

Teaching *from* Zion

"...for out of Zion shall come forth Torah,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."
-Isaiah 2:3

Times of Harvest



Teaching *from* Zion

26

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Much of the world has often viewed Judaism unfavorably for being a sectarian "national" religion, indifferent, if not hostile, to the rest of humanity. While it is a sad truth that the long and bitter years of exile have indeed raised some bad Jewish feelings towards the Gentiles, these are far from reflecting the inherent attitude of Judaism to the place that the Gentiles have in the Kingdom of God. The Jewish New Testament writers, being very concerned about the salvation of the Gentiles, express ideas that were well rooted in Jewish tradition, not only in thought, but also in practice. During the Second Temple period, seventy bulls were sacrificed daily in the Temple in Jerusalem for the forgiveness of the sins of seventy nations, a symbolic number representing the Gentile kingdoms of the earth.

This universality of redemption is visible in both the spring holidays of Passover and Pentecost, which are the central themes of this TFZ. It contains several articles on the universal lessons of Passover, with two articles focusing on particular portions from the Passover Haggadah, (the book that is read out loud at the Seder every year), one that delves into the spiritual applications of Passover cleaning, and a tasty recipe for Shavuot cheesecake that is even kosher for Passover, as well as an article on Pentecost in Acts 2. Both of these holidays have very important applications for Jews and Christians. The Exodus, the journey from bondage to liberty, has especially become a universal ethos that inspired billions of God-seeking souls and people who sought freedom and justice worldwide.

The coming feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) is linked in Jewish tradition with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The recipients were always deeply aware that this divine revelation was not meant to be a limited affair for the people of Israel alone, but that we have a great responsibility for making this revelation known to all

mankind in order to bring all of God's creation back to Him. The Pentecost drama described in Acts 2 clearly alludes to the Sinai revelation. It is like a new giving of the Torah, only this time meant for export, leading to the episode of "speaking in tongues," that is the spreading of the word unto all nations.

We also include an article on the book of Ruth, since it is customary to read this book on Shavuot, as it strikes the same theme: the gathering of the Gentiles into God's kingdom. It is not by coincidence that Ruth, the great grandmother of King David and a founder of the royal Davidic line, is counted among the four ladies that the Gospel of Matthew mentions in Yeshua's family tree. The other three are Rahav, a Cananite prostitute, Tamar, who had to pretend to be a prostitute in order to get the seed of salvation going, and Bat-Sheva, the mother of King Solomon, who committed adultery with David. We may ask ourselves why the Gospel writer chose to emphasize the place of these problematic figures in the Messiah's lineage rather than trying his best to conceal it. Simply put, these four Gentile women stand as a reflection of the four mothers of the Jewish nation, Sarah, Rivkah, Leah, and Rachel. The appearance of these four Gentile women in the Messiah's family tree proves that the Gentiles have a part in the salvation of the world a-priori. The blood that runs through the body of the Messiah was not purely Jewish because it was meant to be shed for the salvation of all mankind. Salvation is not by race but by grace.

This issue of TFZ comes to you at this time between the two holidays celebrating those high moments of redemption and revelation, and it has a variety of fresh looks on some very significant truths that these holidays hold for both Jews and Christians. May this spring bring us all a harvest of great spiritual value, and may we serve the Lord with gladness for the many miracles He has wrought for us and our ancestors. -The editors

Flames Like Fire - Shavuot

Joseph Shulam

This article was shortened from part of *The Jewish Roots of Acts* by Joseph Shulam and Hilary LeCornu.¹

Acts 2:1-12 describes the first biblical feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) in the history of the early Church with these words. *"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound, the multitude came together, and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language?... We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.' And they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'"*

The seven-week interval between Pesach and Shavuot constitutes the period of *ספירת העומר* (sefirat ha-omer) – the counting of the sheaves of newly-harvested barley which were brought to the Temple as an offering at Pesach (Lev. 23:9f). The omer period in Eretz Israel represents a time of great vulnerability, given that two of the seven species, that is barley and grapes, enter a critical growth phase during these weeks. The successful harvest of these species determines Israel's continued existence. Shavuot, the culmination of the forty-nine days, celebrates God's blessing and protection over the land and its fruit.

The Sages interpreted the word *עומר* in the light of Exodus 16:36, *"An omer is a tenth of an ephah,"* as a measure of grain and ruled that it was to be brought of barley only. Thus on 16 Nisan three *se'ot* of barley were reaped, brought to the Temple, ground, and sifted, and of this, one tenth – the omer – was "waved" by the priest. Mishnah Men. 10:1ff describes the ritual in detail. It was celebrated with a great

¹ For a version of this text with more complete references, please see *The Jewish Roots of Acts*.

deal of ceremony and festivity in order to stress the Sages' opinion that 16 Nisan was the correct date to begin the counting.

The counting is preceded by a special benediction *"על ספירת העומר . . . concerning the counting of the omer"*. Since the Bible states *"You shall count for yourselves . . . seven complete sabbaths וספרתם לכם . . . שבע שבתות תמימות"* and *"You shall count fifty days ותספרו חמשים יום"* (Lev. 23:15-16), the counting mentions both the number of days and the number of weeks. The standard formula runs: On the first day, *"היום יום אחד לעומר"*, on the eighth day, *"Today is the eighth day, making one week and one day of the omer שבוע שהם ימים"* and *"אחד ויום אחד לעומר"*, and so on. The time for the counting, which is to be recited standing, is after the evening service, that is, when the new day begins.

Shavuot is variously described in the Tanakh as *chag ha-bikkurim* (the "feast of the first fruit"), *chag ha-katzir* (the "feast of ingathering"), and *chag ha-shavuot* (the "feast of weeks"). It originally served as an agricultural holiday marking the completion of the barley harvest and the commencement of the wheat harvest. Since it was celebrated fifty days ("seven complete sabbaths [i.e., weeks]") after Pesach, it was also known as *chag chamishim yom*, "the feast of 50 days," from whence comes the Greek name "Pentecost," i.e., the "fiftieth."

Luke's description of the community's gathering together in Acts 2 also reflects the festival's designation as *עצרת* (atzeret). The application of this name to Shavuot is apparently influenced by the biblical expression *yom ha-kahal*, "the day of assembly." The Mishna's use of the term would seem to reflect Shavuot's function as the "closure" of Pesach, just as Shemini Atzeret closes the eight days of Sukkot, *עצרת* in this sense signifying "bound [to the festival which precedes it]."

Shavuot is the sole festival which is not designated by a precise date in the Tanakh.² It simply represents the fiftieth day *"from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete Sabbaths"* (Lev. 23:15f). Since no

² Ex. 23:16, 34:22; Lev. 23:11; Num. 28:26; Dt. 16:16

exact specification is given as to which “Shabbat” is referred to, various interpretations and dates were proposed and celebrated during the Second Temple period. While Joshua 5:11 suggests that the earliest practice understood it to refer to the “morrow” of the *first day* of Pesach, a usage confirmed by the Septuagint, Josephus, and Philo, the calendar followed in the Book of Jubilees and reflected in the practice of the Qumran community understood the allusion to be to the first Shabbat *after* Pesach.

Since according to the latter calendar, Pesach always falls on Wednesday, the fifteenth of the first month, and ends the following Tuesday, the “morrow of shabbat” always fell on 26 Nisan, and Shavuot was celebrated on the fifteenth of the third month. In contrast to Jubilees, the “normative” date of Shavuot was not fixed but varied slightly from year to year according to whether the intervening months had 29 or 30 days. A Tannaitic ruling states that “Shavuot may fall on the fifth, sixth, or seventh [of Sivan] – not before and not after” (Tos.Arak. 1:9).

Shavuot is a one-day feast, although in ancient times if it fell on a Shabbat, it was extended to allow for the proper sacrifices. The prescribed rite entailed the offering of two wheat loaves as a food-offering, which then rendered the use of the new crop permissible on the altar. Since the individuals bringing sacrifices and the number of worshipers were enormous, pilgrims who came up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast and were unable to offer their sacrifices at the appointed time were permitted to bring them during the subsequent six days.

The Mishna gives a detailed description of how the people brought their first-fruits to Jerusalem: “[The men of] all the smaller towns that belonged to the *Maamad* [lay deputation] gathered together in the town of the *Maamad* and spent the night in the open place of the town and came not into the houses; and early in the morning the officer [of the *Maamad*] said, ‘Arise ye and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God’ (Jer. 31:6). They that were near [to Jerusalem] brought fresh figs and grapes, and they that were far off brought dried figs and raisins. Before them went the ox, having its horns overlaid with gold and a wreath of olive-leaves on its head. The flute was played before them until they drew nigh to Jerusalem. When they had drawn nigh to Jerusalem they sent messengers before them and bedecked their First-Fruits. The rulers and prefects and the treasurers of the Temple went forth to meet them. According to the honor due to them that came in used they to go forth. And all the craftsmen in Jerusalem used to rise up before them and greet them, saying, ‘Brethren, men of such-and-such a place, ye are welcome!’ The flute was played before them

until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount, even Agrippa the king would take his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court. When they reached the Temple Court, the levites sang the song, *I will exalt thee, O Lord, for thou hast set me up and not made mine enemies to triumph over me* (Ps. 30:1). The pigeons that were hung on the baskets were sacrificed as Whole-offerings, and what the people bore in their hands they delivered to the priests. While the basket was yet on his shoulder a man would recite the passage from *I profess this day unto the Lord thy God* (Dt. 26:3ff), until he reached the end of the passage . . . When he reached the words *An Aramean*... he took down the basket from his shoulder and held it by the rim. And the priest put his hand beneath it and waved; and the man then recited the words from *An Aramean ready to perish*... until he finished the passage. Then he left the basket by the side of the altar and bowed himself down and went his way . . . The rich brought their First-Fruits in baskets overlaid with silver and gold, while the poor brought them in wicker baskets of peeled willow branches, and baskets and First-Fruits were given to the priests.” (Bik. 3:2-8)

The book of Acts describes a situation very similar to the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai that happened according to calculations and Jewish tradition on Shavuot. “*And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*” (Acts 2:2-4)

According to calculations made on the basis of Exodus 19:1, the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai took place in the third month following the Exodus, that is Sivan. Since this was also the month in which Shavuot falls, the latter holiday became associated with the former at some time so that it became known as *chag matan Torah*, “the festival of the giving of the Torah.”

