

HOW WE [DON'T] TELL THE STORY IN MAGID

[revised 5769]

Even though the primary obligation of the Seder evening is to 'tell the story' of Yetziat Mitzrayim, when we read Maggid at the Seder, it is not very clear where that story actually begins (or ends). To determine when, where, and how we actually fulfill this mitzva, we will examine Maggid - one paragraph at a time.

As we study each paragraph, we will ask ourselves: is this part of the story?

If it is, then we can determine how we tell the story.

If it's not, then we must explain why this paragraph is included in Maggid nonetheless.

[The following shiur may be quite important, for as we will explain, one could easily sit through an entire Seder, but not fulfill this important mitzvah! To help follow this shiur, we have attached a pdf file – with all of Maggid on one page!]

WHERE SHOULD WE BEGIN?

Let's contemplate for a moment where would be the best (or most logical) point to start the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim from. One could entertain several possibilities.

The simplest and most obvious approach would be to begin with Bnei Yisrael's enslavement in Egypt. In fact, this is precisely where Sefer Shmot begins!

On the other hand, one could start a bit earlier with the story of Yosef and his brothers, for that would explain how Bnei Yisrael first came to settle down in Egypt. However, if we continue with that logic, we could go back another generation to the story of Yaakov, or even back to story of Avraham Avinu. [Or maybe even back to the story of Creation!]

This dilemma appears to be the underlying reason behind the Talmudic dispute between Rav and Shmuel. Let's explain:

THE MISHNA in Mesechet PESACHIM

The Mishna in the tenth chapter of Mesechet Pesachim sets some guidelines concerning how to fulfill this obligation 'to tell the story', including one that deals with its format:

"matchilim bi-gnut u-mesayim be-shevach" -

- We begin our story with a derogatory comment, and conclude it with praise.

In the Gemara's subsequent discussion (see Pesachim 116a), we find two opinions concerning what this opening comment should be:

- **Rav** - "Mi-tchila ovdei avoda zara..." - At first, our ancestors were idol worshipers..."
- **Shmuel** - "Avadim hayinu..." - We were once slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt..."

At the simplest level, it seems that Rav & Shmuel argue concerning what is considered a more derogatory statement- i.e. the fact that we were once slaves, or the fact that we once idol worshipers. However, this dispute may also relate to a more fundamental question - concerning **where** the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim actually begins - from our slavery in Egypt (Shmuel), or from the time of our forefathers (Rav).

In our study of Maggid, we will show how we actually quote both of these opinions, but not as the starting point of the story, but rather as important statements of purpose.

So where does the story begin?

We will now begin our detailed study MAGGID not only to answer that question, but also in an attempt to better understand HOW we fulfill this mitzva of "sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim" when we recite the Haggada.

'HA LACHMA ANYA'

The opening paragraph of MAGGID - 'ha lachma anya..' is definitely not the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, but rather a quick explanation to the guests about the MATZA on the table. Let's explain why:

In the opening sentence, the leader of the Seder explains how this 'special bread' on the table is what our forefathers ate in Egypt; then he quotes what our forefathers said to one another in Egypt as they prepared to partake in the first Korban Pesach.

"kol dichfin..." - reflects how they invited one another to join a common group to eat the korban Pesach (see Shmot 12:3-6);

"hashta hacha..." reflects their expression of hope that by next year they would no longer be slaves in Egypt, but rather a free people living in the land of Israel.

Albeit its thematic importance, this section is not the story itself – even though it does form a very meaningful introduction.

MAH NISHTANA

Similarly, the 'ma nishtana' is not part of the story. Rather, we want the children to ask questions to ensure that they will take interest in the story that we are about to tell.

As our obligation to tell this story is based on the pasuk "ve-higgadeta le-BINCHA" - and you must tell your children... (see Shmot 13:8 / and our previous shiur), it makes sense that we try to capture their attention before we tell the story. However, as you have surely noticed, this section contains only questions, but no answers.

It should also be noted that these 'four questions' are really one question; i.e. – the **one** question is: 'Why is this night different?' Afterward, the child brings four examples/questions to support his claim that tonight is indeed different.

