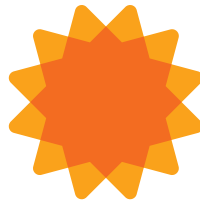


The
Jewish
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JACS

The Anonymous Haggadah

A Synthesis Of
The Passover Ritual And Liturgy With
The Twelve Steps Of Recovery



2025 - Abridged Version

PROUD PARTNER
UJA Federation
NEW YORK



מרים

MIRIAM CHANTED
Sing Unto The Lord
For He Has
TRIUMPHED
GLORIOUSLY:
Horse And Driver
He Has Hurled
Into The Sea

שמחת

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Dear JACS Family,

As Pesach/Passover approaches, shopping lists are being made. Planning the menus for the holiday is a given – but are we planning the Seder? Of course, we make sure to have the Matzot and the special foods for the Seder plate; what about the “programming?” How do you plan to enhance the moments of Seder that have nothing to do with eating?

The Seder is a time to be creative, (bags of plagues and finger puppets, marshmallow ‘hail’, and jumping plastic frogs) but it can also be a time for reflection. This holiday marks the birth of the Jewish nation. Consider discussions you wish to have: How do you and your guests and children feel about: being Jewish, Jewish education, the existence of the State of Israel?

Seasoned educators know that sometimes well-planned lessons may need minor revisions once class is underway – but we never go into a class without our plan books. Seder night should get the same treatment. That’s why Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons, and Significant Others (JACS) is offering this Seder Companion.

In my years as a teacher, I have met all types of students. Some are interested in learning; they ask questions, listen intently, and retain information. Some students are averse to being in class. They find all sorts of reasons to ignore the lesson or even manage to disrupt the lesson. In addition, there may be students who are eager to learn but need encouragement. One may ask simple questions; another may not be able to frame the questions. When we read the descriptions of the Four Sons in the Haggadah, we may recognize parts of ourselves. We are, each of us, a child looking to our Higher Power for guidance and support. Using the Haggadah text and this JACS guide, the hope is that one finds the appropriate approach to educating each child/ inner child.

Reflect on the way the Rabbis of the Mishnaic time period compiled the Haggadah and Pesach Seder. What message does it bring to each of us?

Chaye Kohl
President, JACS Council

Introduction

More than any Jewish book of prayer or study written since the close of the Bible 2500 years ago, the Haggadah has resisted attempts to change its format or content.

The reasons are immediate and apparent to anyone who has enjoyed a Seder conducted by someone who knew what they were doing. The impression that remains is indelible and enriching beyond compare.

Seder night is a journey into another time and place. It is a swift glance at the darkest night of the human soul and a lingering dance with liberty and freedom. It is a long play with family and food, and a short, sharp reminder of the depths to which we may plummet when the framework and fabric of our life decays.

The Journey, more a procession, wends its stately way through fifteen points of interest. There are washing of hands and breaking of bread. There are stories and unfamiliar foods. There are roles for children and playful songs for adults. There is wonder and enchantment, heroes and wicked adversaries, stories of Revelation and Retribution. There is even time to partake of a full Festival meal. If the Seder is an adventure, the Haggadah is Map, Guide, Directory and Vehicle.

The main event of Pesach (Passover) and Seder night is the Exodus from Egypt, the miraculous birth and redemption of the Jewish People. One cannot be long in Recovery without becoming increasingly aware how close are the ideas of Exodus and Recovery. My understanding of the steps and process of Recovery has deepened my appreciation of the Seder. Now my Seder blossoms in the light of Recovery.

The Seder is not simply a description of the Exodus. It is an opportunity to scrutinize the real issue: Our slavery. We were slaves and now we are free.

So, what then is freedom? Does it mean we may now do whatever we want?

If we try that route, we will soon find ourselves back on the road into Egypt. Freedom is not license. It is the absence of constraint and a life-long struggle. We have learned this lesson, painfully, again and again. For when we became habituated to any self-destructive behavior, we were no longer free. Furthermore, of all the destructive patterns of behavior to seduce a person, a "bad habit" is the most difficult to kick. Whether the habit is heroin, gambling or fixing people's lives; whether it is self-denial, fasting, smoking or looking through people's windows. This, then, is what the Haggadah is about. Long before the 12 Steps were formalized, enlightened people knew a way. The Haggadah describes the Recovery process of an entire people. The distilled essence of their experience boils down to this:

- I. They were powerless, they admitted it.
- II. They came to believe in a Higher Power.
- III. They turned their lives and will over to it.

The writings in this Seder companion, unless otherwise specified, are by J. Hershy W., JACS.

From Bondage To Freedom

Rabbi Igael Gurin-Malous

Chief Executive Officer
T'Shuvah Center

Passover is the holiday of recovery.

Leaving Egypt is not just our story and our journey on the road to freedom. It is a foundational roadmap to liberation. Both as a nation and for individuals, it is a story of recovery. We retell it over and over again to keep reminding ourselves of our need to leave slavery behind and choose freedom and sovereignty.

It is also a commandment. We must, in our tradition, tell the story many times in our lives and see ourselves as if WE have left Egypt. We must immerse ourselves in our Torah. We must not just read the story but ask ourselves, "How am I leaving Egypt today?" It is imperative that each of us find our own independence and choose freedom and recovery.

Egypt is not just a country, an ancient place, or a space. It is not just the setting of the enslavement that we've endured. It is also an edict about how we leave Egypt internally.

Egypt (Mitzraim) in Hebrew also means straits or a narrow place. a space that oppresses us. When Moses kills the Egyptian, he may have killed the real person, but he most certainly has killed the Egypt in him--the Metzgeri, meaning that which oppresses him from the inside. Every Passover we are resetting our intention and our commitment to recovery, freedom, action, and personal sovereignty.

Leaving Egypt is the journey and leads to the actions we must take to find freedom. It starts with awareness, a yearly reminder to take inventory. What am I enslaved to? What am I choosing to leave behind? What is oppressing me? Then with the awareness, we must choose our actions, find the discipline to go back to the best version of ourselves. We clear ourselves of fermented, embellished, and puffed-up egos. We get rid of the sour chametz (leaven) so that we can rediscover the core values of who we are.

As we move towards freedom, we will encounter many challenges and obstacles, but the seed of freedom has been planted. The darkness we leave behind in Egypt means that we are inching toward the light. We must make our way towards revelation and, finally, the Promised Land.



The Seder

As with all the rituals of Pesach (Passover) and the Seder, every little detail can be examined and worked until it blossoms and sparkles. And so we will see, even the mundane task of ridding the house of Chometz (leavened food) brings us an acute awareness of the following shortcomings:

- A. Our Denial of the prevalence of Chometz
- B. Our Procrastination over the jobs that need tackling
- C. Our Powerlessness over the final outcome
- D. Our Perfectionism in setting standards we can't meet

In order to clean house properly for Pesach we have in some way to take the following steps:

- A. Break through our denial and become aware
- B. Confront procrastination and take action
- C. Admit powerlessness and surrender
- D. Abandon perfectionism and humbly accept our limits



The Four Cups of Wine

One of the main symbols of the Seder, the four cups of wine, corresponds to the four words for redemption mentioned in the Torah as it is written:

And I brought you out.
And I saved you.
And I redeemed you.
And I took you.

(There is a fifth term hence a fifth cup, but this by tradition refers to the future redemption.)

And I brought you.

There are four characteristics we seem to have in common:

I think I'm bad, defective, worthless.
I'm afraid, should you ever discover who I really am, you must reject me.
No one but I myself can meet my needs.
My greatest need is for escape, ease, comfort, prestige, sex, etc.

To counter these delusions requires time and recovery. We allude to them in the process of drinking the four cups.

1. The first we drink after Kiddush whose message is clear. Hashem wanted us. He still wants us. He chose to bring us out of Egypt. We are not bad or worthless.

2. The second cup we drink after telling the Haggadah which is the description of the worst side of our character and personality. Even knowing that we were idol worshipers, Hashem chose to embrace rather than reject us.



3. The third we drink after eating the holiday meal which symbolizes the satisfaction of our needs, for companionship, food, for a place to belong, etc.

4. The fourth cup we drink after Hallel, "Praise," when we sing Hashem's praises and our wonderment at His unconditional love for us. It is this love which is our greatest need.

So the four cups represent the four realities:

We are perfect just the way we are, and right where we're supposed to be.

We can be known intimately, totally and still be accepted.

We can and will have our needs met by others.

We are loved unconditionally, and this is our greatest need.

The fifth cup reminds us that we are never completely cured and we are always in the process. Only after the end of time as we know it will we be recovered. So we pour it but do not drink it. This is the cup of Eliyahu, the prophet whose arrival we anticipate.

There is a difference in custom as to when this fifth cup for Eliyahu is poured. There are those who pour it before the Ma-Nishtana when we pour the second cup. Indicating that we feel secure knowing that no matter what we have done, at the end of time when a final reckoning is made and all about ourselves is revealed, we will still not be rejected by the Almighty.

The other custom is to pour this fifth cup before Hallel when we pour the fourth cup. This reminds us that even when Recovery is achieved our greatest need will still be the need to be loved unconditionally. Even when Moshiach comes it will be to teach us how to open our hearts to those who are close to us and love them in the way that Hashem loves. As it is written: "Behold I send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of that Great and Awesome day. And he will reconcile the hearts of fathers to sons and the hearts of sons to their fathers".

Charoses

Before the Seder begins, we prepare a dish of chopped fruit and nuts (symbolizing the mortar we used building Pharaoh's cities in Egypt). This is the Charoses into which we dip the bitter herb before eating it. Its main ingredients are apple, walnuts, cinnamon, and wine.

I.

The Apple is our symbol for LOVE the main ingredient in the Charoses. When Egyptians saw Jews multiplying, despite Draconian programs aimed at controlling Jewish birth rate, they tried preventing men and women getting together; by so arranging work-shifts and timetables that married couples would never have time alone together. Jewish Women took the initiative. Acting in concert, they packed lunches for their husbands and went down to their work places on the building sites. When the men were allowed to stop for a break, their wives led them into nearby fields to enjoy privacy. When Hashem saw their intent, He caused apple orchards to spring up wherever couples went to picnic. And in those orchards the Jewish people was conceived, as it is written (Song of Songs): "Beneath the Apple tree I aroused you. There your mother birthed you, where she herself was born."

II.

