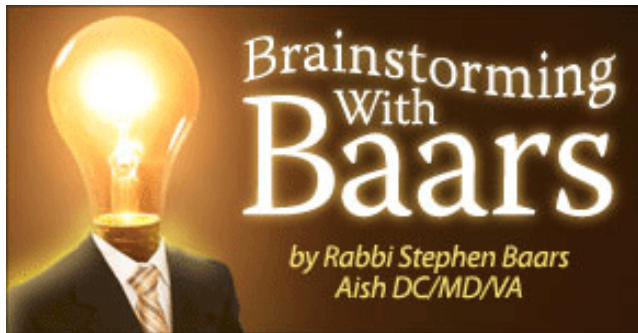


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Bread of Affliction

"This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt."

Seder night is the night we all gather together and, well, complain!

The Haggadah wants you to know how bad they had it back in Egypt. Oy, the matzah!

Strange. Very strange to call food an affliction. Did anyone describe black enslavement as an issue of food? Darfur, Serbia, and of course the Holocaust - can food ever be that bad?

If there is one thing that bonds all parents is that food cannot be disparaged. Try to complain to your mother about dinner, and you can be sure you will get, "there are children in this world who would have less than that in a whole week!"

How can we as Jews, who have a sense of history, who know what we and others have suffered, point to the matzah and say, "that's how bad Egypt was!?"

My Rabbi (Rav Noah Weinberg z"tl) would always say, if you want to figure out a puzzle,

ask more questions.

So why did the Egyptians feed the Jews matzah? A slave is only as good as the food he eats and that food should be nourishing. Matzah does not seem to fit this bill. Furthermore, flour and water will naturally rise into bread if you leave it, one has to consciously bake it early to get matzah.

So why was it so important to feed the Jews Matzah?

The real damage, the real misery, is not what you see, it's what happens so that what you can see can happen.

Golda knew, the real damage was changing how Jews think about precious life, that killing another afflicts the one pulling the trigger.

We don't have a problem enslaving animals. And machines do our bidding all the time. But humanity has come to the conclusion - no doubt based on their reading of our Torah, that slavery of human beings is abhorrent. And that's because a human being has a purpose greater than simply shinning your shoes or picking your cotton. And the only person who can figure that out is you.

A person who believes that, cannot be enslaved. They cannot be abused, because they know they have infinite worth.

When Apple manufactures a new phone, it undoubtedly makes an oversupply, Why? Because it doesn't really know how many it will sell. Those extras are redundant. When God creates humanity, He knows how many He needs, and He doesn't make one more. Therefore, there is no such thing as a redundant human being.

Every one of us is needed for a purpose that ONLY they can do.

If someone tells you, you are redundant, they

are being abusive. That's what the Egyptians tried to tell us.

Now it's Pesach, let's eat!



All Who Are Hungry

"This is the bread of our affliction. All who are 'hungry' (physically), come and eat. All who 'need' (spiritually, emotionally), come and celebrate."

With these words, we begin the Passover hagadda; we take ourselves back to 1313 BCE and begin the transition from slavery to freedom.

One possible reason that the Rabbis started the Seder this way is to teach us that through sharing with others, both on a spiritual and physical level, we can change ourselves. A person who can't share of his blessings, his time, or himself is really a slave to those things.

True freedom is to understand that the only meaningful choices we have in life is the ability to decide what to do with what the Almighty has given us. This could be why the Rabbis taught that if someone studies Torah and doesn't share it, he has missed the whole point. If someone only accumulates and cannot share, everything he owns is the bread of his affliction. He becomes a slave to himself.

One of the lessons we learned in Egypt was how to be concerned with the plight of those around us. As we celebrate our freedom, we should take the time to ensure that all who "need" and all who are "hungry" are taken care of. It is our chance to begin our journey from slavery to freedom, giving us the opportunity to make meaningful choices in life, to be a conduit through which God's blessings can enter the world.



Insights and Stories to Share on Seder Night

The sign proclaimed "International Holocaust Survivors Meeting." The hall was filled with elderly delegates from all over the globe, many confined to wheelchairs and accompanied by nurses. From the podium, chairman Zalman, a silver-haired gentleman in his early 90s, addressed the assembly:

"My fellow survivors, this may be our last meeting. The number of remaining survivors has diminished as the last of us reaches our 90s. The 'revisionist historians' who deny the Holocaust ever happened are sprouting worldwide, and in a very short time there will be no one left to confront them with personal experience."