Although some scholars question whether the uncertainty regarding the date of Shavuot precludes any association of the festival with *chag matan Torah*, it being impossible that the date of the giving of the Torah should be uncertain, the sources indicate that the latter date was in fact debated. The identification of Shavuot with the giving of the Torah was clearly made before the beginning of the third century C.E. and possibly even extends back into the later biblical period.^{III} Jubilees 6:19 appears to allude to

III Tos.Meg. 4 [3]:5; JMeg. 26a; Meg. 31a; Pes. 68b; 2 Chron. 15:10ff; Ps. 50:2f, 81:3f, 99:7; Jub. 14:20; numerous Qumran texts

this identification when it says that the celebration of the festival, which it claims had fallen into disuse, was renewed at Mount Sinai. It sets the same date for both Shavuot and matan Torah while also speaking of Shavuot's "twofold" nature.^{IV} It seems clear that Luke is familiar with this tradition and associates and interprets the events which occurred on this Shavuot as a re-enactment of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

This idea is derived from a midrashic (interpretative) understanding of Exodus 20:18 which provides the occasion for linking the giving of the Torah with flames of fire. The biblical verse literally states that "all the people saw the voices and the flashes/torches." Since voices cannot be seen and God has only one voice, the midrashists, including Luke, associate the voices and flashes with God's word appearing as a flame: "The word that went out from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, was like shooting stars and lightnings and like flames and torches of fire, a torch of fire to the right and a torch of flame to the left. It flew and winged swiftly in the air of the heavens and turned around and became visible in all the camps of Israel and by turning it became engraved on the two tables of the covenant."^V

Here is an early rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 20:18, when it says, "And all the people saw the thunderings." "They saw what was visible and heard what was audible. These are the words of R. Ishmael. R. Akiba says: They saw and heard that which was visible. They saw the fiery word coming out from the mouth of the Almighty as it was struck upon the tablets, as it is said: 'The voice of the Lord hewed out flames of fire' (Ps. 29:7) . . . But how many thunderings were there and how many lightnings were there? It is simply this: They were heard by each man according to his capacity, as it is said: 'The voice of the Lord was heard according to the strength [power]' (Ps. 29:4) . . . not 'with His power,' but 'with power,' i.e. with the power of each individual, even to pregnant women according to their strength. Thus to each person it was according to his strength."^{VI}

These flames were associated in other midrashim with the division of God's word into "tongues." "And all the people saw the voices. The verse does not say 'saw the voice' but 'saw the voices,' wherefore R. Johanan said: the voice went out and was divided into seven voices and from seven voices into seventy tongues, so that all the nations would hear. And every nation heard the voice in its own tongue and was amazed [lit.: their souls departed]. But the people

of Israel heard the voice and were not hurt."^{VII}

According to an ancient tradition drawn from Genesis 10, the nations of the world number seventy (or seventy-two). The associated midrashim on Jeremiah 23:29 thus allude to the fact that all the nations of the world heard, understood, and interpreted the Torah at Mount Sinai: "R. Johanan said: What is meant by the verse, 'The Lord giveth the word: They that publish the tidings are a great host' (Ps. 68:11)? – Every single word that went forth from the Omnipotent was split up into seventy languages. The School of R. Ishmael taught: '[Is not My word like fire? declareth the LORD,] And like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces' (Jer. 23:29): just as a hammer is divided into many sparks, so every single word that went forth from the Holy One, blessed be He, split up into seventy languages."^{VIII}

Luke's language in Acts 2 makes it clear that he understands the feast of Shavuot in terms of a "second Sinai." He recalls the "thunder and lightnings" in terms of a "violent, rushing wind" and describes how "tongues of fire divided themselves" and rested upon the disciples – just as the word, like fire, was divided into seventy tongues. (Luke even hints at Exodus 20:18 when he reverts to the singular "it sat" when describing the division of the tongues of fire). The description of the flames which rested on each disciple is perhaps further reminiscent of the "glory" which the midrash says formed a halo or crown on the heads of the Israelites when they proclaimed, in accepting the covenant, "we will do, and we will be obedient ונעשה ונשמע" (Ex. 24:7). Just as in the midrash each nation heard "in its own language," so the disciples' audience also heard something which amazed and bewildered them. (In a similar tradition, Philo says that the flames became articulate speech in the language familiar to the audience in *Decal.* 46).

Luke joins the traditions based on Exodus 20:18 and Jeremiah 23:29 with the prophetic passages which speak about the outpouring of God's Spirit and His writing His Torah on the hearts of His people.^{IX} Luke's reason for emphasizing Jesus' command to the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem is apparently to indicate that as the Torah was given on Mount Sinai it would be renewed on Mount Zion and would include the Gentile nations as well as Israel. "In the last days, the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that

IV Jub. 1:1, 6:21, 22:1

V Targ.Ps-Yon. to Ex. 20:18

VI Mekh.Bachod. 9; Ex.R. 5:9, 34:1

VII Tanh.Shemot 25

VIII Shab. 88b

IX Isa. 44:3; Jer. 31:31f; Ezek. 36:26f, 39:29; Joel 2:28-29

He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." (Isa. 2:2-4)

Luke does not make it absolutely clear upon whom the Spirit fell. The subject in verse 1 is unidentified ("they"), and although the "all" may refer back to the "all" of 1:14 and thus allude to the 120, verse 14 may imply that only the Twelve were so visited. It is suggested in this respect that the story of the seventy elders appointed to assist Moses (Num. 11:16ff) lies behind verses 4f, the Apostles serving in a similar capacity to the biblical elders. The story regarding Moses may itself be influenced by Genesis 10, where the nations of the world are represented as seventy in number. This tradition suits the view that the Apostles alone spoke in various languages, the biblical elders' task being to adjudicate disputes within the tribes of Israel. (The number of members of the Sanhedrin – who were also required to know seventy languages – was apparently modeled on this tradition.

Despite the attractiveness of this theory, the promise God makes regarding the Spirit is that he would fall on "all flesh," rather than being confined to specific individuals (Ex. 20:19; Num. 11:29). Luke's notation that all the believers were gathered "together in one place" possibly indicates in this regard that the whole community considered itself to be a council similar to the "seventy" and that all its members therefore received the Holy Spirit.

A midrash identifies five people who were called "full" or "filled" מלא in reference to God's gifts: "Joshua was called full, as Scripture says: 'And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom . . . (Dt. 34:9).' Caleb was called full, as Scripture says: 'But my servant Caleb, because he has a

different spirit and has followed me fully . . . (Num. 14:24).' Bezalel was called full, as Scripture says: 'And he has filled him with the spirit of God . . . (Ex. 35:31).' Oholiab was called full, as Scripture says: 'He has filled them with ability . . . (Ex. 35:35).' Hiram was called full, as Scripture says: ' . . . full of wisdom and perfect in beauty (Ezek. 28:12).'^x

Luke describes clearly here the "power" which God had promised to Jesus' followers "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," a power which was designed to equip them to be His "witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." While they have not had opportunity to reach the "ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)" and are still in Jerusalem, the "navel of the world," Jesus' disciples are addressing people (Jews) from all over the diaspora. When they do leave the city and begin spreading the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world and Europe, their witness comes to include not only Jews, but Gentiles as well.

Shavuot is one of the very special holidays that received added importance in the New Testament with the advent of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the promises that God gave to the Israelite prophets like Joel. It is a kind of tragedy that in Christian circles this very important holiday from the Torah and the New Testament has been neglected and that we have forgotten the implications of our agricultural background and the dedication of our best and first fruits to God. Let us take this knowledge and use it to take one step forward toward the restoration of our faith and practices and to bring us closer to God and to Yeshua our Lord.

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From Slaves of Pharaoh to Servants of the Lord

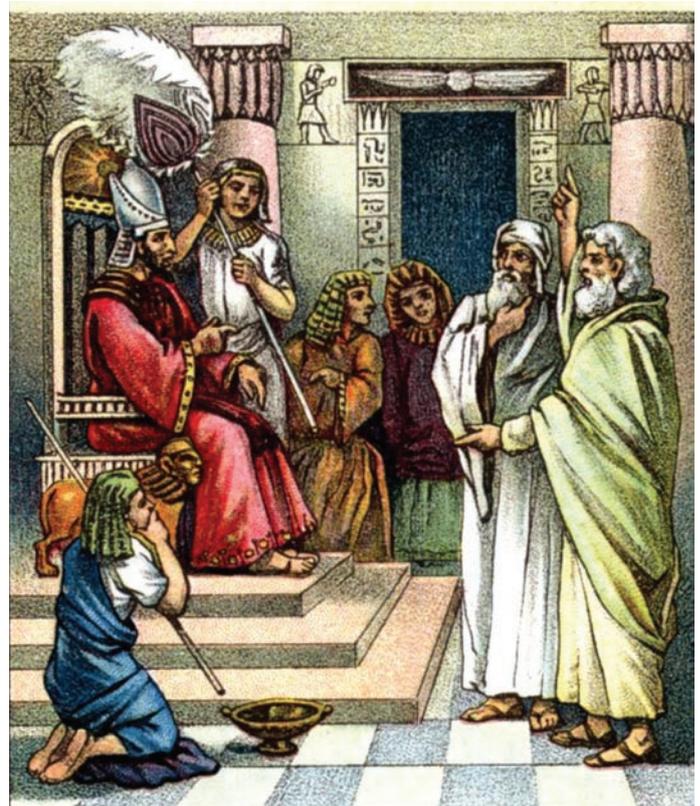
No event in Jewish history can be compared to the story of Exodus in its influence and importance. Coming out of Egypt was a formative event in which Israel was born as a nation. Stories of the Exodus are deeply imprinted in our consciousness and are the essential element in our cultural and religious tradition. Anyone who opens a Jewish Prayer book (Siddur) could be amazed at the amount of references and quotations from the story of Exodus. These emphases are easily understood, since nowhere else do we find such great manifestations of God's power used against His enemies to lead Israel to its redemption. From the very beginning, God promised Moses that his mission would be followed by amazing signs and wonders and that the Passover events would greatly impact future generations. *"Go unto Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs that I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord."* (Ex. 10:1-2).

The story of the Exodus is quite interesting in the light of God's promise to the nation of Israel that they would become a nation of priests. *"I will take you as my people and I will be your God."* (Ex 6:7) The Exodus from Egypt was not only a path from physical slavery to freedom and then to the Promised Land, but also a journey towards God and His presence in our lives. During the days of the Exodus, Israel was formed as a free nation, a nation of God, who dwelt within us and among us. He freed us from slavery to Pharaoh and bought us with many great miracles for Himself, so that we can serve only Him.

The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehuda Levi ben Bezalel), a famous Rabbi who lived in sixteenth century Prague, wrote in his book *Gevurot Hashem* about the great purpose of the story of Exodus. This purpose had to be much greater than mere salvation from physical slavery. Since such great wonders and miracles were performed by God during Israel's Exodus from Egypt, the purpose had to match the greatness of those miracles and wonders. They should lead us to a goal of equal greatness. Mere freedom from physical slavery did not justify all these miracles, but

according to the Maharal, the main purpose of the Exodus was achieving God's presence and being close to Him.

