

The Annotated Passover Haggadah

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Edited by
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and
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Contents

Editor's Note	viii
Reflections: Interpretation and the Passover Haggadah, An Invitation to Post-Biblical Historiosophy ZEV GARBER	1
Reflections: The Disappearing Deliverer, The Moses Enigma KENNETH HANSON	9
Luah Ivri/Hebrew Calendar ZEV GARBER	15
Bedikat Chametz ZEV GARBER	31
`Eruv Tavshilin: "Mixing of [cooked] Dishes" ZEV GARBER	34
The Traditional Seder Table ZEV GARBER	36
<hr/>	
Annotated Haggadah for Passover ZEV GARBER AND KENNETH HANSON	41
Excursus: The Moral Sense of the Ten Plagues ZEV GARBER	68
Excursus: Pidyon Ha-Ben ZEV GARBER	71
Excursus: The Image of Elijah KENNETH HANSON	99

Rabbinic Sages Index	125
Source Index	129
Supplementary Readings KENNETH HANSON	134
<hr/>	
Eucharist and Seder: What Should the Simple Scholar Say? PETER ZAAS	144
Inserting Shoah at the Traditional Passover Seder: Interpreting Anew the Five Cups, and What Would Jesus Say? ZEV GARBER	151
Sample Haggadot and Sedarim NATHAN HARPAZ	159
Romaniote and Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Passover Haggadah: Excerpts and Related Customs YITZCHAK KEREM	176
A Chassidisher Pesach: Passover Traditions and Insights from Chassidic Perspectives DIANE MIZRAHI	188
Why is this Haggadah different? Haggadot in the Non-orthodox Movements ANNETTE BOECKLER	211
Re-arranging Things at the Table for an Isolated and Peculiar Jewish Community at the Bottom of the World NORMAN SIMMS	230
Select Haggadah and Exodus Topics WILLIAM KRIEGER	239

Exodus to Leviticus to Haggadah: The Dynamism of Torahistic Law JONATHAN ARNOLD, ESQ.	248
The Memory of God and the Blindness of Humanity: The Four Children LEONARD GREENSPOON	251
The Dawn of the Jewish Woman: Marginalization, Liberation, and the Exodus ROBERTA SABBATH	259
Haggadah, Shoah, and the Exigency of the Holy DAVID PATTERSON	274
Passover, Holy Thursday, and Catholic Liturgy EUGENE FISHER	289
Setting Our Tables with Grace and Respect: Reformed Table Talk for Post-Shoah Times HENRY KNIGHT	301
Manna and Matsa: Nourishment for the Soul SUSAN CM LUMIÈRE	313
Ziva: The Warrior of Light SUSAN GARBER	327
The Virtual Seder: 15 Nissan, 5780 KENNETH HANSON	341
<hr/>	
Contributors	345
Image Credits	351

Editor's Note

Zev Garber
Kenneth Hanson

About the Editors

The two editors of this work, both academics and scholars of Jewish life, culture, and literature represent two individual experiences with Passover tradition, one being of Orthodox background and the other a convert to the Jewish faith. Their lively collaboration is at the heart of what this volume represents, as it highlights an assortment of interactions with the essence and meaning of the festival, across multiple ethnic and religious boundaries.

The Institution of the Lord's Supper, a Passover Seder?

In November of 2018, a group of collegial scholars convened in Denver at a session of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew (NAPH) at the Society of Biblical Literature conference to treat the connections or disconnections between the Jewish Seder and Christian Communion. The convening panelist were Peter Zaas, from Siena College, Ken Hanson from The University of Central Florida, Zev Garber from Las Angeles Valley College, and respondent Charles Carpenter from Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary. Donald Kim, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, chaired the session. The panel was entitled "The Institution of the Lord's Supper, a Passover Seder?" These collegial scholars responded to and from each other's vantage point, offering insights and opportunities for fruitful dialogue. Texts and abstracts by Hanson, Zaas, Garber and Carpenter are published on *The Bible and Interpretation* website and three of the articles by Hanson, Zaas, and Garber are reprinted in Supplementary Readings.