The audience was very agitated. "What can we do?" they asked. "We've already committed our collective experiences to a 1,000-page volume, in addition to the many videos in existence. What else can we do to ensure that

future generations are aware of the Holocaust?"

A trembling voice was heard from the back of the room, as a lady with shimmering white hair by the name of Shirley slowly cleared her throat. "I have a suggestion. In order for the future generations to recall and internalize our experiences, it isn't sufficient to write a book to collect dust in the library. We must create tangible reminders that our descendents can relate to. I have the three following suggestion:"

1. That a reminder of the Holocaust be posted on every doorpost, to remind us every time we enter and exit our homes.
2. Every day we don a yellow armband with the star of David for 10 minutes to internalize the message.
3. On Holocaust Day we do more than just stand in silence. Let us make our homes resemble a concentration camp. Remove all the furniture to the garage and sit on the floor. Eat potato peels (the delicacy of the camps) and then read the commemorative book! If all future generations will follow these guidelines, I am certain that our national history will be passed on."

TRANSMISSION OF HISTORY

On the night of the Passover Seder we transmit our history to the next generation. The reminder on the doorpost is the Mezuzah, the yellow armband is the tefillin, and the potato peels are the matzah.

By reliving the story of the Exodus we internalize the message to all future generations. That is why the Passover Seder is the center point of the Jewish calendar, and celebrated by the vast majority of the Jewish people worldwide. We must try to understand the importance this great event represents to our national development, in order to

understand the value in its transmission.

It is an old Sephardic custom where, in the middle of the Passover Seder, a loud knock is heard at the door. Standing at the door is an elderly man with a sack behind his back.

"Where are you coming from?" the people inquire.

"From the land of Egypt!" the old man's replies.

"And where are you heading?" they call out in unison.

"For the Land of Israel!" he replies.

At this point all the people place matzah on their shoulders and march around the table, to the delight of the children and guests.

EXODUS FROM EGYPT

The pivotal event of Jewish history that transformed a large "family" into a nation was the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. The significance of the Exodus is explained by Nachmanides (Exodus ch. 13) as the event that demonstrated all the fundamental principles of Judaism before the eyes of mankind: Divine creation, that God cares about man and intervenes by changing the laws of nature at times (i.e. miracles), and the concept of prophecy (why would the Eternal Being want to communicate with an "intelligent baboon"?!). These fundamental ideas were all substantiated by the Ten Plagues which showed God's power over all nature, God's warnings and punishment to the Egyptians, and it all was prophesized in advance by Moses.

Each of these principles was denied or questioned by the leading philosophers in Egypt, and for the generation that witnessed the plagues directly got a clear answer. However, for future generations it was

necessary to preserve the events in a "time capsule"; by keeping the commandments we vividly relive events of the past. That is the specialness of the Passover Seder.

THEME OF FREEDOM

People are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of freedom. Wars are waged for freedom. Animals in the zoo would also prefer to be out of the cage, as wild beasts of prey. But the Jewish concept of freedom is somewhat different...

Scenario 1: The First Seder Night in Egypt

After spending all week circumcising his sons, learning the laws of slaughtering and sacrificing animals, and baking proper matzah, Joseph must now don his cloak and belt, and with his shoes on and staff in hand, eat the Pascal lamb with matzah and bitter herbs "in a hurry." Does this sound like "freedom"?

Scenario 2: A Modern Seder

The father comes home from shul and sits at the table. "It says in the Haggadah to dip, so let's dip! Now it says to break the matzah."

His wife pops up, "But my father didn't do it that way!"

"Okay, so we'll do it his way. Now it says pour the wine."

The son pops up, "My teacher said do it a different way!"

"Okay, we'll do it that way!"

So... is this the feeling of "born free"?

Question: What is the Jewish concept of

freedom?

Answer: Our sages proclaim there can be no freedom without Torah. When we give in to our whims, we are enslaved. Is a drug addict free? How about a TV addict? One can even be enslaved by a telephone! ("Wait -- I gotta answer the phone!")

Freedom means being free from the yoke of physical drives or the rule of man, to be able to perform the will of God. By relating to the Almighty we elevate our existence above the physical, animal realm. That is the Jewish concept of freedom.

