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Historical Introduction, Translation, and Commentary

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Foreword by David Stern



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The Breaking of the Matzah (*Yahatz*)

After the first dipping, it is the custom of most Jewish communities to break the middle matzah of the three matzot into two pieces and put one aside to be eaten at the end of the meal. This custom, termed *yahatz* in the ancient mnemonic devices for the order of the evening, is not mentioned by Rav Saadiah Gaon, was unknown to Maimonides, and is not practiced by Yemenite communities that follow Maimonides.

There were two explanations for this custom. One explanation was that a broken matzah was considered more appropriate than a whole matzah as a broken one emphasized the idea that matzah was the "bread of distress" (Deut. 16:3). Distressed or poor people eat broken bread or half loaves rather than whole loaves. This idea is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud in support of the ruling that on Pesach one is not required to prefer reciting the blessing over bread on a whole loaf (BT *Berachot* 39b). It is said that R. Hai Gaon understood the passage as meaning that there was no preference on Passover; one may recite the blessing over a whole loaf or over a broken one. He actually spoke against the custom of breaking the matzah before the blessing, thinking it unnecessary. Maimonides accepted the principle that the blessing over the matzah should be said over a broken loaf rather than a whole one, but he considered it sufficient to break one of the matzot later in the evening—just before reciting the blessing over bread. The blessing was then recited over two matzot, but one of them was broken. Maimonides gives no special instruction about what to do with the piece that had been broken off (*Hilkhot Hametz u-Matzah* 8:6). Traditional Yemenites follow the instructions of Maimonides but most communities now break the matzah at the beginning of the evening, apparently thinking that the haggadah itself should be recited over broken bread.

The other reason for breaking the matzah at this point is that this serves as an additional opportunity to arouse the curiosity of the children. Breaking the matzah would seem to mean that it was going to be distributed for eating. In other words, this would seem to be part of the pattern of a regular meal. However, instead of eating the matzah, one removes the seder plate and begins the story of the redemption. It may be that a somewhat obscure passage in the Tosefta refers to a custom of giving matzah to the children at this point in the seder.

The Story of the Redemption (*Maggid*)

The Structure

The heart of the haggadah is the section referred to as *maggid*. This section is a conglomerate of passages that have been added, and occasionally changed, throughout the generations. Nevertheless, we can discern a structure to this section, at least post facto.

The section begins with the four questions and concludes with the blessing over the second cup of wine. For this reason, the second cup is sometimes referred to as the cup of the haggadah. The connection between the second cup and *maggid* is illustrated by the instruction, already found in the Mishnah, to fill the second cup at the beginning of *maggid*, even though it will be drunk much later. The connection between the cup and the haggadah is further emphasized by the instruction of Maimonides to remove the table or tray (*Hilkhot Hametz u-Matzah* 8:2), which includes the matzah, before the questions. According to Maimonides, the tray or table is returned only at the presentation of matzah and *maror* (*Hilkhot Hametz u-Matzah* 8:4) just before the conclusion of the *maggid* section. Therefore, just the wine is left on the table during *maggid*.

However, rabbinical tradition connected the matzah with the story of the Exodus. Samuel expounded the biblical term "*lehem oni*" (bread of distress: Deut. 16:3) to mean "bread over which one recites many things" (BT *Pesachim* 36b). This is based on a play of words, reading "*oni*" as if derived from the root *o-n-h* (answer or recite). According to this theory, the matzah is the focus of the *maggid* section. This merged with yet another homiletic explanation of the term "*lehem oni*," that the matzah of the seder should be broken bread, which was discussed above.

Using the bread as the focus of the *maggid* underlines the intrinsic difference between the first part of the *maggid* text and its final passages. The first part talks of the Exodus, expands on biblical passages connected to it, and explains its symbols. Matzah, which is a symbol both of slavery and of redemption, is a suitable focal point for this part of the *maggid*. The second part consists of songs of praise or *Hallel*—two chapters of Psalms (113, 114). The first of these psalms doesn't even have any specific mention of the Egypt or the Exodus. This difference between the two parts of *maggid* is first mentioned in twelfth-century French sources.²⁶ These sources state that one is to lift up the cup of wine just before the *Hallel* as song is connected to wine. Although this instruction is late, the distinction between the chapters of *Hallel* and the texts that precede it is clear and intrinsic.

There are two exceptions to the focus on matzah that are inherent in the performance of the seder. One is related to the passage *ve-~~hi~~ shé-amdáh*, which refers to the covenant between God and Abraham. According to Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz (1565–1630), one should raise up the cup while reciting this passage, for unexplained kabbalistic reasons.²⁷ The corollary of this is that the matzah should be covered while holding the cup—because matzah, representing the staff of life, is more important than wine. Emphasizing the wine in the presence of matzah is considered disrespectful to the matzah.

The second exception to the focus on matzah comes when reciting the Ten Plagues. A custom arose of spilling out some wine at each of the plagues. This

26. H. L. Ehrenreich, ed., *Sefer Hapardes Le-Rashi Z"q* (Budapest, 1924), 51.

27. Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot ha-Brit, Massekhet Pesachim, Ner Mitzvah* 31.

custom, first noted in Ashkenazic sources of the twelfth century,²⁸ is explained, in the earliest sources, as an expression of the idea that these plagues are not applicable to the participants but only to the enemies of Israel. Later sources explained that the reason for this was to express the idea that the participant's cup is not full when troubles befall others—even enemies. Later discussions of this custom refined this notion by stating that wine should not be spilled from the cup but should rather be sprinkled into a dish from a finger that had been dipped in the cup. These sources even defined which finger should be used to remove the wine from the cup, whereas other sources, perhaps more fastidious, thought that the wine should be spilled directly from the cup. A further modification was to remove drops from a surrogate cup, filled with vinegar. Modern scholars have noticed a similarity between the custom of spilling of wine into a cup and an ancient Sicilian game called *cottabos*, in which the participants flicked wine into a basin. However, there is no mention of this custom in ancient sources so one should rather look to medieval Germany for its origin.

