

מדריך הלכתי לסדר של פסח

A Guide to the Seder

The Freehof Institute of Progressive Halakhah



About This *Guide*.

The Seder is the formal meal through which we celebrate Passover and our liberation from slavery in Egypt. The rituals of the evening evoke formative periods in the history of the Jewish people. Some of them – the eating of *matzah* and *maror*, the telling of the story of liberation – stem from the Biblical period, when Pesach was a pilgrimage festival observed at the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. Others – the four cups of wine, reclining, the “salad” course (*karpas*), *afikoman* – seem to originate in the Hellenistic era, when the land of Israel was part of the Greco-Roman cultural (and political) empire. But the structure, content, direction, and purpose of the Seder are defined by the *halakhab*, the Jewish legal tradition, beginning with the Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud and extending through the many subsequent centuries of halakhic thought and interpretation. For all Jews, including progressive Jews, the Seder is an experience of *halakhab* in action. To understand and to fully appreciate that experience, we need to be familiar with its foundations in Jewish law.

The Freehof Institute offers this *Guide* to the fourteen steps of the Seder, a manual that discusses the how-to and how-come of the ritual from the perspective of progressive *halakhab*. We hope you find it helpful as you prepare for Seder in your home or community.

A Note on Reclining.

One of the well-known customs (*minhagim*) of Seder evening is that we “recline” when we eat. It’s one of the Four Questions, after all. The *minhag* goes back to Hellenistic times, to the Greco-Roman symposium banquets, where the attendees would recline on benches and eat and drink their way through the meal. The Mishnah (*M. P’sachim* 10:1) prescribes this as a requirement for all at the Seder, including the poorest of the poor, presumably because *this* is the way that free people (*b’nai chorin* / בני חורין), that is, persons of substance and stature in the community, conduct themselves. The Babylonian Talmud, which emanated from a culture that didn’t know of “reclining” as a common practice, understands it as a symbolic act that demonstrates one’s status as a free person. Thus, the Bavli (*P’sachim* 108a) requires that we recline specifically at *Motzi-Matzah* and when we drink the four cups of wine, for those foodstuffs symbolize our liberation from bondage. By contrast, we do not recline when eating the *Maror*, because that’s a symbol of slavery.[1]

Traditional *halakhab* requires that we recline on our left side through the Seder.[2] But we think it’s more reasonable to adopt the view of those medieval authorities who hold that nowadays we do not need to recline, because that is no longer the way that free persons behave when eating their meals.[3] Thus, there is no requirement that we recline at our Seder today. It makes more sense to sit up straight at the table, since that is the way that free persons of stature (and good manners!) should eat their meals.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that you *shouldn’t* recline, either. One may choose to do so as a way to identify with age-old Jewish practice, as a physical representation of the unity of all the Jewish people through all generations. But it is not a *requirement* to do so.

NOTES

[1] Rashi, *P’sachim* 108a, s.v. *matzah tz’rikhab beseibab* and *maror ein tzarikh beseibab*.

[2] *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Chametz Umatzah* 7:7; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 472:2-3.

[3] R. Eliezer b. Natan (11th c. Germany), *Sefer Raban*, 74b; R. Eliezer b. Yoel Halevi (12th-13th c. Germany), *Sefer Ra’avyah* ch. 525.

The Steps of the Seder סימני הסדר

סימן לסדר של פסח		
קרש	ורחץ	כרפס
קרא חלי וחכין ומלון ומן מן יט פסח - מיוני דים טון קוואט מיט כוונה קידוש מלון	נחך רעק מיך ניכט כו פד געסן דים העט מהני ברכה עכ"ל לו וועטן	היר נחך עפ"ך חנך פיער ועל מין ומלון ומלון טונק ומכני בלכה בוי פרי המד ומלון גניב
יחץ	מגיד	רהצה
דיא מיטלשטי מנה טוהי פון חנכרד טמלן מיט העלפט דחסן לומפיקווען טומ בהוטן	דג מי חול זרוע פון בעטן געט יחול מלון דים מן טיט גילן ומלון כהמ לחא מיט החברע טיט	ומן דג פאר ביימ גנגן למי גיר וומטר לו דיא העכר כרין לו וועטן גלמנגן
מוציא מצה	מרור	כורך
מיון דים חברעטי מנה יונלי טומ מלון טיט ביי פון מייחין טטיק טומט ברעכטן	ד עק נחך דג גריט פון קרין מין מרועה - מין טונק ימין יעדן ווייניג מיט גכוג :	גון נטוי פון דים דריט מנה מין עטיקל מין כויל קרין הידוס ויקלינג כן עעה :
שלחן עורך	צפון ברך	הלל גרעה
גון דריט ריץ טיט מיט יעקן חוב' גיימי - ומלון געט געט הט נחך היט לוגעבן גוט	נחך רעק עמין טוהי זח ומלון מן רעק מ מליקווען חול ממון לו בענטן ניט פרוגעטן	נחך רען בענטן אכט דים טיר מוקן חונט טפ"ך ומן מיטח ומלון קווען דרטוט פול פראקן

Kadesh

קדש



1. *Drink the First Cup.*

Kiddush. The Seder begins with the recitation of *kiddush*. In this respect, the Seder resembles the meals we eat at the onset of Shabbat and the other festivals.[1] *Kiddush*, which is said over a cup of wine, consists of three *b'rakbot* (blessings). The first is *borei p'ri hagafen* (“... Who creates the fruit of the vine”), the blessing we recite before drinking wine on any day of the year. The second, the *Kiddush* proper, is the longer paragraph which *sanctifies* the day and concludes with the words *m'kadesh yisrael v'haẓ'manim* (“... Who sanctifies Israel and the festivals”). The third *b'rakbah* is the “*Shebechyanu*” (*birkat z'man*), customarily recited at the *Kiddush* that begins every festival. If the Seder participants have already recited “*Shebechyanu*” at the time of candle-lighting, as some Reform *bagadot* suggest, it is not necessary to repeat it at *Kiddush*,[2] although some may wish to say it at *Kiddush*. [3]

When the festival begins on Friday night, we add the special insertions for Shabbat, as indicated in the texts of the *Kiddush* printed in our *bagadot*.

If the Seder occurs on Saturday night, *Havdalab* is recited (along with *Kiddush*) over this cup of wine [4] to mark the conclusion of Shabbat. The order of *b'rakbot* is as follows: *Yayin* (wine); *Kiddush*; *Ner* (the blessing over the flame – *borei m'orei ha'eish*); *Havdalab* (the blessing of “separation/distinction,” concluding with the words *hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol* (“... Who distinguishes between the holy and the not-holy”); and *Z'man* (“*Shebechyanu*”).

The Four Cups (ארבעה הכוסות, *arba`ah bakosot*). It is a *mitzvah* to drink four cups of wine on the first night of Pesach.[5] This is done *al haSeder* (על הסדר), at specific moments during the evening's ritual.

1. The first cup is the cup we drink now, at *Kadesh*, over which we say *Kiddush*.
2. The second cup we drink at the conclusion of the *Magid* section of the *Seder*, the telling of the story of the Exodus. We recite the blessing for our redemption (ברכת גאולה, *birkat ge'ulah*) over the second cup.
3. We recite *birkat hamazon*, the Blessing after the Meal, over the third cup.
4. We drink the fourth cup at the conclusion of Hallel, near the end of the *Seder*.