"Everything has its purpose, and the goal must match the means. So when the manifestation was great and important, it is fitting that it would also have an important purpose. It is not fitting to do great acts without an equally important purpose, or a purpose that is much less than the actions taken. How much more so the manifestations of God, whose actions are always an example of wisdom and understanding! All His means lead to a worthy end, so the end justifies the means. As we saw during the Exodus from Egypt that God did awesome and mighty deeds,



when He Himself in His glory brought them out of Egypt, therefore it is fitting that this act would have an end that was as meaningful as the action that brought it about. As we have found written, that the purpose of bringing Israel out of Egypt was so that He should be their God, as it is written in the beginning of the Exodus 6:6-7, *'I will bring*

you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians... I will take you as My people and I will be your God.' (Ex. 6: 6-7) At the end of Parashat Tetzave it is written, 'I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them (in their midst)!' (Ex 29:46) This proves that the beginning of this action of bringing them out of Egypt was for the purpose of becoming their God. Therefore, these parashot appear in this particular order, that first He brought them out of Egypt and then gave them the 10 commandments, which begin, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me,' and only then come the rest of commandments and the Torah portion containing the regulations, because only after He was their God would they be obligated to obey to His commandments. After that, He wished to dwell among them because immediately after that it is written, 'And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.' (Ex. 25:19) Now it is evident that the purpose of the Exodus to become their God and to have His presence in their midst."

According to the Maharal of Prague, the great purpose of the Exodus was to dwell among us and be present within us. "I am the Lord your God that took you out of Egypt to be your God, I am the Lord your God." (Numbers 15:41) From the very beginning, the purpose of the Exodus was to make Israel into the nation of God and to prepare His dwelling place within their midst.

Now let us look at the writings of another great Jewish Bible commentator who lived in the thirteenth century, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, who was known to the world as the Ramban or Nachmanides. He viewed the entire book of Exodus as the story of redemption. In the few lines of his short introduction to his commentary on Exodus, he said that the entire book is the story of the redemption from the

First Exile, when the children of Israel went down to Egypt in the days of Jacob. This is the Exile that God prophesies to Abraham. "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them for four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions." (Gen. 15: 13-14) According to the Ramban, "Even after the Exodus from Egypt and freedom from slavery, the people of Israel still did not find redemption in a land not their own. Yet the book of Exodus



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ends with the story of the building of the Tabernacle, the return of the Holy One Blessed Be He, and His dwelling among them. Then they were redeemed."

It is common to see the Passover redemption as only being from slavery to the Promised Land, as it is stated in Exodus 6:8, "And I will bring you to the Land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will

1 The Maharal of Prague. *Selected Writings*. Ed. Avraham Kariv. Vol. A. Jerusalem: Rav Kook Association, (in Hebrew).

give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord." Yet the Ramban envisions another type of redemption – obtaining closeness to God and making the nation of Israel the carrier of God's holiness, which was fulfilled at Mt. Sinai. *"I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham"* (Ex. 6:7).

This idea deepens the concept of redemption in the book of Exodus. It was meant to do much more than just to grant us physical redemption from bondage of slavery and bring us to the Promised Land. Redemption is not only physical redemption from sorrow and distress because true redemption is impossible without God's presence in our midst or without the ability to be close to Him. The story of the Exodus describes Israel's journey not only from physical slavery to freedom, but from being slaves of Pharaoh to "servants of the Lord," when God revealed Himself to the nation. That is the reason why the book of Exodus ended at Mt. Sinai when God established His presence in our midst and gave us His Torah, which is His teachings and rules that cover all the areas of our lives, from how to worship God up to how to treat our neighbor's lost donkey. We become servants of God by submitting our entire life to His rules and commandments.

The book of Exodus shows us the process of this redemption. The story starts with a description of Israel's suffering under Egyptian oppression, tells how God led our forefathers out of Egypt and slavery with great miracles and wonders by imposing plagues on our oppressors, and concludes with the building of the Tabernacle, when God promised to dwell among us. God chose the people of Israel to be His own and gave us His Torah. There on Mt. Sinai God manifested His presence to the entire nation of Israel in such a way that according to one Jewish saying, "The slave girl at the sea shore saw and experienced more than the prophet Ezekiel." According to the Ramban, the

giving of the Torah was not only the revelation of God to His people, but it also lifted the nation up to the level in which they could carry in themselves God's presence.

This is a clear messianic idea. It is impossible to be free without God in an unknown land, which is why one of God's names in Jewish texts is "The Place." The ultimate purpose of this hard and difficult journey is to come to Him and His presence.

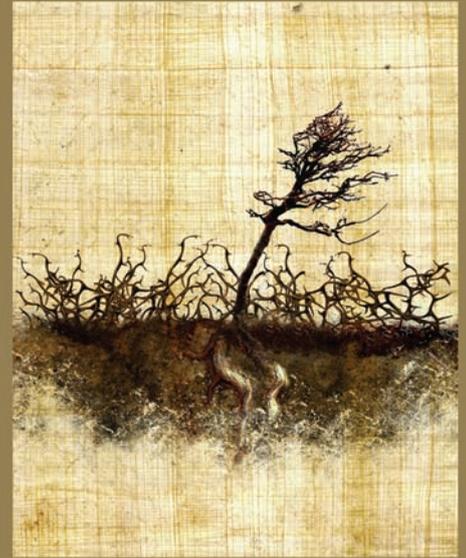
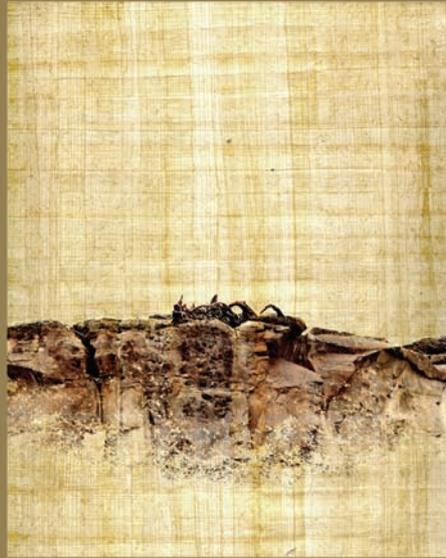
On Mt. Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel to be His chosen nation. This covenant would regulate their lives and relationships, both between the nation and God and among each other. According to the Bible, this covenant was also the marriage covenant between God and His beloved bride Israel. The subsequent wanderings in the desert and struggles to come into the Holy Land were a type of "honeymoon," a time of preparation so God's bride would be worthy of her Husband

This deep rabbinic understanding of the purpose of the Exodus is a pure biblical view. The prophet Jeremiah also spoke about the original goal of the Exodus when he proclaimed the coming of the second covenant between God and Israel, which he called "the new covenant." *"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make the new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the Land of Egypt. My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them," says the Lord. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they will be my people... for they all shall know me."* Hebrews 8 also quotes this text in order to prove that the ultimate goal of the Exodus was to come to the Lord and to become worthy of being a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, a people in whom dwells God Almighty. This is freedom in the truest sense of the word.

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The Torah Speaks of Four Sons

Joseph Shulam

The Passover Seder (festive Passover meal on the first night of Passover) contains two sets of four questions about Passover, which are then answered as the Haggadah continues. The second set is attributed to four sons, who are referred to as the good, the bad, the simpleton, and the one that does not know how or what to ask.

These four sons are representative of the ancient Jewish way of looking at humanity. Greek thought at the time divided everything into two general categories, the good and the bad, the guy with the white hat or the guy with the black hat. Jewish thought recognizes that life is a little more complicated than just good or bad or white or black though. In life we encounter mostly gray, and sometimes even different shades of gray. It is seldom that our choices are between the very good or the very bad, in which case it is not hard to choose. Most people will automatically make a good choice in such a clear case. In fact, in every "very good" there is always a shadow, and in every "very bad" there is always an unseen benefit or a ray of light. In first century Judaism, they divided humanity and everything else in life into four categories, good, bad, and two shades of gray that were a mixture of both.

The message of Yeshua is also characterized by this four-fold division, which was very distinctive in His life and message. The best example of this is Yeshua's Parable of the Four Soils from Matthew 13:4-9, *"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately*

sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

In this parable, the same good seed is sown into all four of the types of soils, which are characterized by external circumstances. One kind was so bad that the seed did not even penetrate it, so the birds devoured the seed. The second soil was shallow and stony, so although the seed sprang up fast, the plants died when the sun shone intensely because they did not have deep enough roots. The third soil was thorny, and the thorns choked the young saplings that sprang up. The fourth soil was good ground, and it gave a rich but not uniform yield. Some parts of the good soil gave a hundredfold yield, and others gave sixty and thirty. In other words even the good soil with the good seed did not all give the same amount of fruit! Even in the good soil there was a gradation or a hierarchy of good.

Most Western teaching on this parable says that only one of the soils was good and that the other three were bad because they did not produce any fruit. Nevertheless, Yeshua often accepted the imperfect and the "the gray" and allowed it to co-exist with the good and the bad until God Himself makes the judgment and distinction between the good and the bad. Matthew 13:24-30's Parable of the Tares makes this very clear. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept,*

his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'

Another practical example like this was Yeshua's attitude toward those who were not from among His disciples and yet used His name. *"Now John answered and said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.' But Yeshua said to him, 'Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side.'"* (Luke 9:49-50) This kind of attitude is hard to imagine in any Christian or even Orthodox Jewish ministry or congregation, but Yeshua did because He held a first century, Jewish view of humanity. He understood that those who are simpletons or those who do not have enough sense to ask the right questions are not very bad, but rather are made up of a mixture of black and white with different shades of gray and some redeeming qualities.

Let us return to the four sons and their questions in the Passover Haggadah. This text is an educational tool inserted into the Seder as a guide for every generation. Asking questions at the table was a very ancient Hellenistic educational practice. Similarly, the father at the head of the Seder table has to communicate and transmit the Passover story to his children in a relevant way that will give them tools to cope with life and remain faithful to the God of Israel. The message has to also be interesting and engage the children with some measure of intrigue. Each son poses a general question about the Passover festival, and the answer he receives depends on the way he phrases his question, which expresses his attitude and relationship to Passover and to God. The father actually examines each son to see what kind of a son he is based on his wording of the question. For example, the wicked son literally asks his father in the Haggadah, "What are these testimonies, statutes, and ordinances that God has commanded **you** to do?" This son is called "wicked" because by stressing "**you**" and not "**us**" he excludes himself from the commonwealth of Israel. The text for this question come from Deuteronomy 6:20-21, and the answer is an historical account of why we are obligated to follow the Passover laws: *"We were slaves*

to Pharaoh in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand...." The implication of the Passover story is a collective historical memory for the purpose of the preservation of the nation: *"Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us"* (Deut. 6:23-25).

In the Haggadah that is the "manual" for conducting the Seder meal, the four sons ask their questions, and each is given the appropriate answer to his question according to his personality type. Each of the four sons symbolizes a different type of person based on the question he asks about Passover. One son is deemed to be wicked because the way he asks his question is rebellious and based on an anti-social attitude that excludes himself from the community and attributes the holiday to his family and not to himself. He wants no part of the Passover traditions and asks why the Jewish people - other than him - practice the Passover Seder.