It is for this reason that we never answer these 'four questions'; Rather, Maggid continues with the answer to the 'one question' re: why this night is special.

'AVADIM HAYINU'

At first glance, the next paragraph: 'avadim hayinu...' seems to begin the story. [In fact, it appears that we have followed Shmuel's opinion (in Pesachim 116a) that we should begin the story with 'avadim hayinu'.]

However, if you take a minute to carefully read this entire paragraph, you'll immediately notice that this paragraph does NOT begin the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. Instead, the 'avadim hayinu' section makes two very important statements, which provide the answer to the 'one question' of WHY this night is so special. Hence we explain:

- **WHY** we are obligated to tell this story – for had it not been for this story of how God saved us from Egypt, we would still be slaves till this day;

And, then we explain:

- **WHO** is obligated to tell this story - i.e. 've-afilu kulanu chachamim..' - and even if we [who gather] are all very wise and learned and know the entire Torah, it remains incumbent upon us to tell that story; and the more we elaborate upon it, the better!

From this paragraph, it appears that before we actually tell the story, the Haggada prefers to first discuss some fundamentals relating to the nature of our obligation!

The first statement deals with a fundamental question regarding **why** this story is meaningful to all future generations, even though we will be discussing an event that took place thousands of years earlier.

The second statement comes to counter a possible misunderstanding, based on the source-text of "ve-higgadeta le-bincha..." - that this mitzva applies **only** to teaching **children** [i.e. those who never heard this story]. Therefore, before we tell the story, the Haggada must remind us that **everyone** is obligated to discuss the story - even 'know it alls'.

[In the next shiur we will discuss this section in more detail in light of Devarim 6:20-25.]

MA'ASEH BE-R. ELIEZER...

To prove this second point of the 'avadim hayinu' paragraph (that even 'know it alls' are obligated to tell the story), the next paragraph in MAGGID quotes a story of five great Torah scholars (in fact Tannaim) who gathered for the Seder in Bnei Brak. Even though they certainly knew the story; nonetheless they spent the entire evening (until dawn the next morning) discussing it.

[This reflects a classic format for a Rabbinic statement. First the Rabbis state the obligation [in our case, that everyone is obligated to tell the story - even 'know it alls'] - afterward they support that ruling by quoting a story [in our case, the story of the five scholars who spent the entire evening discussing the story of the Exodus, even though they surely knew it.]

Even though the Haggada does not quote their entire conversation of that evening, the next paragraph does quote one specific discussion. Let's explain why:

AMAR RABBI ELIEZER BEN AZARYA...

The specific discussion that we quote concerns the Biblical source for our **daily** obligation to '**mention**' the story of the Exodus (see Devarim 16:3). In Hebrew, this obligation is commonly referred to as "**zechira**" [to passively remember], in contrast to our 'once a year' obligation at the Seder of "**sippur**" - to actively **tell** the story of the Exodus.

Most likely, the Haggada chose to quote this specific discussion as it relates to the obvious connection between these two mitzvot ("zechira" & "sippur").

One could suggest that the story we tell at the Seder ("sippur") serves as the reference point for our daily mention ("zechira") of the Exodus - when we recite the third 'parshia' of keriyat shema (see Bamidbar 15:41), every morning and evening. To mention this story on a daily basis only becomes meaningful if we first 'tell the story' in full (at least once a year).

We should note as well that the very pasuk: "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the Land of Egypt **to be for you a God**" (Bamidbar 15:41) supports the opinion of Rashi & Ibn Ezra (on Shmot 13:8) that we must explain to our children that God took us out of Egypt **in order** that we keep His commandments.

Notice however, that we are still discussing the nature of our obligation - but the story itself has not yet begun!

THE FOUR SONS

The next section of MAGGID - beginning with 'baruch ha-Makom', discusses the Four Sons. Here again, we do not find the actual story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, rather another aspect of 'defining our obligation', as this section discusses **HOW** we should tell the story.

This section reflects the statement in the Mishna: "'Ifi da'ato shel ha-ben, aviv melamdo" - based on the level of the child, the parent should teach [the story]. [See Pesachim 116a.]