The walnut is notorious for its "*Klipah*," its shells. Before we can get at the kernel, we must strip away layer upon layer of defenses. The walnut symbolically is almost an analogy of the world. It has four different layers of protection:

1. Dishonesty and self-deception
2. Close-mindedness and blind prejudice
3. Unwillingness and inertia
4. The fog and clouds of habit and history

As we strive to change, the masks and armor fall away, and we reach a clear perception of ourselves. The walnut is a paradigm of suppression, representing all the manifold efforts of dishonesty to prevent us from seeing ourselves as we really are. The walnut is bound up with the prime number 17 which is also the value of the Hebrew word for SIN. It describes an arrow shot wide of the mark, and represents the natural world severed from all its spiritual connections. The raw material of our bodies, the tools with which we strive to serve the Spirit of Hashem's will for us.

In the description of a soul surveying its body at the end of a lifetime, searching for assets to salvage from the wreckage of the past, it is written (Song of Songs), "I went down to the grove of walnuts to Look and See..." The Kabbalists saw in the shape of the walnut many interesting things. The Kernel is reminiscent of the brain,

with its convolutions and striations. But whereas our brains have two lobes, the walnut has four lobes. The universe, according to the Kabbalists, has four "lobes." The walnut has been used to imitate symbols from the "Celestial Chariot" of Ezekiel, to the concept of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

III.

We add cinnamon to the Charoses. In its natural, stick form it resembles straw, which was so necessary to the manufacture of bricks in ancient times. It is bound up with the prime number seven, whose significance is a well-known aspect of Judaism.

IV.

The final ingredient is wine, the juice of the grape. (The ethyl alcohol manufactured in the process of fermentation is but a tiny aspect of wine's multifaceted symbolism and its role in Judaism.) The grape has been chosen to represent the powers of the mind, the capability for thought and faith, prayer, and meditation. Wine represents the fulfillment of that promise, the conscious contact with Hashem and the knowledge of His will for us. Wine is a symbol for Prophecy, which is the ultimate conscious contact where awareness has been reciprocated.

The symbolism was acquired by the grape as a poetic expression of a mundane phenomenon. The mysterious action (of airborne bacteria) which causes the fermentation of the grape into wine, almost an analogy of the process of human thought. The fermentation action with its vigorous bubbling, its transformation into "spirit" and its spontaneous enhancement, simulates the thought process that occurs in our own mind when ideas ferment, solidify and crystallize.

The Union of Man with Hashem was a state of mind, much sought by the prophets and the school of Jewish Meditation. It was always preceded by joy and gratitude which were prerequisites to the prophetic state. So, the grape also came to symbolize joy and gratitude. The only state that is elevated beyond the heights of prophetic communion are those moments when we feel Love as it is written (Song of Songs): "But Your love is better than wine."



Kaddesh

The Seder begins with a Benediction sanctifying the day. A declaration of a Yom Tov. It has a standard form, Kiddush.

We begin Kiddush by filling a 5-ounce cup with grape juice. The second part of Kiddush refers us to our chosen-ness. Those of us who are in Recovery understand the mystery of being chosen.

Why are we in Recovery? What makes us special that we have been granted the grace of this gift? This blueprint for action, this program of life. The Torah, the Steps, the whole concept of our Recovery? The answer, of course, is always a mystery. Hashem simply said "Enough! You've suffered enough!" We are no better or worse, simply lucky. We express our astonishment at the love and joy this festival represents and how different we feel as a consequence.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION

What are ways that you feel enslaved, trapped, stressed by time?

What are sanctified times for your recovery?

What rituals do you use to sanctify time for your recovery and/or Judaism?



Urchatz

The Leader of the Seder only now washes his/her hands into a bowl held by another celebrant. We have accepted the need for leadership, we wash the leader's hands. This small, formal act of service is a symbol of our recognition of their leadership. This is an ancient Jewish ritual in and of itself.

At this point in the Seder, washing the hands has a specific purpose other than to punctuate and elect. It is a statement of purpose, an elevation from the mundane. It symbolizes the wish to be relieved of the bondage of self. Before the Cohen (priest) could perform any of his duties in the Temple, he had to wash his hands and feet from the copper urn in the courtyard. Silently, he prayed, as we do before we begin the Seder.

"Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Your will. Make me an instrument of Your purpose, take away my difficulties that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Your power, Your love, and Your way of life."

When we eat dry foods, washing the hands is not necessary. But as soon as liquids are involved, as with the ritual of Karpas we are about to perform when we will dip vegetables into salt water, we must prepare our hands by washing them. It is easily explained in terms of hygiene and cleanliness.

Urchatz

by Rabbi Gary Katz for JACS

We wash our hands before dipping the karpas into salt water, as was the custom in earlier times to ritually wash the hands before eating bread or any food that would be dipped into liquid. Why did the rabbis enact a law that requires washing of the hands and not any other part of the body? They were very clear to tell us that it is not for physical cleanliness, as we are already expected to take measures to ensure that our bodies are clean and healthy.

One explanation is that the hands represent “action” and “doing.” In fact, the Torah tells us “הַקֹּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדִים” --“the voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” Esau’s name in Hebrew is the same as the word “to do” and hands are synonymous with doing and action. Most of the actions that we take or things that we do involve our hands in some capacity. Therefore, the rabbis required each person to wash their hands prior to eating these types of food so that it would remind us that we need to use our hands in holy and correct ways and that we should strive to take actions that bring us closer to God.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION

What actions do you take for your recovery?

What actions do you find resistance in taking?

What actions do you take to become closer to God?



Karpas

Taking a very small piece of vegetable, less than the size of an olive, we dip it in salt water and eat it.

This whets our appetite physically and intellectually. Even the child in us wakes up asking to be told the meaning. The Karpas signals our bodies it is time to eat. We snap alert, then tax all our powers of concentration in the Seder that follows. The child has a short attention span and so we use tricks to keep the focus on the real message.

Taking food and dipping it in condiments is itself the essence of wealthy eating habits. Only people with quantities of food and the time to enjoy it indulge in the practice of fiddling with bits of food. Is it not contradictory then to pretend we are poor slaves whilst playing with food? Are we pretending to be slaves tonight? Are we playing?

It is possible to identify with feelings we had when we were slaves. We can contrast our present situation with that we endured as slaves, abusing and being abused ourselves.

The Seder is our qualification to be here. We are determined to identify our feelings; we are not about to compare stories.

Let the saltwater point to the tears we have shed to earn our seat at the seder table.

Let the salt point to the eternal bond of Hashem's covenant with Abraham and us.

Let it point to the profoundest longing, the clutching sensation in our stomach, that we experience in our longing for fulfillment. It is this which drives us onwards.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION

In recovery, we are always striving to continue to see ourselves as newcomers. What ways do you "keep it green?"

What are ways that you make sure to remember the hardship and pain that your addiction caused you?

What are other symbols of rebirth and renewal for you in recovery and Judaism?



Yachatz

We break the middle Matzah.

Is matzah poor man's bread or the food of free men? Can it be both? If we regard it as the Bread of Affliction, why did we carry dough on our backs out of Egypt, to let it bake in the hot sun without leavening and rising?

Matzah is a paradox.

Not only is it so, but in breaking the middle matzah we also break with symmetry. There is a bigger half and a smaller half. This unpalatable truth is almost a preamble to the Haggadah. The universe is not symmetrical, all is not evenly divided. There is a richer and poorer half. The distribution of assets is not equal. This is one of the mysteries that persists, omnipresent, throughout time. What was our response as children to the dawning realization that life was not fair? Did we have coping mechanisms? We survived so we must have coped, but we sacrificed our health in order to do so. We split. We broke into pieces. We hid ourselves away. And this is how we prepared ourselves for life.

Like the hungriest of paupers eating what we absolutely must, laying aside the greater part for later, when the time is riper. We compromised, accepting this imbalance, bowing to the "Law of Unfairness" which must prevail.

In many ways, this acquiescence preceded addiction. We grew satisfied with the expression of a mere fraction of our personalities. We went into "survival mode," subsisting on crumbs of humanness, hiding the greater part of ourselves from ourselves.

As we do with the Afikomen. The focus of our lives grew narrower as our preoccupation with gnawing hunger grew stronger. We had nothing to spare for growth when all we had went towards feeding our habits. Fewer and fewer opportunities to begin the fixing, as we chased the fix with growing desperation. In the end it became obvious that we had developed a pathological relationship with the "bread of our affliction."

If the recitation of the Haggadah is our “war-story,” our qualification, why are we breaking the matzah now before beginning our war story?

The answer is heartbreaking. The reason this happens before the Haggadah is because the splitting of the self almost always occurs when we are still in a pre-verbal state. The disorder of our personalities, the shaming and abandonment of ourselves, happens when we are still babies. What follows is the story of our lives after the rupture. The inevitable, inexorable descent into the furnace that was our Egypt, and our deliverance. There are no words to describe the event. We simply break the matzah, leaving the smaller section on the Seder plate, and we wrap the larger piece and put it away for the Afikomen.

Recovery is a lifelong process. We must realize, actualize, and integrate the whole of ourselves. We will do this by eating the Afikomen as a symbolic “last-act” of the Seder. When it is all over, we will have achieved a reclamation of the “self” we abandoned. We take the Afikomen we have wrapped, and we explain to our children:

“This is what our parents did when they came out of Egypt;

As it is written:

And the sun shone so hot that it was baked, without the opportunity to leaven as dough left alone will do. And so they continued to eat the unleavened bread even when they came out of Egypt.”

Why did we continue eating this bread after we had left Egypt? Why is this a point worth mentioning?

In a sense, we are reminding ourselves of those times early in Recovery when we found ourselves in very painful situations, eating what seemed identical to the bread of our affliction. We can only see with hindsight that we were eating bread of freedom. In our haste to leave Egypt we were prepared to go to any lengths; even mothers with tiny children walked away from the only homes they had. Walking into the wilderness with nothing to eat but unfinished pastry dough and trust in their Higher Power.

It is customary to hide the Afikomen, allowing children the excitement of the search. Just another way of keeping them awake and alert while the Seder continues.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION

The middle matzah is broken at the beginning of the seder into two pieces to be used later on in the service of the seder at two different times. Only by being broken is it able to fulfill these two different functions. In what ways did the brokenness of your addiction enable you to be useful at a later point in your life to yourself and in service to God and others?



Maggid

Inviting the Poor by Rabbi Gary Katz for JACS

Before retelling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, we invite the poor and needy to join our Seder tables. The Matzah, flat bread that Jews eat on Passover, is connected to the experience of the Israelite slaves. Since our ancestors were poor and hungry slaves in Egypt, we know what that is like, and we stop here to make sure that we help any poor or hungry in our own communities. So too, since we have suffered various afflictions, we want to reach out and help those who are still suffering. It is an important lesson in Judaism and recovery that we learn from our experiences to help people who are still suffering. In fact, this is such an important lesson that just by speaking about our own suffering and recovery, we help those who are still suffering. Engaging in a lengthy discussion about our own issues and suffering without thoughtfulness of others who are still sick and suffering is just another form of self-indulgence.