The wise son inquires about why the Jews practice the customs of Passover and relates to the laws of Pesach in order to learn them. Those assembled at the Passover Seder table respond in unison, describing this son as wise, since he wants to know more about the Passover traditions of his people and does not exclude himself from the whole of Israel or from his own family. He has a positive attitude that is open to learn what the Torah says and to keep the commandments. The wise son does not only hear the Word, but is also interested to keep the commands of God. In turn, he is instructed in the laws of Passover and told to see himself as being a part of the whole nation, since all of Israel should consider itself as being brought out of Egyptian slavery in each generation.

Now that we have seen the wicked and the wise son, let us examine the two medium sons. The simpleton asks his question indifferently and is unconcerned about the whole festivity of Passover; instead he wished to know generally what is special about Pesach. He is not intelligent enough to look at the text and understand it in order to ask a more profound question, but he sees that something is special about Passover and wants to know why. His question is expressed in more general terms, "What is all this [that he sees at the Seder table]?" Those at table respond by educating and reminding him about God's favors toward the Jews during the time of slavery in Egypt and the

importance of remembering what God has done for us in the past and what He does for us in every generation

The fourth son is probably too young to inquire about Passover and therefore is silent. He does not know what to ask or even how to ask the question. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the father and the others around the table to open up the subject and explain it to him. He is simply told about the Passover story in accordance with the biblical command: *"And thou shall tell your son in that day, saying: it is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt."*

These sons are the same four characters found in Yeshua's parable of the soils. There is the good, the bad, the simple (the rocky soil that has no deep roots), and the one that is too young to ask (the soil that was so surrounded by thorns that it did not even see the sun to get some growing power). While the four sons differ from one another in their reaction to the Passover Seder, they have one thing in common: they are all present at the Seder. The same is true with the four soils because they all receive the good seed from the sower. Even the wicked son is there taking an active, though rebellious, interest in what is happening. Even though he excludes himself, there is still hope that someday he too will become wise and that all the children attending the Seder will become conscientious, obedient to God, and will keep His commandments with circumcised hearts.

In our time of confusion and spiritual bankruptcy, there is another kind of a child – the "fifth son" who is altogether absent from the Seder and who has no interest whatsoever in the Torah and God's commandments. He is not interested in doing God's will at all because he has been taught that it is not necessary to do anything but only to talk about it and to claim "grace" instead of laws and customs. What brought about this all-too-common phenomenon of the fifth son? He is the result of an erroneous psychology and misguided theology that has created a strange environment that speaks of "love" and "grace" and has no roots in either one of these great divine characteristics. This fifth son is a stranger in his own land and a stranger in his own church or synagogue because he does not have any values or ideas for which he is willing to die much less live for. In Israel I would say that he is the extreme secular (hiloni) Jew who does not even care to know anything about his own identity as long as he can do what feels good to him. In other parts of the world, especially in the Christian world, the fifth son is the one who also does not even care to understand what it means to be a Christian, and he is also totally secular and alienated from his own roots. I suppose that the classic fifth

son would be someone like John Lennon from the Beatles, who was ultimately talented and ultimately estranged from finding himself. The fifth son is always looking for himself somewhere else but not in his own backyard. He finds fault with everything that comes from his own history and identity and constantly looks for new surroundings thinking that a new synagogue or a different church will solve his problem. He does not comprehend that the riches that are buried in his own backyard are just what he is looking for- a relationship with the Most High God, the Creator of the universe.

If Passover has any meaning for the modern man, Jew or Christian, it must be that it gives us an identity as those whom God redeemed from slavery into freedom and from darkness into light. Understanding that our world and humanity is much more complex than just "black and white" or "wicked and wise" is a key to finding ourselves and our identity in the Lord. It tells us not to give up just because we cannot reconcile our own place in the universe of God's love. God understands those of us who are not perfectly good or perfectly evil, those who are different shades of gray. This is precisely the place where God's grace and love works the best, in the gray people like ourselves and like the children of Israel who left Egypt with Moses and murmured for forty years all the way to the Promised Land.



Illustrations by Madison Murphy

Illustration by David Roberts



My Father Was a Wandering Aramean

Elizabeth Wakefield

Try to imagine any of the great films about the Exodus (Yetziat Mitzrayim), such as Cecil B. DeMille's the *Ten Commandments* or the more modern *Prince of Egypt* cartoon without Moses. Does it sound impossible? "But who would there be to see the burning bush; strike the Nile and turn it into blood; thunder to Pharaoh, 'Let my people go!'; lead the people across the Red Sea; or any of the other famous scenes associated with this great epic narrative of Israel's beginning?" we might ask. "Yetziat Mitzrayim without Moses? That sounds about as likely as an American Revolution without George Washington!"

Now consider the fact that the entire Passover Haggadah that we read every year at the Seder in order to remember Yetziat Mitzrayim only mentions Moses once and even then only because his name happens to be mentioned in a biblical verse quoted there. As essential as we and the Torah seem to consider Moses to be in the Passover event, the Haggadah almost intentionally

ignores him and his role in Israel's deliverance from slavery. Why might this be, and who then is the hero of Passover according to the Haggadah?

To answer this question, let us examine a central portion of the Magid, the retelling of Yetziat Mitzrayim that comprises the bulk of the Haggadah. The Magid focuses on two biblical passages about Yetziat Mitzrayim in Deuteronomy and in Joshua and weaves in details using other verses, most of which come from the account in the book of Exodus. One of these focal points is Deuteronomy 26, which discusses what is to be done for a First-Fruits offering once Israel dwells in the land. This passage may be one of the earliest and most obvious pieces of early Jewish liturgy. Here is the text as it appears in the Torah:

"When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord

your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and you shall go to the place that the Lord your God will choose to make his name to dwell there. And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.' Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. And you shall make response before the Lord your God. 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruits of the ground, which you O Lord have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God." (Deut 26:1-10)

The Haggadah takes the middle part of this passage, from "a wandering Aramean" to "with signs and wonders" and makes an extended midrash on it, expounding it line by line, and sometimes even word by word, to fill in details of the bitterness of Israel's slavery or the greatness of God's deliverance. There are, of course, many verses about Yetziat Mitzrayim in the Torah that the Haggadah could use as its core, and it may seem strange that it chooses this passage that is more connected to the celebration of First Fruits than to Passover. Besides being a short and succinct summary of the slavery and deliverance from Egypt, however, this passage has numerous advantages for the making of such a midrash. For one thing, it contains many repetitive and nearly synonymous phrases that invite explication in order to make all the phrases necessary and unique parts of the story. It also, like the passage on First Fruits in Leviticus 23, gives no specific time, day, month, or year for the performance of this commandment, encouraging a midrashic "situating" of the passage in some particular space and time. It also has the advantage of leaving all the characters in the drama nameless except for "the Lord your God," the clear hero of the passage. Finally, the use of this passage that refers to the First Fruits offering connects Passover to the entrance into the land of Israel, First Fruits, and Shavuot. We will discuss the implications of this passage for the spring holiday cycle after a brief examination of the midrash itself as it appears in the Haggadah.

Despite its great length, the Haggadah's midrash only covers 4 verses of the "My father was a wandering Aramean" text, stopping before Deuteronomy's account of entering into the land and the First Fruits offering. Anyone familiar with the Torah cannot forget these two elements that are so central to the original context, however. This passage, along with the one that precedes it from Joshua, are important because they remind us of our humble origins and that our true redemption only began in Egypt; it cannot be complete until we enter into the Promised Land and completely worship and obey the one God of our ancestors. They also solidly give all the credit for that redemption to God, not to ourselves, or even to Moses, perhaps one of the greatest Jews in history. Here is the text along with many of the more relevant midrashic embellishments as they appear in the Haggadah.¹

"In the beginning, our fathers were worshipers of idols, but now the Ever-Present has brought us to his service, as it is said, 'And Joshua spoke to the whole people: Thus has Hashem, God of Israel spoken, "Your fathers dwelt in olden times beyond the River (Euphrates), Terach, the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and I multiplied his seed and gave him Isaac. And I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau; and I gave to Esau Mount Seir to possess it, and Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt."... [Josh 24:2-4]

"The Aramean sought to destroy my father [in Deut 26 the plain reading of the text is 'My father was a wandering Aramean'], **and the latter went down to Egypt and sojourned there, with a family, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and numerous.'**

"And he went down to Egypt'- compelled by Divine decree.

"And he sojourned there'- which teaches that our father Jacob did not go to Egypt to settle there permanently, but merely to stay there for a time...

"With few in number'- as it is said, 'Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now Hashem your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.' [Deut 10:22]

"And he became there a nation... Great, mighty... And numerous'- as it says, 'I made you thrive like the plants of the field, and you grew big and tall, and you came to be of great charm, beautiful of form, and your hair was grown long, but you were naked and bare. And I passed over you, and I saw you downtrodden in your blood and said to

¹ For the complete text, see an Orthodox Haggadah; there is not enough space here.

you, "Through your blood you shall live," and I said to you, "through your blood you shall live." [Ezekiel 16:6-7]

"The Egyptians ill-treated us, oppressed us, and laid heavy labors upon us... We cried to Hashem, the God of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice. He saw our ill-treatment, our burden, and our oppression... Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, with great fearfulness, with signs, and with wonders."

"Hashem brought us out of Egypt"¹ - not through an angel, not through a seraph, and not through a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be He, He alone, in His glory, as it is said, 'I will pass through the land of Egypt in that night, and I will slay every first-born in the land of Egypt, from man to beast, and I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt. I am Hashem.' 'I will pass through the land of Egypt,' I, and no angel; 'I will slay every first-born in the land of Egypt,' I, and no seraph; 'and I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt,' I, and no messenger; 'I, Hashem,' it is I, and no other. [Ex 12:12]

"With a mighty hand"¹ - this refers to the pestilence, as it is said, 'Behold, the hand of Hashem will be upon your cattle...' [Ex 9:3]

"With an outstretched arm"¹ - that is the sword, as it is said, 'His drawn sword is in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem.'

"With great fearfulness"¹ - this refers to the revelation of the Divine presence, as it is said, 'Or has God ever sought to come and take unto Himself one nation from the midst of another nation, with trials, signs and wonders, with war and a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm and awesome manifestations as Hashem your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?...' [Deut 4:34]

This midrash has far too many fascinating elements to ever be able to discuss here, like the change from "my father was a wandering Aramean" to "an Aramean tried to destroy my father," the biblical "quote" about the sword stretched over Jerusalem that does not exist in the Bible (see the Artscroll Haggadah for one interesting explanation), the overt Messianic overtones of the "two bloods" (the original Hebrew form of blood there is a strange dual form) by which Israel shall live according to Ezekiel, or its consideration of the revelation of the Shekinah to be a frightening experience, just to give a few examples. Each of these topics could be an article in themselves. Our focus here, however, is the midrash's insistence that God alone

carried out the redemption, without the aid of any other party, which seemingly contradicts the Torah's assertion that Moses played a rather important part in the story.