Based on this dictum, the Haggada quotes a Mechilta, which offers **four** examples of **how** to tell the story to different types of children - each example based on a pasuk in Chumash (where the father answers his son).

The opening statement of this section: 'baruch ha-Makom...' serves as a 'mini' "birkat ha-Torah" [a blessing recited before Torah study], as we are about to engage in the study of a Mechilta - the Midrash on Sefer Shmot. The quote itself begins with "keneged arba banim dibra Torah..."

This section certainly teaches us **HOW** to be a 'dynamic' teacher as we tell this story, and adapt it to the level of our audience. However, note once again that the story has yet to begun!

"YACHOL ME-ROSH CHODESH"

In the next section, beginning with: 'yachol me-rosh chodesh...' we discuss yet another aspect of our 'obligation to tell the story' - this time concerning **WHEN** we are obligated. Here, the Haggada quotes an analytical discourse which arrives at the conclusion that the story must be told on evening of the Seder.

Once again, we find another definition relating to our obligation to tell the story, but we haven't told the story yet!

A Quick Summary

As you probably noticed, this last section is simply one of many that discuss 'secondary' topics before we actually begin to tell the story of yetziat Mitzrayim? Note the topics that we have discussed thus far:

- A. **WHY** we are **obligated** to tell the story- ["avadim hayinu"]
- B. **WHO** is **obligated** to tell the story - ['even know it alls']
- C. **HOW** we are **obligated** to tell the story - [the 'Four sons']
- D. **WHEN** we are **obligated** to tell the story - ["yachol..."]

At most Seders, probably at least an hour has gone by, but we haven't even begun to tell the story!

"MI-TCHILA OVDEI AVODA ZARA..."

After defining the various aspects of our obligation, it appears that MAGGID finally begins telling the story with the paragraph that begins with "mi-tchila ovdei avoda zara..." (apparently following Rav's opinion in Pesachim 116a).

If so, it would seem that we actually begin the story with the story of our forefathers [the Avot] and how Avraham grew up within a family of idol worshipers.

However, if you read this paragraph carefully, you'll notice it isn't a story at all. Instead, the Haggada is making a very important **statement**, and then proves that statement with a text-proof from Yehoshua chapter 24.

To appreciate what's going on, let's take a closer look at this statement and its proof.

The Statement:

"Mi-tchila ovdei avoda zara.hayu.avoteinu, ve-achshav kirvanu ha-Makom le-**avodato**"

At first, our forefathers were servants to strange gods - but now, God has brought us closer to Him - **[in order] to serve Him!**

The Proof:

"And Yehoshua said to the people: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Your fathers dwelt in the past - beyond the River, even Terach - the father of Avraham, and the father of Nachor - and they **servd** other gods. And I took your father Avraham from beyond the River, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed...and Yaakov and his children went down into Egypt'" (see Yehoshua 24:2-4).

This statement should not surprise us, for once again we find the Haggada emphasizing the point (discussed above) that God chose the people of Israel for a purpose - i.e. to **serve** Him!

This statement of 'mi-tchila' will set the stage for the story that we are about to tell - for it explains why God originally chose Avraham - i.e. to become the forefather of a nation that will serve Him. Even though the story itself has not yet begun, the next paragraph will explain its connection to the story that we are about to tell.

"BARUCH SHOMER HAVTACHATO"

In the next paragraph we find yet another 'statement' (and not a story) followed by a proof-text, that relates once again to God's original choice of our forefathers.

Statement:

"Baruch shomer havtachato... - Blessed is He who keeps His promise [of redemption] to Am Yisrael, for God had calculated the end [time for redemption] as He had promised Avraham Avinu at brit bein ha-btarim. As God stated:

Proof:

'Know very well that your offspring will be **strangers in a**

foreign land which will **oppress and enslave them** for four hundred years. But that nation who will oppress them I will judge, and afterward they will go out with great wealth"
[See Breishit 15:13-18].

In this statement, we thank God for keeping His promise to Avraham Avinu, at "brit bein ha-btarim", to ultimately redeem Bnei Yisrael from their affliction, after some four hundred years.