Respectful dialogue and vitriolic disagreement greeted the content and delivery of my "The Traditional Passover Seder: Interpreting anew the Four Questions and Five Cups What Would Jesus Say?" I suggested that in the main, the pageantry of the Passover Seder focuses on two periods of Jewish history: the biblical Exodus from Egypt and the rabbinic recalling of

the account. Through ritual food, drink, and animated reading and interpretation, the participant travels with the Children of Israel as if “s/he came forth out of Egypt,” and sits at the table of the Sages as they observe Passover in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak. Alas, the forty-year trek from wilderness into freedom succumbed in Jewish history into a long night’s journey into exile. “Begin with disgrace and end with glory” (*m. Pesachim* 10.4). That is to say, talk openly and informatively about exilic degradation and destruction, so that, in contrast, the experience of Jewish freedom and triumph are cherished and appreciated. Thus, it is suggested, nay expected, that the greatest tragedy of the Jewish Night, the Shoah, be recounted on the night that accentuates Jewish birth and being. But for many Jews, it is not. How come?

Several questions arise for those who insert contemporary genocide in the midst of freedom. Where is the Shoah inserted, beginning, middle, or end of the Seder ceremony? Does not the message of Hell on Earth compromise the theme of redemption from Heaven? By reading the Shoah into the Haggadah, are we not turning Judeocide into a paschal sacrifice making it a biblical *holocaust* rather than a contemporary historical Shoah? Nonetheless, the “why” of the Shoah is unexplainable and may explain why it is inserted in the second part (“future”) of the service.

The Four Cups at the Passover table represent the verbs of God’s freedom in the biblical Exodus story (Exod 6: 6–8). Also, the Fifth Cup, the Cup of Elijah, is poured to overflowing and the door is opened and the “Pour Out Your Wrath” paragraph bellowed to the outside world. Why Shoah memory and the curse of Nations (pagan and monotheistic) at the Cup of Elijah, symbolic herald of messianic peace? What, if any, is the Shoah link to the Synoptic Last Supper which depicts Jesus proclaiming, “This is my body” (Luke 22:19) and “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24; Matt 26:28)?

According to tradition of Rabbi Judah ben Bezalel, the Maharal of Prague (c. 1525–1609), one reads the “Great Hallel” with the Fifth Cup in hand, and in testimony to the passage, “Who remembered us in our low estate and has delivered us from our adversaries” (Ps 136: 23–24). So, in our day, drinking from the Cup of Elijah testifies “to the land (He gave) for a heritage unto Israel” (Ps 136: 21–22). Is there a link between Auschwitz and Jerusalem? Shoah and Church? Cause and effect or remembrance and not again?

After the session, Chair Donald Kim, was approached by an attendee who let him know how disappointed he was by the way the presenters acted in the room. Kim reports (“The Passover Seder or The Lord’s Supper: What is at Stake?”) that the individual was referring to Zev Garber, who had built up tension in the room because of his impassioned speech concerning the Passover Seder, especially regarding the five cups—

the last one being the cup of Elijah, a time of final justice. Garber was intense. He had Shoah on his mind. The Passover Seder is the remembrance of the great event of the Passover but also a way to look ahead to the final culminating day of deliverance, but the way forward has undergone much pain and suffering: “The Passover represents providential design in history—but Shoah evolved from history.” The Seder deals directly with the pains and points to the future ahead for the Jews, whereas the Christian Lord’s Supper commemorates Jesus’ sacrifice with the elements representing the body and the blood. Jesus was having a Passover meal that culminated with the Lord’s Supper, but the meal was *not* a Seder. If so then the Last Supper operative is a corrective exercise in remembering the blood Covenant of Christ *without* supersessionism, that is, *not* replacing the covenantal-faith trials and successes leading to the role of Yeshua’ Ha-Mashiach. Kim summarizes that remembrance connects but does not equate the Last Supper and the Jewish Passover. Remembering the last meal between Jesus and his disciples is Christian commitment to and reenactment of the new covenant in the body, blood, and teaching of Jesus Christ. And Seder memory for the Jew recalls, reenacts, and recommits the Lord’s salvific acts in pivotal memories of Jewish history.