If not Moses, then who is the hero of this midrash? Even a quick perusal of the text reveals that all the important action is attributed to God: "The Ever-Present has brought us to his service;" "I took your father Abraham... and led him... and I multiplied his seed and gave him Isaac;" "God has made you numerous as the stars of heaven;" "I made you thrive like the plants of the field... and I passed over you... and saw you downtrodden... and I said to you, 'Through your blood(s) you shall live;'" "God heard our voice. He saw... God brought us out of Egypt;" "God's hand will be upon your cattle;" and "has God ever sought to come and take unto Himself one nation from the midst of another nation, with trials, signs and wonders, with war and a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm and awesome manifestations as Hashem your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" Even Jacob's journey to Egypt was "compelled by Divine decree" here. The most impressive part of the midrash that emphasizes God's actions is this polemical portion near the end, however: ***"Hashem brought us out of Egypt"***¹ - not through an angel, not through a seraph, and not through a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be He, He alone, in His glory, as it is said, 'I will pass through the land of Egypt in that night, and I will slay every first-born in the land of Egypt, from man to beast, and I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt. I am Hashem.' 'I will pass through the land of Egypt,' I, and no angel; 'I will slay every first-born in the land of Egypt,' I, and no seraph; 'and I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt,' I, and no messenger; 'I, Hashem,' it is I, and no other."

This intense repetition and insistence on God acting alone clearly marks this midrash as polemical, leading one to ask what the compilers of the Haggadah were polemicizing against. Indeed, the contemporary Israeli scholar Israel Yuval views the entire Haggadah as a product of an early polemic between Jews and Jewish-Christians. He says that the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE caused both groups to form their own differing interpretations of Passover in an attempt to replace the then impossible sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Consequently, "Jews adhered to the original meaning of the festival as deriving from the initial redemption from Egypt that served as a sign of a second deliverance still to come. Christians narrated the tale of a second redemption already in place: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Both stories offered a liturgical alternative to the old sacrificial rite, addressing simultaneously the difficult question of how to celebrate a

¹ All the English translations of the Haggadah texts come from the *Artscroll Passover Haggadah*. Ed. Joseph Elias. Mesorah Series. Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1982.

festival of redemption in an age of foreign domination and oppression. Both began with degradation- either Egyptian servitude or the crucifixion- and concluded with praise, holding out hope for the future.^{III} In light of this controversy, Yuval believes that Deuteronomy 26 was intentionally chosen to be the center of the Magid instead of the more obviously relevant story in Exodus 12, precisely because of its emphasis on God acting alone and because it omitted the motif of the Passover lamb, which the early Christians interpreted as a symbol of Yeshua. Omitting Moses and his role also avoided the early Christian interpretation of Moses as an archetype of Yeshua.^{IV}

Whether one agrees with the reason for this polemic or not, however, one cannot dispute that Yetziat Mitzrayim happened because of God's power and mercy alone. God called Moses to help facilitate Israel's deliverance, but there was nothing inherent in Moses that brought freedom to his people. In fact, God could have chosen anyone to complete His purposes, and in Exodus 3 Moses even tried to convince God to choose someone else, arguing that he had a speech impediment. Even after all the amazing things that God did through Moses, the Torah tells us that Moses was the "most humble man on earth" (Num 12:3). It seems that this humility and giving God the credit for His miraculous actions as represented in the Torah and the Haggadah is supposed to be an example for all of us, just as the Seder is supposed to be a teaching device to remind us of God's miracles in our history and to instill its moral lessons in our current lives.

The history of the Seder, the Haggadah, and Israel's celebration of Passover is controversial and complicated. One thing that seems certain though is that the ritual of the Seder existed long before there was a Haggadah with a fixed text. Lawrence Hoffman believes that the Magid was originally "a free-flowing account of the Exodus as response" but that by the second century it "was being fixed according to a midrashic treatment of Deuteronomy 26, probably at the initiative of Gamliel II, who augmented the response with a mandatory explanation of the symbolism implicit in certain seder foods."^V The Mishna records a debate about what content should be included in the Magid and how it should begin. The early rabbis agreed that one should

"begin with disgrace and end with glory" but still debated whether "degradation was physical ('Our forebears were slaves to Pharaoh...') or spiritual ('In the beginning our forebears worshiped idols...')."^{VI} Consequently, the Mishna (mPesachim 10, 4) considers two options for beginning the Magid: the "my father was a wandering Aramean" passage from Deuteronomy 26 or the "in the beginning, our fathers were idol worshipers" passage that draws from Joshua 24. As the now deceased scholar Louis Finkelstein pointed out, in fact both passages fit this prescription, one that "opens with Israel in bondage and ends with Israel redeemed by God" and the other that "opens with the ancestors of Israel worshiping idols and ends with their worship of God."^{VII}

Currently, the Haggadah begins with the passage about the idol worshipers and then continued with the wandering Aramean. Neither passage points to a particularly illustrious beginning, for after all, who can be proud of an ancestor who was a homeless Syrian or an idol worshiper? It seems rather that this is part of the point. Instead of being proud that we were redeemed from Egypt because we deserved it, we are meant to be thankful that God in His mercy redeemed us with His power and glory. He, not us, and not even Moses the quintessential ancient Israelite, is the true hero of Passover. Humility is built into the Seder from the very beginning, as the first thing we say when we start the Magid with the matzah is, "This is the bread of affliction/ poverty/ humility that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and join in celebrating the Pesach festival. This year we are here, next year may we be in the land of Israel. This year, slaves, next year- free men!" (By the way, this is probably the same part of the Seder reflected in Yeshua's holding up the matzah and saying, "This is my body, broken for you," which is also an incredible example of humility).

Now that we have seen the textual advantage of Deuteronomy 26 because of its example of humility, let us now examine the way it links Passover to the rest of the spring holiday cycle. While remembering that the central text behind the midrash was originally supposed to be recited when presenting the First Fruits at the Temple, we will start with Passover's connection to Bikkurim (First Fruits). Like the lesson of humility in the Haggadah, the very act of offering the first fruits of our crops to God instead of keeping them for ourselves reflects an acknowledgment

III Yuval, Israel J. "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue." *Passover and Easter: From Origins and History to Modern Times*. Vol. 5 of Two Liturgical Traditions Series. Eds. Lawrence A. Hoffman and Paul F. Bradshaw. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, p. 98.

IV Ibid, pp. 109-110.

V Hoffman, Lawrence A. "The Passover Meal in the Jewish Tradition." *Passover and Easter*, pp. 9, 13-14.

VI Ibid, p. 15.

VII Finkelstein, Louis. *Pre-Maccabean Documents in the Passover Haggadah*. *Harvard Theological Review* xxvi, no 1, (1943) 307.

that the success of our crops (and indeed all the other work of our hands) depends on God and His blessing and not merely on our own knowledge or skills.

Israel's spring holiday cycle according to the Torah begins with Passover and Unleavened Bread, quickly followed by Bikkurim, and 50 days of the counting of the Omer until Shavuot (Pentecost). These spring holidays all have important agricultural implications that can only be realized once the land is conquered and settled. Passover itself obviously relates mainly to the historical event of leaving Egypt, but eating matzah for 7 days in the subsequent holiday "Unleavened Bread" in the Torah has a more agricultural connotation, despite the historical explanation about the dough not having time to rise because of the speed at which Israel left Egypt. Many scholars have puzzled over whether these two feasts were originally two separate entities and how they merged together if that was the case and what their original connection was. This same scholarly confusion has accompanied the connection between Passover, the waving of the sheaf for the Bikkurim offering on "the morrow after the Shabbat" (Lev 23:11, 15), the counting of the omer for 50 days, and the celebration of Shavuot, which has no historical event attributed to it in the Torah, although later tradition celebrated the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai on that day.

Part of this confusion stems from the fact that in the Second Temple period, a great deal of controversy existed among all the different sects of Judaism as to when exactly the "morrow after the Shabbat" on which the first sheaf should be cut and waved was. There is not enough space here to detail all the hows and whys of the dispute, but it seems that most Jews of the period followed the tradition that eventually became the norm in Judaism, that is to cut the sheaf and wave it on the same night that Passover (the day long festival, not the full 7 days of Unleavened Bread), ended. That was the same night the counting of the omer for the 50 days up until Shavuot began. Once this first omer (sheaf) was offered in the Temple, the people were allowed to go into the markets and start buying the new produce of the year and eat it. The first sheaf of barley that was waved 7 weeks before Pentecost was supposed to "serve as global first fruits freeing for ordinary consumption of the whole of the subsequent harvests."^{VIII}

This regulation comes from Leviticus 23:10-14. "...When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to

VIII Nodet, Etienne and Justin Taylor. *The Origins of Christianity*.
Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998, p. 388.

the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Shabbat, the priest shall wave it... And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God..." The decision to start the waving and counting of the omer on the night after Passover is most likely based on Joshua 5:10-12, which records Israel's first Passover in the Promised Land. "*While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.*" These texts prove that Bikkurim really cannot be celebrated outside the land of Israel or without a Temple or Tabernacle, meaning that the redemption of Passover was not complete until coming into the land, which Deuteronomy 26 also makes quite clear. The Israelites did not actually celebrate either Passover or Shavuot during their desert wanderings.

Where then does Shavuot fit into the equation? Since early tradition did not connect it to any particular historical event, it might have remained a marginal holiday only celebrated by farmers. For the Essenes of the Second Temple period, however, with all their interest in cycles of "Sevens" (see the book of Jubilees), it became their most important festival of the year, as the "seven of sevens," since Leviticus says to count seven sevens and then celebrate on the fiftieth day. Since they refused to participate in any of the Temple ceremonies because they considered it to be impure, they equated the holiday with the renewal of the Covenant, (which of course they restricted to only a select group of initiates), the offering of the first fruits of certain products before God apart from the Temple, and the eating of their "pure meal." It thus became the custom of many sectarian Jewish groups of the time period to receive new members on that day, since for them entry into their community meant being received into the Covenant. This may be part of the background to the Shavuot reception of 3000 new members into the Jewish-Christian community in Acts 2.^{IX} Shavuot could also be considered the final seal on the spring season of holidays of redemption, marking the true end to the celebration of Passover. Current celebrations of Shavuot focus on the establishment of God's kingship over Israel with the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai.

Despite this more metaphorical interpretation of
IX Ibid, p. 397.