Why four cups? Various explanations are given in the traditional sources. The most widely-known, perhaps, is that each cup corresponds to one of the four לשוני גאולה,[6] the words that appear in Exodus 6:6-7 to signify God's promise of redemption to Israel:

והוצאתי (*v'hotzeiti*) – “I will bring you out from the bondage of Egypt”

והצלתני (*v'hitzalti*) – “I will rescue you from slavery to them”

וגאלתי (*v'ga'alti*) – “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm”

ולקחתי (*v'lakachti*) – “I will take/acquire you as My people”

A Fifth Cup? Some manuscripts of the Talmud [7] mention it. Since this contradicts the Mishnah (*P'sachim* 10:1), which speaks of four cups, some authorities regard those texts as erroneous. [8] Others, however, accept the reading and rule that it refers to an “optional” cup [9]: if one wishes to drink a fifth cup, one is entitled to do so. One might choose to drink a fifth cup because, according to some, it corresponds to a fifth expression of redemption: והבאתי (*v'heiveiti*), “I will bring you to the land that I promised to give,” etc. (Exodus 6:8). This promise is certainly relevant in our day, as it calls to mind the restoration of Jewish settlement in the land of Israel and the establishment of the Jewish state, which many see as *atchalta d'ge'ulah*, “the beginning of our redemption.” And since our redemption, even if it has begun, remains incomplete - the world is not yet perfect, and injustice and persecution remain the lot of the Jews and many other peoples - the fifth cup remains optional, rather than an obligatory part of the *Seder*. If one chooses to drink a fifth cup, its proper place for the fifth cup is immediately following the recitation of Psalm 136. The fourth cup would follow immediately upon the conclusion of Hallel [10] (the end of Psalm 118).

Substitutes for Wine. The sources [11] teach us that “One who does not (usually) drink wine, either because he or she finds it harmful or distasteful, should nevertheless force him- or herself to drink it (at the *Seder*) to fulfill the *mitzvah* of the four cups.” This rule expresses the special nature of wine at the *Seder*. On all other *Shabbatot* and festivals, one may fulfill the requirement of *Kiddush* simply by listening to the *b'rakah* and responding “*Amen*” at its conclusion without drinking the wine. On Pesach, by contrast, the obligation to drink four cups is separate from that of *Kiddush*, and one can fulfill it only by drinking the wine. There is, however, an important exception to this rule: the word “harmful” in the text cited above should not be read literally. All authorities agree that one should *not* drink wine at the *Seder* if the consumption of alcohol poses a serious health risk to that individual.[12] Besides,

unfermented grape juice is considered “wine” for ritual purposes, so that those who do not wish to drink wine may fulfill their obligation thereby.

What if, for health reasons, an individual should not drink even grape juice? Traditional authorities will rule that this person is exempt [13] from the requirement to drink four cups. In our view, this is an unacceptable alternative; we ought to do everything we can to include such persons within the observance of the Seder ritual. Following the reasoning that permits the use of substitute beverages for wine (*chamar m'dinah*, “local wine”) on other ritual occasions and that those beverages need not be intoxicants,[14] [we recommend](#) that individuals who cannot drink grape juice use coffee, tea, or other natural fruit juices for the four cups. In such a case, the *b'rakhab* recited over each cup is *Barukh atta Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha`olam shebakol nih'yah bid'varo*.

NOTES

[1] I.e., Sukkot, Sh'mini Atzeret, Shavuot, and Rosh Hashanah. *Kiddush* is understood as the fulfillment of the *mitzva* to “remember (*zakhor*) the Sabbath day and sanctify it”: call it to mind (*zokhreihu*) over wine; *B. P'sachim* 106a. This requirement extends to festivals because, as Rambam tells us, the festivals are also referred to as “sabbaths” (*shabbatot*; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkehot Shabbat* 29:18).

[2] The lighting of the *ner shel Shabbat* or *ner shel yom tov* (the Shabbat or festival “lamp” or candles) was originally a private act performed by the housewife during the late afternoon prior to the onset of the holy day. Her husband, presumably at synagogue, was not present. If the festival candle-lighting is performed in the presence of the entire company, it represents the beginning of *yom tov* for all those gathered, so that it is appropriate to recite “*Shebechyanu*” at that time.

[3] Since that is the moment when we truly *sanctify* the holiday.

[4] If sundown has not yet occurred, the blessings of *ner* and *havdalah* may be postponed until we drink the second or third cup of wine.

[5] *M. P'sachim* 10:1 (וי לא יפחתו לו מארבע כוסות של יין); *Mishneh Torah, Hilkehot Chametz Umatzah* 6:7.

[6] *Y. P'sachim* 10:1 (37b-c); Midrash *Sh'mot Rabah* 6:4; Rashi to *P'sachim* 99b, *s.v. arba kosot*.

[7] Our printed editions (*B. P'sachim* 118a, end of the second line) read ת"ר רביעי גומר עליו את ההלל. A number of manuscripts, including Codex Munich, the only manuscript of the entire Talmud in our possession, read חמישי (“fifth”) in place of רביעי (“fourth”).

[8] See Rashi and Rashbam to *B. P'sachim* 118a, *s.v. bakbi garsinan*. The term *bakbi garsinan* – “this is how the text is supposed to read” – signals a textual emendation. It's quite likely that Rashi and Rashbam were working from a manuscript variant that read “the fifth cup” and “corrected” that reading. Our printed text, in turn, accepts their emendation. See also *Chidushei R. Nissim Gerondi (HaRan), P'sachim* 118a.

[9] *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 158:4:10, based upon Geonic precedents (*Otzar HaGe'onim, P'sachim*, p. 127).

[10] If one recites the passage יהללוך (*y'hallekha*) at the conclusion of Psalm 118, the fourth cup and its blessing should follow that passage.

[11] See *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 472:10: מי שאינו שותה יין מפני שמזיקו או שונאו צריך לדחוק עצמו לשתות לקיים מצות ארבע כוזות.

[12] See *Mishnah B'rurah*, 472, no. 35, who explains the word מזיקו as “causes one a headache.” Thus, if drinking wine would cause actual illness, one is exempt from the requirement, since drinking wine with such consequences “is not the way of observing freedom” (*Sha`ar Hatziyun*, no. 52).

[13] See R. Ovadyah Yosef, *Chazon Ovadyah* vol. 2, (Jerusalem 1979), p. 126.

[14] See CCAR Responsum 5755.16, “Substitutes for Wine Under the *Chupah*,” *Teshuvot for the Nineties* (New York: CCAR, 1997), pp. 231-236, <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-responsa/tfn-no-5755-16-231-236>.

U'r'chatz

ורחץ



2. Wash the Hands.

The first of two hand-washings takes place now, immediately prior to *karpas*, the eating of a green vegetable. (By “hand-washing,” of course, we mean the ritual of *n'tilat yadayim*, pouring water over the hands from a vessel (a “*k'li*,” like the one pictured). This particular hand-washing is quite a rarity. We’re likely familiar with the *n'tilat yadayim* that is traditionally performed immediately before eating bread (or *matzah*), but this one is unique to the Seder. Its origin, like that of so many of our ritual practices, goes back to Temple times, and it reflects a desire to imitate the priests (*kohanim*) who ate all their meals in a state of ritual purity. Under the rules that define this “purity,” liquids are especially conducive in transmitting *tum'ah* (“defilement”). Thus, if one wishes to eat food that is dipped into some liquid condiment – for example, a green vegetable dipped in salt water – one must first perform *n'tilat yadayim* to remove *tum'ah* from the hands, lest they transmit that *tum'ah* by way of the condiment to the food itself.[1] This custom has generally disappeared, even among the most traditionally observant.[2] Thus, some traditional *bagadot* provide that only the leader of the Seder (*ba'al habayit*) performs the hand-washing of *U'r'chatz*; it is a symbolic re-enactment of Temple custom and not a practice that is followed today.

Do We Recite a B'rakhab? Since we no longer perform this particular ritual except at the Seder, most authorities rule that we do not recite the *b'rakhab* (blessing) *Barukh atah... asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim* ("... and Who has commanded us concerning the washing of the hands").[3] That instruction appears in most *bagadot*. On the other hand, some authorities, most notably Rambam,[4] do require both the washing of hands before eating foods dipped in liquid *and* a *b'rakhab* before this hand-washing.

We favor the first opinion. First of all, it's the common practice nowadays not to say a *b'rakhab* here, and there's something to be said for ritual unity among the Jews! Besides, it makes sense. If we don't say this *b'rakhab* (indeed, if during the rest of the year we don't perform this hand-washing), there's little reason to say it now, especially since we do not tend to be strict about the laws of ritual purity. (Why then do we perform the hand-washing before eating bread? See below in the section *Rach'tzah*.) On the other hand, you may wish to follow the position of Rambam and recite the blessing, perhaps because this hand-washing *is* a symbolic re-enactment of Temple custom and therefore an expression of our hope for redemption.