Recall how the previous paragraph explained that God had chosen our forefathers to establish a nation to **serve** Him. This paragraph connects that theme to the story of the Exodus, for the slavery forecasted in this covenant ["brit bein ha-btarim"] - was to serve as a 'training experience' that would facilitate the formation of that nation. [See our discussion of this topic in the previous shiur.]

Hence, this paragraph explains why the story of the Exodus must begin with "brit bein ha-btarim" – but we haven't told the story yet!

"VE-HEE SHE-AMDA"

As we lift our cups and recite the "v'hee sh'amda" - we declare yet another important statement, connecting that covenant (and the events of the past) with today:

"ve-HEE she-amda la-avoteinu **ve-LANU** "

- And it is THIS [Promise that was part of the COVENANT, i.e. brit bein ha-btarim] which stood for our fathers, AND for us as well. For not only once [in our history] did our enemies try to destroy us; but in EVERY generation we are endangered, but God comes to save us [for the sake of His covenant]."

The word "hee" in this statement obviously refers to the promise [havtacha] of brit bein ha-btarim (mentioned in the previous paragraph). This statement is so important that our custom is to raise the cup of wine before reciting this proclamation!

Here we explain that "brit bein ha-btarim" was not merely a 'one-time coupon' promising one major redemption, but rather it defined an eternal relationship between God and His people. The events of Yetziat Mitzrayim are only the initial stage of this everlasting relationship. Therefore, anytime in our history, whenever our nation is in distress - God will ultimately come to redeem us –so that we can serve Him.

This paragraph provides us with a deeper understanding of why every generation must tell-over the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, but once again – it's not THE story.

At most Seder's – over an hour has passed, and most people are paying more attention to their watches than to their Haggada - yet we still haven't told the story!

"TZEY U-LMAD" / "ARAMI OVED AVI"

With this 'thematic background' complete, the Haggada is finally ready to tell the story (for those who are still awake). However, as you may have noticed, we do not tell the story in a straightforward manner.

Take a careful look at the next section of MAGGID, noting how the Haggada takes four psukim from Devarim 26:5-8, and quotes them one word (or phrase) at a time. Each quote is followed by a proof of that phrase, usually from either the story of the Exodus in Sefer Shmot or from a pasuk in Sefer Tehillim.

[To verify this, be sure to first review Devarim 26:1-9 before you continue.]

This section begins with "tzey u-lmad: ma bikesh Lavan...." which is simply a drasha of the opening phrase 'arami oved avi', and then continues all the way until the drasha concerning the Ten Plagues. Even though this section constitutes a rather elaborate Midrash on four psukim from 'mikra bikkurim' (Devarim 26:5-8) – **this is how and where we tell the story!**

The reason why MAGGID chooses this format to tell the story is based once again on a statement in the Mishna in the tenth chapter of Masechet Pesachim:

"ve-dorshin me-arami oved avi ad sof ha-parasha" – and then we elaborate on the psukim from 'arami oved avi' until the end of that unit"

And that is exactly the format that our Haggada follows!

We quote Devarim 26:5-8, word by word, or phrase by phrase – quoting a 'drasha' for each; and that becomes the 'framework' for telling over the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim. ['arami oved avi' is merely the first drasha.]

Even though 'technically' it would suffice to simply quote these psukim, we elaborate upon them instead, in an effort to make the story more interesting and meaningful. [In fact, we are quoting a Sifrei - the Midrash on Sefer Devarim, which most probably was composed for this very purpose.]

From a 'practical' halachic perspective, this is a critical point to understand - for in this section we finally fulfill our obligation to TELL THE STORY - and hence this section should be treated as the most important part of MAGGID!

[Unfortunately, this section is usually one of the most neglected parts of the Haggada, since we are usually 'out of steam' by the time we reach it. Also, if one is not aware of the elaborate nature of these quotes, it is quite difficult to understand what's going on. Therefore, it's important that we not only pay attention to this section, but we should also be sure at this point to explain the details of the story to those who don't understand these psukim, or these drashot.]

WHY MIKRA BIKKURIM?