Although these two exceptions give the appearance that the *maggid* section is not to be considered as a single unit focused on the matzah, the lateness of the connection of these two passages specifically with wine, rather than matzah, justifies our consideration of this whole unit as a single entity. This does not mean, of course, that all the passages included in this section were introduced at the same time or even at the same place. Nevertheless, it is not out of place to understand the whole unit as a structured unit. It opens with questions about the food and it closes with R. Gamliel's explanations of the foods. Between the opening and closing food statements, we find four main units: three versions of the Exodus story and a recapitulation of God's grace. Between the first and second stories of the Exodus we find passages that serve as transitions. A structured table of contents of the whole unit may help to clarify this.

A. The questions about the foods

1. First version of the Exodus story (*avodim hayyinu*: Deut. 6:21)
 The way the seder was conducted by the sages
 The way the message is to be explained to the four children
2. Second version of the Exodus story (*mitheilah ovdei avodah zarah*: Josh. 24:2)
 (mention of the covenant of Abraham)
3. The *bikkurim* story of the Exodus and its midrash (*arami oved avi*: Deut. 26:5)
4. A recapitulation of God's grace (*Dayenu* and *al ahat kamah vekhamah*)

B. R. Gamliel's explanation of the foods

28. Until recently, this was known only from later sources who attributed it to Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms, a German pietist who flourished at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries. It has recently been found in his writings; see Rabbi Elazar Vormsensis, *Oratio ad Pascam* [in Hebrew], edited by Simcha Emanuel (Jerusalem: Sumptibus Societatis Mekize Nirdamim, 2006), 101.

We notice that passage A is responded to in B, forming an envelope around the various stories of the Exodus. We may also discern an order in the way that the various stories of the Exodus are arranged. The first story, based on Deuteronomy 6:21, deals with the most immediate sense of the Exodus: we were slaves and now we are free. The second story, based on Joshua 24, expands on the spiritual meaning of the story: at first we were idol worshipers and now God has brought us into His service. The third, final story, based on the declaration of one who brings first fruits to the Temple in Deuteronomy 26, is open to interpretation—depending on how we translate the first verse. According to what we have assumed to be the earliest interpretation, this story tells of the ancestor of the Jewish people who was a homeless wanderer, and it ends with the settlement of the Jews in the Land of Israel. This, of course, broadens the story historically as the first story ends with physical freedom, achieved immediately at the Exodus; the second ends with spiritual freedom, reaching its peak at Mount Sinai; and the third ends with the settling of the Land of Israel, years later. However, as this story has been reinterpreted, its general message is one for the future: enemies have always risen against the Jewish people and God has always been there to save them from their enemies. This is followed by a recapitulation of the great things that God has done for the Jewish people, culminating in the building of the Temple, which, in this context, is clearly meant for the future.

Finally, the passages between the first and second story and the passage between the second and third story serve as transitions between the stories; their significance will be explained in context.

Questions and Answers—Paschal Foods

We have already noted the connection between the questions asked at the beginning of the evening and the declaration of R. Gamliel that comes shortly before the meal. This connection between the questions and the three main foods of the evening has become obscured due to the fact that the text of the questions in the haggadah has undergone a number of changes. As noted above, the earliest texts of the Mishnah have only three questions that relate to the three foods required to be eaten during the evening: Why matzah? Why dipping? Why roast meat? The questions relate to the superficial aspects of these foods, inquiring what the reason is for eating these foods and what their significance is. Despite the similarities between the questions, the everyday custom presumed by each is distinctly different.

The three foods that were required to be eaten were not special foods. In modern times, the matzah eaten at the seder is distinct from the foods usually served at the table. However, in talmudic times, unleavened bread, such as modern pita bread, may have been served frequently. It was easily prepared, as one did not have to go through the fermenting process, waiting for the dough to rise. Thus a question about this had to be formulated in a negative way: not

“Why do we eat matzah?” but “Why don’t we eat any other kind of bread?” The same is true of the roast meat eaten at the meal. Meat is often eaten roasted. What was unique was that the menu consisted of only roasted meat, either the meat of the paschal lamb or roast meat eaten in commemoration of the paschal lamb. So the question took the form of “Why don’t we eat meat prepared in any other way?” The preferred vegetable for *maror*, lettuce, was neither unique nor served in any special way. The only way to make the eating of lettuce distinctive was by serving or eating it in a different fashion from what was done regularly. Since everyday customs changed from place to place and from time to time, we find that early sources present us with different versions for the question of dipping.

What is probably the earliest version of the dipping question is found in the manuscripts of the Mishnah. The question was: “On all other nights we dip but once and tonight we dip twice.” This version shows that the normal custom was to dip once. It is not clear exactly which dipping was the additional one but we might assume, based on Roman custom, that the dipping before the meal was usual, whereas the additional dipping was the one done at the beginning of the meal. The *Eretz Yisra’el* Talmud tells of the existence of another version of this question: “On all other nights we dip [or: eat] it with bread and tonight we dip it by itself.” Babylonian sages also had to change the version of the question as it appeared in the Mishnah in order to make it appropriate for their customs. After several attempts at revising this question, the version finally accepted was that which appears in modern *haggadot*: “On all other nights we do not dip even once, tonight we dip twice.”