NOTES

[1] See *B. P'sachim* 115a: צריך נטילת ידים - כל שטיבולו במשקה : אמר רבי אלעזר אמר רב אושעיא and Rashi *ad loc.*, s.v. צריך נטילת ידים; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot B'rakhot* 6:1; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 158:4.

[2] The common explanation is that, since in the absence of the Temple-based purification rituals we are all in a state of ritual impurity, the Sages did not require *n'tilat yadayim* for foods dipped in liquid (*Mishnah B'rurah, Orach Chayyim* 158, note 20).

[3] See the preceding note: if the Sages didn't require this hand-washing, the *b'rakhab* is likely a *b'rakhab l'vatalah*, an "unnecessary blessing." See *Tosafot, P'sachim* 115a-b, s.v. *kol sbetibulo b'mashkeb*; *Tur Orach Chayyim* 473 (quoting R. Meir of Rothenburg); *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 158:4, and *Magen Avraham, Orach Chayyim* 158, no. 6 (ספק ברכות לקולא). "when there is a doubt as to whether a *b'rakhab* is required, it's best not to recite it").

[4] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhhot Chametz Umatzah* 8:1 and *Hilkhhot B'rakhot* 6:1. See also Rashi above, at note 1, and in *Siddur Rashi* (ed. Freimann, Berlin, 1912), p. 183.



3. Eat the Green Vegetable.

Our *minhag* is to dip a green vegetable, usually parsley or celery, into salt water, recite the blessing *borei p'ri ha'adamah* (“...Who creates the fruit of the earth”), and eat it. How it got this way is a complicated story. The practice of **טיבול**, eating foods dipped in condiment, goes back to the symposium banquets of Hellenistic times, which became the model for the formal meals on Shabbat and festivals (*m'sibot*) described in the Rabbinic sources. Prior to the main course, the participants in the meal would dip and eat vegetables and other appetizers. Since the Seder is the most striking example of such a *m'sibah* in our contemporary observance, it's no wonder that this “salad course” or **טיבול ראשון** (*tibul risbon*, the first[1] act of dipping-and-eating) is retained.

But since very few things in Jewish life happen without argument(!), we should note two important arguments that accompany this seemingly simple act in the halakhic literature.

A. *What Vegetable*[2] *Do We Eat?* The Mishnah (*P'sachim* 10:3) reads: **הביאו לפניו מטבל בחזרת עד**, שמגיע לפרפרת הפת, “(The plate) is placed before one; one dips and eats *chazeret* until it is time for the main course.” *Chazeret* is “lettuce,” which certainly qualifies as a green vegetable. The problem is that some varieties of lettuce qualify as *maror*, the bitter herb, so that if we eat the

maror at this point in the Seder we would have to recite, in addition to the *b'rakhab* “*borei p'ri ha'adamah*,” the appropriate blessing for the bitter herb (... *al akhilat maror*; see below). That's okay if the only green vegetable we have is a bitter herb.[3] But since we don't want to eat the *maror* prior to eating the *matzah*, (since that is the moment when the bitter herbs are ritually appropriate),[4] it's best to use a different vegetable for *tibul rishon*. [5] As noted, the *minhag* is to use *karpas* (parsley, celery, or some other spring green) for this purpose. Like most ritual customs, this one has received numerous explanations or rationales. One of our favorites: the first three letters of the Hebrew *karpas*, when transposed, spell the word פ-ר-ך, which describes the backbreaking labor our ancestors were forced to perform in Egypt. And the final letter, *samekh*, which carries the numerical value of sixty, stands for the traditional total of 600,000 Israelites enslaved by Pharaoh.[6]

B. *What Condiment Do We Use?* Salt water, right? Not so fast. Some early authorities (*rishonim*) specify *charoset* as the condiment for *karpas* as well as for the *maror* to be eaten later.[7] This, presumably, is because *charoset* is the only condiment mentioned in the Mishnaic and Talmudic discussions of *tibul* (טיבול), dipping. Others, however, are adamant that *charoset* should be reserved for the *maror*,[8] so that, if we use another green vegetable for *karpas* (which we do – see the preceding paragraph), we should dip it into a different condiment (salt water or vinegar, for example).[9] Since our *minhag* is to use salt water as the condiment for *karpas*, you'll probably want to stick with it; your Seder guests will be expecting it. But *charoset* is acceptable, so the choice is yours. And there could be an advantage to using *charoset* here: since everyone expects salt water, the switch to *charoset* might spur some questions... and as we know, the Seder is all about questions.

NOTES

[1] Since we dip a second time when we eat the *maror* later on.

[2] The requirement can be fulfilled by eating any food over which the appropriate *b'rakhab* is *borei p'ri ha'adamah*, that is, a food that grows from the ground (and not from a tree), eaten in its raw state. So a cucumber or zucchini would work, even though they are technically “fruit”.

[3] See Rambam's *Commentary to Mishnah P'sachim* 10:3.

[4] See below, in the discussion of *Koreikb*.

[5] Thus, in his *Mishneh Torah (Hilkhos Chametz Umatzah* 8:1-2), Rambam instructs us to place *yerek acher*, “another vegetable” besides *maror*, on the Seder plate and to use that other vegetable for *tibul rishon*.

[6] *Sefer Abudarham* 79d among other medieval sources.

[7] *Seder Rav Amram Gaon, Seder Pesach* (printed edition); *T'shuvot Hage'onim Sha'arei T'shuvah*, no. 287; *Hilkhos R. Yitzhak ibn Gi'at, Hil. P'sachim*. P. 325; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hilkhos Chametz Umatzah* 8:2; R. Meir of Rothenburg, cited in *Tur Orach Chayyim* 473.

[8] *Tosafot, P'sachim* 114a, *s.v. m'tabel b'chazeret*: because the *charoset* symbolizes the mortar used to make the bricks during our slavery in Egypt, it is more appropriate to use it for the *maror*, which symbolizes the bitterness of bondage, rather than for the *karpas*.

[9] *Tosafot, P'sachim* 114a, *s.v. m'tabel b'chazeret*, citing Rabbeinu Tam.



4. Break the Middle Matzah.

The Broken Piece. The leader of the Seder breaks one matzah here, with each of the two pieces serving an important ritual role. The larger one is set aside for the *afikoman*, to be eaten at the conclusion of the meal (see *Tzafun*, below). The smaller piece will be used for the *b'rakhot* of *Motzi-Matzah*, the everyday blessing recited before eating bread and the special blessing recited at the Seder for fulfilling the *mitzvah* to eat matzah. Why do we recite those *b'rakhot* over a broken matzah rather than a whole one? After all, on Shabbat and other festivals we use two unbroken loaves of bread (*challah*) for that purpose. The answer is that the Torah refers to matzah as *לחם עוני* (*lechem oni*; Deuteronomy 16:3), which is variously translated as “the bread of affliction/distress” or “the bread of poverty”; thus, “just the poor person (עני) must make do with only part of a loaf, so do we fulfill the *mitzvah* with part of a *matzah*.”[1]

How Many Matzot? Most *hagadot* instruct us to break “the middle *matzah*” for this purpose, which means that there are three *matzot* on the Seder plate. That’s our standard *minhag*, but (as always) there are different customs. Early authorities, particularly Geonim and S’fardim, speak of two *matzot* on the plate, so that the leader will recite the *b'rakhot* over one whole *matzah* and one broken piece.[2] Their rationale seems to be that while on all other Shabbatot and festivals we recite over two whole loaves, the requirement of *lechem oni* on Pesach means that we lessen our festive joy and recite over one whole and one partial *matzah*. [3] Other Geonic sources, however, speak of three *matzot*, [4] which was also the

custom of Rashi and his successors in France and northern Europe:[5] we begin with three whole *matzot* and recite the blessings over two and a half. This allows us to fulfill the requirement of לחם משנה (*lechem mishneh*), that we make our Shabbat and festival meals over two whole loaves (or, in this case, *matzot*). Their rationale, it would seem, is that Pesach is no less festive than other *yamim tovim*, so that the broken piece comes *in addition* to the two whole *matzot*. [6] Three *matzot* is the standard declared in the *Shulchan Arukh* [7] and, as we've indicated, it's the widespread *minhag*. However, no less a scholar than the 18th-century Gaon of Vilna continued to put two *matzot* on his Seder plate, [8] so that option still exists. Your choice may depend upon your understanding of the nature of the holiday. Does the memory of our slavery and the reality of oppression in the world diminish the measure of joy that we feel at this moment? If so, you might begin with two *matzot* and break one of them at *Yachatz*. Or does our liberation render Pesach a *yom tov* like all others, so that we rejoice in full measure *and* remember our slavery in Egypt over a broken *matzah*? If so, you would follow the standard *minhag*, put three *matzot* on the plate, break the matzah and recite the blessings over two whole ones (for *lechem mishneh*) and a broken one (for *lechem oni*).