We begin by reciting:

הָא לַחֲמַת עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכַפִּין יִיתִי וְיִיכֹל, כָּל דְּצָרִיד יִיתִי וְיִפְסֹח. הַשְׁתָּא. הָבָא,
לְשָׁנָה הָבָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי, לְשָׁנָה הָבָא בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

"This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, let them come and eat. All who are needy, let them come and eat the Passover meal with us."

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION

What ways do I look to give back and help those who are still suffering?

How do I use my own affliction and suffering to help other people?

What are you still hungry for?

What are positive and negative ways that you fill your hunger for spirituality?



Ha-Lachma-Anya

The first Seder in its modern form was conducted on the road into Babylonian exile some 2500 years ago. We had reached the lowest point of our resources. Our homes were wrecked, our families torn apart, we had been stripped of all our pride. Nebuchadnezzar was uprooting whole peoples, dispersing an entire Jewish population, dragging us into slavery. Bondage seemed to dog our steps; it was history repeating itself. We felt powerless.

Our leaders, however, made us aware in our despair that this was not a repetition of the Egyptian story. In tents open to weary travelers, they prepared a seder. Inviting anyone who cared to join, they prepared the Seder we are following now.

We begin our recitation with an invitation in the dialect of common man. The Aramaic tongue was, for thousands of years, the Yiddish language of diaspora Jews. As English is to the reader of this Haggadah, was the Ha-Lachma-Anya of yesteryear. "This then is bread of poverty that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt...."

Lest there be those amongst us who feel trapped in the present, enslaved to a substance or destructive behavior. The message is crystal clear: We have been there, and this is our story.

There is an interesting play on words, and a hint implicit in the text of the invitation. First and foremost, we have to hunger for the miracle to happen in our life. We have to want it more than anything. Only then, the Haggadah tells us, All who need may come and celebrate Pesach.



Ma Nishtana: The Four Questions

Of people in recovery, others sometimes inquire: Why can't you just leave your past behind you? Make a clean break, don't dwell in the past: rehashing it again and again. You've stopped your habit, pulled yourself together. You're clean now, sober, and respectable. Why go back and sit in a room full of people like yourself, people who may still be doing the crazy things you no longer do? Is it healthy to live in the horror story? Look to the future. Don't talk about the past as though you had some kind of disease. You glorify the program and call it Recovery, treating it like a Dialysis machine or Iron Lung without which you could not live. Why can't you be like a normal person?

The youngest person sitting at the table is usually the first to ask the "four questions."

1. Why is our disease so all-encompassing, so all-excluding?

Other people have their hobbies, recreations, pleasures— how come we can't enjoy these things like they do? Why did we have only "the bread of our affliction"? The symbol we use for the object of our obsession is the unleavened bread - Matzah. Our world had shrunk very small.

2. How come there was no pleasure left in what we were doing?

No amount of "acting out" could rid us of our real feelings. Everything we did to relieve the pain merely substituted or increased it. The symbol we use for the bitterness and pain is "Maror" (bitter herbs).

There are two more questions commonly asked by the newcomer. They refer to the process of recovery.

3. Why do we treat ourselves so well in Recovery? Why don't we just get on with life? Why pay so much attention to the way we feel? Whence the slogan EASY DOES IT? Surely a little more discipline, more will-power, a tougher daily regimen, all would work more efficiently than this gentle touch with which we treat ourselves?

The relaxed attitude we adopt is symbolized by the "condiments" (dipping food into food).

4. Why do we take Recovery so slowly? Surely, we ought to be rushing to get well? We need fixing now!

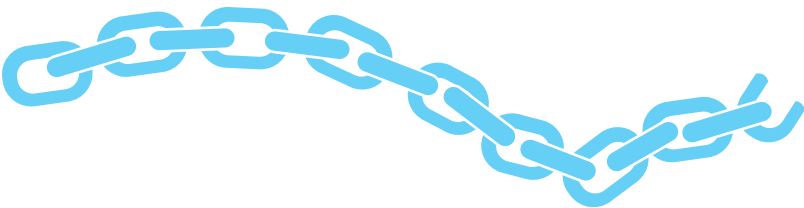
The pace at which we expect changes to occur, is symbolized by the "Leaning." Sprawling and reclining as though we were "in our cups." Why does all this take so long?



Avadim Hayinu: We Were Slaves

The Answer is simple and we keep it simple.

1. We weren't just overdoing things a little, we were slaves! And we were powerless. It took the power of the Omnipotent Almighty to extract us from there, which he did with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. So severely were we addicted to our own slavery and shame that if Hashem had not taken our forbearers out of Egypt, then we would still be hopelessly enmeshed in that sickness and slavery. We, ourselves, and our children would be without Recovery. And such is the nature of this disease that we must constantly treat it by talking about it. It doesn't matter whether we are clever, intuitive, experienced or whether we know the whole program backwards, whether we can recite the Big Book by heart. We are still commanded to share with others our Recovery. And the more meetings we attend the more praiseworthy we will be.
2. The metaphor of the strong hand and the outstretched arm refers to the substance or activity to which we were addicted. The strong hand as explained later at greater length, is the cessation of using or acting out our addiction. This is the first and most difficult step to take.
3. The outstretched arm refers to the gradual separation and the distance we put between ourselves and the paraphernalia of addiction. The putting away of people, places, and things.



Freedom

By G.S., NA, JCS Writers in Recovery

How I would come to understand this is a sad story- and everyone has a sad story.
I used to wear regret like a noose
At any given time
Thrusting me back
Into memories that would steal my breath-
And make me pray for death.
I used to wear a rotating badge
My names were
"Victim,"
"Sick," and
"Junkie,"
To recall a few.
Sometimes I prefer not to recall at all.
They call it "dissociating,"
I call it self-preservation.
I used to wear lies like expensive jewelry
That everyone knew was fake.
I told myself that the lies were true
If I could just convince myself
Then maybe I was justified.
My mind was broken.
My body-
Withered away.
But, freedom was found in the most unlikely place-
An oxymoron to those who have yet to experience it.
Freedom was and is,
Surrender.

The Four Sons

The Clever One Says Mah - "What"

There are four kinds of Sons referred to in the Torah. These are the four personality types in and out of Recovery to whom we can convey the message:

1. The clever, fiercely intellectual, much too smart for his own good and terminally unique.
2. The one who thinks he's too wicked for it to work for him.
3. The newcomer, barely coherent, totally beaten and ready.
4. The one who's still out there, who can't stop and desperately wants help.

He uses the word "What" in the deprecatory way that Moshe used it when he asked: "And what are we that you rebel against us?"

"So what's the big deal?" asks the clever one. "What are these testaments, statutes and laws that Hashem has commanded you?" From his use of the word "you" in the question, we can infer his real needs. He's scared. He is like the arrogant addict who walks into the room, reads the 12 steps and says, "Is that all you have to do?" His error is twofold. He thinks he's too clever for such a simple program to work in his life, and he thinks he can do it on his own.

The Haggadah tells us:

"You should also say to him." The word "also" seems superfluous. The Hebrew word for also, "Af" has another, emotional, meaning. "Af" means heavy-nasal-breathing-anger. The attitude of the clever one will often infuriate, frustrate, and invoke anger in us. We have all been in this position. In response, the Haggadah warns us to be gentle. The Hebrew word for "Say" —"Emor" is the softest, lightest form of address as opposed to "speak" or "tell".... Gently is the only way to carry the message. And the message is: All the laws of Pesach including what happens after the Seder is over. We tell him, "You can't do it on your own." Almost the first law of Pesach is that you require a group. One person can't eat the Pascal lamb; it must be celebrated en masse. Groups of people whose only requirement is a desire to join may come together in the Ritual of Sharing.

"If any of them is missing, let the whole group be concerned," says the Mishnah. You cannot bake matzahs on your own... You cannot escape from Egypt on your own... So don't say "You," say "Us."

Finally, we tell him, the reason it works is because we take it with us when we leave here. Even when the Seder is over, we don't eat anything else, that the taste of Recovery we have shared remains with us until we meet again. Therefore, we eat no dessert after the Pascal lamb.

The Wicked One Says Mah - "What"

He uses the word "what" in the sense that Yaakov (Jacob) used it when he exclaimed, "What an awesome place this is."

"What an awesome program this is you work," says the wicked son. He thinks everyone in Recovery must be adhering to some impossible program of perfection. (From which he is excluded by virtue of his redeemability.) He also, in an inverted grandiosity, is no less annoying than the clever one, and considers himself more unique than anyone else.

However bad you think a person might be, he's just worse. In essence, our response is to identify with him. Yes! We too felt that way. In fact, we all felt the same way, unsalvageable and despicable. In those days we thought we were G-d, so if we couldn't do it, who could? That's why Hashem brought us out, doing for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. We blunt his argument, we take the bite out of his snarl, we tell him

"Because of this," —the seder we're having now. "Hashem did for us." The reason He did for us was that we might carry the message of Recovery to you, not because we were any better than you.

"What does he think?" we ask "For us and not for him?" Does he really believe Hashem would have left him in Egypt? Does he think he's irredeemable? He obviously never met us before.

In the quote which we put to him:

"Because of this, Hashem did for me when I came out of Egypt."
The word "Did" is ambiguous. The Hebrew for "Did" is "Asa." It means a very earthy form of creativity like the making of Man himself (e.g., when the word Asa is used in Naase Adam, "Let us make man.").

It also refers to the final act of creation which is speech. What Hashem "did" for me was to verbalize all the pain which I could not speak for myself. This, we tell the so-called wicked son, is what Hashem did for me. He taught me the words with which to express my feelings.

The Simple One Says Mah - "What"

The simple one uses "What" in the sense that Yirmuyahu (Jeremiah) used it when he lamented, "Remember, Oh G-d, what happened to us?"

"Just what is this?" asks the simple son. He is openminded and willing to listen, to learn.

Why the seder? Why the exodus? Why the slavery?

To him we say: "We were powerless. It was Hashem's strong arm that brought us out of Egypt, out of slavery."

Admitting powerlessness is our first step. If we won't admit it, we can't get help, you have to lose to win. Tam, the Simple one, is ready to hear this message, his name implies it. Tam in Hebrew and all Semitic languages means "The End," an unequivocal finality. He is finished, beaten, willing and ready.

The Tam actually says: "What's this?" Mah Zos. The word Zos, this, refers to the Recovery known in Hebrew as "Teshuvah" more commonly translated as "Repentance." The three elements in the classic description of Teshuva are Repentance, Prayer, and Charity.