THE HAGGADAH

One of our most ancient books, the Haggadah is the guidebook to the Seder, which means "order." Before the Haggadah was composed, every parent would tell his child about the Exodus in his own words. We now have a standard text for all Jews -- with much room for individual additions and explanations.

The Haggadah was written when the Temple was still standing and we had a Pascal sacrifice. After the destruction of the Second Temple, some changes had to be made, and other additions were added later.

FOUR MITZVOT

The Seder is built around the mitzvot of the evening, two of biblical origin and two rabbinical:

1) The Torah commands us to retell the story of the Exodus in all its detail.

2) We are instructed to eat matzah on this night.

3) Bitter herbs (marror) is required by the Torah only when accompanied by the Pascal lamb. Today, without the Temple, it is only a

rabbinical injunction.

4) The Sages instituted the four cups of wine, to be drunk at various stages of the Seder, to punctuate the end or beginning of a new section. Wine symbolizes the joy of life.

The Seder -- including the dipping, leaning, text, blessings, Afikoman, etc. -- is constructed around these four mitzvot.

THE NUMBER FOUR

In Exodus 6:6 the Almighty proclaims, "*Say to the children of Israel: I am the Lord. I will extract you from under the burden of Egypt; I will save you from their bondage; I will redeem you with outstretched arm and great justice; I will take you unto me for a nation, and I will be your Lord.*"

We find here four expressions of redemption (extract, save, redeem and take), forming the theme of Passover as four: four cups of wine, four questions (no answers!?), four sons.

The next verse in Exodus proclaims: "I will bring you into the land," corresponding to the fifth cup we pour for Elijah the Prophet who traditionally attends all Passover Seders. But this cup we don't drink, as we have yet to see the final redemption of our people.

"THE POOR BREAD"

The opening passage of the Haggadah begins with the words, "This is the poor bread that our ancestors ate in Egypt." But there is an older text which states, "This is like the poor bread." What changed?

"What luck," exclaimed Jacob, as he counted the first thousand dollars he'd ever earned. "If I invest this money and make a profit, it will be the end of these rags and stale bread!" Eventually Jacob became a multi-millionaire. However, in order to retain a sense of

appreciation, he would celebrate his good fortune one day each year by donning old rags and eating stale bread, to remember the difficult times. He would then consume a sumptuous feast and give presents to all of his children. His young children always looked forward to that day when their father would dress up in rags...

Until the day when Jacob began losing money. First a little, then a little more, until he had lost his entire fortune. He then donned rags and took stale bread in his hand. When his children saw, they were happy: "Celebration day has arrived!" they squealed. With disappointment, Jacob informed them that now it was for real.

The Jews were slaves in Egypt and life was bitter, but the Almighty took us out and brought us to the Holy Land flowing with milk and honey. Surrounded by the luxury of Jerusalem in Temple times, we still remembered our bondage in Egypt. Thus the original text: "This is like the poor bread our ancestors endured in Egypt." But once our Temple was destroyed and we are poor again, we can now proclaim: "This is the poor bread."

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

It was midnight. All of Egypt arose from their beds to find their firstborn dead. The only firstborn to survive was Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh was terrified. He ran in his pajamas to the land of Goshen where the Jews lived, and searched frantically for Moses. The Jewish children taunted him: "He lives over here! No, over there! No, I'm sorry, his house is on the other side" -- relishing in Pharaoh's predicament.

When Pharaoh finally located Moses' tent, he begged him to come out. Moses refused, citing the decree of Pharaoh (Exodus 10:28) never to "see my face again!"

"What should I do?" demanded Pharaoh. "I am a firstborn and will certainly die like the

others!"

Moses responded, "Go outside and proclaim at the top of your voice: "Attention, all Jewish people! Until today you were my servants, and now you are the servants of the Almighty!"

Pharaoh, having no choice, complied, and his voice was heard throughout the land of Egypt. At that moment the Jews were officially free.

"WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT?"

The commentaries (Abarbanel and others) explain that the Four Questions basically ask one question: Why does the Seder feature contradictory symbols? The matzah and bitter herbs symbolize slavery, while the leaning and dipping are signs of freedom (as a nobleman eats) -- so why do you demonstrate both freedom and slavery simultaneously?