NOTES

[1] B. *P'sachim* 115b-116a; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Chametz Umatzah* 8:6.

[2] *Otzar Chiyot Minhagim Bein B'bei Eretz Yisrael uvein B'bei Bavel* (ed. Levin, 1942), pp. 46-48 (the Palestinian custom was to use two *matzot*, while the Babylonians would add a third *matzah* if the Seder occurred on Shabbat); *Siddur Rav Saadyah Gaon*, p. 148; Rabbeinu Chananel, *B'rakhot* 39b Alfasi, *P'sachim*, fol. 25b; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Chametz Umatzah* 8:6.

[3] This is the explanation offered by Alfasi (see preceding note).

[4] Rav Sherira Gaon, in *Otzar HaGe'onim, P'sachim*, pp. 117-118.

[5] Rashi and Rashbam, *P'sachim* 116a, *s.v. af kan b'frusab*; *Tosafot, P'sachim* 116a, *s.v. mah darkei shel ani*.

[6] Rashi *ad loc*.

[7] *Orach Chayyim* 473:4.

[8] *Ma'aseh Rav*, no. 187.



5. Tell the Story.

The word *Magid* is the verb form of the noun הגדה (*bagadah*) which means “narrative” or “story,” refers to one[1] of the three[2] Toraitic *mitzvoth* that we fulfill at the Seder:

וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.

(Exodus 13:8) You will tell (*v'bigad'ta*) your child on that day: I do this because of what God did for me when I went forth from Egypt.

Creativity. This “telling” comprises the bulk of the liturgy that we recite on Seder evening, and the *bagadot* that we use devote the majority of their pages to it. Liberal *bagadot* tell the story of our freedom in many different ways, and that’s okay; the tradition designates this part of the Seder as the place where we are entitled to give voice to our creativity within the formal structure of the evening’s ritual. To be sure, the sources provide us with a *keva* (קבע), a fixed form) and a *nusach* (נוסח), a narrative text to recite. This goes back to the Mishnah (*M.*

P'sachim 10:4), which instructs us מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח, to begin the telling with the unhappy origins of our people and to conclude it by recounting our redemption, and to tell the story by way of Midrashic elaboration on the verses Deuteronomy 26:5-9 (ארמי אובד (אבי וכי). But we are not bound to that fixed form. Already in Talmudic times we find a dispute as to which “unhappy origins” the Mishnah refers,[3] and it is difficult to imagine that, in the days before printed *bagadot*, every Midrashic elaboration was the same. Perhaps this is why our text of the *bagadah* tells us that “whoever expands upon the story of the Exodus is worthy of praise” (וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח).[4] This explains why the paragraph *Ha Lachma Anya* (“Behold, the bread of affliction”) is recited in Aramaic, the vernacular of the Jews in ancient Palestine and Babylonia and why other sections of the *Magid* are often recited in the local language.[5] The point is *not* to recite some fixed version of the story but to tell it in a language and in a way that those assembled around the table will learn and understand.[6]

The Second Cup. We pour the second cup of wine immediately following *Ha Lachma Anya*, but we do not drink it until the conclusion of the *Magid*. We do this, tradition tells us, in order to arouse the curiosity of the children present, to encourage them to ask questions such as “why are we pouring a second cup before the meal?”[7] This would qualify as the child’s question, which is essential, given that the *Magid* is conceived in large part as the answer to an inquiry from our children (Exodus 13:14: וְהָיָה כִּי־שְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מַה־זֶּאת וְאָמַרְתָּ – “And in the future, when your child asks you ‘what does this mean?’, you will tell your child: ‘With a strong hand did Adonai bring us forth from Egypt, the house of bondage’”). This explains why the Four Questions occur here: it’s the proper time for the children to ask their questions.

The Missing B'rakhot. You’d think that, because reciting the *bagadah* enables us to fulfill the positive commandment (מצות עשה, *mitzvat aseh*) to tell the story of our redemption from Egypt, the story would be preceded by a *berkat mitzvah*, a benediction like the ones recite before fulfilling other such positive *mitzvot* (for example, the eating of *matzah* and *maror* (see below). But although there is some evidence that some Jews used to recite a benediction before reciting the *Magid*,[8] no such blessing exists in our standard *bagadot*. Various reasons are given for this. Some say that we recite no *b'rakhab* here because we’ve already mentioned the Exodus from Egypt in the *Kiddush*, so that we’ve technically fulfilled the obligation to tell the story even before we arrive at the *Magid*. [9] Others explain that we don’t recite a *b'rakhab* over this *mitzvah* because unlike other positive *mitzvot*[10] it has no fixed, definite measure. While we can fulfill it with a brief mention of our liberation, on Seder evening we embellish the story at great length (“whoever expands upon the story of the Exodus is worthy of praise”).[11]

Similarly, while we recite the first two Psalms (chapters 113-114) of *Hallel* at the conclusion of the *Magid*, our standard *bagadot* do not include the blessing *asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu likro et haballel*, which normally precede the *Hallel*. This reflects the widespread *minhag* (custom), but it’s a bit strange, given that we *do* recite the concluding blessing when we complete *Hallel* after dinner. As always, various explanations are offered for why we

don't say the introductory blessing. The most logical is that, because dinner interrupts the recitation of *Hallel*, it would be inappropriate to recite a blessing now over a *mitzvah* that we will not complete for some time.[12] On the other hand, numerous medieval authorities report that the *b'rakhab* is recited at this point, meaning that the matter is in considerable doubt.[13] If you decide to say the *b'rakhab* at your Seder, then, you are departing from the accepted custom but still well within the teachings of tradition.[14]

One blessing that all customs recite is *birkat g'ulah*, “the blessing of redemption,” which concludes the telling of the story. The blessing is said over the second cup of wine, so it is immediately followed by the blessing *borei p'ri hagafen*. For some reason, some liberal *bagadot* omit this blessing, possibly because of its graphic description of sacrifices in the Temple. Other liberal *bagadot* include the *b'rakhab*, minus that description:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר גָּאֲלָנוּ וְגָאֵל אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם, וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְלֵילָה הַזֶּה לְאַכֵּל בֹּרֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ יִגִּיעָנוּ לְמוֹעֲדִים וְלַגְּלוּת אַחֲרֵים הַבָּאִים לְקִרְאָתֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם, שְׂמֵחִים בְּבִנְיַן עִירָךְ וְשֹׁשֵׁים בְּעִבּוֹדְךָ וְנוֹדָה לְךָ שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ עַל גְּאֻלְתֵּנוּ וְעַל פְּדוּת נַפְשֵׁנוּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' גָּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

“Praised be You, Adonai our God, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has redeemed us along with our ancestors from Egypt, and who has enabled us to reach this night, on which we eat *matzah* and *maror*. So too, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, may You enable us to observe other festivals and holidays – may we celebrate them in peace! – to rejoice in the rebuilding of Your city and to exult in service to You. May we sing a new song over our ultimate redemption and salvation. Praised be You, Adonai, who has redeemed Israel.”[15]

NOTES

[1] See Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hillkhot Chametz Umatzah* 7:1. The actual commandment is stated in Ex. 13:3 (זָכוֹר אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יָצִאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם), “Remember this day, on which you went forth from Egypt”). The *halakhah* reads the word “remember” as an act of *telling*, of calling to mind (see Ex. 20:7, “Remember the Sabbath day,” which the Rabbis understand as the source for the requirement to recite Kiddush). The verse Exodus 13: 8, says Rambam, specifies that the telling must be done ביום ההוא, “on that day,” i.e. on 15 Nisan at the Seder.