These are the building blocks of the 12 steps. We Confess, Admit, Come to believe.

We become willing, grow humble, make restitution. We Pray and Meditate and we carry the message. Another description of Teshuva uses words of Kabbalistic significance and numerical equivalence.

1. KOL = VOICE = 136
2. T'ZOM = FASTING = 136
3. MAMON = MONEY = 136
4. ZOS = THIS = 408

Zos is a name for the "Shechina." It refers to the manifestation of Hashem in the world of man. Recovery is the reason for the creation of the universe. Why did Hashem allow life to evolve to the point where all the symmetries have broken? All the parities are gone? Even the Universe is no longer evenhanded. Man is the destroyer, so why did Hashem settle upon us?

Look at us in Recovery and the answer is self-evident. The fixing! Not the Fix, not the fixation. Repairing, recovering, that's the meaning of life. When the Simpleton asks his simple question, he is being the most profound and complex.

The One Who Can't Ask - Sh'eyno Yodaya Lishol

You must carry the message to the one who can't ask for help. That is our primary purpose, as it is written: "And you shall tell it to your child on that day, saying: Because of This, Hashem did for me, when I came out of Egypt."

This is exactly what we told the wicked one when he asked his question, the message is identical: "It works! Look at me, I'm not a slave. I am free. You too can be free. This is why Hashem brought me all this way, so that I could bring this message to you."

Which Child of Recovery Am I?

By Rabbi Ilan Glazer

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Who am I?

The Torah speaks of four children – one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask. Which child am I?

The wise child makes recovery the primary focus of their life. They attend meetings, read literature, develop their spirituality, work with rabbis, coaches, and other healers. They know that the blessings of recovery can be taken away at any moment, and they surround themselves with positive influences, and keep careful watch over their recovery. These wise children ask questions of those who have been in recovery a long time. “How did you make it? What steps did you take? How did you grow? What can you teach me?” They listen to the stories of newcomers, listening for insights, and they reach out to these newcomers and offer a hand of friendship, a listening ear, and ongoing support for the journey of recovery. These brave, wise children find a new life in recovery and by their example, they liberate and inspire others to make positive changes, one day at a time.

The wicked child belittles recovery and its adherents. “I don’t need this program – If everyone in my life would stop messing things up, I’d be fine on my own. I can handle it all by myself. I don’t want to do the work. You’re all crazy for doing this. What could possibly be so important that you’re willing to give up all fun in life? I don’t need this. I don’t want this. I’m out of here.”

The simple child comes into the rooms and says “What is going on here? What is this thing called recovery?”

The one who does not know how to ask may be the one whose life has been shattered by the disease. A loved one who overdosed. Relationships torn apart. Bankruptcy. Jail. Homelessness. They ask themselves: What happened to the life I had? How did things get so bad? They blame themselves, and they’re afraid to even speak the questions out loud for fear that even more walls will come crashing down upon them. Amidst the pit of despair, sometimes even the questions are too much. How can my life improve? I don’t even know where to begin, or whether it’s even possible... Which recovery child am I?

It depends on the day. I am more likely to be wise if I engage in recovery activities each day, if I eat nutritionally, stay hydrated, sleep enough, maintain a spiritual practice, surround myself with community, avoid my addictive behaviors and processes, and put recovery first. And yet, even with all of that, sometimes my demons show up and my wickedness comes out in full force. Sometimes, I don’t want to think about it – I just want to hear a reading, read a quote, be inspired and that’s enough for the day. And sometimes I am so paralyzed by fear, doubt, and insecurity that I can’t even ask a question.

I am all four children of recovery. Which one I am in this moment depends on the day. When I awaken in the morning, I wonder: Which version of me will show up today? What can I do to ensure that wisdom and serenity are part of my life today? What can I do to keep my faults at bay? Am I clear on the simple, tangible activities I can do each day to embrace recovery, and when I can’t even ask the question, do I have people I can call for advice or a listening ear?

Whichever of my inner children shows up, can I love them? Can I reparent them and let them know that they are not inferior or wrong for existing? All of our ancestors stood together at Mount Sinai. There must have been people of all kinds assembled together – wise, wicked, simple, and unable to ask the questions. All who stood at Mount Sinai received Torah. I must remember that all parts of me deserve to be liberated, and Torah is here for all parts of me as well.

God took my ancestors out of slavery and into freedom. Can God take me out of slavery today? If I am wise, perhaps I can help God free myself and others from the disease of addiction.

Will I be wise today? Can I love myself even when I’m not?

May freedom and liberation come to us all.

In Every Generation..... Bchol Dor V'dor

A Chassidic Approach to Overcoming Guilt and Shame

Rabbi Benzion Leser

*Posek for the Jewish Board, Rabbi/Jewish Chaplain,
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Shame and guilt are emotions that people do not want or welcome. It makes us feel uncomfortable, disappointed, let down, and can be very painful. These feelings when very strong and overwhelming are a hindrance and impediment for a person to function productively. They will make us feel unworthy and defective, and will obstruct us from serving Hashem properly.

The *Yetzer Horah* will trump up these feelings and whisper in ones ear and psyche that since they are guilty of doing this or that, or ashamed of previous actions or misdeeds there might be no reason to continue to serve Hashem *Yisboroch*. This intuition that one is not worthy of serving Hashem, is the reason and cause of frostiness in ones relationship with Hashem.

These negative feelings of guilt and shame may cause many to turn towards unhealthy actions and addiction. They may turn to undesirable substances and alcohol to escape these potent feelings. This in turn causes more guilt and shame, which further pushes one deeper into addiction, a vicious cycle.

As we celebrate the Seder tonight, we can find a way to have the proper perspective to break this cycle of difficult feelings. We can find the way to strengthen ourselves to recognize the good human beings that we are. This will assist us in our relationship with Hashem.

Tonight we celebrate the redemption of *Bnei Yisroel* from *Mitzrayim*. The spiritual level of *Bnei Yisroel* upon their redemption was not very desirable. The *Bnei Yisroel* had sunken into the world of *Tumas Mitzrayim*. They had reached the 49th level of impurity that the Egyptians were very proficient at. As the Holy Arizal explains the verse (*Shemos 12:39*) ולא יכלו להתמזהמה "for they could not delay" that had the *Bnei Yisroel* delayed leaving *Mitzrayim*, they would have sunken to the 50th level of impurity. Reaching that low level would have made it impossible for *Bnei Yisroel* to ever leave *Mitzrayim*.

This concept of the Arizal is used to explain the words that we recite in Kiddush of Yom Tov, which we recite at the beginning of the Seder. In the Kiddush for Yom Tov we say

תחלה למקראי קודש זכר ליציאת מצרים

"a holy assembly, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt".

The *Revid Hazahav* explains the language in *Kiddush*, in the name of his holy mentor, my ancestor, *Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Horowitz* (of *Ropshitz zy"a*, author of the *Zera Kodesh* 1760-1827). He explains, that many times we feel ill equipped to serve Hashem because we are guilty of sinning and we are ashamed of our past action or lifestyle. At those moments, we ought to remind ourselves of the spiritual footing of *Bnei Yisroel* in Egypt. (תחלה למקראי קודש) When one wants to reignite their relationship with Hashem they should remind themselves that the worst behavior of a Jew today doesn't equate or come close with the super low level of the *Bnei Yisroel* in Egypt at the point of the Exodus. Astonishingly, at that precise low point of their spiritual journey, Hashem chose them, to be his chosen nation, his servants, and to give them the Torah.

In the *Haggadah* we read *Bechol Dor Vdor* – in every generation, *Chayav Adam Lirois es Atzmoh-* is the person obligated to see themselves, *Kiliuh Hu Yatza M'Mitzrayim-* as if they themselves left Egypt. The holy Rebbe of Bobov zy"a The *Kedushas Zion* (Rabbi Benzion Halberstam who was killed during WWII Hy"d) suggests this is the message of the *Haggadah* to Jews in every generation, with whatever challenges they may face, physical or spiritual, which is obstructing them from serving Hashem. That we ought to in every generation think of ourselves that we are definitely better than *Bnei Yisroel* at the time of their redemption from Egypt.

Dear Jewish brothers and sisters, let us remind ourselves that whatever might be in our past we are definitely worth a redemption. We need to strengthen our selves, make amends with our past and let go of the past. We need to kick away any unhealthy feelings of shame and guilty, with seeing ourselves befitting for a redemption.

May Hashem help that in merit of doing away with these unhealthy feelings of inadequacy of serving Hashem, that we have the strength to reignite our relationship with Hashem. May we have the strength to feel worthy of redemption, and may Hashem repay us in kind that we should be *Zocheh* to the coming of *Moshiach* in our days, *Amen*.

Go Out and Learn - Tzay U'Imad

Go out and learn what Lavan the Arami plotted to do to Yaakov our father. He was worse than Pharaoh who only wanted to kill the males. Lavan tried to uproot us completely. Pharaoh hated us as a people, Lavan hated us as an idea. To glimpse how profound such hatred can be, it is necessary to project ourselves beyond the present moment and imagine as it were the world without all possibility of redemption.

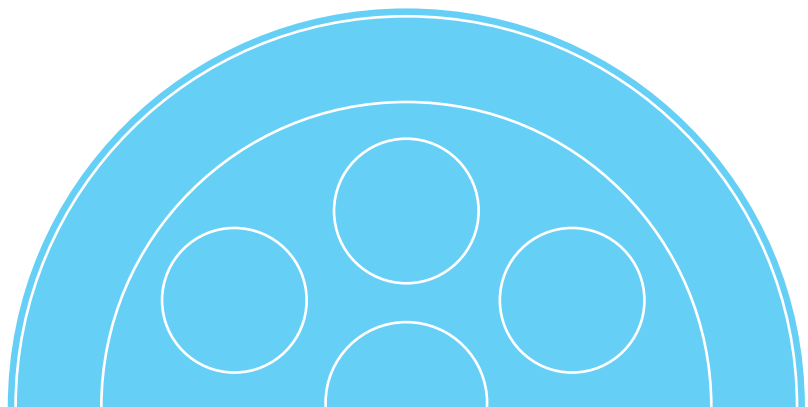
Lavan was the brother of Rivka (Rebecca), wife of Yitzchak. When Eliezer, Avraham's servant, went to Mesopotamia to betroth Rivka as a bride for Yitzchak, Lavan tried to poison him so that no Jewish nation could be born. Later, Yaakov, Lavan's nephew, came to Lavan looking for a wife for himself. He fell in love with Rachel, Lavan's daughter, but was tricked into marrying Leah. Lavan was desperate to prevent the marriage of Yaakov and Rachel, for they would give birth to Joseph and the hope of redemption from Egypt, and to Benjamin and the hope for ultimate redemption. Lavan tried 100 ways to cheat Yaakov out of every possible joy and profit, but he never succeeded because Yaakov was such a straightforward man and because Hashem took charge of his affairs and caused them to prosper.

