

DIALOGUE¹

Your child will ask you ... you shall say to him (Exodus 13:14).

Try describing a Passover seder to someone who never actually participated in one, and you'll find yourself groping for models that only partially fit the bill. The seder is part family dinner, part prayer service, part ritualistic consumption of symbolic foods, part songfest and storytelling marathon, part child-parent quizzing session ... among other things.

The *seder* straddles a number of otherwise distinct areas of our lives because the event it commemorates—the exodus and liberation of the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt—likewise combines realities and categorizations that we normally see as distinct and apart from each other.

THE EMANCIPATION OF G-D

The divine promise of redemption was conveyed to Moses in a formula that came to be known as "the four expressions of redemption":

I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I will deliver you from their servitude; I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments; I will acquire you for Myself as a people ..." (Exo 6:6-7).

In the Torah scroll, the biblical text is written without vowel points (*nikud*). This means that in addition to the traditional pronunciation, which conveys the basic meaning of the text, the text also allows for alternate readings, revealing additional layers of meaning, in keeping with the adage, "There are seventy faces to the Torah."⁽²⁾

One such alternate reading is applied to the first of the "four expressions of redemption" quoted above. The great sage and *paytan* (liturgical poet) Rabbi Elazar HaKalir² suggests that the Hebrew words *ve'hotzeiti etchem*, "I will take you out, can also be read as *ve'hutzeiti itchem*, "**I will be taken out with you**"—implying that G-d Himself is also imprisoned in Egypt, and awaits redemption together with His people.⁽³⁾

This is also the deeper meaning of a phrase that appears frequently in the prayer book, referring to the festival of Passover as "the time of our liberation." On the most basic level, the plural "our" refers to us, the people of Israel. But on another level of interpretation, "our liberation" is the joint liberation of G-d and of Israel.⁽⁴⁾

The essence of the human soul is "literally a part of G-d above."⁽⁵⁾ As long as we are enslaved, **as long as our soul's deepest yearnings are**

stifled and denied actualization, G-d, too, is not free. In the words of the prophets, "In all their distresses, He is distressed" (Isaiah 63:9); "I am with him in his affliction."

RELIGIOUS RITUAL OR SOCIAL CONVENTION?

In general, the Torah's commandments fall under two categories: (a) "Between man and man"—social laws that govern relations between individuals and communities. (b) "Between man and G-d"—laws that outline our duties to our Creator. **On Passover, as befits the "season of our liberation, the two categories fuse into one: "between man and G-d" is synonymous with "between man and man," and vice versa.**

Hence the unique format of the seder as a hybrid of religious ritual and social get-together. The purpose of the *seder* is to "remember the day on which you left Egypt" (Exodus 13:3) and reaffirm our commitment as G-d's people. To this end, we eat the matzah and the *maror* and retell the story of the Exodus. Yet the entire seder is constructed as a dialogue, as answers to questions posed by the "four children"—the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child, and "the child who does not know how to ask."⁽¹⁰⁾

In other words, one remembers the Exodus not in meditative communion with G-d, but by fulfilling the commandment to "tell your child" (Exodus 13:8) This includes "your child" in the broader sense of the term—any individual whom you are in a position to teach and enlighten,⁽¹²⁾ including "children" who are antagonistic or indifferent to the essence of Passover.

The freedom attained on Passover reveals the superficiality of the dividing line between the social and religious spheres of life. On the day that G-d became free through the redemption of the human soul, it is most obvious that no relationship can be forged with G-d that does not include a commitment to one's fellow man.

(2) *Midrash Rabbah*, Bamidbar 13:15; *Zohar* 3:152a; et al. See also Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 34a.

(3) *Siddur*, *Hoshaanot prayers*. See the essay, "The Essence of Existence," on pp. 16-20 above.

(4) See *Likutei Torah* (Written Discourses on the Torah), *Shemini Atzeret* 88d.

(5) *Tanya*, chapter 2.

(7) Psalms 91:15. Also see *Sifri*, Deuteronomy 32:34.

(8) See Talmud, *Yoma* 85b and *Kidushin* 40a; et al.

(10) Passover *Haggadah*.

(12) "Your children are your disciples" (Rashi, Deuteronomy 6:7); **"Whoever teaches another's child Torah, it is as if he had given birth to him"** (Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 19b).