A fourth question was added to the original three in *amoraic* times. This question is: “On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, on this night *maror*.” This is clearly a later question as it appears neither in the best manuscripts of the Mishnah nor in early manuscripts of the haggadah. The reason for adding this question was, apparently, the recognition that the questions should relate to the special foods of the evening, coupled with the difficulty of connecting the question of dipping vegetables specifically with bitter herbs. This latter difficulty was enhanced by the substitution of a vegetable other than lettuce for the first dipping, as noted above. The formulation of this question followed the pattern of the questions about matzah and roast meat—even though, at least in later times, it was no longer accurate: other vegetables were eaten at the seder and the first dipping itself was with an “other” vegetable.

The final change in these questions occurred in *gaonic* times. The campaign to eliminate roast meat from the meal succeeded and the question about roast meat was no longer relevant. It seems that by this time the number of four questions had become a canonic number, so the elimination of the question about roast meat required the addition of another question. The question added was: “On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, on this night we all recline.” The custom of reclining at meals was no longer prevalent, and it was preserved only as a halakhic requirement at the seder. In earlier times it could

not have been marked as a unique feature of the seder, but in gaonic times it was appropriate for an additional question. This question is not found in any text of the Mishnah or in early *haggadot*. The great majority of texts of any type have either the question about roast meat or the question about reclining, showing that “reclining” was a substitute for the question about roast meat. Nevertheless there are several *haggadot* from the Cairo Genizah that include both questions, such as TS H 152,²⁹ making a total of five questions for the evening.

R. Gamliel provides the answers to the questions: “Whoever did not say these three things on Passover has not fulfilled their obligation: *Pesach*, matzah, and *maror*.” It is unlikely that R. Gamliel meant that one just had to *say* these three words. The word “*amar*,” translated here as “say,” might be better translated here as “explain,” as it is used in Aramaic. The explanations following this statement should also be attributed to R. Gamliel.³⁰ The version of these explanations found in the Mishnah differs from that found in the *haggadot* in a number of major points. I present the text of the explanations as it appears in the best manuscripts of the Mishnah:

Passover—for the *Makom* passed over the home of our ancestors in Egypt;
bitter herbs—for the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt;
matzah—for they were redeemed.

The most significant difference between this text and the text preserved in the *haggadot* is the explanation of the matzah. The haggadah states that the reason for eating matzah is because “the dough of our ancestors had not risen before the King of Kings, the Holy one Blessed be He, appeared before them and redeemed them, as it is said: ‘And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves’ (Exod. 12:39).” This explanation seems clear and reasonable, and Naomi Cohen has claimed to have found a parallel to this in the writings of Philo.³¹

The stark explanation given in the Mishnah, “for they were redeemed,” is not clear. Some scholars have suggested that this explanation is based on a play on words—matzah sounds like *motzi* (brings out). The only justification for this interpretation of the explanation is that the explanations for Passover and bitter

29. A facsimile of this is found in Kasher, *Haggadah Shelemah*, 91.

30. G. Alon has suggested that the words “*Pesach*, *matzzah*, and *maror*” were not originally part of R. Gamliel’s statement, which originally stressed the three explanations presented in the Mishnah.

31. Naomi G. Cohen, *Philo Judaeus: His Universe of Discourse* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 308–309. For a discussion of the rabbinical sources see Tabory, *Pesach Dorot*, 51.

herbs are also based on wordplays. Indeed, the element of wordplay is most obvious in connection with the sacrifice for there is no other reason for calling this sacrifice "Passover" but for the fact that it celebrates the passing over. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the explanation for matzah is not satisfying, and no better explanation has been offered.

There are two major differences in the structure of the explanation between the Mishnah and the haggadah. The first is that the Mishnah gives direct explanations and is satisfied with that. The haggadah turns each explanation into the form of question and answer, that is: "For what reason do we eat this matzah? Because . . ." The second is that the haggadah is not satisfied with a simple answer but it supplies a biblical proof-text for each explanation. The formulation of the statements as questions and answers and the addition of biblical proof-texts in midrashic form give these statements the nature of other parts of the haggadah. There are some texts that retain the original explanation of the matzah with the proof-text: "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves" (Exod. 12:39).³² This biblical proof-text is not really appropriate for there is no clear-cut relationship between the explanation, "for they were redeemed," and the biblical verse, which just points out that they had been driven out of Egypt before they managed to bake leavened bread. It was necessary to add a verse, since the other two foods also had verses attached to them. However, no more appropriate verse could be found. It is possible that its addition, necessary for structural reasons, was the cause of changing the explanation.

There are several other variants between the two texts that are of interest. One of the most significant is the actualization of the foods. In the Mishnah, the foods are discussed abstractly: *Pesach*, matzah, and *maror*. The haggadah, however, emphasizes that these foods are eaten by the participants. The question is not "For what reason is matzah?" but "For what reason do we eat this matzah?" In some manuscripts, this actualization appears only in connection with matzah and *maror*. The paschal lamb is not actualized for it could not be eaten after the destruction of the Second Temple. The traditional text presents a compromise: the paschal lamb is referred to as that "which our ancestors ate when the Temple existed." Perhaps connected with this is the substitution of "Holy One, Blessed be He" instead of the *ha-Makom*³³ as the appellation of God.

32. See the text of the Mishnah as preserved in the Valmadonna manuscript of the Babylonian tractate of *Pesachim*.

33. For the translation of this term see p. 86.

The Story: From Lowliness to Glory

The Mishnah prescribes that the story of the Exodus should present a contrast: beginning with disgrace or lowly status and ending with glory and pride. The Mishnah does not prescribe any specific text for this story, other than the midrashic explanation of Deuteronomy 26:1–5. Our first evidence for the first two stories of the Exodus in the traditional haggadah is from *amoraic* times. Rav is quoted as saying that one should recapitulate Jewish history as was done in the beginning³⁴ by Joshua, that is, “In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods” (Josh. 24:2; JT *Pesachim* 10:5; 37d). The passage suggested by Rav appears in both the Babylonian and *Eretz Yisra’el* versions of the haggadah.