Annotated Passover Haggadah

At the conclusion of our well-attended, emotive NAPH session on the Passover Seder and the Last Supper in Denver 2018 (see Iggeret 91, 25–29; <http://vanhise.lss.wisc.edu/naph/?q=node/11>, find link to Iggeret 91), panelist Peter Zaas suggested to me a follow-up Passover Haggadah in the making. Unexpected tribute but overwhelming commitments prevented me from getting overtly excited at the time. Two years later inspired by a recently published monograph on *Judaism and Jesus* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020; with Ken Hanson) and completion of our “Pittsburgh Shabbat Massacre” papers by Garber-Hanson-Sabbath (NAPH session, 2019 AAR-SBL Annual Meeting, San Diego. Now published in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 55.3, Summer 2020), I decided to kick-start this venture. A prolong discussion with Ken Hanson confirmed this decision. Also, Ken accepted enthusiastically to serve as co-editor of this new Annotated Passover Haggadah (APH).

APH is parsed into two parts. Part One: Sefaria Haggadah, Hebrew-English text with appropriate religious directive and short paragraph commentary provided by the Editors. Obligatory Haggadah reading and participation is explained and directed in accordance with traditional standard of Passover Halakha. Part Two: Supplementary Readings from invited contributors are oriented to convey the Passover Story inside and outside the Seder service. In sum, a new innovative effort to teach, learn, and

engage Judaism's story of People Freedom enacted at home, synagogue, and school. Go forth and *haggid/i/u haggadah*.

—Zev Garber

The annotated Haggadah presented here is intended to be unique, both in substance and appeal. It is unique although we have seen in recent years the proliferation of literally hundreds of fresh versions of the traditional “telling” of the Exodus from Egypt. The story is well-known and often repeated, beyond the Jewish world, having been immortalized in multiple religious traditions, as well as in cinematic film adaptations. The Haggadah of Orthodox tradition has been translated, elaborated, neutered, abbreviated, truncated, and all but exfoliated, to the extent that one may wonder what, yet another edition may possibly offer. The current volume nonetheless makes an important contribution, since, while preserving both the traditional Hebrew text, along with an equally traditional English translation, it provides important analytical, philosophical, and theological perspectives on the seminal event of Jewish consciousness, memory, and self-awareness.

It is, by design, academic in its approach, taking pains to offer the most meaningful commentary on long-overlooked sections of the text. Its two authors dredge deeply from their own backgrounds, one being an Orthodox Jew by heritage and the other a convert to Conservative Judaism. Equally, this volume brings forth contemporary reflections on the broader implications of the Exodus narrative, the liberation from bondage, and the stylistic intonations of the Haggadah, line by line. Important terminology and phraseology are highlighted and elaborated, in a manner which conveys serious understanding to scholars and lay people alike. It is, in short, serious, and scholarly yet accessible to a general readership.

From the opening *Kiddush*, explanatory notes reflect the eternal values and concepts communicated in the text, which is at once deeply Jewish, yet intrinsically universal, uniting an assortment of religious traditions across time and space, in the eternal shadow of the events which inexorably led across the Sea of Reeds and onward to Mount Sinai. Moreover, this Haggadah is intended, notwithstanding its scholarly rigor, for practical use in family and congregational settings, for those who wish, during this all-important night, to delve ever deeply into the narrative, to go beyond the mere repetition of an annual ritual into a more richly rewarding and profound experience.

Supplementing the careful commentary on individual passages, the authors include specific essays (excurses) dealing with important themes and concepts from an overarching, analytical perspective. From the nature of the ten plagues, to the redemption of the firstborn son, to the image of the prophet Elijah, the reader is taken on a journey deep into the essence of the

great deliverance and its echoes across the generations of those who keep the tradition alive.

The “kosher meat” of this Haggadah is bookended with “standalone” interpretations, beginning with a post-biblical, theological interpretation of the course of history—“historiosophy.” It highlights the literal, allegorical, typological, and moral sense of the Haggadah, in light of the evolving life of the Jewish community over the centuries. As the vicissitudes of Jewish experience have warranted, contemporary history has always been read into the Exodus narrative. The reader and participant in the Seder are encouraged to adopt the sequential steps of confrontation, analysis, interaction, and internalization. The Seder itself thereby becomes a learning device in the larger “hermeneutical circle.” Additional reflections center on the figure of the great deliverer, Moses, who is conspicuously absent from the Haggadah. The fact that Moses, who is so central to the account in Exodus, has vanished from the traditional “telling” of the story is key in relating the ultimate message of Jewish monotheism. God alone, above and beyond any heroic personage, is the Master of History.