1 Yanki Tauber, *The Inside Story, Exodus*, (Meaningful Life Center), pp. 110-113.

2 Eleazar beRabbi Qallir (c. 570–c. 640), also known as Eleazar ha-Kalir, was a Byzantine Jewish poet whose Hebrew-language liturgical verses or *piyyuṭim* are sung during significant religious services. In particular, he wrote hymns for the Three

Pilgrimage Festivals, for special Shabbats, for weekdays of festive character, and the fast days.

1. *The divine promise of redemption was conveyed to Moses in a formula that came to be known as "the four expressions of redemption."*

I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I will deliver you from their servitude; I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments; I will acquire you for Myself as a people ..." (Exodus 6:6-7).

- a. This is why we drink four cups of wine at the Passover *Seder*:

- 1) The "Cup of Sanctification," 2) The "Cup of Affliction,"
- 3) The "Cup of Redemption," 4) The "Cup of Praise."

- b. Luke 22:14-20

¹⁴When the hour came, Yeshua and his apostles **reclined** at the table. ¹⁵And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶For I tell you, **I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.**" ¹⁷After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹And he took bread (i.e., the *Afikomen*), gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup (i.e., the "Cup of Redemption") is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you ...

- 1) This is another example of the way in which Yeshua and his disciples honored the Mishnah (the Oral Torah) insofar as this "liturgy" is rabbinic—not Biblical.
- 2) When Yeshua said, "I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God," he was talking about eating the Seder meal, which he will do when he comes to establish the kingdom.
- 3) And, when he said, "do this in remembrance of me" the "this" he was describing does NOT refer to "communion" but to the celebration of Passover. He expected his disciples to integrate his work of redemption into the Passover *Seder* that they would celebrate annually until he returns.

2. *In the Torah scroll, the biblical text is written without vowel points (nikud). This means that in addition to the traditional pronunciation, which conveys the basic meaning of the text, the text also allows for alternate readings, revealing additional layers of meaning, in keeping with the adage, "There are seventy faces to the Torah."*

- a. The Sages teach that there are seventy faces to the Torah: expressing the truth that there are multiple levels of meaning hidden beneath the surface of the text. Over the ages, various interpretive methodologies have been employed to reveal these deep and profound teachings, ranging from the literal to the mystical. These methods and the insights they yield impact every aspect of Jewish life including practical law, custom, tradition, and world-view.³
- b. At the very end of the thirteenth century (1291 CE), the Bible scholar Bachya ben Asher of Saragossa, Spain noted that there are four ways of interpreting Scripture. These came to be known by the acronym פֶּרְדֵּס (*pardes*), spelled פ (pay) ר (resh) ד (dalet) ס (*samech*).

- 1) The **pay** stands for **peshat**, meaning "literal explanation of the text." The commentator seeks to explain the plain meaning of the text and no more.
- 2) The **resh** stands for **remez**, meaning "allusion, allegory, symbolism." The commentator compares words and phrases in one part of the Bible to similar words and phrases in other parts of the Bible and draws inferences from them.
- 3) The **dalet** stands for **derash**, a form of the word *midrash*, meaning "interpretation." Here the commentator probes beneath the literal meaning or a word or phrase in order to uncover an ethical or moral lesson that is thought to be implicit in the text.
- 4) The **samech** stands for **sod**, meaning "mystery, secret." Kabbalists (mystics) in particular are fond of probing the stories of the Bible to uncover the secrets of the Torah and of life itself.

These methods of interpretation are used in varying degrees and combinations by biblical commentators ... (They do so in order to) resolve obscurities and contradictions in the biblical text and to extract moral lesson from it.⁴

- a) Shabbat 63a (cf. Yevamot (Levirates) 11b, 24a)

A verse cannot depart from its plain meaning (*i.e.*, it's *peshat*).

- c. The great teachers (rabbis) during (Yeshua's) day used a technique that was later called **remez**. In their teaching, they would use part of a Scripture passage in a discussion, **assuming that their audience's knowledge of the Bible would allow them to deduce for themselves the fuller meaning of the teaching** ... (Yeshua) ... used this method often.