THE ANSWER: "WE WERE SLAVES IN EGYPT"

On the original Passover night, we were officially slaves until midnight when Pharaoh proclaimed us free. We therefore celebrate our freedom by symbols like matzah (slavery), leaning (freedom), and bitter herbs (slavery) dipped into charoset (freedom). Yet this is more than a symbolic ritual; it is an undertaking to relive the events of the past that have so greatly influenced our lives and are a basis of God's relationship with the Jewish nation.

"We would still be subjugated to Pharaoh"

Although we would probably have been freed by now, the stigma of slavery would still continue to haunt us (a common experience among former slaves). So there is an aspect of our lives today that was affected by the Exodus. Therefore, we must thank the

Almighty -- and the more the better!

THE FIVE RABBIS

That explain why we cite the story of the five greatest rabbis of their times. Significantly, none of their ancestors were actually slaves, because they either belonged to the tribe of Levi (i.e. they were Kohanim and Levites) or, in the case of Rebbe Akiva, the child of converts. Yet despite this, they spent all night discussing the Exodus!

RABBI ELAZAR BEN AZARYA

When the Sages demoted their leader Rabban Gamliel, they offered the premiership to Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya who was 18 years old at the time. Rabbi Elazar consulted his wife, who correctly predicted the reinstatement of Rabban Gamliel. When Rabbi Elazar was prepared to accept the position (even temporarily), she countered, "Your beard is black while the Sages are gray. They will never respect your decisions!"

Rabbi Elazar reluctantly agreed, and he went to sleep intending to forgo the honor. In the morning he found that his beard had turned gray. This was a heavenly sign that he should become the leader.

"I am like 70 years," proclaimed Rabbi Elazar. Although he was only 18, he resembled age 70. (By adding the numerical value of the word Ben [52] to his age [18], it equals 70.)

Despite this sign from heaven, Rabbi Elazar could not convince the other Sages to accept his opinion concerning the last paragraph of the Shema. Since this section deals with the mitzvah of tzitzit, which applies only during the daytime, and also the mitzvah to remember the Exodus, which specifies "all the days of your lives," the opinion of the other Sages was to omit the third paragraph during the evening prayer.

Rabbi Elazar disagreed, and was eventually aided by a young student, Ben Zoma, who explained the verse, "All the days of your lives," to include the evenings as well.

The other Sages had a different interpretation. The prophet predicts that the miracles of the Messianic era will out shadow the miracles of the Exodus. If so, when the Messiah arrives we should stop remembering the Exodus! Therefore the verse stresses, "All the days of your lives" -- to include the days of the Messiah as well.

A chassidic interpretation: "All the days of your life -- to bring the Messiah," means that the goal of our days is to achieve the final redemption!

THE FOUR SONS

Yankel came from Poland. He wore a beard, kept Shabbat, and celebrated Passover with wine, matzah and the whole works.

His son Jack worked on Shabbat, but as long as his father was alive he attended the family Seder. When Yankel died there was no more Seder.

Jack's son Marvin asked, "What's this?" -- i.e. Why is it that when Zayde was alive we had a Seder and now we don't? His son Trevor never even participated in a Seder so he didn't even know what to ask. These are the four sons of the Seder. (Tragically, the fifth son doesn't even come to the Seder...)

THE WISE SON

He wants to know everything: all categories of mitzvot, testimonies (laws of historical meaning), statutes (that we don't fully understand) and civil law. It's a pleasure to teach someone thirsty for knowledge. They eat up every word. Teach him all the laws of "Seder night" up until the last one: we do not

eat after the Afikoman. (In order to keep the taste of Passover in your mouth, to continue discussing the Exodus all night long.)

THE EVIL SON

He doesn't ask a question, but makes a statement: "What's all this business for you? What's the purpose of all these meaningless rituals?" He excludes himself from the people, so we "knock out his teeth!" (Don't allow him to eat our roasted lamb, so his teeth "stand on edge"!) We don't even address him directly, but turn to the other sons and proclaim, "God performed these miracles for me"; "me and not him" -- had he been there he would have remained in Egypt. (Indeed, 80 percent of the Jewish people became so assimilated that they never left Egypt.)

THE SIMPLE SON

He asks a simple question and receives a plain reply. Don't overcomplicate issues if you want to be understood.