[2] The other two are the commandments concerning the eating of *matzah* and *maror*. There is a complication with *maror*, however, since the consensus view holds that it is no longer a Toraitic *mitzvah* but rather one that is enacted by the Rabbis, the Sages of ancient times. See below, the section on *Koreikb*.

[3] *B. P'sachim* 116a: some say this relates to our slavery in Egypt, while others think it means our pre-Abrahamic beginnings as idol worshippers. In a classic example of halakhic compromise, the traditional *bagadah* text mentions both.

[4] And see Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hillkhot Chametz Umatzah* 7:1.

[5] See *Sefer Kol Bo* (14th-century Provence), ch. 50; *Beit Yosef, Orach Chayyim* 473; *Abudarham*, 81a; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 473:6, (Isserles); *Mishnah B'rurah* 473, no. 64; *Sefer Yosef Ometz*, ch. 756. The essential parts of the story – and even the entire story - are recited in the vernacular so that all can understand the substance.

[6] As we read in the Mishnah (*P'sachim* 10:4: ולפי דעתו של בן אביו מלמדו, “the father teaches the child according to the child’s capacity to understand.” We tell the story in such a way that it meets the needs and interests of the listener.

[7] Rashi and Rashbam, *B. P'sachim* 116a; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 473:7.

[8] R. Menachem Hameiri, *Beit Hab'chirah, B'rakbot* 12b: “אלא שיש חולקים ומברכים”, “but there are those who dissent (from the general practice) and recite a blessing (over the *bagadah*).” However, he doesn’t give us the text of the *b'rakhab*.

[9] *Sefer Abudarham* (14th-c. Spain, *Seder habagadah ufeirusbehab*) in the name of R. Yitzhak Alfasi (Rif).

[10] For example, the reading of the Megillah at Purim.

[11] *Sefer Abudarham loc. cit.* in the name of R. Shlomo ben Adret (Rashba).

[12] R. Asher b. Yechiel, *Hilkebot Pesach B'k'itzarab*.

[13] See R. Nissim Gerondi on Alfasi, *P'sachim* fol. 26a. The *minbag* among S'fardim is to recite *Hallel* with a *b'rakhab* during the evening *t'filah* that precedes the Seder and then at the Seder to recite the two before-dinner Psalms with no *b'rakhab* (*Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 487:4). Thus they resolve the doubt as to whether the *b'rakhab* should be said at all. Of course, this raises another problem: why do they repeat *birkat hashir* to conclude *Hallel* at the Seder, given that they’ve already recited it at services?

[14] Numerous medieval authorities report the custom to say the blessing twice: once before dinner, prior to reciting Psalms 113-114, and again before concluding the *Hallel* following *birkat hamazon*.

[15] See *M. P'sachim* 10:6. The *halakhab* follows Rabbi Akiva, whose version of this *b'rakhab* includes a supplication for future redemption along with the expression of gratitude for our redemption from Egypt. Our version here includes this complex theme: just as we remember God’s acts in our history, we recall that we are not yet truly free.



6. Wash the Hands.

Now, immediately before we eat the *matzah*, we perform the ritual handwashing (*n'tilat yadayim*) that is done traditionally before eating bread. The word *n'tilah* (נטילה) means “take” or “move,” and it signifies the ritual act of pouring water over the hands from a vessel with a handle or handles.[1] Pictured is such a vessel, called a *natla*, although a cup or mug with a handle will do. One pours water three times over each hand and, immediately before drying the hands,[2] recites the *b'rakbah*: *Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotv v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim*, “Praised be You, Adonai our God, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has sanctified us through *mitzvot* and commanded us concerning the washing of the hands.”

It is customary not to take any action, even to speak, between the washing of the hands and the blessing *Hamotzi*. This is because any such action or speech might distract one's attention from keeping the hands in a state of purity before beginning the meal. This custom is a stringency. Not all authorities require that we remain silent; since we're sitting at the table awaiting the food, they reason, there's no distraction.[3] The best thing to do, perhaps, is to

avoid *unnecessary* conversation at this point. It is certainly permissible to say anything related to the Seder itself, such as instructions for dealing with the *matzah* (see the next section).

Why do we perform the ritual of *n'tilat yadayim* today, given that we no longer observe the laws of ritual purity? The Talmud (*B. Chulin* 106a and Rashi *ad loc.*) informs us that we wash the hands in order that the *kohanim* develop the habit of doing so, since they are absolutely required to eat their special food (*t'rumah*) in a state of ritual purity. But this answer is less than satisfying; after all, with the destruction of the Temple there hasn't been any *t'rumah* for 2000 years! Moreover, why should we progressives feel ourselves beholden to memorialize the Temple and its sacrifices? So the Talmud suggests a second answer: we perform this ritual because the ancient Sages ordained it and it is a *mitzvah* to heed their words! This answer is hardly more persuasive than the first: we want to know *why* the Sages would have ordained this action in the absence of any good reason to do so. The Tosafot (northern Europe, 12th-13th centuries)[4] suggests a reason: **משום נקיות**, we do this for the sake of cleanliness, a value that is not restricted to our remembrance of the Temple. We perform *n'tilat yadayim* before eating bread, *the* most powerful ritual symbol of food and sustenance, to remind ourselves that we eat our food in the presence of God who provided it; it is therefore fitting that we do so in a state of physical and spiritual cleanliness.

NOTES

[1] The Rabbis compared *n'tilat yadayim* to the “water of purification” (**מי חטאת**; Numbers 8:7), which was poured from a vessel (*Chidushei HaRashba, Chulin* 107a).

[2] *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 158:11 (Isserles). One is obligated to recite a *b'rakbah* immediately before the act over which it is pronounced (**עובר לעשייתה**), and drying the hands is considered part of the act of *n'tilat yadayim*. Although R. Yosef Caro in the *Shulchan Arukh* rules that the blessing should be recited immediately before the pouring of the water on the hands, and although S'fardim generally follow Caro's position, many S'fardim today have adopted the practice as described by Isserles; see *Yalkut Yosef, Hilkebot N'tilat Yadayim*, 158:10.

[3] *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 166 and *Mishnah B'rurah ad loc.*

[4] *B. Chulin* 106a, *s.v. mitzvah lishmo`a*.

Motzi Matzah

מוציא מצה



7. Eat the Matzah

We introduce the Seder meal, as we introduce every festival or Shabbat meal (סעודה / *s'udab*), by reciting the blessing over bread (בא"ה...המוציא לחם מן הארץ / *barukh atah... hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*). Since tonight's bread is matzah, and the eating of matzah is one of the *mitzvot* of the evening, we follow the *b'rakbah* with a ברכת מצוה (*birkat mitzvah*), a blessing over the performance of this particular ritual obligation: על אכילת מצה / *barukh atah... aser kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al akhilat matzah* (“...who has sanctified us through *mitzvot* and commanded us concerning the eating of matzah”).

The standard practice (at least, it's the one recommended in the *Shulchan Arukh*)[1] is to take the two whole matzot and the broken middle matzah (or the *one* whole matzah and the broken piece; see above, the section on *Yachatz*, “How Many Matzot?”), recite both *b'rakbot* over them, break them and eat the matzah. This is a compromise among many different opinions. Some hold that we should recite *hamotzi* over the two whole *matzot* and *al akhilat matzah* over the broken piece while others reverse the order of blessings. We hold with the first opinion: if matzah is לחם עני, “the bread of poverty,” it is more fitting to recite the *birkat mitzvah* over that piece, which symbolizes the lack of wholeness of which the term *lechem oni* speaks. Thus, we should recite *hamotzi* while holding all three (or both) matzot and then, holding the broken piece by itself, we recite *al akhilat matzah*. [2] And *then* we eat the matzah!