3 https://seforimcenter.com/Seventy-Faces-Rabbi-Avraham-Arieh-Trugman__p-14204.aspx

4 Alfred J. Kolatch, *This is the Torah*, (Jonathan David Publishers, 1988), pp. 10-11.

- 1) When the children shouted “Hosanna” to him in the temple and the chief priests and teachers of the law became indignant (Mat 21:15), (Yeshua) responded by quoting Psalm 8:2: “From the lips of children and infants, you have ordained praise.” The religious leaders’ anger at (Yeshua) can be better understood when we realize that the **next phrase in the Psalm reveals why children and infants offer praise—because the enemies of God would be silenced.** The religious leaders realized that (Yeshua) was implying that they were God’s enemies.

e. Galatians 3:15-18

¹⁵Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as **no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established**, so it is in this case. ¹⁶The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed” (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 24:7), meaning one person, who is Messiah. ¹⁷**What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, DOES NOT SET ASIDE THE COVENANT PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED BY GOD and thus do away with the promise.** ¹⁸For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

1) ¹⁶and to your seed ...

- a) In the *Tenach* the term “**seed**” (Hebrew *zera*’), like English “posterity,” is used in the singular as a collective noun to refer to all of a person’s descendants. Thus the *p’shat* (simple sense ... of this text has “**seed**” referring to Abraham’s descendants (Gen 12:7, 13:15, 17:7-8). But Sha’ul is not expounding the *p’shat*; rather, his emphasis on the singular form of the word allows the seed to sprout into a richly layered *midrash*.⁵

- f. NOT a *mystery* in the sense of a “mystery religion,” *i.e.*, a religion centered on secret or mystical rites for initiates, especially any of a number of cults popular during the late Roman Empire, but rather something to be revealed at a later time.

1) Romans 11:25-32

²⁵**I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (*sod*)**, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn

godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins” (Isa 59:20-21). ²⁸As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable (Num 23:19). ³⁰Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. ³²**For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all** (Gen 12:1-3).

3. *The great sage and paytan (liturgical poet) Rabbi Elazar HaKalir suggests that the Hebrew words ve’hotzeiti etchem, “I will take you out, can also be read as ve’hutzeiti itchem, “I will be taken out with you”—implying that G-d Himself is also imprisoned in Egypt, and awaits redemption together with His people.*

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a. Isaiah 43:1-3

¹But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. ²**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;** and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. ³For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior ...

b. Isaiah 63:7-9

⁷I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. ⁸He said, “Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me”; and so he became their Savior. ⁹**In all their distress he too was distressed**, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

c. Exodus 33:12-14

¹²Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these

⁵ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 549.

people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' ¹³If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." ¹⁴The LORD replied, "**My Presence (lit., My Face) will go with you**, and I will give you rest."

d. Acts 9:1-6

¹Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, **why do you persecute me?**" ⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Yeshua, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

e. Berachot 9b

I am that I am.⁽⁷⁾ The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Go and say to Israel: **I was with you in this servitude, and I shall be with you in the servitude of the [other] kingdoms.**⁽⁸⁾ He said to Him: Lord of the Universe, sufficient is the evil in the time thereof! Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Go and tell them: I AM has sent me unto you.⁽⁹⁾

(7) Exodus III, 14.

(8) **Babylon and Rome.**

(9) Exodus III, 14.

1) There is no "Roman" captivity mentioned in the Bible. This obviously refers to the impact of Rome's control/influence over Israel in the 1st-century CE and the subsequent persecution of the Jewish people during the first several centuries of the "common era" under the Roman "Church."

4. *In general, the Torah's commandments fall under two categories: (a) "Between man and man"—social laws that govern relations between individuals and communities. (b) "Between man and G-d"—laws that outline our duties to our Creator. On Passover, as befits the "season of our liberation, the two categories fuse into one: **"between man and G-d" is synonymous with "between man and man," and vice versa.***

a. Proverbs 19:16-17

¹⁶Whoever keeps commandments keeps their life, but whoever shows contempt for their ways will die. ¹⁷**Whoever is kind to the**

poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.

b. Deuteronomy 15:7-11

⁷If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. ⁸Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. ⁹Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. ¹⁰**Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.** ¹¹There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

c. Matthew 25:31-46

³¹"When the Son of Man comes in his glory ... ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.**' ⁴¹"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry ... I was thirsty ... ⁴³I was a stranger ... I needed clothes ... I was sick and in prison ... ⁴⁴"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, **whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.**' ⁴⁶"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."