An explanatory section on the Hebrew calendar is next, being central to the Jewish notion of the sanctification of time. It is, moreover, important to understand the placement of Passover relative to the continuum of Jewish holidays within the yearly cycle. The adaptation of the traditional calendar to modern Israel, including the addition of Independence Day and Jerusalem Day, is also referenced.

The overall theme of this Haggadah is a celebration, not only of the deliverance from Egypt but of the widely disparate ways in which the Passover is observed by sundry traditions, worldwide. Going beyond the “normative” observance of the Passover Seder, this Haggadah breaks new ground in referencing the increasing interest among Christians and Messianic Jews in observing the Exodus from Egypt. While the theological concepts and doctrinal precepts among these disparate groups are beyond reconciliation, the fact that those who profess Christian faith have, in recent decades, come to appreciate and indeed celebrate the redemption of the Jewish people is at the very least noteworthy and due some level of consideration.

Bearing this in mind, several supplementary essays deal with an assortment of issues, such as the Last Supper of Jesus, its depiction in the Christian gospels and Pauline epistles, and its relation to the communal meal referenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Additional contributions include:

- a discussion of the origin and development of the Christian Eucharist in light of the Passover Seder,

- a plea that the tragedy of the Shoah also be recalled on the night of Passover, and that Jewish belief and observance be recognized “without polemics” in Christian preaching and catechism,
- the Torah’s “liberation from meaninglessness,” and from a “merely material world,”
- the rootedness of the Christian Eucharist in Judaism and Jewish tradition, and,
- a call for Christians and Jews to engage in the mutual tolerance of each-others’ religious traditions, especially in light of the Shoah, as they set their tables “with grace and respect.”

Other articles deal with such topics as the Christian portrayal of the Last Supper in art, the way in which the Haggadah keeps the commandments of the Torah alive in present memory, and the four children at the Seder. An exploration of the roots of Chassidic Passover traditions includes the special place of women and femininity, and the *Seudat Mashiach*, the “Feast of the Messiah.”

In keeping with the eclectic emphasis of this volume is an essay focusing on the customs of the Romaniote and Judeo-Greek Jews, whose unique Haggadah and Sephardic cuisine deserves our attention. Another deals with the observance of Passover in Hamilton, New Zealand. A final, “creative” section presents the reflections of a third-generation Jewish American, whose personal evolution ranged from an assimilated, secular upbringing to a culturally identified Jewish awareness. This is followed by a fictional story, revolving around a female character, and tracing the path of redemption, from the land of Goshen to the foot of Mt. Sinai, where Moses disappears into the mists to receive the tablets of the Law.



Fig. 1 Gustave Doré (1865), “Moses Showing the Ten Commandments”

Lastly, there is a description of perhaps the most unusual Passover season in history, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, as experienced in the spring of 2020. The many virtual Seders observed around the world at this time have underscored, more than ever, the unparalleled ability of the

Jewish people to adapt traditional observance considering whatever “plague” the blows of time and chance may have chosen to inflict. To be sure, the sanctified memory of this mighty deliverance, witnessed so long ago by the children of Israel, remains forever emblazoned in the Jewish soul. This being central to the day itself and its commemoration, the authors present this newly annotated Passover Haggadah.

—Kenneth Hanson

Reflections: Interpretation and the Passover Haggadah, An Invitation to Post-Biblical Historiosophy

Zev Garber

Interpreting the Passover Haggadah, a collection of documents on the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and considered authoritative by the Synagogue, is the problem of relating blocs of religious thought patterns to the fluid, constantly changing life of the Jewish community. It is a question of old forms and new challenges. In the history of the interpretation of these documents various hermeneutical methods have been employed. The following is a summary sketch of the more important ones.