What Is Matzah? Matzah, obviously, is unleavened bread. It is made from the flour of one of five species of grain: wheat, barley, rye, spelt, and oats (*M. P'sachim* 2:5). It's somewhat ironic that, according to Jewish tradition, these grains are what we mean by *chametz*; we are forbidden to consume or to possess these foodstuffs during Pesach, *unless* they have been baked into matzah. The source of this irony is Deuteronomy 16:3:

לֹא־תֹאכַל עִלְיֹה חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל־עִלְיֹה מִצּוֹת לֶחֶם עָנִי

You shall not eat (the Pesach sacrifice) with *chametz*, for seven days thereafter you shall eat *matzot*, the bread of affliction (or “the bread of poverty”).

From the juxtaposition (סימוכין / *simukhin*) of the words *chametz* and *matzot*, the Rabbis learn^[3] that one can fulfill the obligation to eat matzah *only* if the matzah is baked from the flour of grains that are subject to fermentation (חימוץ / *chimutz*) when they come into contact with water. Those are the five grains we've specified. From here we derive two important details. First, unleavened bread baked from any other grains, even when mixed with these five, is not matzah. And second: other species of plant that may resemble these five grains or flour milled from them (examples: rice, corn, legumes) are not *chametz* and are not prohibited on Pesach according to the *halakhab*.^[4]

Egg Matzah. What we in North America call “egg matzah” is a version of the tradition describes as “enriched matzah,” *matzah ashirah* / מצה עשירה. Ordinary matzah is made from dough that consists of the flour of the five grains mixed only with water. The mixture must be placed immediately in the oven, since the process of fermentation (חימוץ) begins when the dough sits unbaked for eighteen minutes. Enriched matzah is made by mixing the flour with liquids other than water, such as egg, wine, fruit juice, oil, and honey. According to the Talmud and most subsequent authorities, these mixtures do not undergo חימוץ, even though the dough rises and it looks as though it has fermented.^[5] But this determination is the subject of a dispute among the Tanaim, the early Rabbinic sages,^[6] and some later *poskim* rule stringently as a result.^[7] The result is that some communities, particularly S'fardim, permit the consumption of enriched matzah during Pesach, while the Ashkenazim traditionally forbid it “except in urgent cases, for the sick or the elderly.”^[6] We see no reason for any Jew today to observe this stringency.^[7] *Matzah ashirah* is therefore permitted during Pesach.

One important caveat, though: we do *not* use enriched matzah to fulfill the *mitzvah* to eat matzah at the Seder. The Seder matzah is called *lechem oni* (לחם עני), “the bread of affliction” or “the bread of *poverty*”; hence, the *mitzvah* requires plain matzah, consisting of flour mixed with water alone, rather than the “enriched” variety.^[8]

Shmurah Matzah (Matzah M'shumeret). This is matzah baked from grain that has been “watched” or “guarded” (*m'shumeret*, from the Hebrew root ש-מ-ר) since the time of its harvest (*misha`at k'tzirah*) to make sure that it has not come into contact with water and undergone fermentation (חימוץ, *chimutz*). Most matzot sold during the run-up to Pesach'

however, are baked from grain that has been watched *misha`at lishab*, from the time that the flour was mixed with water and kneaded into dough. These “regular” matzot are perfectly kosher for Pesach; the “watching” insures that no *chimutz* has occurred. But there’s a long-standing stringency (*chumra*) that favors the use of *shmurah* matzah at least at the Seder, to fulfill the *mitzvah*.^[9] That’s okay for those who wish to do so and to pay the exorbitant prices charged for *shmurah* matzah. We, however, think that this *chumra* is unnecessary and that “regular,” non-*shmurah* matzah is perfectly fine for use at the Seder and throughout the holiday. For a fuller discussion, visit the Freehof Institute [website](#).

NOTES

[1] *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 475:1 and *Mishnah B’rurah*, note 1.

[2] This is the position described by Rashi and Rashbam, *B. P’sachim* 116a, *s.v. af kan*. See *Tosafot ad loc.*, *s.v. mah darko*: this was the *minhag* of R. Yitzhak of Dampierre, one of the luminaries of the Tosafist school.

[3] *B. P’sachim* 35a; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hillkhot Chametz Umatzah* 6:4.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *B. P’sachim* 35a; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hillkhot Chametz Umatzah* 5:2; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 462:1.

[4] *B. P’sachim* 36a (*baraita*: אין לשין עיסה בפסח בין וכו’).

[5] Based on Rashi, *P’sachim* 36a, *s.v. ein lashin et ha’isa*: the text in *P’sachim* 35a) says only that one is not punished by *karet* for eating *matzah ashirah* but does not say that it is permissible to do so. Most authorities disagree with Rashi; in their view, the *baraita* in *P’sachim* 36a refers to a mixture of wine or fruit juice with water, in which case fermentation does occur (*Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 462:2).

[6] *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 462:4 (S’fardim); Isserles *ad loc.* (Ashkenazim).

[7] A standard explanation for the stringency (*chumra*) is that if one were to mix flour in these other liquids one might accidentally add water to the mixture, which would cause **חימוץ** (*Arukh Hashulchan, Orach Chayyim* 462, par. 4). This concern clearly does not apply to packaged *matzah ashirah* that was baked under careful supervision (*hashgachah*).

[8] *B. P’sachim* 36a; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 462:1. An interesting exception here is Rambam, *Mishneh Torah Hillkhot Chametz Umatzah* 6:5, who permits the use at the Seder of matzah baked from a mixture of water and fruit juice, though he prohibits matzah baked from a mixture of flour and wine or oil on the grounds of *lechem oni*. He apparently reasons that, in order to be defined as “enriched” – and therefore not *lechem oni* – the matzah must be composed of a mixture of flour and a substance of some recognized value (e.g., wine, oil) and that fruit juice does not count as such a substance. Most everybody else disagrees with him: to qualify as *lechem oni*, the matzah must be baked from a mixture of flour and water.

[9] *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 453:4.

Maror

מרור



8. Eat the Maror

We eat maror (bitter herbs) at the Seder for two reasons.

First, it's a symbolic reminder of the bitterness of our slavery in Egypt. The Torah itself already hints at the connection in Exodus 1:14: וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת־חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעִבְדָּה קָשָׁה, “the Egyptians embittered (*vay'mar'ru*) their lives with hard labor. And the *halakhab* is that we do not recline while eating the maror because “it is a remembrance of slavery.”[1]

And second, the Torah requires that the Pesach sacrifice be eaten along with matzah and maror: עַל־מִצּוֹת וּמַרְרִים יֹאכְלֵהוּ (Numbers 9:11). (We'll have more to say about this in the next section.)

But what exactly *is* maror? The Mishnah (*P'sachim* 2:6) lists five vegetables that qualify: חֲזֵרֵת; עוֹלֶשֶׁן; תַּמְכָּה; חֲרַחְבִּינָה; and מַרְרֹר. The most commonly used varieties are the first, *chazeret*, generally understood as lettuce (preferably romaine), and the third, *tamkha*, generally understood as horseradish. You can fulfill the *mitzvah* with either, but remember: maror must take the form of a raw vegetable, the class of food over which we say the blessing *borei p'ri ha'adamah*. (See the section on *Karpas*, above: the *b'rakhab* recited there includes the maror we eat now.) Bottled horseradish spread, which contains other substances and chemicals, is a processed food product and *not* a raw vegetable. If you use horseradish to fulfill the *mitzvah*, it should be the fresh, raw variety. (Save the bottled stuff for the gefilte fish, if that's how you start your meal!)

Some liberal *hagadot* instruct us to place some maror on a piece of matzah. This is an error: matzah and maror must be eaten separately at this point of the Seder.