THE SON WHO DOESN'T ASK

Marvin is sitting quietly, minding his own business, and the Torah commands us to approach him and tell him of the Exodus. This is the source of our obligation, because the other sons who asked would receive a reply in any case. What can we accomplish with such an ignorant Jew? We must get him to ask, to arouse him to be bothered by the basic questions of life and Judaism. Then he will seek out the answers on his own.

"WHEN IS THIS OBLIGATION?"

One might have thought that the obligation to tell the Passover story begins on the New Moon of Nissan, or on the afternoon before Passover when we sacrifice the Pascal Lamb. Therefore the verse stresses, "On account of this" -- when the matzah and marror are

before you. When children observe their parents performing the mitzvot, practicing what they preach, the message comes across clearly.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The Sages explain that the Haggadah "begins with derogatory statements and ends with praise." There are two opinions as to what this refers:

1. We were slaves and now we are free.
2. We were idolaters and now serve God.

We follow both opinions because each one is applicable. In the physical sense we were slaves who gained freedom, while in the spiritual sense we were idolaters and discovered the truth. Terach, the father of Abraham, had a store that sold idols. ("How's business? Thank gods!") Abraham single-handedly introduced monotheism to the majority of the civilized world. (Maimonides)

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch was a great scholar and also a member of the Moravian parliament. Once when traveling on a train he encountered a young progressive Jew who was amazed that a distinguished member of Parliament was also an "old fashioned" Jew!

"My son," explained Rabbi Hirsch, "I'm not 'old fashioned.' Actually, you are. You see, I follow the path of our father Abraham who rejected the 'old-fashioned' ways of his father Terach. You, on the other hand, continue in the old ways of Terach!"

"AND NOW..."

"...the Almighty has brought us close to His service." What is meant by "now"? -- Abraham lived 3,000 years ago! Rather it refers to this night of Passover when every Jew feels a connection with our past and closeness to the Almighty. Right now is the time to get in

touch! (Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe)

"HE KEEPS HIS PROMISE

We bless the Almighty for "keeping His promise." What kind of god doesn't keep his promise? "He calculated the end" (kaitz in Hebrew). God told Abraham that his children would be strangers in a foreign land, where they would be slaves, and tortured for 400 years. We see here three levels of suffering: strangers, slaves and victims of torture.

Question: The Jews were only in Egypt for 210 years, yet the verse claims 400.

Answer 1: Since Pharaoh caused them unbearable torture, 210 years of brutal torture was equivalent to a full 400 years of humane subjugation. This is why we eat matzah with marror, and say that the reason we left Egypt in a hurry (symbolized by the matzah) was due to the marror (the bitterness).

Answer 2: Since the verse doesn't specify Egypt, it seems that God's promise could be referring to an earlier period when Abraham was in the "Promised Land" but had to pay a stiff price for his wife's grave. He remained a stranger in the land. The Exodus was exactly 400 years from the birth of Abraham's son Isaac.

We thank God for keeping His promise in a special way: He "calculated the end," subtracting the "Kaitz" (numerical value 190) from 400, leaving exactly 210 years.

The kabbalists say the Jews had reached the 49th level of impurity, and had they remained in Egypt for a moment longer they would have reached the 50th rung and never gone out. That's why it was necessary to "calculate the end."

"THE PROMISE"

God's promise -- that He will bring the Jews' adversaries to judgment and even out the score -- has kept us going. In every generation they come to destroy the Jewish people. (Our enemies have a true appreciation of the Jew's mission, sometimes even more than we do!) Yet the Almighty saves us from their hands, time and again.

Others explain the protection to refer to the Torah itself.

"AN ARAMITE WANTED TO DESTROY MY FATHER"

When Jacob and his family escaped from Lavan, Lavan chased after Jacob and wanted to destroy him. (Genesis 31:23)

Question: How does Lavan, from the book of Genesis, make his way into the story of the Exodus?

Answer: In order to shorten the story we read Deuteronomy 26:5 which briefly tells the story of the Exodus. Those verses begin with Lavan the Aramite.

The story of the Exodus really began much before. The spark that Abraham ignited was spread by his children -- and almost extinguished by Lavan. This same spark became a nation and went out of Egypt.

Question: How is the fact that Lavan wanted to destroy us connected to our descending to Egypt?

Answer 1: When there was a famine in Canaan, Jacob could have sent his sons to Aram where grandfather Lavan had food. Instead Jacob was ready to take his chances with the physical danger of Egypt, rather than the spiritual danger of Lavan's negative influence.