Shavuot's significance, it still maintained many of its agrarian elements in the Second Temple period. Shavuot is not the same as First Fruits in most biblical passages, but Numbers 28:26 calls it "Yom haBikkurim," (the Day of First Fruits), which creates some interpretive difficulties. Philo [a Hellenistic Jewish commentator who lived in Alexandria in the first century] tried to solve this by saying there were two feasts: "Pentecost proper, which is the *public* feast *par excellence* of first fruits and lasts one day, and a feast of the Basket, private and less definite, lasting six months from the beginning of summer to the end of autumn, the period during which all the cultivated kinds come to maturity."^x

Bringing the First Fruits offering was not ultimately interpreted to refer to every kind of food though. "According to Exod 23:19, the first fruits of all the produce of the earth are to be brought to the sanctuary, but MBik 1:3 restricts the obligation to seven kinds that characterize the Promised Land according to Deut 8:8: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olive oil and date juice. It is a question only of crops harvested in the land of Israel, and the most devout make the pilgrimage each time that they are in a position to bring the first fruits of a kind, whereas others make the offerings when they come on pilgrimage for Pentecost or Tabernacles, which are the terms fixed by MBik 1:10 for the times of first fruits."^{xi} This interpretation would then mark Shavuot as the *beginning* of the summer agricultural festivals that celebrate Israel's entrance into the Promised Land instead of the *end* of the celebration of freedom from Egypt.

Perhaps the inclusion of the Bikkurim passage in the Passover Haggadah along with Philo's comment that individual Israelites could bring these offerings all the way up until Sukkot in the fall, (which is supposed to remind us of the way God provided for us during the 40 years of wandering in the desert), would rather lead us to conclude that the entire cycle of Biblical holidays are meant to remind us of the different spiritual applications we can learn from Israel's defining historical event of Yetziat Mitzrayim. In this scheme, the cycle starts with Passover and does not end until Sukkot, with the entire thing meant to bring contemporary significance to the events of our history. God can choose anyone He wants to facilitate His miraculous acts among humankind, but the credit belongs to Him alone. True redemption is not merely physical freedom from slavery, but also necessitates that we enter into the land God promised us and worship Him alone in spirit and

in truth. Our survival both in the desert and even in our own land when we think we control our own crops and destinies depends entirely on God, an acknowledgment of which demands great humility on our part, especially in a world where there is a "self-help" book for every possible problem. With humility and thanksgiving then, we should praise God for the double redemption that He has worked for us, Yetziat Mitzrayim from physical slavery in Egypt and the freedom from the spiritual slavery to which we were bound through our sins before Yeshua's Passover sacrifice for us.

Let us conclude with a final quote from the Haggadah, which beautifully sums up these ideas. "Therefore it is our duty to thank, to praise, to laud, to glorify, to bless, to extol, and to give respect to Him who performed all these miracles for our fathers and for us. He has brought us forth from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to bright light, and from bondage to redemption!"



Barcelona Haggadah. 14th century.

X See Philo of Alexandria. *Special Laws* 2, 215. Nodet and Taylor, p. 388.

XI Nodet and Taylor, p. 387.



The Exodus from Egypt, the Lamb, and the Kitchen Cabinet

Joseph Shulam

There is one line in the Passover Haggadah that states that every one of us has to see himself as if he personally was taken out of Egypt. At first sight and from a totally secular point of view, this statement looks foolish. How can I, Joseph Shulam, who was born in Bulgaria, who immigrated to Israel with my family in 1948, who has never been enslaved to anyone or anything, who lives free in the land of my forefathers in the city of the great King, Jerusalem, see myself as having been freed from Egyptian slavery? To the straight mind of a Western person, this might seem like another foolishness or an ancient Jewish myth, which is how I perceived it as a secular Israeli boy when I first heard it at my next door neighbor's Seder. My own family did not have a Passover Seder. They had a wonderful fancy meal with pork-chops, but no telling of the story of the Exodus or blessing of the matza or wine.

Now that I have grown up and have been a student of God's Word for many years, I look at that passage in the Haggadah and am totally confounded by the great wisdom in that statement. Religions have the tendency to push God away into the highest heavens. Religion makes God transcendent, distant from our daily experience and struggle down here in the "Vale of Tears" (עמק הבכרה). We can read our religious documents that describe the great events of Pharaoh's chariots drowning in the rage of the Red Sea and the children of Israel being delivered from the enemy, but the next day we wake up from the four cups of wine drunk in the Passover Seder and see that we are still at war and that our enemies still desire to take our lives. Reality in Israel and for the Jewish people seldom matches our hopes and expectations, and in spite of this reality we still continue to find hope and comfort in the old stories that we repeat ever year around a rich table of good food and good company and the old history of our faith.

What is that compelling magic of the Passover story that causes everyone, Jew or non-Jew, to love the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt? There could be many answers to this question, but the one that I think is probably the most compelling is that we are all looking for salvation, redemption, freedom from oppression, and deliverance from slavery. We are all essentially looking for Superman to come down and save the girl in distress or to bring justice to a world where the evil prosper and the righteous suffer. The Passover story has served centuries of oppressed people, which is the reason why the slaves brought from Africa to the United States adapted the story of Moses delivering Israel from slavery to their own situation. Therefore, they sang the African spiritual, "Go down Moses, tell old Pharaoh, let my people go." People in all generations enslaved by enemies, to drugs, or to other bad habits have looked at the model of the Exodus with hopeful eyes that God will somehow intervene in history and deliver them from their private slavery. There is much more to this story than these existential expectations, however.

We all pool inspiration from history and telescope it to our time and feel good about it. When we do this, we feel connected to history, and it helps us understand our present situation better and participate in both the past and the future. We are telescoping in and out of history all the time. One of the best scenes that describes a backwards telescoping into history appears in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. *"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was the Messiah."* Paul here telescopes

the Israelite experience in the wilderness by saying that the crossing of the Red Sea, the guidance of the Pillar of Fire and the Cloud are similar to the baptism and guidance of the Holy Spirit for the Church because the Rock from which Israel drank was the Messiah. This kind of thinking is difficult to understand if we do not put ourselves back into the picture. By reading the book and entering into the context of what is written with both the mind and the emotions, we experience a text that actually has the power to change our minds, which makes the experience become real for us.

There is another very similar Jewish statement that says, "Every day one should feel as if he received the Torah today." As Jews we are commanded to bring the past into the present. Christians are commanded to do the same when they take the bread and wine in memory of what Yeshua accomplished by His death, burial, and resurrection. We telescope ourselves back into first century Jerusalem by eating a small piece of matza and drinking a small cup of wine or grape-juice and in fact participate in Yeshua's death, burial, and resurrection. This is what it really means to do communion "in memory" of Yeshua. It certainly does not mean to just remember Yeshua and His death as a mental beep like on a cell phone that reminds us of our appointments. We are not observers of what has happened in history; we are participants in history. Even now we are making history when we celebrate Passover and when we "do this in memory" of Yeshua.

Paul actually makes the same argument in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. *"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* Paul's language here is emphatic and the language of command: "therefore purge" and "therefore let us keep." The reason given for this command is that the Messiah is our Passover sacrifice.

It is sad that this command has been ignored by Christianity for nearly two thousand years. As early as 386-7, John Chrysostom was delivering his infamous "Homilies Against the Jews" in Antioch, which forbade Christians to celebrate Passover and accused those who did of being accomplices in the murder of Yeshua. It is this kind of fourth and fifth century Christian anti-Jewish sentiments that have uprooted the Biblical heritage of the Church and replaced it with non-Biblical, pagan-based practices like painting eggs and eating chocolate rabbits.

In a step forward, however, it seems that the present

Pope Benedict XVI (Cardinal Ratzinger) disagrees with this attitude, as he wrote in his book *Behold the Pierced One*, "...It seems to me, this Passover celebration which has come down to us from the nomads, via Israel and through Christ, also has (in the deepest sense) an eminently political significance. We as a nation, we in Europe, need to go back to our spiritual roots, lest we become lost in self-destruction. This feast needs to become a family celebration once again, for it is the family that is the real bastion of creation and humanity. Passover is a summons, urgently reminding us that the family is the living home in which humanity is nurtured, which banishes chaos and futility, and which must be protected as such. But we must add that the family can only be this sphere of humanity, this bastion of creation, if it is under the banner of the Lamb, if it is protected by the power of faith which comes from the love of Jesus Christ..." One modern Jewish Catholic comments on this quote, "Here we see Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) calling for all Catholics to celebrate with their families the Passover Seder for deep theological and spiritual reasons connected with preserving the faith in the family. Many modern Catholics seem to have lost the customs of making God part of the ordinary life of the family and they could learn much from the Orthodox Jewish families who bring God in a natural and spiritual way into the daily rhythm of family life."¹

These developments can be seen today all throughout Christianity, as many Christians of all varieties are restoring the practice of keeping the Passover Seder meal and retelling the story of the Exodus. They realize that in a way we are all coming out of Egypt and being delivered from slavery to this world and its powers and rulers into the Kingdom of God because Yeshua our Messiah is the ultimate Passover Lamb, just as Paul states in 1 Corinthians. Indeed we all, both individually and collectively, are supposed to see ourselves as having been taken out of Egypt and as participants in the great drama of salvation that has become the model of Divine salvation for all. Yeshua is called the Lamb of God from the very inception of the Good News and John the Baptizer's call, *"Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."* The "Lamb of God" is a direct allusion to the Passover. The New Testament message starts with the Lamb of God in the Gospels and finishes with the Lamb of God in the book of Revelation. Let us therefore celebrate the Feast as the Paul instructed, not only by the cleaning of the old leaven from our houses, but also by cleaning out our hearts from the leaven of malice and iniquity.

¹ This quote and comment are taken from the website <http://aronbengilad.blogspot.com/2008/11/passover-seders-are-sinful.html>

Pillars of Zion

Leah Kurki

Rittie Katz, Elizabeth Wakefield

We visited Leah in her home in Jerusalem on a sunny day in June 2008. As we entered, we were immediately struck by the lovely shades of blue with which she had furnished her apartment. Her home is sunny and warm, as is its occupant. One of the first things we noticed was a picture of a sun flower painted on the wall underneath one of the windowsills. When we asked about it, she told us that she had painted it herself one winter after some water damage left a permanent stain on the wall. In the fashion of her indomitable and optimistic personality, she turned this stain on the wall into something beautiful. She says it is a parable for the life of the believer with Yeshua, who turns all of our stains and sins and pains into something beautiful and a blessing for ourselves and others.



Leah Miriam Kurki was born in a village in the Karelia area of Finland (today under Russian control) in 1933 into a family with 11 children. She is one of the youngest, and nine of those children are still alive today, with her oldest brother having reached age 88 and her youngest sister being 70. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, they heard bombs going off less than 30 kilometers away. One night her little sister was born with the sounds of bombs in the background. Ten days later when the Russians captured this area in 1939, they took her family's house, so they all had to flee. More than 400,000 Finnish citizens had to flee during this time and left the area completely under Russian control. The Finnish government tried to help all the refugees who had been displaced by the conflict by giving them houses further into the country, but as the Russians advanced, they kept having to abandon their new houses and flee all over again. Leah says that at one time, there were nine of them trying to live all together in a two room house. One of her brothers was killed while fighting in the war.