It is not by chance that Chazal chose to incorporate a Midrash of "mikra bikkurim" - even though it is rather cryptic - as the method through which we fulfill our obligation of sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim. Let's explain why.

Recall from our shiur on Parshat Ki Tavo, that "mikra bikkurim" (see Devarim 26:1-10) serves as a yearly proclamation whereby every individual thanks God for His fulfillment of the final stage of brit bein ha-btarim.

[This is supported by numerous textual and thematic parallels between the psukim of mikra bikkurim (Devarim 26:1-9), and brit bein ha-btarim (see Breishit 15:7-18). Note as well the use of the word 'yerusha' in 26:1 and in 15:1-8!]

This proclamation constitutes much more than simply thanking God for our 'first fruits'. Rather, it thanks God for the Land (see Devarim 26:3) that He had promised our forefathers (in brit bein ha-btarim / see Breishit 15:18). The 'first fruits' are presented as a 'token of our appreciation' for the fact that God has fulfilled His side of the covenant - as each individual must now declare that he will be faithful to his side of the covenant.

As mikra bikkurim constitutes a biblical 'nusach' ['formula'] through which one thanks God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim, one could suggest that it was for this reason that the Mishna chose these same psukim as its framework for telling the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim.

[It very well may be that this custom to tell the story at the Sefer with "mikra bikurim" began after the destruction of the Temple (note that the Tosefta of Mesechet Pesachim does not include this custom, while the Mishna (compiled later) does include it! Without the Temple, the individual could no longer recite "mikra bikkurim". However, we can at least remind ourselves of this yearly need to proclaim our allegiance to God's covenant - by quoting from "mikra bikurim" at the Seder!]

This may explain why the Haggada only quotes the first four psukim of mikra bikkurim (where it talks about Yetziat Mizraim) but not the pasuk that describes how He bought us into the Promised Land.

Finally, note also the word 'higgadeti' in Devarim 26:3 and compare it with the word 've-higgadeta' in Shmot 13:8!

See also Rambam Hilchot Chametz u-Matza chapter 7, especially halacha 4.]

THE MULTIPLICATION TABLES

When you study the "drashot" of these four psukim, note how the drasha of the final pasuk leads us directly into the Ten Plagues. At this point, the Haggada quotes an additional drasha - by R. Yossi ha-Glili - that there must have been 5 times as many plagues at the Red Sea than were in Egypt [based on the ratio - 'etzba' of the Makkot to 'yad' at Kriyat Yam Suf, i.e. hand/finger = 5/1].

Then R. Eliezer and R. Akiva add multiples of 4x and 5x for each plague - based on Tehillim 88:49.

[Note in the Rambam's nusach of MAGGID, he skips this entire section. This suggests that this Midrash is an additional 'elaboration', but not a necessary part of the story that we must tell. In other words, if you need to skip something, this section is a 'good candidate'.]

DAYENU

Now that the story is finished, it's time for 'praise' - following the format of the Mishna "matchilin bi-gnut u-mesaymim be-shevach" - and we will now explain how DAYENU serves as a special form of HALLEL (praise).

You are probably familiar with all the questions regarding what we say in Dayenu, for example, how could a Jew say, let alone sing, that 'it would have been enough' - even had God not given us the Torah?

And how could a 'zionist' say, let alone sing, that 'it would have been enough' - even if God had not given us the Land of Israel?

However, the answer to all those questions is rather simple, once one understands that each time we say the word "dayenu" - it really implies that 'it would have been enough - **to say Hallel!**'

In other words, we say as follows:

- Had God only taken us out of Egypt and not punished the Egyptians, **it would have been reason enough** to say Hallel

- Had He split the sea, but not given us the 'manna', that alone **would have been reason enough** to say Hallel...

... And so on.

With this background, the next paragraph of that poem makes perfect sense:

"al achat kama vekhama..."

- How much more so is it proper **to thank God** for He has performed **ALL** these acts of kindness ..

He took us out of Egypt, **and** punished them, **and** split the sea, **and** gave us the manna etc.

In essence, this beautiful poem poetically summarizes each significant stage of redemption, from the time of the Exodus until Am Yisrael's conquest of the Land - stating how each single act of God's kindness in that process would be reason enough to say Hallel, now even more so we must say Hallel, for God did all of these things for us.