I. Hermeneutics

What, then, can be said about the matter of how to approach the miraculous? After all, miracles are the fishbones that stick most pertinaciously in the skeptic's craw—not only because the religious conjure salvation by invoking them, but because they are flatly unbelievable and the skeptic has a suitcase-full of miracle stories that even the religious will agree are fraudulent. Although the issue does not lie at the heart of my project in this book, its position as a watershed problem is insured by the fact that it has both metaphysical and epistemological implications.

If miracles have occurred, then that surely implies something significant about the way the world is causally ordered and about what (or who) so orders it. Again, if there are or might be miracles, we must face questions about how they are to be identified: whether it is the proper business of science and historiography to do so, or whether other means must do it. And if the biblical miracle stories are false, then that may tell us something about the prospects, not only for Christian soteriology but also for assessment of the historical reliability of Scripture.

Literal

The text means just what is said and nothing more. If a passage is not precisely clear, it can be made understandable by a comparison of the troublesome passage with other similar passages. For example, to fulfill the Mishnaic requirement (*m. Pesah.* 10.1,3 ff) that the Passover retelling must “begin with disgrace and end with glory,” two separate paragraphs, one by Rav (“In the beginning our forefathers were idolaters”), and the other by Samuel (“We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt”), are presented for the same purpose: to better explain a midrashic commentary of Deut 26: 5–8 (“A wandering Aramean was my father”).

The separate responses themselves are reflections of historical developments. When Eretz Israel came under the sovereignty of the Ptolemies of Egypt (301–198 BCE) all references to Egypt’s defeat and humiliation were cautiously avoided. Thus, we read in Samuel’s reply that “we *were* slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt,” and this is followed by “the Lord brought us forth from there,” and not “from Egypt” as expected. Similarly, when the Seleucids of Syria held control over Eretz Israel in the years 198–167 BCE, a pro-Seleucid sentiment was necessary. Thus, “Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the river, even Terah, the father of Abraham....” is found in Rav’s response.



Fig. 2 Hasmonean John Hyrcanus with Seleucid Antiochus VII

Allegorical

This hermeneutic assumes that the literal meaning of the text is neither the basic nor the “true” meaning. While the text may speak of an “A” in its literal story, it intends to call attention to a “B” which is another order of existence. Allegorical interpretation understands the literal figures, events, places, etc., within a text as ciphers—usually of extraordinary concepts which, for one reason or another, are not directly expressible in literal language. Sometimes the literal figures, etc., are understood as representations of larger entities. For example, the passage about the Four Sons/Children is “really” about the *masks* (sic) Jews wore in the Talmudic period and have worn in all ages up until today in their attempts at non-involvement in Jewish identity and Jewish destiny.

Another form of allegorical interpretation may best be described as mystical and esoteric. Here the text is understood as non-rational but not

anti-rational whereby the divine draws one upward towards itself. The interpreter-reader is led to a unity with the divine reality which lies beyond the text. Thus, the intention of the text is not to impart information, no matter how lofty, but to bring one into communion with the divine reality, or to mediate an experience of the divine attribute of freedom. The Seder foods, rituals and commentary complement the text in this regard.

An illustration of an allegorical Passover ritual is *bedikat ḥamets*, the night before Passover search for leaven grain (specifically, wheat, barley, spelt, rye, oats, and their derivatives), which is biblically and rabbinically prohibited during the Passover week. Leaven grain ferments upon decomposition and this allegorically represents Man's rising inclination toward evil. The annual process of searching for *ḥamets* is a constant reminder for Man to search his/her everyday thoughts and deeds and resolve not to do evil but good. All are obligated to search for *ḥamets*, an indication that even the righteous are capable of transgression and wayward action. Also, as one obtains results in finding the pieces of *ḥamets*—the Lurianic school of Kabbalah suggests that ten pieces be found, corresponding to the ten *sefirot* or divine emanations—so that s/he improve her/his state by a solemn resolved to live in a cosmic unity with all that is around her/him, suggested by the presence at the Passover table of vegetable, animal, human and divine symbols.