Lavan hated Yaakov and everything he stood for; as it is written, "the Aramaian loathed my father." It was only the promise that Hashem has made to Himself, regarding Israel that stood us in good stead.

The rest of this verse quoted in the text segues neatly into the Haggadah and the story of the Exile into Egypt, as it continues: "And he went down into Egypt, and he sojourned there, small in number, and became there a great nation, powerful and numerous."

What follows is a note on how we came to be in Egypt. Don't think we went willingly. We were forced down by the word of the Almighty. Don't think we went down into Egypt intending to stay there. No! We went down merely to sojourn. Did all this hesitation and reticence prevent us becoming enmeshed in the experience of Egypt and the subsequent slavery? The answer to that is history.

Many of us began using a medication at the express prescription of a medical practitioner, many of us began eating simply to assuage a ravening hunger. Many of us were genuinely angry at something in our lives which needed change. The end result was always the same. The medication became a habit, the meal became a binge, the anger became abusive rage, friendship became obsession, the rules changed as we were playing, and we never noticed.



And the Egyptians Plotted Evil Against Us

As it is written:

“Let us be crafty, lest they multiply. And it will happen if the opportunity arises, a war will break out and they will join our enemies and fight us and leave the land.”

This is the description of the onset of the disease. The behavior or habit takes on a guile and cunning as though it were part of a master plan. Powerful and baffling!

So it was with the Egyptians. They did whatever they had to, making sure not to spook us into refusing. Once we were hooked, they led us gently by the nose down the path to the point where we no longer had a choice but to do as we were told. They gave us important tasks to perform, granaries and treasuries to build, told us how well we were doing, how much they needed us. They told us that what we were paying them in labor was just taxes. As it is written:

“And they appointed tax collectors over them.”

“They gave us hard work.”

“And the Egyptians worked the Children of Israel harshly.”

The midrash tells us that at first all Egyptians gathered to make bricks. Pharaoh himself rolled up his sleeves and played in the mud with us making bricks. We thought we were doing no more than our patriotic duty.

The actual Hebrew word for harshly is Parech, which is made up of two separate words, Peh-Rach, meaning “gentle mouth.” This is how addiction always begins. It feels good. Softly we were seduced into a life that became increasingly harsh and oppressive. Which of us doesn’t remember how hard we worked to stay out there?

And We Cried Out

And we cried to Hashem, G-d of our Fathers. We did not cry to our own personal G-d. We had no G-d. We were devoid of any conscious contact with Hashem. We had no interior vision and faith in a Higher Power. The spiritual path of prayer and meditation was not yet open to us. The closest we could get was to cry to the G-d of our Fathers. We knew that Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov had a very personal relationship with Hashem. They tried to pass that information on to us, but we had to go the long way around and make our own journey.

Most of us are familiar with "foxhole prayers," promising all manner of things to Hashem if only He will save us this one more time. "And Hashem heard our voices." It does not say, "He heard our prayers," since they were hardly that. We were incoherent, in great pain. We did the most we could do, reaching out and asking for help. No newcomer can do more.

He Saw Our Pain

This is the loss of intimacy, as it is written:

"And Hashem saw the Children of Israel and Hashem knew."

The word 'know' has sexual connotations, as it is written:

"And Adam knew his wife and she conceived and bore him a son."

Addiction leads to the place where ultimately nothing remains of the joys and pleasures we take for granted. Intimacy and addiction are mutually exclusive, for it is accompanied by high levels of core shame. Intimacy sets the stage for risking exposure and nakedness. Intimacy uncovers the core self which the addict can never risk for fear of rejection.

The next thing we lost were our children. We mirrored no one and no one mirrored us. Kabbalistically, 'son' symbolizes kindness. What remained was unbalanced fear symbolized by 'daughter.' All the drugs and behaviors we abused have vicious side-effects, more so because they are distorted balances of emotions and sensations. Drugs famous for inducing euphoria left us severely depressed, while those famous for making us reckless left us shrill with paranoia. Killing the males and leaving the females is another example of imbalance. The pain was intense.

Hashem also saw the pressure we were under. No one but an addict in search of a fix, feeding a habit, desperately searching for validation, comfort or relief, knows the meaning of pressure. What incredible lengths we went to just to avoid the inevitable. We willingly trod the treadmill of unreality to avoid facing ourselves. Our hunger was a ravenous beast we desperately tried to keep sedated. The sheer energy expenditure involved in remaining "out there" far exceeds the most arduous lifestyle we work at in Recovery.

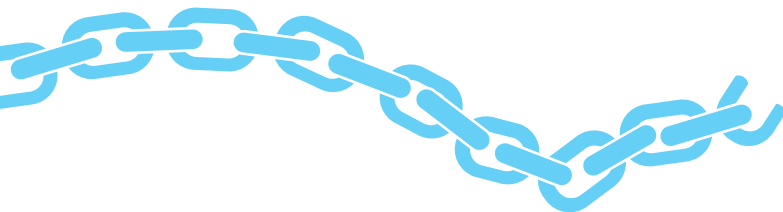
Hashem Took Us Out Of Egypt

It wasn't a medical doctor or psychiatrist. It wasn't a judge or probation officers. Hashem didn't send any of the counselors, advisors, or representatives He has it at His command. In His Glory and Solitary Majesty, He brought us out of Egypt. As it is written: "And I passed through the Land of Egypt this night." This night refers to the addiction which is the true exile in darkness.

1. Egypt, the seduction of abandonment to the world of slavery is the Place which we now had the power to resist. "And I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt."
2. Firstborn refers to the glittering pantheon of illusory hyped-up irresistible People whom we now had the power to resist. "And all the idols of Egypt I judged and executed."
3. Idols refer to all the ephemeral objects of our obsession, Things to which we imagined ourselves eternally enslaved. "I am Hashem." I can restore you to sanity. "No one else."

Hashem brought us out of Egypt with:

- A. A mighty hand
- B. An outstretched arm
- C. Fearsome greatness
- D. Signs
- E. Wonders



With a Mighty Hand

This is the Pestilence. Pestilence was real in Egypt, for us now let it be a metaphor. The five descriptions of Hashem's power correspond to the **five stages of Recovery** from any form of addiction, obsession, or compulsion that the disease may take.

The first steps we took led to the cessation of our acting out behavior. We had to stop using before we could recover, but we lived to use as much as we used to live. Sobriety, abstinence, solvency, or whatever recovery we sought required first the Mighty hand of Hashem. This is the mighty hand referred to in the Haggadah. Just saying NO! is a very difficult action to take.

A symbol of just how difficult is the Pestilence, the sudden death of all our props and crutches. Everything we relied upon died or was jerked out from beneath us. In an age where everything from running water to agriculture to transportation and clothing depended on beasts of burden and domestic animals, the instantaneous death of cattle, livestock, horses, asses, camels, sheep, and goats, was catastrophic. This is what it was like to stop using.

The second stage of recovery is the Outstretched arm, symbolized by the cutting sword. We begin to cut ourselves off from the people, places and things associated with our addiction. If we don't make this break, odds are we will relapse. We must push away all the accouterments and paraphernalia of using. We begin by holding them at arm's length. We are still fascinated and obsessed by them.

With the third stage of recovery comes great fear, symbolized by the "Shechina," the Divine Presence, awareness. As we go beyond earliest recovery, distancing ourselves a little from the whole experience, we encounter fear of returning and relapsing. Fears of many varieties surface. We discover that the whole fabric of our lives has been shot through with fear. We feel defenseless and naked. Stripped of our armor, we are gripped by terror for our lives. We know that without help from somewhere, we must surely go back to a life of using. This fear is a natural, healthy, and defensive response to the reality of weakness when we consider the life-threatening nature of our disease. Fear for the loss of sobriety can be a valuable tool in staying "clean."

The fourth stage is The Sign, the image of the external power which keeps us from hurting ourselves. The almost tangible, visible, physical guarantee of safety. The object of our desperate white-knuckled "hanging on" through the turbulence of Recovery. The symbol is a staff. The Hebrew word for staff is *Mateh* which, besides meaning staff, also means Tribe. The words "staff" and "tribe" are interchangeable since the staff is actually a symbol of identification in tribal societies. Each of the twelve tribes was represented by an elder or Prince. His symbol of authority and vested power was the staff he carried. For many of us, our tribe is the fellowship we belong to and the meetings we attend. It is the staff of our life when meetings are our bread and butter.

The fifth stage of Recovery is the Miracle, the Wonder, the change we have wrought in ourselves through the new course of our action. We have turned our life around and now have a new purpose. This is symbolized by Blood. Earlier we referred to Hashem's condition upon our Recovery.

"Either by your blood ye shall live or else by your blood shall ye live."

This is the full circle, the last stage of our Recovery when we internalize the steps, becoming staffs of life.

The Ten Plagues

It is customary when announcing the ten plagues to shed ten drops of wine from the cup, to indicate the absence of joy in the punishment of our enemies. It is never the right time to gloat at the downfall of others and this ritual reminds us of that.

The Kabbalists imbue the action with a deeper significance. The wine, as we mentioned earlier, represents the powers of thought, more specifically the “understanding” or deduction we associate with intuition. This is known as Binah and is attributed to the feminine or receptive aspect of life. Prophecy with its receptive role vis-a-vis Hashem is feminine and grounded in “Binah”, intuition, until the prophecy is passed onwards by the prophet. Then it becomes positive, masculine, and specifically “Chochma.” wisdom.

Prophecy requires simcha, joy and gratitude, which are associated with wine. They too are feminine aspects of the psyche. Here, however, we acknowledge another aspect of our feminine, negative self. Its roots are in the future, for there are many possible futures. The future like Woman, may give birth to many possibilities. The past is Masculine, there is only one past. It is in the past that our resentments have their source. Resentments more than anything in life, cut us off from the source of Simcha and prophecy. We simply have to let go.

Part of the problem with our feelings is the overwhelmingly, primal nature of their capacity. At first when we regain our feelings and sensations, they feel huge. A small hurt, like a drop of wine on the end of our fingertip is associated with the entire cup of wine. We have not learned to differentiate; it feels as though there is a swimming-pool full of pain in the basement which overflows if we add so much as another single drop to it. Instead of feeling appropriate sensation, we experience as it were a lifetime of stored hurts we never felt before.