A somewhat different form of Rav’s suggestion appears in the Babylonian Talmud (BT *Pesachim* 116a). Here we find a disagreement with Samuel over the definition of the mishnaic rubric for the haggadah that one “starts with disgrace.” Rav states that one should begin: “Originally, our forefathers were idol worshipers,” which seems to be a paraphrase of the verse from Joshua quoted above. However, Samuel offered another suggestion—that one should use the recapitulation of Jewish history found in a Deuteronomic passage: “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt” (Deut. 6:21). This passage is actually prescribed by the Torah as the beginning of a lesson to children who ask about the significance of the commandments. Samuel’s suggestion was accepted in the traditional haggadah but it does not appear in the *Eretz Yisra’el* haggadah as defined by the *haggadot* found in the Cairo Genizah.

Apparently, neither Rav nor Samuel felt that the demand that the pattern of “shame and glory” should appear in the haggadah was fulfilled by expounding the above-mentioned Deuteronomic verses (or, perhaps, was no longer fulfilled by it; see below). Their alternatives described the shame but neglected to describe the glory with which one was to conclude. The traditional haggadah completes this pattern for Rav by noting that God has led us to His worship and, for Samuel, it notes that God has freed us from slavery. It is interesting to note that both biblical passages, that of Deuteronomy and that of Joshua, conclude the recapitulation of Jewish history with the gift of the Land of Israel to the Children of Israel. Traditional *haggadot* do not contain the complete biblical passages. This gives meaning to the statement of Rava, two generations after Samuel, that one must say “and us He freed from there” (Deut. 6:23). This is the final verse of the passage considered mandatory by Samuel. It would seem that people refrained from citing this verse as its conclusion—“that He might take us and give us the land that He had promised on oath to our fathers”—was not relevant to Diaspora Jewry. Therefore, Rava found it necessary to insist that at least the first part of this verse must be said.

34. This word, “*kit’chilah*,” was corrupted into “*mit’chilah*,” which was understood to mean “from the beginning” and was incorporated into the text of the haggadah.

The Midrash

The mishnaic description of the early paschal ritual tells us that “he begins with the disgrace (or: lowly status), and concludes with glory; and he expounds the biblical passage ‘my father was a fugitive Aramean’ until the end of the section.” The specific passage denoted by the Mishnah to be part of the haggadah is the passage from Deuteronomy (26:5ff.), which was the declaration required by the Torah for one who brought first fruits to the Temple. The Mishnah marks the beginning of the passage by its opening phrase, but its definition of the end is not totally clear. All three clauses of the mishnaic prescription have been the subject of vast amounts of scholarly discussion. For purposes of clarity, I will deal with them in reverse order.

I will first deal with the interpretation of the closing phrase of the instructions: “until he concludes the portion.” This phrase cannot be taken literally, in its present context,³⁵ for the portion concludes with the verse “Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O Lord, have given me” (Deut. 26:10). This verse is obviously irrelevant and inappropriate for the seder evening. The question of the inclusion of the penultimate verse, “He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut. 26:9), has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. This verse is not included, in rabbinical tradition, as part of the haggadah. However, it would have been appropriate for the people who ate the paschal lamb in Jerusalem, especially according to the rabbinical midrash that “this place” refers to the Temple (*Sifrei Devarim* 301, p. 319). Therefore, it has been suggested that this last verse was originally part of the haggadah of those who celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem, and possibly for all the residents of *Eretz Yisra’el*. This verse was eliminated from the haggadah after the destruction of the Second Temple, or perhaps even earlier—by people who conducted a paschal meal outside of Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.

We may now turn to an understanding of the correct translation of the opening biblical verse. The translation cited above, “My father was a fugitive Aramean” (Deut. 26:5), is the modern JPS translation. Rabbinical tradition, as preserved in the haggadah, translates this verse as “An Aramean (Laban) tried to destroy my father.” Something of a compromise between these two understandings is found in the *Sifrei Devarim*, which expounds this verse as “this teaches us that Jacob went to Aram as a wanderer and the Torah considers Laban as if he had destroyed him” (*Sifrei Devarim* 301, p. 319). Some medieval commentators and many modern scholars have tended to accept the first translation as the correct meaning of this verse. Modern scholars have shown that this explanation was also known in antiquity, and scholars have tried to explain

35. This text appears also in the mishnah of *Bikkurim* 3:6, which tells of the reading of this passage in the context of bringing the first fruits. Scholars suspect that the passage in *Pesachim* was copied from *Bikkurim* in spite of the inappropriateness of the last phrase.

why the rabbis reinterpreted this passage.³⁶ It is possible that the two issues, the use of the penultimate verse and the understanding of the first verse, are related. While the Temple existed, people who included the penultimate verse of this portion in their haggadah understood the whole passage as truly representing their radical change in status. The people had started out as fugitives or wandering nomads, and now they stood in their permanent home, the land given to them by God. This interpretation fits in well with the Mishnah's description of the text as "beginning with disgrace and ending with praise." After the destruction of the Temple, the penultimate verse, no longer relevant, was omitted. It is possible that this verse was never part of the haggadah outside of Jerusalem. Without this verse, the portion closed with the salvation from Egyptian oppression. There was no longer any parallelism between the lowly beginning as nomads and their present status as people saved from persecution. Perhaps this was the reason that the first verse was reinterpreted to deal with oppression rather than with landlessness.³⁷ In this way, the rhetorical pattern was retained: we began as persecuted by Laban and now we have been saved from persecution and slavery.

Although the Mishnah demands the exposition of this biblical portion, it does not give any details about the nature of this exposition. We have three midrashim on this chapter: one found in the halakhic midrash to the book of Deuteronomy (*Sifrei Devarim* 301, p. 318), a second one found in the traditional *haggadot*, and a third in Cairo Genizah *haggadot*.³⁸ Although the *Sifrei Devarim* might be thought of as the earliest of the three, its great similarity to the version found in the traditional versions of the haggadah has suggested to scholars that it is an interpolation in the *Sifrei Devarim* from the haggadah. Be that as it may, the similarity between the two eliminates the necessity to deal separately with the version in *Sifrei Devarim*.