Another example, the message of the hare-hunt scenes that are found in early Haggadahs is rather interesting, particularly since the allegory is so indirect. The problem of what sequence to follow when the Passover Seder was celebrated on Saturday night was solved through memorizing the order by way of an acronym, *YaKeNHaz*. *YaKeNHaz*, sometimes pronounced *YaKNeHaZ*, represented after the Sabbath (*ner*), the separation of the holiness of the Sabbath from weekdays (*Havdalah*), and thanksgiving for the festive season celebrated anew (*zeman*). To the Ashkenazi Jews, *YaKeNHaz* sounded like the German-Yiddish *Jagenhaz*, "hare-hunt," which thereby was interpreted within the Passover message of freedom by understanding the hare as the Jewish People outsmarting its enemies, who are virtually illustrated as hunters with dogs and nets.

Typology

It was the hermeneutic method called typology that enabled the Sages to make use of the verses of Scriptures to read contemporary history into the Passover Haggadah. The verses serve as pointers toward a closer understanding of contemporary issues, e.g., "Go forth and learn what Laban, the Aramean, sought to do to Jacob our father; while Pharaoh decreed death only for the male children, Laban sought to uproot all," is based on Gen 31:22–34, and especially Gen 32:24. The midrash reflects the trouble

4 *Annotated Passover Haggadah*

between the Seleucids (Syrian=Aram=Laban) and the Ptolomies (Egypt=Pharaoh) over Eretz Israel. Passover is anti-Egyptian in outlook nevertheless some gesture was necessary for Jews living under benign Ptolemaic rule to placate their Egyptian rulers. Hence, the denunciation of Laban (read Seleucids) as a greater enemy of Jewish welfare and continuity.

Later, under Roman rule, “Laban the Aramean” is seen as Rome, through a play on the Hebrew consonants which spell “Rome” and “Aram,” since Rome was then the threat in Eretz Israel against Jewish independence and freedom. Finally, in the course of Jewish history down to the present, in different places and times, “Laban the Aramean” has been interpreted as the threat (culturally, physically, spiritually) posed to Jewish survival by, e.g., the Church, Fascism, Russia, Arab nations, etc.

The Moral Sense of Haggadah

This hermeneutic concentrates on the use of certain passages to teach proper moral behavior and first became prominent in Jewish circles during the late Talmudic period when a consensus arose among rabbinical interpreters that the haggadic texts disclosed their meaning in a number of ways. Besides literal and allegorical hermeneutics, there was the method of interpreting scripture to get at its implications for ethical behavior. Through this method, one can save “embarrassing” traditional passages from deletion by the contemporary liberal-minded Jew, e.g., the Ten Plagues, especially the last, the killing of the Egyptian first-born, is not seen literally as the Torah commanding human slaughter but as a polemic against the gods of Egypt (cf. Exod 12:12b: “against the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgment,” recited in the Haggadah and the key to understanding the plague narrative), suggesting that the way of God and Torah, however liberally interpreted, is the guarantor of Israel’s survival and not Egypt’s gods (read: diaspora assimilation, non-Jewish ways, etc.).

Similarly, the recitation of the “Pour out thy wrath” accompanying the Cup of Elijah need not be understood as an expression of vindictiveness toward the non-Jew but should rather be interpreted as invoking the Judge of all the Earth to deal justly with the nations of the world as He *continuously* does with Israel, so that the complete messianic fulfillment of the future, a brotherhood of man inspired by the Torah way, can be realized swiftly in our day. This is not poor theology, as some have claimed, but the authentic Jewish understanding of *Heilsgeschichte*, of the interdependence of mankind, and of dialogued between Israel and the nations conducted without politics, politeness, and paternalism and in the full power of the Jewish way, as seen, for example, in Genesis 17, Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah 2, and Micah 4.

In addition to the above, the continuous process of interpretation has produced other hermeneutical insights. It will continue to do so as long as

the classical written tradition persists but cannot anticipate every possible new situation. It is for this reason that hermeneutical stances are needed to serve the interpreter as general principles for reaching decisions in concrete situations. The crucial problem in textual interpretation is to discover a suitable hermeneutic, one that is both fair to the original image and faithful to the contemporary ethic.