Both Leah's parents were strong believers, and she grew up with a deep faith. She never had a question about whether to believe or not. She always simply believed and learned and understood more as time went on.

Leah went to a Lutheran school as a child where she learned English. When she came to Israel in 1971, however,

she knew she needed to learn Hebrew in order to survive. Therefore, she pretended not to know any English so people would be forced to talk to her in Hebrew until she got to the point that she forgot English altogether.

Leah's father studied a lot of Tanakh, and even though he had not had much schooling, he understood what the Bible said, loved Israel, and imparted that love to his children. Since Leah's father was a farmer, the family was not rich in a materialistic sense, but Leah says that she saw examples of faith, courage, and humor from her parents that have become part of her nature, too.

After the war, the Carmel Society (a Christian Zionist organization in Scandinavia) started, and Leah's father was a member from the very beginning. Leah remembers that in 1948 there was a party or a meeting of believers near her village. Her father played Ha Tikvah (the national anthem of Israel) on his trombone at the meeting, and she had a very strong and emotional reaction.

When Leah left home at age 18, she went to a religious nursing school and studied there for four years. Then she worked as a teacher in the same school to train other nurses for a few years before going to work in a nursing home for the elderly. In 1961, the Carmel Society sent a group of volunteers to Kiryat Anavim. Leah's father asked her if she wanted to go, but she had just started her nursing career and still had school debts, so she declined.

Later, in 1971, Leah finally came to Israel for the first time. She worked for a year and studied Hebrew in Kibbutz Shevaim for six months, working for half the day and studying for half the day. Before the school ended in 1973, one of her friends from Yad HaShemona, a Messianic moshav near Jerusalem, who had worked as a nurse at one of the hospitals in Jerusalem, Shaarei Tzedek, asked Leah if she would cover for her at the hospital while she went home on vacation. Her supervisor had been so impressed by Leah's friend that she asked her to replace herself with another Finnish nurse.

Leah rose to the challenge and substituted for her friend for two months at the hospital. At the end of that time, she approached her supervisors to tell them that the two months had finished, but they said, "What? You think we are going to let you go now?!" Since then, Leah has stayed in Israel and at Shaarei Tzedek hospital. She worked most of the time in the eye department. Back in those days, there were never enough nurses, so she had no problem keeping her job. Even so, it took three years before the Ministry of Interior gave her a visa that lasted longer than a year, and it took more than ten years before she attained permanent residence. She says that she never considered converting because she was born into a Christian family and always wanted to stay that way. She never had thought she would stay in Israel forever, but it ended up that way. Since there are some Finnish Jews who never made aliyah, Leah considers herself to be taking their place at the moment. Her family always asks her if she wants to go back to Finland now that she is retired, but she always refuses because she considers Israel to be her home now.

Leah is extremely modest. She described herself as "a simple nurse who worked with a lot of other new immigrants." When she came to Jerusalem, she went to a congregation up the street from Netivyah. There were lots of Finns there, and Moshe ben Meir used to give Tanach lessons while his Finnish wife Ahuva translated for him. (For further information regarding Moshe and Ahuva Ben Meir you may order the book *From Jerusalem to Jerusalem* or refer to the previous *Teaching from Zion* on the Parables of Yeshua). Although Leah met Ahuva once or twice at meetings in Finland, she never really knew her or any of the other Finnish immigrants in Israel until she came here. When Moshe Ben Meir passed away, Joseph Shulam began to give the Bible lessons. At a certain point, he became too busy and said, "If you want to continue learning about the Tanach, come to Netivyah for Bible lessons." So Leah came to Netivyah in 1979 or 1980 and has been with us ever since.

One of Leah's most outstanding characteristics is her undaunted optimism. She is simply happy all the time! When asked how she stays so happy all the time, she answered, "The first thing is my faith. It helps that my parents had such strong faith. They were never rich and had a hard life, but they always believed. Our family was content with what we had. We also always laughed together and told jokes. This happiness was natural to me and my family."

Leah never married or had children. She said she never opposed the idea and even had a boyfriend at one time. He broke up with her when she went to study nursing though because he did not want his wife to study. She has no regrets about this, however, saying, "If I hadn't become a nurse, I never would have been able to live in Israel. I believe in marriage, of course. Single people should pray for God's will in this regard, though I think it has actually been nice to be alone. There is a Finnish expression which says that even though it may be cold, it is easier to be single."

We then asked Leah how she felt about Israel. "Of course our current government is not all right!" she exclaimed. "They do everything in their own strength and give themselves all the credit. God is always our guide, however. If we would only obey, we would not have to take these forty year trips around the desert. Even so, the end will always be for our own good. I believe the future will be good, but I do not know how long it will take us to get there!"

Here are Leah's words of advice to next generation of young believers. "First of all, strengthen yourselves in the faith. Read and study the Bible as much as possible and believe it! This is the foundation, though I believe it is much harder for young people today than it was when I was young."

Since our interview, Leah underwent a successful cancer surgery and seems to be continuing in pretty good health and strength. She is still a pillar of the "Power Ranger" prayer group of the elderly ladies in the congregation and brings a flood of warmth and optimism everywhere she goes. She says she would like to thank God for leading her faithfully all this time and to thank her family for always being such good examples to her and supporters of Israel. When we asked her how she felt about her current health situation, she said, "Sometimes I think I have seen a lot in my life, so if the Lord wants to take me home now, that's ok. On the other hand, I have no objection to staying here."

Personally, we hope God allows you to stick around for a long time yet, Leah. You are a bright fountain of optimism, joy, and serenity.

Cleaning out the Old Leaven

Marcia Shulam

Springtime! What a wonderful season of the year this is! Our winter - sometimes cold, windy, rainy, and with occasional hail or snow - is passing, the almond trees have bloomed, and the wild flowers are blooming. The feast of Purim (Esther 9:18-19) was celebrated with many prayers and much rejoicing in costumes from Texas and the Wild West, and now Israel has just celebrated Pesach (Passover).

For most homemakers, this involves various degrees of house cleaning, and indeed why not? Our homes have been closed up to keep us warm through the winter. Rugs need a good beating, windows need to be washed, and some beautiful spring days beckon us to air out pillows, blankets, and covers. If it is warm enough, we need to consider getting out some summer "duds" and putting away our warm winter clothing.

As I begin to give our kitchen a good kosher-for-Pesach cleaning, I ask myself again, why do I do this every year? It is an echo of the age-old question from the Pesach Haggadah, "Why is this night different from any other night?" My inspiration for this cleaning out of leaven comes from the Scriptures - Exodus 12:14-24 and I Corinthians 5:6-8 specifically. This celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the salvation of all of Israel's firstborn from death, and Israel's redemption from slavery reflect the need of the whole world to be freed from sin, to be saved by the blood of the Lamb of God, and to be redeemed from the slavery of sin and reconciled to God. Our Messiah Yeshua can do this, if we let Him.

In order to avoid eating leaven, we clean out all grains and leavening agents. From Purim and until Pesach I stop buying leavened products- cookies, crackers, noodles and pasta, cakes and pies, frozen French pastry and kubeh, oatmeal, cornmeal, cereals, and then finally bread. I usually clean out my pantry first and put all of our leavened products in a couple of boxes to be eaten or given to some non-observant friends before Pesach. What does this leave us to eat? All kosher meats, fish, and fowl, plus fruits and vegetables, and milk products kosher for Pesach (some yogurts may have starches in them) are available for our enjoyment. I will never forget the first chicken soup with matzo balls that Joseph took me to eat at my first Seder

meal. Sephardic Jews allow rice and legumes (kitniyot) to be eaten during Pesach, while this is not the custom for Ashkenazi Jews. In Israel we are blessed with a wide range of kosher for Pesach products.

My cleaning continues with kitchen cabinets, drawers, microwave, oven, stovetop, fridge and freezer, getting rid of crumbs and dirt and covering some surfaces. Couches, chairs, dining table, and the coffee table are all places where there may be food crumbs. These areas are also most practical to clean just before the holiday. The last couple of days involve koshering dishes that I plan to use during the holiday (mostly by washing and then immersing in boiling water 24 hours later) and bringing down Pesach dishes, and preparing food for our first couple of days. Everyone has his or her favorite recipes. Many people have separate dishes to eat from and cook in for this week of Unleavened Bread. And some folks simply buy disposables to eat from for this special week. You can find many rules from different rabbis on ways to kosher your kitchen. I have always used the guidelines in *How To Run A Traditional Jewish Household* by Blu Greenberg. You can also check out various websites for koshering for Passover.

Some of us may enjoy this extreme spring-cleaning, and others less so. As for me it has varied over the years depending on my state of health. The Apostle Shaul compares sin to leaven in I Corinthians 5, and he calls on believers to "*celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice or wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*" (I Corinthians 5:8). Cleaning sin out of our lives parallels the cleaning out of leaven from our homes. Sometimes it seems easier to do the house cleaning than to do the soul/life searching and cleansing, which should be a more than once-a-year activity. As believers redeemed by the blood of our Messiah, our Passover sacrifice, "*We are indeed unleavened*" (I Corinthians 5:7). Living our lives in sincerity and truth is our daily challenge, and we must encourage our brothers and sisters to do the same. May we celebrate the feast and live our redeemed lives with sincerity and truth in the footsteps of our Messiah Yeshua.

Photo by Agapie Camil

Z. Schechter

Out of Bitter Bondage into Sweetness and Freedom

This is a very festive and joyous season of the year, as spring is universally associated with growth, renewal, change, and joy. In the saga of Israel, we too experience this during this time of year, although our joy is also intertwined with sadness and the threat of annihilation, whether in Persia at Purim or as we mourn the dead of Israel's many wars. At Pesach we renew our relationship with "The Holy One Blessed Be He," as He brings us unto Himself to instruct us in His Righteousness at Shavuot, which ends in joy.

With this recipe I try to combine our more joyous spring festivals, as I merge our removal of *hametz* (leaven) from our dwellings for Pesach and the milk and honey, which are associated with the giving of the Torah and Shavuot. Many people wonder what the significance of eating dairy foods at Shavuot is. Of course, there are many facets to this tradition, which should not be surprising. One theory is that the Jewish people knew that God would include food laws in Torah, but since we did not yet know the proper procedures for slaughtering and preparing animals, it was decided to hold a dairy feast instead. After all, God explained the Pesach feast to us in immense detail. Others say that we serve dairy foods on this day because the Torah which we received on Shavuot is white, pure, and sweet like milk. Although the Talmud teaches us that festive joy requires meat and wine, we primarily eat dairy on Shavuot. (Many people do eat a late afternoon meat meal before the sun sets at the end of Pentecost, however). The Torah is referred to as, "*honey and milk under your tongue*" in Song of Songs 4:11. Often in the Tanakh, our obedience to God is directly linked to the fruitfulness of the land, "*a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey.*" (Exodus 3:8) One might also call it a good and spacious land, full of mitzvot, for truly the instructions of The Holy One Blessed Be He are as sweet as milk and honey. "*How sweet are your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*" (Psalm 119:103)

Photo by zingyyellow

Kosher for Pesach Cheesecake

Crust

1/3 cup / 75ml	ground walnuts or almonds
2/3 cup / 150ml	matza meal
2 Tablespoons / 30ml	granulated sugar
1 Tablespoon / 15ml	honey
3 Tablespoons / 45ml	softened butter

Mix together, and then press in the bottom of the 8 inch / 20cm pan. (A spring form pan is best but not necessary). Place in a preheated 350°F / 180°C oven for 10 minutes. Set aside till completely cool.

