנוּ, our hope is not yet lost). My friends sing this song as they suffer freezing weather, daily blackouts and bombing sirens, internal exile and exile throughout the world. They sing it on battlefields and in cemeteries burying their children. A recent poem by Ukrainian Jewish poet Alex Averbuch seems to speak directly to the prophet Malachi.

"How do you return to a town which does not exist  
when you are looking for space  
amidst the sullen ancestors  
and you're told  
get ready, get ready, and not yet realizing  
that it isn't addressed to you  
you ask: my beloved, and where am I to go now?"

Averbuch is speaking also to Jews in and out of Israel, to Palestinians in and out of Gaza and the West Bank. To everyone processing October 7, 2023. The world has changed. We must redefine home and it may be as Rabbi Barry Dov Katz suggests, that doing so requires reaching back to one of our earliest metaphors of exile.

"The story of Noah is too hard to bear.  
But at least there was an ark.

Now.  
We are the ones who need an ark to save us from the flood.  
We all need gopher wood and pitch for our souls.

Since we don't have an ark  
We will be the ark  
Together.

May it be Your will, our God,  
That Your spirit  
Which hovers over the face of the waters  
Will return our spirit and give us strength  
To become the ark.

Naphtali Herz Imber writes his Passover piece in the last year of his life. He hasn't found the home, the redemption he imagined as a young man. Instead of renouncing hope, the self-proclaimed Baal HaTikvah ends up redefining hope.

He writes "Wine, which makes the heart of man rejoice, symbolizes hope. At the seder, the child goes ... to

open the door, and the father rises up, cup in hand, saluting that invisible belated guest. Who is he? He is Elijah the prophet for whom a cup is also prepared. He is the Prophet who according to legend is alive and will never die. What a grand symbol for Israel. Israel will live forever, as he has lived up to this day, despite the relentless persecution of his foes.”

Option Two: Elijah is the image of fear and despair.

Elijah’s unusual story in Kings 1 & 2 has turned him into a source of Talmudic stories, of Kabbalistic symbols and into a Jewish folk hero.

For the Rabbis, Elijah functions a bit like an angel, a messenger who arrives in disguise and tests or educates a person. He has privileged information about God. He comes to an individual, not a people.

Later, the image of Elijah grows dark and darker. By the time Elijah appears at our seder, in the early Ashkenazi Middle Ages, he arrives so disguised as to be invisible and immaterial. The Machzor Vitry Haggadah links Elijah to הַיְהוָה הַיְהוָה

“Pour out your wrath on the nations who do not know you.”

Elijah is a hope that embraces the other abstractions of vengeance, wrath and darkness.

Naftali Herz Imber’s nephew, Shmuel Yakov Imber was also born in Zloczow. In 1889. Also a poet, Shmuel Yakov wrote in Yiddish and Polish, not Hebrew and English. He edited an international anthology of Yiddish poetry in 1927. While in New York to solicit contributions, Shmuel Yakov considered immigrating but went home to Poland. He was killed in 1942.

The year Shmuel Yakov was sent to Belzec extermination camp, Kadya Molodowsky, another Polish Yiddish poet, escaped to New York where she wrote “Letter to Elijah the Prophet.”

“Old message-bearer, Elijah,” -- the poem starts,

Poetry Warning to Gashmius Readers: I am about to share a large part but not all of her devastating poem. I’ve omitted some and consolidated other lines. You can read Kathryn Hellerstein’s masterful translation of the full poem in Hellerstein’s Paper Bridges: Selected Poems of Kadya Molodowsky.

“Old message-bearer, Elijah,  
I have lost all the addresses,  
So now I write a letter to you.  
Surely you have not forgotten an old friendship,  
When, as a child, I would open the door for you.

It can’t be that now you will not hear out  
My long, bitter letter,  
This bitter megile of mine.

You are the prophet of mercy and vengeance,  
Your fiery chariot shatters the clouds.



You know my heart. I have guided the harrow  
To cleanse the garden for justice and good.

I am fallen and trampled,  
Bitten by each dog running past on the street.

What an injustice that you don't come take a seat  
At our Seders with their everyday wine.  
The songs that we sing there are so tiresome,  
Perhaps you'd want redemption in time.

On your bright route, tasting every cup.  
Have you been there?  
There ... there ... behind the evil wall?  
In the land of pain, in the home of ruin?  
Is the patch on their holiday despair  
Larger than in the middle of the week?

Did you take a sip from their cups?  
Did it scald your lips?