Fears and hatreds have similar dynamics. At this point in the seder when we announce the anguish suffered vicariously as it were on our behalf by the Egyptians in the Haggadah, we let go our resentment and rage. We spill it over the edge recognizing for a moment the primal nature of our rage and how it resembles a cup filled to the brim. What remains afterwards is thus our cup of joy and gratitude.

These are the ten plagues that the G-d brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt. Each of us has suffered the plagues in all their variety of forms and richness of diversity. The order of manifestation as they occurred to the Egyptians in Egypt was particular to them. Rather than compare our own stories, let us identify.

The Fantasy of Omnipotence

Blood

To understand the significance of the first plague we must first understand what importance was attached to the River Nile in Ancient Egypt. A great deal has been written on the subject and this is not the place for a detailed review. Suffice it to say that for Hashem to strike all the water of the Nile into blood was to strike directly at the heart of political, cultural, religious, and economic life.

The Nile irrigates the whole of Egypt by inundation. It is swollen by rains in the mountains at its source. Heavy with organic sediment, it overflows its banks, irrigating as it fertilizes. It is the source of life, wealth, and art. It is a god. Ceremonies associated with the inundation, rituals and sacrifices comprised a large part of Egyptian daily life. The priesthood, centering upon the King and Queen of Egypt, the Pharaoh, was dedicated to the perpetuation of the links between the royal family and the Nile. As Pharaoh walked down to the water, it would rise to meet him. Pharaoh, by association, became a god. The Nile was not a symbol; it was a reality.

Some of us have had a similar relationship with a substance, mood-altering ritual, or obsession. Suddenly, after Millennia of being their most trustworthy, reliable friend, the river turned into a putrid filthy morass of blood, an enemy. We, too, have gone through this state of change when our "best friend" showed its true ugly face, the other side of dependence where all is ill health and slavery. No more than we were the Egyptians able to forsake the Nile; Just because it had turned to blood didn't mean that their habits changed suddenly. They continued in their denial through all the stages of substitution and rationalization. As it is written: "And all the Egyptians continued to dig beside the river looking for water to drink, because they could not drink the river water."

Frogs

This plague reduced Pharaoh from the proud, vain tyrant to a ridiculous figure, the butt of a Divine joke. When Hashem warned that He would mock Pharaoh and his institutions, that He would playfully dismember the instruments of government, this plague of frogs surely fulfilled all that promise.

A frog appeared in Pharaoh's palace, in his bed chamber, in his bed. When it was crushed, two live frogs appeared in place of the dead one. They multiplied like insects and croaking, hopped out of Pharaoh's bedroom, and made their way through the palace. They invaded the ministry buildings surrounding the royal palace. From the government departments, they split, multiplied, and spread like tendrils of the bureaucracy itself into every corner of Egypt, into people's kitchens, their kneading troughs, even into their ovens. (The Hebrew for frog, "Tzfardeyah" also translates into Birdwitted - "Nonsense!") Like the croaking reptile which simply announces itself and tries to be louder than the next croaking frog, so are politicians. All this could not fail to be interpreted by the Egyptian civilian as a humorous humiliation of their monarchy and its vested interests by a Higher Power.

We, too, have seen all our efforts at control come to nought. We have been humiliated disastrously in direct consequence of our actions and decisions, we have seen them bear witness to our stupidity, to our delusions. As we tried to get the cosmos to dance to our tune, and all its creatures to act the parts we assigned to them, we appeared no less ridiculous than frogs.

Denial

Lice

This plague was an attack on the disease's most powerful weapon, "Denial". Denial is a mechanism whereby the most outrageous manifestations of the addiction can be explained without admitting the necessity of change. An example would be someone with lung cancer blaming automobile emissions for the illness whilst smoking three packets of cigarettes every day. The Egyptians had a similar attitude. When the plagues began to strike, The College of Magicians produced practitioners who could simulate these effects with their thaumaturgical arts. The result of their success was to enable Egypt to prolong its agony, it was "business as usual". This is the function of denial. The mere fact that they could produce similar results with magic meant, somehow, that their lives were not as unmanageable as Moses was attempting to point out. Pharaoh didn't feel quite powerless over events as long as someone close to him was murmuring into his ear, "It's only a strong manipulation of natural forces, your majesty". But as with all illusion, there is a natural upper limit to the intricacy of the web.

When first we lie or deny the truth, to ourselves or others, we have to compensate. The ripples spread outward from the event of the denial, each untruth has ripple-like effects, ramifications, each having to be explained. If I deny the effect of the cigarettes on my lungs, I have to redefine the meaning of the term carcinogenic. If I maintain that denial, I have to redefine the definitions of phenomena such as melanoma, asbestosis, and other things. If I wish to continue in my denial, I have to explain, in some new way, enzyme activity and amino acids and a thousand other facts.

There reaches a point where lies and evasion can no longer explain events fast enough to avoid the momentum of the truth. Magic and illusion have their own "event horizon". In Egyptian magic, the illusion could not be sustained if it required the denial of something smaller than a grain of barley.

There are simply too many details to take care of to maintain the illusion. This was the wonder of the plague of lice. They are smaller than a grain of barley. It was at this stage of events that the Magicians of Egypt began to lose face and ultimately their power. They tried to duplicate the lice but were unable to. At which point, they broke through their first level of denial and admitted a Higher Power. As it is written:

"And the Magicians said to Pharaoh, "It is a finger of G-D."

Wild Beasts

Maintaining His attack on Pharaoh's denial, Hashem instructed Moshe to confront Pharaoh in the morning when Pharaoh went down to the water. Pharaoh relieved himself every morning privately by the water in order to maintain the illusion that he was a god and so did not need the toilet. Moses warned Pharaoh but he would not budge. Suddenly, like some monstrous, collective delirium tremens, Egypt was filled with marauding animals, snakes and scorpions. But the land of Goshen, where the Children of Israel lived, was free and peaceful. At this point, Pharaoh's denial began to crumble, and he proceeded to the next stage of his defeat. He tried to negotiate.

We have all, at one time or another, tried negotiating with our disease. If I switch brands, add water, change partners, only on weekends, anything from geographic relocations to surgery, just let me carry on as I was. And all to maintain the fantasy of omnipotence, Pharaoh called Moshe and Aharon and told them to start public worship of their G-d in the land of Goshen, hoping thereby to placate Moshe and maintain control. Moshe demanded the right to travel three days into the wilderness; Pharaoh agreed on condition they went no further. The plague was lifted, Pharaoh changed his mind and once again refused to let them go.

Defiance

Pestilence

The plague referred to earlier in the Haggadah as “Mighty Hand” was the sudden death of all the livestock in the fields. We too have seen the disappearance of all our valuable possessions, jobs, businesses, houses, and automobiles. We know what it means to be smitten with the pestilence. To look around and survey the desolation of all one’s wealth disintegrating. To ask; “Why is this happening to me?”, as though this wasn’t somehow a logical progression considering the direction in which we were headed.

The “beast” in Egypt was food, clothing, transportation, status symbol, object of worship and means of waging war. It was commerce and agriculture. It struck the Egyptian suddenly and forcibly that life could not go on as it had been doing. Pharaoh’s reaction was not so incomprehensible to those of us who have been in his position. He became defiant. As it is written: “And Pharaoh sent inspectors and, behold, not a single one of the animals belonging to Israel had died in the plague. And Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to send out the People.”

Boils

At the point where their very bodies rebelled and broke into many suppurating boils, the illusion and denial broke down completely. As it is written: “And the Magicians could not stand before Moshe because of the boils. The boils afflicted the Magicians and the Egyptians.”

The Magicians lost all their credibility and, in fact, are never heard of or referred to again in the Torah. Because the Egyptians felt the way they did about themselves, because their self-esteem, like ours, was based so much on their external physiognomy – because they were so proud of their physical culture, smug and self-satisfied, safe in the knowledge that whatever hardships would have to be borne as a result of their obstinacy and defiance could always be deflected upon the slaves and lower orders of society. They were themselves smitten. Their bodies became disgusting, repulsive, and painful. The small domestic and household pets of which the Egyptians were worshipfully reverent, the dog and cat, were equally subject to the plague of boils though they had been immune to the pestilence. The message was clear to them as it has been to us. When we use and abuse, we jeopardize ourselves and all those around us.

Don’t look to place blame for misfortune that befalls those we love, somewhere else. While we were busy chasing our “high,” too busy to take care of those who really needed it, they suffered. If children fell ill because their environment was unsafe – because we couldn’t afford to provide them with the nutrition, hygiene and care they needed or because our affairs were in such chaos – it’s typical for us to go in search of a blame victim.

These plagues, their sequence, their targets and all the details of their execution were purposeful. Our experiences, however painful and humiliating, can always benefit others, and that’s a promise.

Ambivalence

Hail

Before this plague occurred, Hashem via Moshe warned Pharaoh very specifically about what was to come, adding: "And this time I will send all my plagues to your heart."

In the description of the hail that fell, we are told that it was accompanied by very loud thunder. However damaging the hail was, its impact was not as great as the thunder. The hail was not the frozen raindrops with which we are familiar. It more closely resembled molten lava spewing from an erupting volcano in droplets. Yet the thunder which accompanied it was far more frightening. Because very loud noise is disorienting, and in order to hang on to illusions we must be able to fixate on them. When Pharaoh appealed to Moshe to beg Hashem to lift the plague, he referred to "the God-thunder and the hail." Moshe answered "I will pray, the plague will be lifted but you are not ready to let the people go."

To Moshe, it was clear that Pharaoh had no intention of letting go, he was ready to die and bring the entire world down with him. Pharaoh was not a coward, he was not weak, but he was not smart. He was challenging the Almighty. Hashem said, "In order that all the world might see that I am The Higher Power and that ultimately there is hope, that prayer and faith are necessary and worthwhile, I will let you live." Pharaoh bore the lice and the boils without demur. He was not afraid of pain. Yet when the noise of the thunder filled his head, cutting him off from his defense mechanism, he was just as frightened as any other human would be. Very loud noise by itself is a form of torture against which the body is not equipped to defend itself. Are we different? Are we ready to let go? Are we tired of all the noise in our heads?

Locusts

The locust was also preceded by negotiation. Pharaoh, urged by his people who were losing heart, tried to bargain with Moshe. But when he was told that Moshe intended leaving with young and old, men and women, he balked. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the destruction wrought by the voracious locusts who devoured everything edible, scared Pharaoh. He panicked, calling Moshe and Aharon, confessing to having sinned against their G-d and them, begging them to forgive him again and to beg Hashem to remove "this death." But the truth is that as much as he wanted to let them go, he wanted to hold on to them.