The two versions found in the *haggadot* apparently reflect differences between the Babylonian version of the haggadah, found in the traditional *haggadot*, and the *Eretz Yisra'el* version as found in the *genizah haggadot*. The *Eretz Yisra'el* version of this midrash has very little midrashic material. In fact, this midrash consists only of a few midrashic explanations of the opening verse and an expansion of the closing verse. There are only two comments that are

36. Tigay has suggested that the rabbis found it difficult to think of their ancestors as Arameans; see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *JPS Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 243. The latest discussion of the history of the interpretation of this verse is Menahem I. Kahana, *Sifre Zuta on Deuteronomy: Citations from a New Tannaitic Midrash* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003), 415–417. See also Karin Zetterholm, *Portrait of a Villain: Laban the Aramean in Rabbinic Literature* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).

37. For the possibility that the reinterpretation was influenced by Christian typology, see Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Christian Dialogue," 111–113.

38. See p. xiv, n. 8.

common to both traditions. The first is the opening comment that the meaning of this biblical passage is that Laban tried to destroy Jacob. The second is an expansion of the verse "And he went down to Egypt" (Deut. 26:5), explaining that Jacob did not do so by choice but rather that he was forced to do so by the word of God (see p. 90).

There is one other comment that seems to be common to both traditions and that is the midrashic expansion to the verse "The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents" (Deut. 26:8). The midrash took this to be a hint to the Ten Plagues. The first three terms ("mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power") refer to six plagues, as each term consists of two words, and the final two terms ("signs and portents") refer to four plagues as each of the two terms appears in plural form. Although this explanation appears in both traditions, in the Babylonian tradition it follows another, less fanciful explanation to this verse, and it is preceded by the words "another explanation" (*davar acher*). Thus this explanation may be an addition to the Babylonian tradition and an example of the influence of the *Eretz Yisra'el* tradition on that of Babylon.³⁹ The traditional haggadah, in turn, enhanced this explanation with the addition of an expanded numerical midrash counting the plagues, an explanation that was yet considered by R. Saadiah, in the tenth century, as a permissible option but not necessary.⁴⁰

The midrash of the Deuteronomistic passage in the traditional haggadah has been shown to be of two distinct patterns. The more common pattern does not really expound on the biblical passages but just quotes biblical prooftexts that substantiate the Deuteronomistic passage.⁴¹ Thus, for instance, the verse that states that the Jews went to Egypt "with meager numbers" (Deut. 26:5) is substantiated by quoting another verse, "Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven" (Deut. 10:22). The prooftext is introduced by "as it is said" and there is no further explanation. It is noteworthy that this type of midrash, which might be called "primitive midrash," does not appear in the *Eretz Yisra'el* version. It has been suggested that this form of midrash is actually the later one.⁴²

The other pattern follows more traditional midrash, adding explanations to the main text without prooftexts. An example of this is a text that we have men-

39. For examples of mutual influence see Rovner, "An Early Passover Haggadah According to the Palestinian Rite."

40. *Siddur R. Saadja Gaon* [in Hebrew], edited by I. Davidson, S. Assaf, and B. I. Joel (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1941), 243.

41. See David Henshke, "The *Midrash* of the Passover *Haggadah*" [in Hebrew], *Sidra* 4 (1988): 33-52. Henshke argues that this was the original part of the midrash.

42. Rovner, "A New Version of the Eres Israel Haggadah Liturgy and the Evolution of the Eres Israel 'Miqra' Bikkurim' Midrash."

tioned above. The haggadah adds to the verse “And he went down into Egypt” (Deut. 26:5) the explanation: “compelled by the [Divine] word.” This is a remarkable example as there is nothing in the verse itself that mandates this interpretation and the interpretation cries out for a proof-text to verify its statement.⁴³ Another example of this type of midrash is the opening passage of our midrash, identifying the biblical Aramean as Laban, attempting to destroy the incipient Jewish nation, which is also explanatory, without any proof-text at all. However, this example does not follow the regular pattern of first quoting the verse and then giving the explanation but instead reverses it by first quoting the explanation and then bringing the biblical verse as a quasi proof-text for the explanation.

Many of the expositions are confluences of the two methods. Thus we read “‘and sojourned there’ (Deut. 26:5)—this teaches that Jacob our father did not go down to settle but to sojourn there, as it is said: ‘For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen’ (Gen. 47:4).” Here we have an explanation about the intent of Jacob, followed by a verse that seems to have been meant to justify the explanation, but really adds nothing.

We have one example of a parallel between the Babylonian version and the *Eretz Yisra’el* version that demonstrates clearly the issue of conflated midrash. The Babylonian text reads: “‘And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt’ (Deut. 26:8)—not by an angel; not by a seraph; nor by a messenger but the Holy One, Blessed be He, in His own glory and He alone as it says: ‘For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I the LORD’ (Exod. 12:12).” The *Eretz Yisra’el* version lacks the proof-text, ending with “He alone.” We cannot be sure what this comparison implies. On the one hand, we might think that the original version of this text was an ordinary midrashic text, as it appears in the *Eretz Yisra’el* version, and the Babylonian version added a proof-text to make its pattern conform to the pattern of the majority of the other midrashim. On the other hand, it is possible that the *Eretz Yisra’el* version eliminated this proof-text. This passage has been discussed as a component of the Jewish-Christian polemic in its stressing that Moses was not the redeemer, “thereby refuting the view that Moses is an archetype of Jesus.”⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that the polemic, if it really

43. See Kasher, *Haggadah Shelemah*, 34.

44. Yuval, “Easter and Passover as Early Christian Dialogue,” 110. Cf. P. Winter, “*Ou Dia Xeir Presbews oude Dia Xeir Serape oude Dia Angelou: Isa lxiii:9* [in Greek] (the Septuagint reading for Isaiah 63:9), and the Passover Haggadah *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1954): 439–441; Judah Goldin, “Not by Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdale Goodenough*, *Studies in the History of Religions XIV* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 412–424; idem, *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 163–173.

exists, is much stronger in the Babylonian version, where anti-Christian polemic would seem much less important than it is in the *Eretz Yisra'el* version, the home of such polemic as existed.