Batter

2lb / 0.9kg	cream-cheese (<i>American style</i>)
1 1/4 cup / 300ml	granulated sugar
3 Tablespoons / 45ml	potato starch*
4 extra large / 5 small	eggs
2 Tablespoons / 30ml	vanilla extract

* if not available 1/8 cup / 25ml unflavored instant mashed potatoes

Blend cheese, sugar, and starch until light and creamy; be sure to scrape the bowl to assure a uniform texture. Add egg and vanilla mix until consistent. Take care not to over mix. Pour mixture into pan and bake at 375°F / 190°C in a convection oven for about 2 1/2 hours. (In a conventional oven it will take a bit longer).

The key to the perfect cheesecake is to neither over nor under-cook it. If under-cooked it will be very loose in the middle, and if over-cooked the top will crack as it cools. Yet either way, I am sure that you will enjoy this recipe.

Serve with fresh berries or seasonal fruit and drizzle with honey.

בתאבון
Enjoy



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Our Mother was a Wandering Moabite

The story of Ruth is set "in the time of the judges," strategically placed as the link between the days of judges and kings. While scholars debate the purpose and date of the text, this is a story about a foreign woman finding a home among the people of God. Perhaps it functions as a post-exilic polemic against the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah and a call to embrace the God-fearing non-Israelite community among them, an attempt to weave some early feminism into Israelite history in the character of a strong, assertive, and righteous matriarchal figure in the creation of the Davidic dynasty, or a gentle reminder to the Israelites of God's redemptive purpose for all peoples, and their inclusion in His greater plans. Ruth provides what few accounts do – the genealogy of King David. However, the story of Ruth is not singular in its content, and the language is reminiscent of the themes found in the story and call of Abraham. I wish to explore the concept of Ruth as matriarch as Abraham as patriarch, and through these two characters, our role as strangers in the land as reflected in the New Testament.

To begin, I would like to juxtapose the call and story of Abraham with the journey of Ruth. While the similarity may seem tenuous, the language and themes are familiar. "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your **country** and your **kindred** and your **father's house** to the **land** that I will show you.'" (Gen. 12:1, emphasis mine) We later find, "Our father was a **wandering Aramean... [foreigner]**" (Deut. 26:5)

After the losses suffered by Naomi in Moab, she heard that the famine of her homeland had ended and decided to return to Bethlehem. "Naomi said to her two daughters-

*in-law, 'Go back each of you to your **mother's house**. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband! They she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ... Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go [**country**], I will go; where you **lodge [mother's/father's house]**, I will lodge; your people shall be my **people [kindred]**, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me and more as well, if even death parts me from you!' ... So Naomi returned together with Ruth the **Moabite [wandering foreigner]**, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest."* (Ruth 1: 8-9, 14-17, 22, emphasis mine)

Both Abraham and Ruth left their country, people, and familial home, bereft of heirs. (The text explicitly indicates Sarah's barrenness, Gen. 11:30 and implicitly indicates Ruth's barrenness as she was married for years without bearing a child, Ruth 1:4-5.) Both left their homes out of loyalty to another, and both are remembered as strangers and foreigners coming to a promised land. While God promised Abraham an heir after his long journey to the land of Canaan, Ruth received no such hope.

Miroslav Volf, an influential Christian theologian, states, "The courage to break his cultural and familial ties and abandon the gods of his ancestors (Josh 24:2) out of

allegiance to a God of all families and all cultures was the original Abrahamic revolution. Departure from his native soil, no less than the trust that God will give him an heir, made Abraham the ancestor of us all.^I

Ruth's story is a development and expansion of the Abrahamic theme. Her choice to be a foreigner and to journey made her a spiritual daughter of Abraham. Volf says, "To be a child of Abraham and Sarah and to respond to the call of their God means to make an exodus, to start a voyage, become a stranger (Gen 23:4; 24:1-9)."^{II} However, her role far exceeded simply that of daughter. "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son... The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David." (Ruth 4:13, 17) Matthew recalls this genealogy, beginning with Abraham, including "... Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David... (v.5b-6a)" concluding with "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born who is called the Messiah (v.16)." Ruth is not only recalled as the mother of the Davidic line, but is named as one of the four matriarchs of the Messiah. Like the patriarch before her, Ruth went forth from her country, kindred, and mother's house, leaving behind her ill-remembered people and came into the promised land, bearing a son, and thus finding herself not only redeemed, but redemptive – for Naomi, for her people, and for all mankind.

Being followers of Messiah in the spirit of Ruth and Abraham, we are in a sense strangers in the place in which we reside. "The solution for being a stranger in a wrong way is not full naturalization, but being a stranger in the right way... At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures."^{III} This is the very thing Paul exhorts believers to do at the climax of his epistle to the Philippians.

The Roman generals Mark Anthony and Octavian colonized the city of Philippi in 42 BC. Many of their soldiers were given land in and around the city and remained there as colonists. They did not intend to return to Rome, but in the event they needed the aid of the emperor, he would come and deliver them. These soldiers were Roman citizens, and their role was to export Roman culture and law to

Philippi, not the least of which included the imperial cult, namely that Caesar the emperor should be worshipped as savior and lord.^{IV}

This is the background into which Paul writes the counter-imperial climax of his epistle to the Philippians: "*Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us... our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be confirmed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.*" (Phil. 3:17, 20-4:1)

Roman citizenship is the common reference behind the term "citizenship in heaven." The point of this reference is not that Paul's audience is waiting to escape to the place of their citizenship (from Philippi to Rome, or from earth to heaven), or that citizenship is about a place of residence, but rather that the believers are loyal to and ambassadors of heaven on earth – colonizing earth with heaven, as it were. But this colonization of earth with heaven is not the image usually conjured up when we think of imperial colonial powers overtaking and imposing their will and culture on those around them. This "is a coded call to those living under imperial rule to celebrate the unique lordship of Jesus the Messiah, being prepared to [give up] the privileges of empire as Paul was prepared to [give up] his status as a Pharisee."^V This is not colonization by the threat of the sword, but by the suffering of the cross – by becoming strangers.

Abraham and Ruth were both foreigners in the land of promise. The promise to Abraham was that the land he was dwelling in would one day be his and would no longer be foreign. Ruth was made no promise, but her loyalty to Naomi and belief in the God of Israel led to her redemption and the redemption of the world. They both showed allegiance to God (one of the characteristics of citizenship of heaven), even while marginalized as outsiders in their societies. Following the example of Ruth our matriarch and Abraham our patriarch, we too must choose to be strangers in the land while proclaiming the Messiah's prayer that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6). In the meantime, we pray God will make us like our mother Ruth - both redeemed and redemptive for others.

I Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, p. 29.

II Ibid, p. 39.

III Ibid, pp. 39-40.

IV Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, pp. 225, 230.

V Ibid, p. 235.

News from Netivyah

Netivyah is a multi-functional ministry and one of the leading "leavening" ministries for the Jewish people the world over. Since the publication of the last *Teaching from Zion* on the subject of progress, Netivyah has purchased two additional offices right next to our older office. One of these offices serves as the office for our youth leader and soup kitchen director as well as our youth club, and the other is currently "game room" for the youth that come almost every day to play, to be counseled, and to study the Word of God. These new offices are going to serve many purposes, and we are thankful that we can own our property and not be at the mercy of landlords who can be pressured by the Orthodox Jewish parties and organizations to kick out the disciples of Yeshua.

Our congregational building is nearly 100 years old, and it was built by the methods and materials that were in existence in Israel at that time. Over the the last few months, the floor in the kitchen, the entryway, and the bathrooms suddenly started sinking rather quickly, so we had to open up the entire floor to assess the situation. In the end, we had to lay down a new cement and iron grid under the floor and new tiles, which was a big unexpected expense that had to be done in order to keep people from getting injured. Besides serving as our congregational meeting place, this building also serves as our soup kitchen, which is now feeding 120 Jerusalem households weekly.

We are in the process of giving the finishing touches to the Hebrew version of our *Hidden Treasures* book. This book is small, but it seems to have hit a very important need in the Body of the Messiah. There are very few books that deal with the subject of Hermeneutics and even fewer that deal with Hermeneutics from a first century, Jewish point of view. There is a great need to study and understand this subject in Israel, since many of the congregational leaders have not studied Biblical interpretation in a formal way. Therefore, we will probably sell this book at a very low price and give away most of the 2,000 copies that we will be printing in Hebrew.

The quest to help restore the hidden Jews of Portugal continues as we are starting the second stage of organization for an international conference to bring to the world's attention the plight of these Jews who

were forced to convert to Catholicism and yet kept their Jewish identity in secret. Many tens of thousands of these hidden Jews were killed and burned alive because they ate kosher food or celebrated Passover or circumcised their sons, and even now the fear of torture and the Inquisition lives on in the souls of these people. First, we want to raise international awareness about this issue and bring them and their problems to the light of the world media and public opinion. Second, we would like to see the doors of Israel open to them without forcing them to convert to Orthodox Judaism. We are going to need funds and prayer support to hold this conference in 2010 in Portugal, and we ask you to start praying for the successful resolution of this historical miscarriage of justice that was all done in the name of Jesus and Christianity.

The world financial situation has affected every charity and ministry in the world. We are not cutting down the level of our activities, nor do we plan to cut down the quality and the measure of what Netivyah is doing. The real response to hard times is to do more and not less. It is not right to save funds and keep from doing good with the holy money that was contributed by the saints for the work of the Lord. As long as we can, we are going to do as much and more with everything that God gives us. We pray and hope that you will stand with us in this task and learn from the Psalms that when times are hard we dedicate more to the Lord and not less.

Here in Israel, we have just celebrated Israel's 61st birthday! We have a new government now, and we ask for your prayers that they will do the right thing and not bow to pressure from the international community or even internal special interest groups instead of keeping our country's best interest in mind. The mere fact that Israel has survived this long is a testimony to the grace of God and His love for His people and this land.

We are grateful and thankful for your prayers and your support and hope you enjoy this *Teaching from Zion* magazine on the spring holidays of Pesach and Shavuot. We hope its articles will cause you to think and motivate you to both study more and learn to enjoy the Word of God in your actions and celebrations of God's goodness.

Photo by Woodenship