From this perspective, "dayenu" serves a double purpose. First and foremost, it concludes the story with "shevach" [praise] and qualifies the Hallel that we are about to sing. However, it could also be understood as a continuation of the story of the Exodus. Let's explain why and how:

Recall that the last "drasha" [elaboration] on the psukim of "arami oved avi" led into a lengthy discussion of the Ten Plagues. To fulfill our obligation at the Seder 'to tell the story', we could (and do) finish right here. But the poem of "dayenu" actually continues that story, picking up from the Ten Plagues ["asa bahem shfatim" refers to the Plagues], and continuing through all the significant events in the desert until our arrival in the Land of Israel and building the Temple.

This takes on additional significance, as the DAYENU concludes 'the story of the Exodus' with entering the Land of Israel and building the Bet ha'Mikdash.

Even though the Mishna instructs us to quote the entire "Mikra Bikurim" section [i.e. Devarim 26:5-9] - for some reason

(probably because we are in "galus") our custom is only to quote until 26:8 (how God took us out of Egypt); but we do not include 26:9 (how He brought us to the Land of Israel:

"va'yvi'einu el ha'Makom ha'zeh" - va'yiten lanu et ha'aretz ha'zot" - He brought us to this place [most likely referring to the Bet ha'Mikdash - where the proclamation is being made] and He gave us the land of Israel" (see Devarim 26:9)

Even though we don't elaborate upon this pasuk in our version of Maggid, "Dayenu" enables us to include it!

In this manner, the song of "dayenu" serves as both "shevach" [praise] and "sippur" [story] - at the same time!

[It is also interesting to note that we find 15 levels of praise in the Dayenu, that most probably correspond to the 15 steps leading to the Bet ha-Mikdash, better known as the 'shir ha-ma'a lot', i.e. the 15 psalms in Tehillim (120-134) / composed for each step.]

"RABBAN GAMLIEL"

Even though we have completed our story, before continuing with the Hallel, the Haggada wants to make sure that we also fulfill Rabban Gamliel's opinion (in Masechet Pesachim chapter 10) that we have not fulfilled our obligation of "v'higadta l'bincha" unless we have explained the connection between that story and the commandment to eat PESACH, MATZA & MAROR.

Rabban Gamliel's statement could also imply that our obligation of eating matza and maror is not complete unless we explain how they connect to the story that we just told. This would explain why it is added at the conclusion of the "sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim" section, as we are about to fulfill our obligation to eat matza, and maror.

[In our times, this section may also be considered a 'fill in' for the KORBAN PESACH itself. During the time of the Bet ha-Mikdash, MAGGID was said while eating the korban pesach. Nowadays, since the korban cannot be offered, we mention pesach, matza, and maror instead of eating the korban. Thus, this section forms an excellent introduction to the Hallel, which in ancient times was recited as the Korban Pesach was offered, and later when it was eaten.]

This section forms the conclusion of "sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim", and sets the stage for our reciting of Hallel - to praise God for our salvation.

[See Rambam Hilchot chametz u'matza 7:5, where his concluding remark implies that "haggada" ends here.]

"BE-CHOL DOR VA-DOR"

Considering the integral connection between the events of the Exodus and "brit avot" (discussed above) the statement of: "be-chol dor va-dor chayav adam lir'ot et atzmo ke-ilu hu yatza mi-Mitzrayim..." takes on additional significance.

Before we say HALLEL, we conclude our story by stating that in every generation - each individual must feel as though HE himself was redeemed from Egypt. As the purpose of this entire historical process of redemption was to prepare Am Yisrael for their national destiny - it becomes imperative that every member of Am Yisrael feels as though they experienced that same 'training mission'.

As we explained in Part One of our study of Maggid, we must feel as though we ourselves went through this experience. By telling the story of 'what happened' - we are reminded of the purpose for 'why it happened' - in order that this 'virtual experience' will affect our daily behavior; even when are not eating matza!

In Part Three, we return to explore each section of Maggid in greater detail - based on our conclusions in Parts One & Two.