We may now turn to the opening phrase of the Mishnah, which calls on the reader to begin with lowly origins and end with glory. This rhetorical pattern, beginning with lowly origin to stress the heights to which one has risen, is obvious and was well known in antiquity.⁴⁵ However, it is not clear whether the mishnaic call to use this pattern is meant to describe the exposition of the biblical *bikkurim* passage mentioned in the Mishnah immediately afterward or rather calls to recite another text, only after which one is to expound the biblical passage. The presumed original interpretation of this *bikkurim* passage, that the ancestors were wandering nomads who have finally, through the grace of God, reached their homeland, fits well with this pattern. The interpretation preserved in the traditional haggadah, that the ancestors were persecuted by Laban and finally rescued by God from the hands of Pharaoh, does not fit the rhetoric pattern as well as the other.

The Other *Maggid* Texts That Are in Common Use

I will now turn to the other, ancillary, texts of the *maggid* section. The section opens with an Aramaic presentation of the matzah used at the seder as the "bread of distress (or: affliction) eaten by our ancestors in Egypt." The opening of the *maggid* with an explanation of the significance of the matzah has been considered as of great antiquity. Attempts have been made to show a parallel to this statement in Philo,⁴⁶ and others have discerned in it an anti-Christian polemic.⁴⁷ However, the fact that this introduction does not appear in *Eretz Yisra'el* versions of the haggadah suggests that it is late material and of Babylonian origin. It does not appear in the siddur of Rav Saadiah Gaon, but the conclusion of the passage, expressing the hope that the participants will yet be free men and will return to the Land of Israel, does appear in his siddur.⁴⁸ The expression of this hope also argues for a non-*Eretz Yisra'el* provenance.

The Passover of the Sages

The next texts to be considered are the texts that come between the story of the Exodus as suggested by Samuel and the story of the Exodus as suggested by Rav. Here we find two interpolations. The first interpolation consists of two units. The first unit consists of two stories about sages who discussed the

45. For the influence of this direction on Christian thought see Everett Ferguson, "The Disgrace and the Glory: A Jewish Motif in Early Christianity," *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989): 86-94.

46. Cohen *Philo Judaeus*, 306.

47. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Christian Dialogue," 105-106.

48. *Siddur R. Saadiah Gaon*, 136.

Exodus. These two stories are introduced by the statement that “even if we are all wise, we are all understanding, we are all elders, we all know the Torah, we are obligated to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Everyone who lengthens the discussion is praiseworthy.” These passages are not found in *Eretz Yisra’el haggadot* or in the haggadah of Rav Saadia Gaon. They are found in the *haggadot* of Rav Natronai, Rav Amram, and Maimonides and in all later *haggadot* that have been examined.

Although the two stories come from different sources, they combine in a thematic whole. The first story tells us of sages who were discussing the story of the Exodus throughout the night until their students came and told them that it was time to recite the morning *Shema*:

One time R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, R. Eliezer b. Azaryah, R. Akiva, and R. Tarfon were participating in a festive meal in B’nei B’rak and were discussing the Exodus throughout the night, until their students came and said to them: “Our masters, it is time to recite the morning *Shema*.” (See p. 85)

This passage is not found in any rabbinical source other than the haggadah. There is a similar story in the Tosefta (*Pesachim* 10:11, pp. 198–199) that also tells of a banquet of sages that seems to have taken place on Passover eve. This story reads:

Once R. Gamliel and sages were gathered together in the home of Ben Zonin in Lydda and they were engaged in the laws of Passover all night until the cock crowed. The tables were removed and they went to the bet midrash.

The Toseftan story has several points in common with the story in the haggadah. Both stories took place in the land of Judaea, not far from each other, in the first decades after the destruction of the Second Temple, and they both purport to tell us how the sages celebrated the Passover eve. They both tell of a banquet of sages, without telling us whether others, such as women and children, were present. Both tell us that the sages’ discussion continued until the morning, although one version implies that they would have continued on if the students had not interrupted them. The significant difference is that the story in the Tosefta tells us that the sages devoted themselves to the study of law whereas the story in the haggadah tells us that they talked about the Exodus. These two versions seem to reflect two different approaches to what type of discussion was appropriate for the evening. The approach that was accepted in the standard haggadah was to deal with history and legend rather than with *halakhah*. However, the halakhic approach appears even in the standard haggadah: the response to the wise child is to teach him the laws of Passover.