Answer 2: The entire descent into Egypt was

a result of the sale of Joseph, which was a result of the brothers' jealousy at the favoritism of their father showed to Joseph. Had Jacob married Rachel first, Joseph would have been the first-born and the brothers would not have been envious. Only because Lavan switched Leah for Rachel did we end up going down to Egypt!

THE TEN PLAGUES

The custom is to pour 10 drops of wine from our cups when reciting the plagues, to indicate sorrow that our enemies had to suffer. (There was once a miser who would spill the 10 drops from his cup into his wife's cup, and then she would do the same into his cup!)

Every plague had an aspect of "measure-for-measure," which is how the Almighty evens the score in the world:

1) Blood: The Jews would drink fresh water from the Nile. The Egyptians would drink blood. "Give me that glass, Jew!" cried Muchmad. But when he drank, it turned into blood. "Refill the glass and let's drink at the same time!" ordered Muchmad. But even now, the Jew drank water and the Egyptian drank blood.

We all live in our separate worlds, and in the Egyptians' world it was blood. Only by paying money could the Egyptian get water. "That will be \$100, please!"

2) Frogs: Pharaoh sealed his palace frog-proof and posted a big sign: "No frogs allowed!" When the swarms of frogs banged on his window, he sat nonchalantly on his throne. The frogs then went into a huddle: "We have to do something!" One little frog decided to get into the pita that was baked for Pharaoh daily. He jumped into the kneading trough and then into the dough. As the frog was put into the furnace, he prayed, and miraculously survived the heat.

When Pharaoh began to eat, the frog jumped into his stomach and wildly started croaking. Pharaoh yelled for help, opened the palace windows, and in came hopping all the frogs.

3) Lice: Egypt's magicians, who were so far able to duplicate the miracles of Moses, were dumbfounded. How can (what they thought was) the "black magic" of Moses have effect on such tiny creatures? They were forced to admit it was the finger of God.

The above three plagues were measure-for-measure, in that the Egyptians would not allow the Jews to drink, sleep or bathe. They Egyptians now appreciated the difficulty of being deprived of water (blood), sleep (frogs) and a bath (lice).

All three plagues in this series take place at sea level (upon the Nile River bank and in the sands of Egypt.)

The Sages point out that the first three plagues were carried out only by Aaron, because Moses owed a dept of gratitude to the Nile for saving his life (the baby in the basket), and to the sands of Egypt for concealing the Egyptian he had killed years earlier (who had been beating a Jew).

4) Wild Animals: From the onset of the plagues, the Jews were switched from working on the pyramids to doing domestic labor. "Morris! Take my children for a picnic in the park!" When the plague of wild animals struck (lions and tigers and bears -- oh my!), Morris and the Egyptian kids were eating their picnic lunch. When Morris returned home alone, the frantic parents inquired, "Where are our children?" To which Morris replied, "One was eaten by an elephant, another by a boa constrictor, and I also saw some wolves and bears having a feast, but they didn't touch the sandwiches."

5) Cattle Plague: The pride of Egypt was their world-famous horses and livestock. When

they all suddenly dropped dead in the fields (those in the barns were spared) -- except for the livestock of the Jews -- the Egyptians started to ponder things more seriously...

6) Boils: Three of the plagues were performed by Aaron, three by Moses, and three directly by God. The plague of boils was the only one that was done by all three. Moses and Aaron both filled their fists with soot from the furnace, and then Moses miraculously took all four fistfuls into one fist and tossed it up to the sky, where God spread it throughout the entire Land of Egypt, causing boils to erupt on the Egyptians' bodies.

The measure-for-measure of this second series of three plagues was that the Egyptians had forced the Jews to risk their lives hunting for them (wild beasts), attending to their livestock (cattle plague), and would constantly beat them until their bodies were covered with sores (boils). This second series of plagues occurred at ground level.

7) Hail: Although it rarely rains in Egypt (the Nile periodically overflows enough for the Egyptians to water their crops), Moses predicted fire-entrapped hail (a natural contradiction) and even warned the Egyptians to bring their remaining livestock and servants indoors. Those who feared the Almighty took them inside, while those who didn't pay attention to His word (teaching us that the definition of fearing God is taking His word seriously) kept them outdoors, and when the hailstorm came (except for the land of Goshen) all was destroyed. Only the wheat and spelt that were not yet fully ripened (so as to bend in the hailstorm, instead of breaking) were spared.