Capitulation

Darkness

The significance of this plague was the isolation it imposed upon the Egyptians. As it is written:

“No one could see his brother and no one could get up for three days.”

The darkness, we are told, was palpable. But the greatest darkness is when we cannot hear what our brothers are saying. Seeing is analogous of all communication between friends. All meetings of the mind are called seeing. If we continue determinedly down the path of self-obsession, we must eventually reach that point of palpable darkness where all communication breaks down. If insanity is defined as making the same mistakes but expecting different results, then Pharaoh must, by this time, have been insane. Again, he tried negotiating and saving face. He could not admit his powerlessness. He tried to salvage something from the situation. Eventually he took refuge in rage and forbade Moshe from setting foot in his palace again. Moshe agreed saying, “Yes, let it be just as you have spoken. I will not see your face again.”

Slaying the Firstborn

We tend to blame providence and bad luck for the losses we suffer as a consequence of using and abusing. The price is the same whether we learn our lesson or not. There is no way to use safely, and death is always the price. Pharaoh and all his people, every Egyptian, regardless of race, caste, or rank, all lost a loved one, child, or sibling. The anguish was great. The capitulation was total: no more deals or negotiations, no more stipulation or clauses, no more conditions or half measures. They suddenly became aware of their own mortality.

Sometimes it requires the death of someone close to us to make us ready to change. It is impossible to scare an addict since all the denial mechanisms forbid it. Sometimes though, a moment spent thinking about the state of life as it is now, especially when a major tragedy has occurred, is sufficient for the seed of doubt to take root and grow. For each of us in Recovery, “the slaying of the firstborn” has occurred (at least once).

Darkness — The Worst Plague of All

Rabbi Moses Haber

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Why is the plague of darkness so bad? It is listed among lice, violent animals and the death of one's first-born son. To many 'regular' people, darkness is simply something that happens before and after daylight. It's expected and solved for by the use of fire and electricity. To those reading this holy Haggadah, the plague of darkness can be the worst of all. Because when one sits in darkness, they sit ALONE. Sitting alone, sometimes for days and months, with no one to speak to who understands their inner pain, their loss of self and their mind's torment, can be the most punishing isolation of all. Worst of all, for the most sensitive, one can be in a room full of people and still feel the unbearable pain of being alone.

The plague of darkness was actually twofold. The first feature of the plague was the loss of sight. Not simply the inability to see what was in front of you, but the inability to see your 'brother/friend'. When one is isolated, the focus of one's vision is limited to such a degree that one only sees himself and no other. Family, friends, community and wider world events are beyond the reach of the perspective of one who is isolated. The dark room where one sits is just the tip of the pain, for the darkness descends into the depth of one's identity, their soul!

The second feature of the plague was the inability to 'get up'. The darkness, according to the literal understanding of the phrase, was so thick a person couldn't stand up. They were stuck! No movement from a laying down or seated position. Symbolically, they lost the personal agency and ability to remove themselves from the current situation. For some today, being in 'stuckness' is when our minds cycle and cycle over and over, endlessly repeating the same stories we tell about ourselves leading to self-paralysis and inaction.

When viewed through the lens of addiction and recovery, to those who have tasted the pain of isolation and aloneness, the plague of darkness takes on new meaning.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit The Blind Museum in Holon, Israel. The experience was extraordinary. You enter a completely dark section of the museum and are told that there are typical settings you would find in daily life; a busy street, the marketplace, and a grocery store to navigate by touch and hearing alone.

Many on the visit told me afterwards of the gripping level of anxiety they had before the tour in expectation of losing the ability to see. Yet, all along, the guide, herself visually impaired, after memorizing each of our names, called out to each one of us by name. Her voice became the 'light' that led us through the maze of everyday life, of walking the streets, and navigating the marketplace. Through it all, her voice led the way for us out of the darkness.

To the recovering, this suggests that we are duty bound to use our voices to let those sitting in darkness and isolation know that they are seen and heard and won't be forgotten about. The Torah is full of mitzvot that command us to care for the lonely and downtrodden, for each mitzvah the reason states 'remember how it was for you in Egypt'. Each of us has gone through our own period of exile in their own type of Egypt. Once redeemed, our task becomes to help redeem others. Through those interpersonal redemptions may we all merit the final redemption as one people.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT OR DISCUSSION

Similar to the Jewish first born being spared from the plague of the first born, what were you spared from by finding recovery?

What freedoms have you found in recovery?

What do you still seek to find more freedom from? What tools could you use to help with this?



Dayainu

Dayainu does not mean it would have been enough. Rather, it would have been more than we deserved.

If we count our blessings here, we find:

FIFTEEN REASONS FOR BEING GRATEFUL

He brought us out of Egypt.

Obviously our first gratitude is for the fact that we are no longer trapped, enslaved to substances and habits. There could be no growth so long as we were in Egypt.

It does not say He judged them, rather, He did judgments among them.

The word “did,” *asa*, refers to the most tangible form of creativity, the ultimate unfolding of Hashem’s plans. Hashem is not judgmental simply for its own sake. His judgments are very creative. He did it for us, in order to show us the nature of our addiction and the power of the lie in which we lived. Hashem exposed both the Egyptians and their gods.

He “Did” their gods.

The creativity we refer to is undoubtedly the humor and playfulness in the humiliation of the Egyptian gods.

He killed their firstborn.

This is the culmination of the first lesson. Slavery means death. Addiction means death. The worship of ungod means death. Let this be clear and unequivocal.

He gave us their money.

It does not say gave us their wealth, rather their money. A medium of exchange, the dollar, is a piece of green paper of little value. But it represents agreement amongst people to maintain a monetary system and all the cultural ramifications it carries.

For the system to be successful, a stable balance of forces must exist in the marketplace. The whole structure of economics that worked so well for the Egyptians now came to work for us. It was a sane, peaceful, rewarding system. The word chosen here to describe money, *mamon*, is unusual in this context. One might have expected the word *kesef*, silver, to be used. *Mamon* does not appear in the story of the Exodus, whereas *kesef*, is mentioned often. We did not have to go through the hardship of developing our own through scarcity and hardship and want. We didn’t need any more upheavals in our lives concerning mundane things. Poverty makes Recovery difficult. We had enough on our hands without skyrocketing inflation and a forced return to the barter system.

He split the Sea for us.

We might have had to fight a pitched battle with them the way we did weeks later with the Amalekites. The Egyptians might have found themselves drawn away to fight elsewhere against marauders, or any number of other possibilities. Instead, we were taught to surrender and turn our will over to Hashem. That was good for us.

He passed through it on dry land.

We are not merely remarking that Hashem took care of details. When the Red Sea split and we passed through it, we did not walk through mud and swamp. Everything was as dry as a bone and the walk was comfortable. We are really pointing out that Hashem is loving and caring. The ungodly we served in Egypt were many things, none of them loving and caring or anticipating of our needs.

He drowned our oppressors in it.

Apparently, it was very important to us to see the Egyptians destroyed. Perhaps we were afraid that so long as they could chase us, they were incapable of letting go and we would have to battle endlessly with them. Perhaps we, ourselves, could never let go until we saw them utterly defeated. Whatever the reason, Hashem did drown them all in the Sea.

He took care of our needs.

Forty years in the wilderness. He protected us from sun and wind, snow and rain, snakes and scorpions. We were surrounded by "Clouds of Glory" and never really lacked material things. We had our needs met.

He fed us manna.

This was not just food. This was an entirely new creation. A whole new species of long molecule, this was not some growth or desert cacti. The Manna gave a whole new meaning to the phrase "Living by the word of Hashem."

He gave us the Shabbos.

Shabbos is priceless; it is not a "Sabbath," or day or rest. Only those who live it know what it feels like. To describe it is fruitless.

He brought us close to Mount Sinai.

This, in itself, was an enormous step for us. We became willing to have all our defects of character removed. We were willing to go to any lengths to do Hashem's will. We were entirely ready. What higher spiritual peaks could we possibly have aimed for? We weren't just present at Mount Sinai, we were close.

He gave us the Torah. Not merely a jewel out of His treasury, Hashem gave us the whole treasury.**He entered us into the Land of Israel.****Built us the "Chosen House" (Temple) to atone for our sins.**

Who mentioned sins? Sin is implicit in the way we are. We aren't angels. We aren't expected to get it right the first time or even the second time. We are going to keep failing. What matters is progress, not perfection. The Hebrew words chosen here to mean Temple are Bais Habechira, literally translated as "House of Choice." We are no longer slaves because we have a choice. The real distinction between the using addict and the recovering addict is the power of choice. And so, our gratitude list ends with thanks for the gift of what is more commonly referred to as Free Will, freedom to choose.

Dayenu

Jonah Mendelsohn, Artists in Recovery

(with the T'shuvah Center)

Mitzraim is a state of mind, and we carry our chains within us. This is what they sound like, clanking in our self-talk:

What do you mean, we are made in the image of G-d? That's insane. We are all so different, and all so awkward, and hurt each other so much. Given the mess that we have made of our lives – lost jobs, broken relationships, physical pain, the mess in our homes (if we even have homes) – and of our world – wars, plagues, environmental destruction, corruption, inequity – how is it possible that we can be redeemed? It often seems the best we can do is hide in our devices, built by tiny fingers in far off countries, binge on stories and imaginary explosions, while tiptoeing through the minefield of our own lives, a rigged economy full of tripwires, race on a treadmill toward a carrot that we can never reach, numb ourselves with the illusion of pleasure that only brings pain.

But today, we are reminded that there is a way out. We don't have to blindly accept these messages, this belief that we are insufficient and unworthy. There is another story to be told, if we are willing to give it a try.

Just today, if we can admit we are crazy, even if we can't imagine what sanity is like, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we can picture peace, even if we choose to remain in our suffering, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we ask for help, even if our eyes stay closed, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we open our eyes and see the mess we've made, even if we are completely overwhelmed and our mouth stays shut with shame, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we speak to admit one wrong – even if we might make the same mistake again - it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we feel the tiredness in our bones, and breathe out a heavy sigh of relief, and our head still hangs staring at our feet, unable to move, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we look up from the mess and ask for help, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we find one broken thing on the floor, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we hold the broken thing and express some remorse, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we start a pile of broken things, and stolen things, and useless things – even if we still can't find the floor - it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if we ask for a clean floor – ask for help - even if we still feel embarrassed, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

Just today, if I push the mess to the side and offer someone a chair and a cup of tea – a moment to pause and feel grateful, even surrounded by the craziness, it will be enough – *dayenu*.