This unit continues with a second story, taken from the Mishnah (*Berachot* 1:5). This story tells us of a discussion by rabbis whether there was an obligation to remember the Exodus in the evening. The context of the story is ambiguous. In the context of the Mishnah it is clear that this discussion has nothing to do with Passover but is rather a discussion about the obligation to remember the

Exodus on every night of the year. It is brought in the Mishnah to document how the sages reached the decision, stated in the prior Mishnah, that one is obligated to remember the Exodus in the evening. In the present-day evening prayer there are two mentions of the Exodus. The first is found in the third chapter of the *Shema* and the second is found in the penultimate blessing of the *Shema*. In the *Eretz Yisra'el* version of the *Shema*, the third chapter was not recited in the evening and, therefore, the ruling of the Mishnah must be referring to the mention of the *Shema* in the penultimate blessing. However, many commentators, neglecting to take the *Eretz Yisra'el* custom into consideration, thought that the reference in the Mishnah was to the mention of the Exodus in the third chapter of the *Shema*. Be that as it may, the context of the story in the haggadah makes it seem as if this story were a continuation of the prior story about the Passover celebration of the sages. Indeed, some versions add the words "to them," reading: "Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah said to them," making it very clear that this story is a continuation of the prior story. Although the composition is historically inaccurate, the combination of the two stories offers us a narrative that is typical of later sympotic literature. The sages were discussing the Exodus when their students arrived to tell them that it was time to recite the morning *Shema*. Rather than getting up to recite the *Shema*, the incident provoked a discussion about proper times for the fulfillment of the commandment to remember the Exodus. It is instructive to note that the discussion in the second story is not of the Exodus but of the laws related to the Exodus. Similar stories, in which events at the meal provoke discussion connected with those events, are found in sympotic literature. The purpose of this combined story, within the framework of the haggadah, is to tell us that one should discuss the Exodus at length and, therefore, although the bare history of the Exodus has already been completed, the haggadah now turns to other versions of the story.⁴⁹

The Four Children

The second interpolation is also a composite passage, presenting us with four different types of children and explaining how one should relate to each type.⁵⁰ The function of this interpolation here may be understood as a justification for continuing with different versions of the Exodus as each individual must understand the message of the Exodus in his own way. The previous passage focused on sages and their lengthy discussions even though they are presumed to know it all. Now it is necessary to explain the story to everyone according to his understanding and tendencies. This is exemplified by the various types of individuals found in each family.

49. In the commentary, I will discuss the age of R. Eleazar ben Azariah and the continuation of the *derashah*.

50. See F. O. Francis, "The Baraita of the Four Sons," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42 (1974): 280–297; *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Literature* 1 (1972): 245–283.

The passage about the four children is found in all Babylonian versions of the haggadah and, with minor variations, in the *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (Pisha 18, ed. Lauterbach, pp. 166–167), the midrash *halakhah* to Exodus. We shall refer to it as a *baraita*, a term commonly used for material that is assumed to be of *tannaitic* origin even though it is not found in the Mishnah. This *baraita* is found also in the Jerusalem Talmud (JT *Pesachim* 10:4, 37d), with greater variations. Nevertheless, it is not found in the *Eretz Yisra'el haggadot*.

Most of the *haggadot* introduce this interpolation with an expression of thanks to God who has given the Torah to His people: “Blessed is the *Makom*, Blessed is He; Blessed is He who gave the Torah to His people, Blessed is He.”

The *baraita* of the four children is a complex passage based on biblical interpretation and rabbinical patterns of rhetoric. The Torah contains five passages that talk about transmitting the message of the Exodus and the events connected with it to future generations. Three of these passages utilize the Exodus in contexts that are not connected to Passover. In one of them, a parent is commanded to respond to a child’s question about the redemption of firstborn boys with the statement that God took the Children of Israel out of Egypt with force, killing the Egyptian’s firstborn when Pharaoh refused to let the people go (Exod. 13:14–16). The second verse tells a parent to respond to the child’s question about the meaning of the commandments with the statement that God freed the Jews from Egyptian slavery and gave them the Land of Israel, which justifies His demand to observe all the commandments (Deut. 6:21). The third verse is an aside about the purpose of hardening the heart of Pharaoh “that you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons’ sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians . . . in order that you may know that I am the Lord” (Exod. 10:1–2). None of these three verses specifies that these statements are to be used at the paschal celebration. Nevertheless, the first two are included in the *baraita* of the four children as responses to children whereas the third is totally ignored in the haggadah.

The two other verses are more directly connected to Passover. The first (Exod. 12:26–27) talks about the sacrifice of the paschal lamb in the Land of Israel. When the children ask, “What do you mean by this rite?” you should reply, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.” The final verse tells us that, while observing the seven-day matzah festival, “you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt’” (Exod. 13:8).

The four verses that serve as the base of this *baraita* do not explicitly distinguish between the types of children who are the springboard for the discussion. However, some linguistic and stylistic differences between the passages may be the source of the rabbinical exegesis. The clearest example of this is the passage “And you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt’” (Exod. 13:8). Since this passage con-

tains nothing about this statement being a response to the child's asking, it was clear to the sages that this child was not capable of asking questions.

It is also fairly easy to understand how the sages assumed that one of the three remaining passages referred to a wicked child. Two of the three begin with a child's asking (*yishal*) while one begins with a child's saying (*yomru*; Exod. 12:26). This fact may have been joined with the content of the statement, "What do you mean by this rite?" to facilitate the understanding that the inquirer is a difficult child. Comparing this question to the similar question, "What does this mean?" (Exod. 13:14) could bring us to understand, as the sages did, that the first question shows a lack of personal interest and involvement in what is going on.

Finally, we are left with two questions in which the Torah actually uses the verb "ask." They are "What does this mean?" (Exod. 13:14) and "What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the Lord our God has enjoined upon you?" (Deut. 6:21). If we have to assign one question to a wise person and one to a less sophisticated questioner, the choice is clear.

The question that remains to be asked is why there have to be four children. Why not three (not distinguishing between the two who ask) or five (including the verse that is ignored)? This question is related to another problem connected with the division of the four children. The division into four is not on the same level. Two of the four children are clearly graded according to their intellectual level: wise, and one who is not capable of framing a question. The place of the "simple" child is ambiguous. Does "simple" (*tam*) represent simple piety or does it represent a simple mind? The Jerusalem Talmud has, in this place, a "foolish" (*tippesh*) child, which is clearly an intellectual attribute. The wicked child clearly represents a personality characteristic and should be in apposition to a good or pious child. This has led scholars to posit that our text is a conflated one composed of two earlier texts. One of the earlier texts referred to the wicked child alone, or perhaps compared the wicked one to a pious child. Another text referred to three children of various intellectual levels: a wise child who asks intelligent questions, an intermediate child who asks innocuous questions, and a simple child who does not know how to inquire at all. In the conflation of these texts, the wise child and the pious child were coalesced into one figure.