This led the Egyptians to ask, "Why didn't your great Deity wait for the wheat to be hard and break as well?" The answer: "He had to leave something for the locusts to eat!"

8) Locusts: The locusts swarmed down from

the sky after being transported by a strong easterly wind. They covered the entire land and consumed whatever the hail had spared. Pharaoh hurried to summon Moses and begged him to stop the plague.

Question: Why was Pharaoh in such a rush?

Answer: Pharaoh wanted the plague stopped before the locusts could lay eggs and doom the future crops as well.

The Egyptians, lacking anything else to eat, figured they might as well eat the locusts (and it is a delicacy in Egypt until today). They froze, pickled and preserved locust. They canned, bottled, and salted locust. What happened next? A westerly wind suddenly came and transported all the locusts (including the preserved ones) into the Red Sea.

9) Darkness: For three straight days the Egyptians couldn't see, and for three additional days the darkness was so thick that they couldn't move. They were literally "glued to their spots" and could not eat, drink, sleep, or even use the facilities. During these days the Jews (who could see) searched for the Egyptians' homes for hidden wealth, to prevent them from later claiming poverty.

The measure-for-measure here is that the Egyptians had forced the Jews to tend their crops (locusts), stoned them with rocks (hail), and chained them to the wall in dark dungeons (darkness). This third series of three plagues came from the sky.

10) First Born: The Almighty Himself descended on Egypt (i.e. a revelation of the Divine presence), and the first-borns, who are more spiritually attuned, were killed by the overdose (Maharal). The miracle was that the Jewish first-borns were not killed, which is why even today they fast (or complete a tractate of Talmud) on the day before Pesach.

This plague was announced in advance: God

refers to the Jewish people as His "first born" (Exodus 4:22), and Pharaoh was immediately informed of the consequences that his first born will die.

HOW MANY PLAGUES?

In the Haggadah, there is a big argument as to how many plagues hit the Egyptians (counting all the minute details). Was it 10 in Egypt proper and 50 at the sea? Or 40 and 200? Or 50 and 250? The Vilna Gaon asks: What difference does it make? It's all over already! He answers that since God promised never to bring the plagues of Egypt upon the Jews (see Exodus 15:26), the more they got, the less we get!

DAYENU!

The Haggadah lists all the details of God's kindness at the time of the Exodus, and after every statement we proclaim, "It would have been enough for us!" We repeat this 15 times. God could have just taken us out of Egypt without the plagues, but He also destroyed our enemies and their idols. He split the Red Sea and led us upon dry land (if it had been a little muddy, who would have complained?). He brought us to Sinai where we had a feeling of total unity, and then gave us the Torah, brought us into Israel and built the Temple.

Question: Would we really have been satisfied without the Torah, etc.?

Answer: It means only that it would have been enough of a reason to thank Him. And how much more so, after we appreciate all the favors from God, that we must dedicate ourselves to His service. Today as well, we should make a list of all the favors we receive constantly and how each one "would be reason enough" to thank God.

PESACH, MATZAH AND

MAROR

Rabban Gamliel proclaimed that whoever doesn't explain the meaning of these three symbols -- Pesach, Matzah and Marror -- doesn't fulfill his obligation of Seder night.

Question: If someone would eat the Pascal lamb, matzah and marror without explaining the symbolism, why should it not fulfill his obligation? Where else do we find such a mitzvah that if you do not explain its meaning you do not fulfill the obligation?

Answer: It refers to the mitzvah of retelling the story of the Exodus. If you fail to explain these symbols, you do not fulfill your obligation.

1. Pesach: God passed over our houses in Egypt when he killed the first born at midnight.
2. Matzah: The dough of our ancestors didn't rise until they were literally "thrown out" of Egypt.
3. Marror: The Egyptians embittered our lives with harsh labor.

Question: In chronological order, marror (embittered our lives) should precede God passing over our houses and the dough not having time to rise.

Answer: Matzah symbolizes the fact that the Israelites left early on account of the suffering being so great. Therefore only in retrospect do we see that the marror had the purpose of causing the matzah. Pesach, which symbolizes the appearance of the Almighty, was of paramount imp