II. Historiography, Historiosophy

As the liturgy of the Seder night suggests, memory is an essential function of the Jewish consciousness. Yet, we often make the mistake of assuming that our stress on commemoration entails a commitment to the craft of the historian.

In recovering the past, Jewish memory has not traditionally been interested in history, as that term is currently defined. Since inception until modern times, Jews did not interest themselves in historiography. They did not see their literature as dealing with historical matters, nor did they collect “histories.” They did not encourage techniques, theories, nor inspire principles of historical research and presentation; nor support methods of historical scholarship. The narrative presentation of history based on a critical examination, evaluation, and election of material from primary and secondary sources and subject to scholarly criteria are absent from Jewish classics. In a sentence, Jews, participants in history, wrote no “official” history. The one possible exception is Josephus, who lived in the first century, but as a Jewish apologist before Rome, he wrote not for Jews but on behalf of Jews.

Jews in pre-modern era did not look backwards with the aim of discovering facts. Rather they sought to derive paradigms from the sacred events of the past by which they can then interpret and respond to contemporary happenings. Paradigmatic and not pragmatic concern was the issue and emphasis. Jews dabbled in *historiosophy* (a philosophy of history) and not historiography. The biblical authors discuss life liberation, deliverance, and the Jewish People’s continuous relationship with God. Running through this experience is an element of mystery stemming from God’s penetration into history, limiting human knowledge and ethical conduct. The right and ethical life is to be attained by following creeds, rites, rituals, and appointed times—all of which enables each generation to reenact the pivotal moments in the life of the Jewish People.

The ambiguity of contemporary vicissitudes is illumined with reference to the paradigmatic categories of the past. Remembering the Exodus, for example, is not to ask which Pharaoh, how many Israelites, and how a sea can split, but to think constructively and imaginatively about Freedom in the present and in the future. Responding to the destruction of

Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish People, the Sages/Rabbis salvaged Judaism by placing it beyond time and history. They elevated Jewish values, practices, and thought beyond the daily course of events—determined by Gentiles—to a timeless plane.

After 70 CE Jews lived between the glories of the past and the messianic restoration to come. Contemporary events were noteworthy only insofar as they were foretold by past generations and/or gave clues about the coming redemption. In this context, Maimonides' attitude towards history (*Commentary to Mishnah, Sanhedrin* 10:1) is typical, occupation with history is “a useless waste of time.”

III. People and Land

We have suggested that the Passover Haggadah is non-historical but not anti-historical in foundation and tradition. Let us now confront the literature itself by looking at a selective theme in context: freedom from tyranny. In the biblical documents this is seen as the Exodus from Egypt (Diaspora) but for the *ba'al Haggadah* (redactor of the Haggadah), this concept extends to the liberation of the Land of Israel.

Mishnah *Pesahim* 10.4 specifically prescribes that the entire Deuteronomic confessional (Deut 26:5–10) of *Hag Habikkurim* (centrality of the Land) be recited but the *ba'al Haggadah* intentionally deletes the last two verses (“He brought us to this place and gave us this land. A land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which you, O 'Lord, have given me.”) due to the Land's subjugation to a foreign power (Rome).

The four cups of wine reflect the four verbs of freedom in Exod 6: 6–7:

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and *I will bring* you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and *I will deliver* you from their bondage, and *I redeem* you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments, and *I will take* you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God.

Yet a fifth verb mentioned in verse 8,

I will bring you into the *land* concerning which I lifted up my hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, I will give it to you for a heritage; I am the Lord.

is *passed over* (sic) due to the Realpolitik of Roman despotism in the Land.

Anti-Roman polemics are subtly conveyed in the Haggadah. Case in point, the post-70 question about the bitter herbs, in lieu of the pre-70 “meats” question (“Why on the night of Passover, roasted paschal lamb is eaten, and not stewed or boiled?”) is clearly the present political situation despite the Exod 1:14 prooftext offered. Sentence in point, Deut 26:8 talks of the Exodus from Egypt with great terribleness (*MoRa*) but the word suggests an appearance (*MaReH*) of God’s awe (*MoRa*) equated to the defeat of Rome (*RoMaH*).