We dip the maror into charoset before we eat it. Charoset is considered a *mitzvah*, a remembrance of the mortar that our ancestors used to make bricks in Egypt.[2] The Talmud (*B. P'sachim* 116a) suggests another possibility: charoset was considered an antidote for the harmful chemical present in the lettuce. Either way, charoset helps to fulfill the customary requirement of *tibul* (טיבול), that we eat the ritual foods at the Seder by dipping them into a condiment. Specifically, this is the second time we dip, as hinted in the Four Questions (הלילה הזה שתי פעמים, “tonight, we dip twice”). Some authorities hold that charoset is *the* condiment par excellence and that it should be used for *karpas* as well as maror (see the discussion in the section on *Karpas*, above). Rambam, in fact, has us dip the matzah in charoset as well,[3] though our custom differs, of course.

Take the maror and dip it *lightly* in the charoset, so as not to annul the bitter taste of the vegetable.[4] Recite the blessing אשר קידשנו במצותיו וציונו על אכילת מרור ב"א"י, *Barukh atah, etc., asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al akhilat maror*.

Eat the maror.

NOTES

[1] Rashi, *B. P'sachim* 108a, *s.v. maror ein tzarikh basibab*; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 475:1. *Mishnah B'rurah*, note 14 and other commentaries make the point that one is *permitted* to recline while eating the maror but not required to do so, which is the halakhic standard for the four cups and for the matzah.

[2] It's a Rabbinic ordinance; *M. P'sachim* 10:3 and *Mishneh Torah, Hilkehot Chametz Umatzah* 7:11. Others claim that, because apples are a common ingredient in its recipe, charoset reminds us of the apple orchards where the Israelite women would go to deliver their babies at the time of Pharaoh's decree (*B. P'sachim* 116a and Rashi *ad loc.*, *s.v. zekher latapuach*). The *agadah* appears in *B. Sotah* 11b.

[3] *Mishneh Torah, Hilkehot Chametz Umatzah* 8:8, on the basis of Geonic precedents.

[4] *B. P'sachim* 115a; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkehot Chametz Umatzah* 8:8; *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 475:1.



9. Eat the Matzah and Maror Together

It's called the Hillel sandwich, so named in memory of the first-century sage Hillel, who combined (כורך) the three principal ritual foods - the Pesach sacrifice (he lived during the days of the Temple), matzah, and maror – and ate them together. In this way he fulfilled the *mitzvah* of Numbers 9:11, על־מִצּוֹת וּמַרְרִים יֹאכְלֵהוּ, “they shall eat it [the sacrifice] together with matzot and bitter herbs.” It's not clear that this was the accepted way of eating the three foods during the days of the Temple. The Talmud (*B. P'sachim* 115a) reports that Hillel's colleagues regarded the “sandwich” method as optional: one could, if one wished, eat the three foods together *or* eat them separately.

The Temple is gone, and we no longer offer sacrifices. Could we still fulfill the *mitzvot* of matzah and maror by eating them together? The established *halakhab* says “no.” Without the Pesach sacrifice, there is no way to observe the instruction of Numbers 9:11 as Hillel interpreted it. Consequently, the two remaining *mitzvot* are of different levels of authority. While eating matzah is a *mitzvah d'oraita*, a commandment of the Torah, eating maror is now considered a *mitzvah d'rabanan*, an ordinance of the ancient Rabbis. And the rule is that we

can't perform a Toraitic *mitzvah* and a Rabbinic *mitzvah* simultaneously, because the latter would cancel out the former.[1] That's why we recite the phrase **זכר למקדש כהילל**, "this is a symbolic reminder of what Hillel used to do in the days of the Temple," prior to eating the sandwich. It's *symbolic*, because we are not able to fulfill the *mitzvot* this way anymore. We eat the matzah and maror separately and *then* combine them, to remember a time when it was possible to fulfill the *mitzvot* in this way.

Why do we progressive Jews perform a rite in memory of the Temple when we do not pray for the restoration of the sacrifices? Perhaps we can understand the unraveling of the "bundle" – Pesach, matzah, and maror – as a symbol of the fragmented lives we live in an imperfect world. By eating the matzah and the maror separately, we acknowledge this fragmentation, this incompleteness. And by then performing *Koreikb*, we express our faith in the possibility of redemption, which we can understand as the restoration of wholeness to our lives as Jews and as human beings. Redemption, after all, is the theme of the evening, and *Koreikb* celebrates that theme through traditional Jewish ritual language.

NOTES

[1] *B. P'sachim* 115a. Matzah is still a Toraitic *mitzvah* because, even though there's no longer a Pesach sacrifice, there's a verse (Exodus 12:18) that instructs us to eat matzot on the night of the Seder, separate and apart from the sacrifice. By contrast, we never hear of a commandment to eat maror *except* in combination with the sacrifice and the matzot. Hence, we eat maror nowadays because the Rabbis determined that we should do so as a **זכר**, a symbolic reminder of the maror that accompanied the sacrifice in Egypt and in the Temple (*B. P'sachim* 120a; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkebot Chametz Umatzah* 7:12).



10. Eat!



11. Eat the *Afikoman*.

Before the meal, during [Yachatz](#), we broke the middle matzah (or the second matzah, for those who recite the Hagadah over two matzot) and placed half of it in reserve (*tzafun* = “stored away, hidden”) to serve as the *afikoman*, which we eat at the end of the meal and which serves as the last food consumed at the Seder (not counting cups of wine #3 and #4). It happens, of course, that this final piece of matzah, which is an absolute requirement to conclude the Seder, will either disappear or be snatched away, so that the leader of the Seder must offer a reward or a ransom to get it back. (Hopefully, the reward offered in the poster, above, is an exaggeration.)

Afikoman is not a Hebrew word. It’s likely drawn from the Greek *epikomion*, or “after-dinner revelry,” the sort of drunken fun and games that customarily followed many a symposium banquet. The Rabbis did not approve of such things; hence the language of the Mishnah (*P’sachim* 10:8) ואין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן, which seems to mean “one may not conclude the Pesach meal with *afikoman*,” that is, with after-dinner entertainment.” The Rabbis of the Talmud were uncertain as to the meaning of the Greek. While some of them

understood the word to refer to partying,[1] others thought it meant “dessert” or other food that concluded a festive meal. Eventually, *afikoman* comes to denote the matzah that must be eaten at the conclusion of the Seder,[2] which is our practice.

NOTES

[1] For example: Rav (*B. P’sachim* 119b) understands the phrase as “the Seder attendees should not remove themselves from one group to another,” a practice that evokes a party atmosphere. The Talmud Yerushalmi (*P’sachim* 10:6 / 37d) quotes one sage as explaining *afikoman* as “song.”

[2] Rashi and Rashbam, *P’sachim* 119b. Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkehot Chametz Umatzah* 8:9, explains that the matzah replaces the Pesach sacrifice itself: the meal should end with the taste of the sacrifice (or, nowadays, the *tzafun* matzah) on one’s mouth, since it is a *mitzvah* to eat those foods. In this he follows Geonic tradition; see *Otzar haGe’onim, P’sachim*, no. 357 (p. 129).



12. Recite *Birkat Hamazon*; Open the Door; Drink the Third Cup.

Once we've eaten the *afikoman*, the last food (aside from the required cups of wine) we consume at the Seder, it's time for *Birkat Hamazon*. The practice of reciting a blessing following the meal is based upon Deuteronomy 8:10: וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־: הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ, "You shall eat, be satiated, and praise Adonai your God for the good land that God has given you," i.e., the blessing comes *after* we have eaten.[1] The blessing traditionally consists of four distinct *b'rakhot*. For some reason, many liberal versions of *birkat hamazon* do not include the fourth benediction.[2] For those who are not satisfied with that exclusion, we offer an abbreviated text here:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, המלך הטוב והמיטיב לכל, שפָּכַל יום ויום הוא היטיב, הוא מיטיב, הוא ייטיב לנו, הוא גִּמְלָנוּ, הוא גוֹמְלָנוּ, הוא יְגַמְלָנוּ לְעַד חוֹ וּלְחֶסֶד וּלְרַחֲמִים.

Praised are You... the sovereign who is good and does good for all, who has been, is, and always will be good to us, who has bestowed, bestows, and always will bestow and will always bestow goodness upon us, who has and will always bestow upon us grace, love, and mercy.