So many names stick in my throat...  
I'm afraid to ask you, and don't tell me  
If something has happened ...  
Bestir your compassionate brow,  
Put out my lamp,  
And if you have received no news,  
Put out my lamp  
And close my eyes."

If you find unbearable a world where Elijah can't save us, where he is indifferent to horror, then I offer  
you

#### Option Three: The Elijah of our own agency.

This version of a common Jewish folk tale comes from Nina Jaffe in her beautiful book *The Mysterious Visitor: Stories of the Prophet Elijah*.

A pious man goes to his rabbi. Rabbi, I've lived in Brooklyn my whole life, he says. I've kept the traditions of the Jewish people and taught them to my children. I have observed Passover all my life but I have a question that has been nagging me. Rabbi, for years I've been opening the door for Elijah but I have never seen him.

The Rabbi says, Simon, I will tell you now, there is a way you can see him. You know the Yakowivtz family. They arrived here with just the clothes on their back. Their apartment is empty. They have nothing. Tomorrow, I want you to give them what they need for the seder meal. Sit with them and sing holiday songs with them and take care of them for all the days of the holiday. If you do all this, you will see Elijah.

Simon does all this but still does not see Elijah. When the holiday is over he tells this to the rabbi, who smiles and says,

I know that Elijah did come to your seder this year. And here is how you can see him. The rabbi puts a small mirror into Simon's hand. Look closely, my friend, says the rabbi and you will see the face of Elijah.

This give me hope when I consider all that is wrong in our world. All that is violent and terrifying and heartbreaking. I pray that we can be like this folktale Elijah/Simon. May we all go out -- proactively -- as so many have done and continue to do. May we support those who are wandering and in pain. May we make the miracles of redemption.



*"Hunt The Rabbit!"* by Lya Finston [21]



# Sources & Endnotes

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## Plagues

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## Motzi Matzah

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## Korech

[1] Haggadah, Korekh.

[2] B. Yoma 9b.

[3] B. Bava Metzia 30b.

[4] Ibid.

[5] This is how the Talmud explains the statement in b. Yoma 9b that the Second Temple was destroyed on account of baseless hatred. See Tosafot on b. Bava Metzia 30b, s.v. "לא חרבה."

[6] See Ramban on Leviticus 19:2. For a similar analysis, see Moshe Avigdor Amiel, *Hegyonot El Ami: Breishit*, ed. Shmuel Rosenzweig (Merkaz Shapira: Machon Or Etzion, 2013), 404-405.

[7] Aharon Shmuel Tamares, "Herut" in *Patsifizm Le-Or Ha-Torah*, ed. Ehud Luz (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur, 1992), 131.

[8] See b. Yoma 72b, b. Shabbat 88b.

[9] Tamares, 132.

[10] Ibid. Compare with Rashi and Cassuto on Ex. 20:2.

[11] Ibid., 137. For a longer translation of this passage, see Shaul Magid's "On Vengeance and Becoming the Aggressor" above.

[12] Naim Ateek, *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 86-87.

[13] See Hayyim Rothman, *No Masters But God: Portraits of Anarcho-Judaism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 204-206.

[14] See Aharon Shmuel Tamares, *K'nesset Yisrael Ve-Milkhemet Ha-Goyim*, ed. Tsachi Slater and Hayyim Rothman (Jerusalem: Blima Books, 2021), 97-101.

[15] *The Kuzari* 1:114.

[16] See, for instance, *Sha'arei Orah*, Fifth and Tenth Gates.

[17] In the words of Avraham Chein, a Chabad rabbi and another anarcho-pacifist, “So long as the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are two trees, and knowledge does not grow from the Tree of Life itself, knowledge bears a curse for the world and a curse for man.” *Avraham Chein, Be-Malkhut ha-Yahadut, Vol. 3* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1970), 343.

[18] A striking formulation of the development of this idea in Lurianic Kabbalah is interpretations of the Talmudic dictum that God sent the Jewish people into exile in order to attract converts (see b. Pesachim 87b), which is interpreted to mean wayward pieces of God. See, for instance, the opening of Sha'ar Pesukim on Shemot as well as Ben Yehoyda and Mar'it Ha'ayin on b. Pesachim 87b.

[19] Ateek, 87.

[20] For a range of possible formulations, see Bashir Bashir, “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Integrative Solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *The Middle East Journal* 70:4 (August 2016), 560-578.