For there is always more available to us than we know, or deserve – more ease, more comfort, more connection, more help. We just have to open our eyes and our mouths and breathe, giving in to this involuntary urge for life. However, we have abused ourselves or others, something within us remains pure, a gift that requires only acceptance. Today and every day, as we travel through the wilderness, may we find a moment to pause, stop struggling, and be grateful for the gifts around us, and the gifts within us, and the gifts which we have to give, and the gifts which we are.

The Haggadah and Healing

By Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW

The Three Key Symbols-Rabbi Simcha

Shortly after the recitation of the plagues, the text introduces the three central symbols of the seder: the sacrificial Pesach (Passover) offering (originally lamb), the matzah (unleavened bread) and the marror (bitter herbs).

I suggest a 3-step process for this part of the ceremony: read the Haggadah itself; draw out the connections and associations among the three symbols; and superimpose the framework provided by the three symbols on your own experience.

The Pesach Offering

This symbol works on at least three levels:

- The miracle: God passes over (pasach) and spares the Israelites during that most terrifying plague, the killing of the firstborn. This embodies redemption and providential protection but also terror and tragedy.
- The actual sacrifice: The shankbone recalls the original Pesach offering, which the soon-to-be freed Israelites prepared while still in Egypt.
- The days of the Temple: The Passover Feast was consumed by throngs of Israelites at the Temple in Jerusalem in a major annual pilgrimage.

Matzah

The unleavened bread enjoys several paradoxical dual identities:

- The bread of affliction and the bread of redemption; symbol of humility, vulnerability and servitude - and also freedom, choice, being God's children;
- A reminder of the Israelites' total lack of preparedness, and yet their total willingness and readiness;
- A sign of God's self-revelation and Israel's self-discovery.

The matzah recalls the stunningly abrupt divine deliverance - but equally, the incredibly trusting act of faith of the Israelites to follow their invisible God into the wilderness, even after 400 long years of enslavement.

Marror

Of the three symbols, this is the easiest for us to appreciate. The Jewish experience in recent times and the experience of many other people and nations who suffer hardship make it particularly accessible. Note that the bitterness is described not only in terms of excruciatingly hard labor, but as the ruthless oppression of one people by another.

As you look for the connections among the three symbols, you might find it helpful to create a chart (ahead of time), like the one below.

| PESACH | MATZAH | MARROR |
|----------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Future | Present | Past |
| Relief | Reorganizing | Pain |
| Redemption | Thankfulness | Bitterness |
| Miracles | Positive response, Adaptive | Oppression |
| Recovery, Hope | Treatment | Diagnosis |
| Sobriety | Recovery | Addiction |

And whatever else you think of!

The Haggadah recommends that “in every generation, every individual should feel as though he or she had actually been redeemed from Egypt.” This sentence empowers those who have struggled with illness to rethink the three symbols through the prism of illness and recovery. Relate the many aspects - some of them paradoxical and dualistic, as above - of these intensely personal experiences to the national story of slavery and freedom:

- Do you feel that you are still enslaved? In what ways have you been set free?
- If you had to name three actual, physical symbols to parallel those of the seder, what would they be? What encapsulates both your confinement and your delivery? What embodies your suffering and bitterness?
- As you articulate aspects of your odyssey with illness, treatment, and recovery, try to relate them to the Exodus story and the liberation of the Hebrew slaves: How was their experience like yours? What emotional, psychological, and spiritual processes did they have to undergo that reflect your own?

Your midrash - your personal interpretation based on your particular experience - links your history to that of the eternal narrative. It is a unique one that adds to the meaning of Passover for all assembled. “In each generation” means nothing if not here and now, and “every individual” implies all those gathered at your table and their deepest, most profound experiences.

The Haggadah is not just a chronicle of a bygone historic moment. It is a script for a live, unfolding drama, with all of us as players.

Hillel and the Earl of Sandwich

By Chaye Kohl

John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, England was an avid card player. Lord Sandwich is purported to have asked his servant to bring his meat positioned between two slices of bread because he did not want to stop playing cards, nor did he want to soil the cards with the grease on his fingers (if he indeed ate the meat with his fingers.) Others at that table in the 1700s indicated they wanted their snack assembled “just like Sandwich” and the sandwich was born.

Or was it?

The trenchers of the Middle Ages in Europe were either large wooden serving platters or slabs of stale bread that were used as serving platters for meat. In the case of a bread trencher, it soaked up the juices of the meat served and the platter could be eaten at the end of the meal or fed to the dogs.

And if we go back to the ancient East where flat round breads were the food staple of Asia and northern Africa, we meet Hillel the Elder who wrapped his korban Pesach – lamb – with bitter greens – *marror* - in a soft matzah which made for a savory meal.

No matter the origin, sandwiches have become a mainstay of the working people as the centuries have unfolded. Easy to pack, packed with quick energy, and particularly filling, the bready treat can be: healthy (tuna, lettuce, tomato); salty and sweet (peanut butter and jelly); or decadent (triple decker deli).

Bread, the staff of life, has also become a metaphor for how groups of people may see things differently. Dr. Seuss, in his “The Butter Battle Book” features two cultures whose differences polarize them. The Yooks eat their bread with the butter-side up, the Zooks eat their bread with the butter-side down, and the conflict between the two sides leads to an escalating arms race and the threat of annihilation.

But I digress...

As we approach Pesach, it is the sandwich of the seder that is on our minds. Hillel Hatzadik’s (Hillel the righteous one) sandwich was actually more of a wrap. The matzah of his day was not of the crunchy, board-like texture we are accustomed to pulling from a box (machine or handmade). That made it easier for him to create “*Korech*.”

Transporting us back to the Tannaitic period in Israel, there was a difference of opinion among the scholarly *Tannaim*. They debated how to eat the ceremonial foods at the Pesach seder. When the Bible instructs us to eat the paschal lamb, bitter herbs, and matzah at the Pesach meal, should these foods be eaten separately or together? The view which posited that these foods be eaten separately sees each as a separate item on the Pesach menu; eating each food was given as a separate command.

The symbolism for each stood alone. *Maror* symbolized the bitterness of slavery, and Matzah and the paschal lamb symbolized freedom. In ancient Egypt, the Israelites were instructed that the lamb be set aside days before the holiday. Then the lamb was roasted as the matzah baked. That meal was eaten by slaves, dressed in traveling clothes, shoes on their feet, and staff in hand ready to leave their lives of slavery behind them.

Hillel Hatzadik considered the best way to commemorate the slavery/redemption experience was to wrap all these foods, heavy with symbolism, and eat them together. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks indicates that it was Hillel's opinion, based on the reading of a verse in *Bamidbar*, that we are to eat the three foods together. Rabbi Sacks reflects: "Perhaps, too, he [Hillel] was reminding us of the Jewish experience of history. Within the bitterness of slavery, there was also hope and promise of freedom. Within freedom, we are also commanded each year never to forget the taste of slavery, so that we should not take liberty for granted, or forget those who are still afflicted (Sacks Haggadah, Maggid Press).

Recreating the Exodus story is what we are exhorted to do each year. It is difficult for most of us. Can I truly envision a life of slavery? Am I a slave to my passions or to other people? Loss of loved ones may be part of my life, but can I envision a life where each day brings loss of life. The eating of matzah and *maror*, established by rabbinical authority as part of the paschal commemorations for generations to come, are prompting me to use my imagination to conjure up the slavery and liberation of my ancient ancestors.

Years after they entered the land and built the *Beit Hamikdash*, when families traveled en masse to Yerushalayim for Pesach, the sages debated the question: how best to help people remember slavery and liberation? "*Harei anu, u'vanenu, u'venei vanenu meshubadim hayeenu*;" We, our children, and our children's children were enslaved.

How good is my imagination?

What reenacts the first Passover for me is having people at the seder, around a table laden with the special foods fraught with symbolism. As we pass the plates of matzah, *maror* and *charoset* I am constructing a sandwich similar to the one Hillel Hatzadik made when he sat at a meal in Yerushalayim, imagining slavery and redemption of years prior to his birth. Hillel may not have been schooled in Multiple Intelligence Theory and the efficacy of tactile learning, or the Twelve Steps, but he understood human nature. Making and eating this sandwich can tap into my inner Israelite.

The matzah is laid out, the romaine lettuce and grated horseradish are carefully laid on top, and then I close up the sandwich and dip it in charoset. Just before I take a bite, I recite the words "*kein asa Hillel...*"; *just as Hillel did!* [The Haggadah Bais Levi (Brisk) reminds me to eat both *maror* and Matzah in every bite, or I will have to go back and repeat the process.]

Constructing the sandwich, reciting the passage, and eating transport me. And just as Hillel did, I combine the memories of slavery and freedom, chew thoughtfully, and connect to the chain of ancestors who have been doing this for millennia.

Nirtzah: Conclusion of the Seder

*Chasal Sidur Pesach
The End of the
Haggadah*

This is the end of our Haggadah, yet it is the beginning of the next step of your journey. The Haggadah represents a journey to freedom, much like the freedom we seek as recovering addicts. Likewise, the Seder comprises 15 “steps,” much as we take 12 Steps in our own journey to personal yearning to be happy, joyous and free. There is no end to work the steps, and there is no end to the 15 steps of the Haggadah.

FINAL QUESTIONS

What did you learn?

What inspired you?

What will you take with you as journey on in your recovery?

There is a power to asking questions and having the privilege of many years ahead to discover the answers!

The core of this delightful Haggadah companion was discovered hidden in the JACS archives. We fused selections from these early JACS participants with submissions from newer members of our recovery community. We hope you have as much joy reading this supplement as we have had in its preparation. May we celebrate a festival of profound freedom this year and for many healthy years to come!

-JCS Recovery

Next year in Jerusalem!

לשנה הבאה בירושלים

May we merit to see the rebuilding of the
temple speedily in our days.

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ABOUT US

Guided by Jewish faith-based values, **JCS Recovery** serves individuals and families Guided by Jewish faith-based values, **JCS Recovery** serves individuals seeking recovery from addiction in all five boroughs and the New York metropolitan area. We offer tailored recovery services to adults and families of all races, ethnicities, religions, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. We aim to provide our clients with the tools to put them on a path of health, well-being, recovery, and independence.

Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others (JACS) is a program of the Jewish Health, Healing and Recovery Network of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (The Jewish Board). JACS is a volunteer, mutual-help organization dedicated to encouraging and assisting Jewish alcoholics, chemically dependent persons and their families, friends and associates to explore recovery in a nurturing Jewish environment; promoting knowledge and understanding of the disease of alcoholism and chemical dependency as it involves the Jewish community; and acting as a resource center and information clearinghouse on the effects of alcoholism and drug dependency on Jewish family life.

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