Drink the Third Cup. We recite the blessing *borei p'ri hagafen* and drink the third cup of wine. We should not drink any wine between the third and fourth cups (*M. B'rakhot* 10:7). Some explain this as a defense against intoxication; one shouldn't fall asleep and miss the rest of the Seder.[3] Others say it is to avoid giving the impression that we are adding to the statutory number of cups we are to drink tonight.[4]

Open the Door. It is customary to open the door at this point. Some say it is to welcome Elijah the prophet, who according to our tradition will proclaim the coming of the Messiah. The “cup of Elijah” might be poured at this point. (NOTE: The “cup of Elijah” is not identical with the optional fifth cup, which we discuss above [*Kadesh*] and below [*Hallel*], but a separate *minhag* that over time may have become conflated with the fifth cup.) Thus, the custom expresses our hope for the final redemption at the moment we celebrate our redemption from slavery in Egypt. When the door is opened, traditional *hagadot* have us recite the verses Psalms 79:6-7 and 69:25 and Lamentations 3:66, which ask God to deal harshly with the nations that have persecuted us. Those who are troubled by that practice – at an hour of hope, why must we think about vengeance? - can take comfort: there is no requirement that we say these verses.

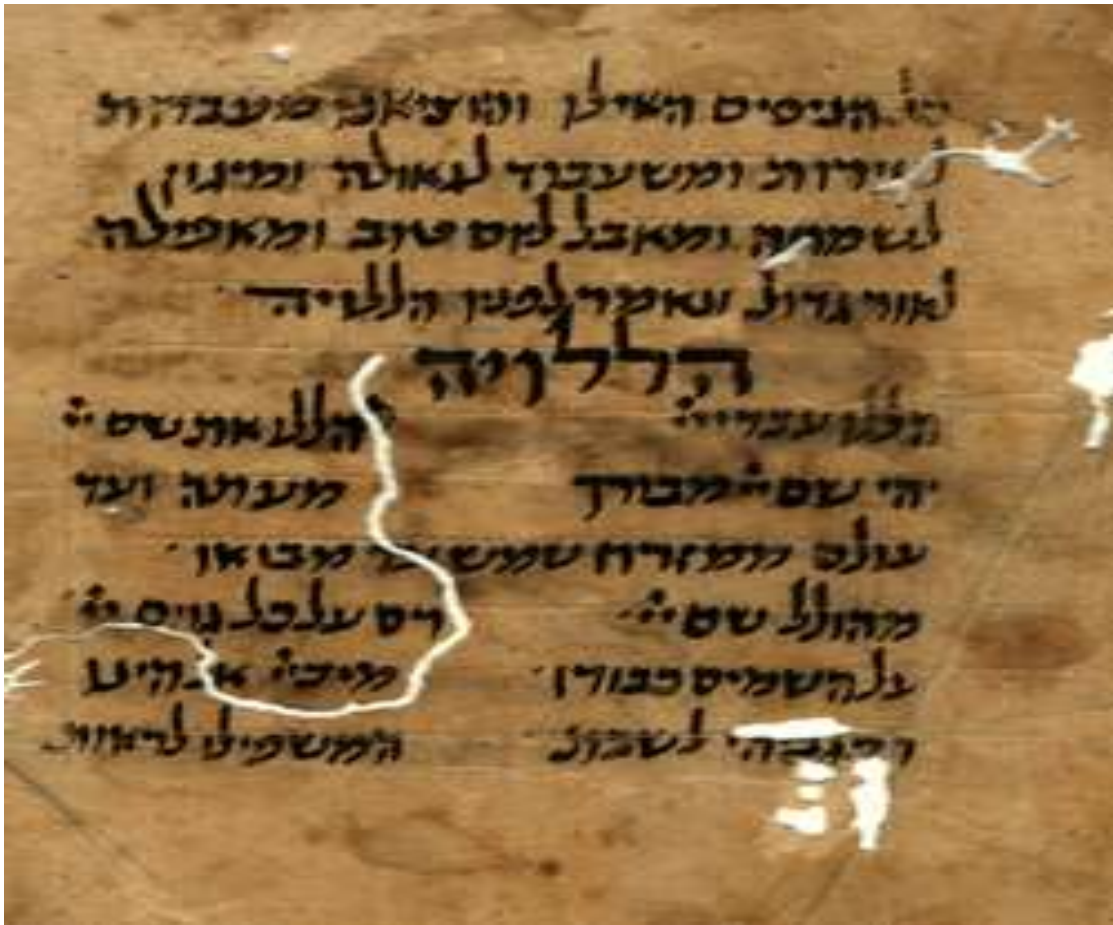
NOTES

[1] *B. B'rakhot* 21a.

[2] The consensus view in the *halakhab* is that the first three *b'rakhot* are required by the Torah (*mid'oraita*, מדאורייתא), specifically by a *midrash* on Deut. 8:10; the fourth *b'rakhab*, by contrast, was ordained by the Rabbis of Yavneh (*mid'rabanai*) as an expression of hope in the redemption of Israel following the destruction of the Temple and the suppression of the Jewish revolt against Rome (*Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim* 188:1-2). Is that the reason why the fourth *b'rakhab* (“Hatov V'hameitiv”) is missing in many liberal versions? If so, it's puzzling. Many of our ritual practices are “Rabbinic” in origin, but that doesn't render them less important or less powerful than those rooted in the Torah.

[3] *Talmud Yerushalmi P'sachim* 10:6, 37d. The Talmud objects that one is probably already intoxicated from the wine one has consumed during dinner. The answer given is that wine we drink during a meal does not have the power to intoxicate. This is why we call the Rabbis “Rabbis” and not “physicians”! By all means be careful with your consumption of wine during *all* parts of the Seder.

[4] Rashbam, *B. P'sachim* 117b, *s.v. bein sh'lishi lir'vi i lo yishteh*.



13. Complete the *Hallel*, Drink the Fourth Cup.

We recited the beginning of the *Hallel* – Psalms 113 and 114 – at the end of the *Magid* section of the Seder. (The text pictured here, from a fragment discovered in the Cairo Genizah, depicts the first part of the *Hallel*.)

The Mishnah (*M. P'sachim* 10:7) instructs that when conclude the *Hallel* we recite a closing benediction (*birkat hashir* / ברכת השיר). What benediction is that? The Talmud (*B. B'rakhot* 118a) offers two different answers: 1) יהללוך / *y'hallelukha*, the *b'rakbah* that concludes the recitation of *Hallel* on all other days, and 2) נשמת כל חי / *nishmat kol chai*, the long concluding passage of the *P'sukei D'zimra* section of the *shacharit* (morning) service on Shabbat and festivals. Our *hagadot*, following the age-old Jewish tradition of compromise, have us recite both blessings. We recite *y'hallelukha* upon finishing the *Hallel*, but we don't say the *chatimah* (the last line of the blessing that concludes with *Barukh atah...*). Then we say *Hallel Hagadol*,

the so-called “Great Hallel (Psalm 136). Upon finishing that psalm, we recite *nishmat kol chai* along with its *chatimah*, the paragraph that begins with the word *yishtabach* (ישתבח).

The Fourth Cup. We recite the blessing *borei p’ri hagafen* and drink the fourth cup of wine. Then we recite the *ברכה אחרונה* (*b’rakah acharonah*), the blessing said after drinking wine.

The Fifth Cup? [See above](#), in the section *Kadeish*. If you decide to drink a fifth cup of wine, you should arrange it as follows:

- Conclude *Hallel* (Psalms 115-118), recite the passage *y’hallelukha* (יהללוך).
- Say *borei p’ri hagafen* and drink the fourth cup.
- Recite *Hallel Hagadol*, recite *nishmat kol chai* (נשמת כל חי).
- Say *borei p’ri hagafen*, drink the fifth cup, and recite the *ברכה אחרונה*.

Nirtzah

נרצה

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם.
בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹמְרִים:
לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם הַבְּנוּיָה.

14. Conclude the Seder.

Sing and enjoy!