[21] Note from Lya Finston: Haggadot from as early as the 15th century contain both hand-drawn and printed illustrations of men and dogs hunting rabbits. This is particularly mysterious considering rabbits are neither kosher nor present whatsoever in the story of Exodus. Like many aspects of the Seder, this imagery's purpose is not literal, but symbolic. The rabbit hunt is meant to serve as a mnemonic device for the order of the Seder. When the first letter of all 5 stages of this ritual meal are merged together in an acronym, they spell out יַקְנֵה־זֶ' — pronounced “YaKNeHaZ.”

(ו = wine, ק = kiddush, נ = light/candle, ה = havdalah/hamavdil, ז = time/shehechyanu)

When spoken aloud, this acronym sounds almost like “jag den Häs,” or “hunt the rabbit” in Yiddish. Hare hunting scenes were thus reproduced in Haggadot as pictographic reminders of the seder's sequence.

While the text in the Haggadah preserves our memory of Exodus, this mnemonic device calls attention to the way in which we do so. Jewish history is preserved through ritual performances which, following prescribed procedures, derive their success from identical repetition. The repetition inherent to all ritualistic practice is thereby designed not only in the service of the divine, but also in the service of human memory. Above all other Jewish holidays, Passover exemplifies the idea of memory as worship.



# Gashmius Community Contributors

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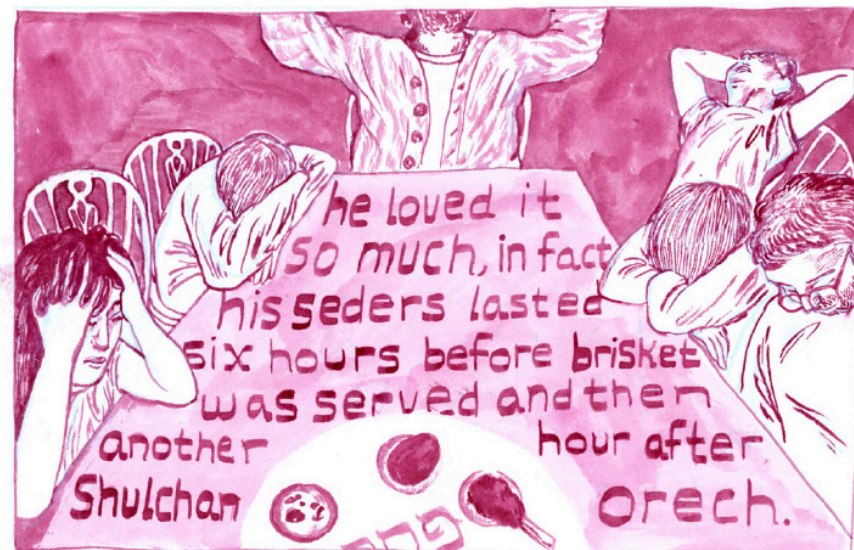
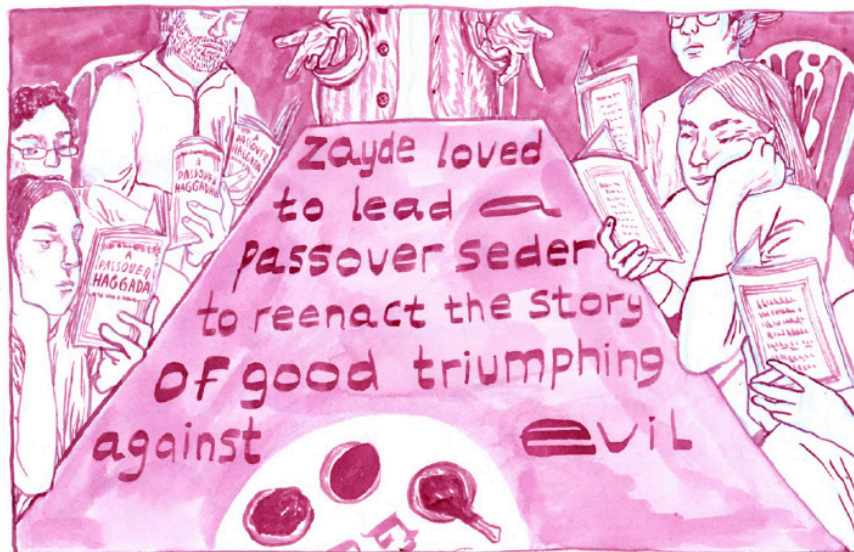
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Excerpt From *The Sofer* by Rosabel Rosalind