The paragraph about the five masters who recline together at Benei Berak talking about the departure from Egypt all night is a guise for discussing the liberation from Rome. The association of Rabbi Akiba with this Passover plot—he is one of the five—is historically sound since he was the major religious support for the Bar Kochba rebellion against Rome in 132 CE. A variant of this story is a tale told in *t. Pesah* X.12 involving religious revolutionaries meeting in Lydda.

Moses and Joseph are not central in the Haggadah because their story is from off the Land of Israel. Likewise, the stories of persecution in the Middle Ages from Church and Mosque against *People and Land* is the *Sitz-im-Leben* of “Pour out thy wrath” passage. Finally, the challenging issue at the time of the Rabbis till our time, and every age in between, is how to “speedily lead the offshoots of thy stock/redeemed to Zion in joyous song” (next/this year in Jerusalem). Again, People and Land.

IV. Class Lesson

The counterpoint on the biblical (past) rabbinical (present) Passover message of freedom, that is, liberation of People and Land, is the role played by the Liberator who moves related but independent through passages of the Haggadah.

See, for example, the passages that speak of God and He alone, who redeems Israel and not messengers (“For I will go through the Land of Egypt in that night”: I, and not an angel. “I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt”: I, and not a serap. “And against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments”: I, and not a messenger. “I am the Lord”: I am He, and no other.) or messiahs (cf. the Sages’ opposition to Ben Zoma).

A deeper appreciation of the Haggadic hermeneutic devices develops if the professor in a class setting plays more of a passive role than is traditionally assigned to him/her. By encouraging the student to read the text as *p’shat* (literal meaning of text with special emphasis on its historical, literary, and linguistic features) and answer questions from context and prooftext, the professor is encouraging exegetical scholarship, which otherwise would not grow from the total lecture method that detaches the student from the material.

Take “Laban the Aramean,” for example. In the Haggadah, we read: “Go forth and learn what Laban, the Aramean, sought to do to Jacob our father. While Pharaoh decreed death for the male children (see Exod 1:16, 22), Laban sought to uproot (*la-`aKKoR*) all.”

Now the prooftext (Deut 26:5) speaks of an Aramean who is a “wanderer”/ *’oBeD* (=Jacob) and not an Aramean who “would have destroyed”/ *’iBBeD* (= Laban). Furthermore, why is the crime of Laban (insider) worse than the aggravated offense of Pharaoh (outsider)?

A possible explanation may be found in the statement about the Wicked Son/Child. About this child, we read: “S/He removes her/himself from the community, by denying the *’iKKaR*/ the Principle. That is, the Israelite or Jew who does not credit God (*’iKKaR*) as deliverer of Land and People, excommunicates oneself from the salvific message of Passover.

By plying the role of a class catalyst, the professor encourages the student to see the problems in the text and prooftext, including, the similarity of language by Laban and the Wicked Son/Child. Hopefully, the students experience the excitement of learning when they conclude that the Laban/Wicked Son/Child paradigm suggests that Israel’s existence and destiny are shaped more by internal than external forces. Jewish self-hate, and not antisemitism, ultimately determines Israel’s continuity and immortality.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, let me suggest, that whatever hermeneutic is selected should take seriously the four sequential steps of the Learning process: initial *confrontation*, in which the interpreter experiences the idea, behavior, or object superficially; *analysis*, here the interpreter seriously probes the occasion or object in the light of previous experiences and knowledge; *interaction*, where the interpreter’s reciprocal communication with others helps him/her benefit from their feelings, ideas, experiences, with the reality under discussion; and *internalization*, where, by turning the new experience and sharing of ideas upon him/herself, the interpreter reacts meaningfully to the new reality as it relates to him/her as an individual and as a member of society. The hermeneutic activity combines real life situations with inherited tradition and permits the interpreter to confront deep philosophical-religious ideas in a convincing application, since it nurtures sensitivity and empathy, which lead to ethical decision-making and moral development.

In discovering a suitable hermeneutic, the interpreter becomes a listener as well as an interrogator. The process of asking and listening constitutes a circle—the hermeneutical circle. It is in this fashion that the Seder institution originated, and the process of Haggadic interpretation has developed and proceeded down to the present day.

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