Several scholars have offered another theory. The typology of four children is based on a pattern common among the sages of listing four combinations of two qualities. In this case, the qualities under consideration are wisdom and piety. The wise child has it all; the wicked child is intelligent but impious; the third child is pious but has no wisdom and so cannot ask intelligent questions; the fourth child is a blank slate from both standpoints. This approach helps explain the order of the children, which does not follow the biblical order. The list starts with one who has all the good qualities, followed by the two who have one good quality apiece, ending with the one who has no qualities at all. This

approach also explains why one verse was totally ignored. The starting point of the *baraita* is not the Bible but rather a list of four types of children for whom appropriate verses were found in the Bible.

We may now turn to the response given to each child, noting that the text of the haggadah strays from the biblical text. The answer to each statement in the haggadah is usually different from the answer given in the Torah. Much of the commentary on this passage attempts to explain why this is so. I will describe the problem and suggest a solution based on a historical-critical approach.

The most obvious discrepancies between the responses in the haggadah and those in the Torah relate to the wise child and to the wicked child. The response to the wise child in the Torah is:

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the LORD freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand. The LORD wrought before our eyes marvelous and destructive signs and portents in Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household; and us He freed from there, that He might take us and give us the land that He had promised on oath to our fathers (Deut. 6:21–23).

But the haggadah ignores this and tells us that the proper response to the wise child is to teach him the laws of Passover. The haggadah mentions the prohibition of eating after the meal as an example of the laws of Passover, and it has often been suggested that the intention was to demand the teaching of all the laws of Passover, ending with the last detail—that one is not to eat after the paschal meal. Some texts actually add the word “until,” reading: “teach him the laws of Passover, until ‘one may not eat after the paschal meal.’”

The response to the wicked child in the Torah is “It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses” (Exod. 12:27). This is replaced in the haggadah by the verse “It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt” (Exod. 13:8), which is the statement to be made to the child who does not ask anything. This verse appears again in this *baraita* in its proper place, apparently as the statement to be made to the child who does not ask. However, a significant number of *haggadot* lack a definite response to this child, satisfying themselves with the statement “You should begin [the explanation] as it says: ‘And you should tell your child on that day.’”⁵¹

It is noteworthy that the verses that are omitted, the responses to the wise child and to the wicked child, appear prominently elsewhere in the haggadah. The response to the wise child is the first version of the story that appears in the haggadah, and the response to the wicked child is used as the proof-text for R. Gamliel’s explanation of the significance of the paschal sacrifice. It is thus

51. For the information on the *haggadot* that follow this version, see Kasher, *Haggadah Shelemah*, 25–26, and Safrai and Safrai, *Haggadah of the Sages*, 212.

conceivable that the compiler of this *baraita* did not wish to use verses that appear elsewhere in the haggadah as a general text in the context of a specific response to one of the children. In the case of the response to the wise child, the response selected by the sages was eminently appropriate to the question—perhaps even more appropriate than the response supplied by the Torah. The sages interpreted the question not as “What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the LORD our God has enjoined upon you?” but as “What are the decrees, laws, and rules that the LORD our God has enjoined upon you?” The obvious response is to teach him the laws of Passover.

This explanation, that the biblical response to the wise child was ignored because it appears elsewhere in the haggadah, fits in well with the observation that this *baraita* appears only in *haggadot* that begin the *maggid* section with this verse. The corollary to this is that this *baraita* was created within the framework of the haggadah and that its appearance in the midrash to the book of Exodus is secondary.

We have noted that the *baraita* of the four children is found in the *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (Pisha 18, ed. Lauterbach, pp. 166–167) with only minor variations. However, two of the variations are of great interest. One is just stylistic. Where the haggadah expounds the response to the wicked child as “to me and not to him, if he had been there he would not have been redeemed,” the *Mekhilta* reads this in a more confrontational way: “to me and not to you; if you had been there you would not have been redeemed.”

The other difference seems to be much more significant. The *Mekhilta* quotes the wise child’s question as: “What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the LORD our God has enjoined upon us?” However, the masoretic text of the Bible reads here “enjoined upon you.” The reading of the *Mekhilta* helps resolve an exegetical problem. The fault of the wicked child, as expounded in the text of the haggadah, is that he talks to his parents in an excluding manner: “What do you mean by this rite?” emphasizing that he has nothing to do with it. However, according to the standard texts, the wise child also speaks in an excluding manner: “What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the LORD our God has enjoined upon you?” It is true that this statement is not as confrontational as that of the wicked child for the wise child includes himself among the others by recognizing that it is “our God” who has commanded these things. Nevertheless, commentators have thought that the reading of the *Mekhilta* is the one on which this exposition is based, strengthening this position by noting that other texts also have this reading. Many copies of the Maimonidean text have this reading, and it is also the reading of the parallel text in the Jerusalem Talmud. Most notably, this is also the reading of the Septuagint, which is followed by the Vulgate. This point is also meant to enhance the antiquity of the midrash by making it rely on a Septuagint type of Hebrew text that had long disappeared. However, it has been argued that the reading of the Septuagint is an internal error, based on the similarity of “upon us” and “upon you” in Greek. If this is true, the changed version of the biblical text would be

additional proof that this *baraita* is not really biblical exegesis but is rather a type of rabbinical rhetoric.

As we have noted, this *baraita* also appears in the Jerusalem Talmud. There are some minor differences between the sources. One of the more interesting ones is that the statement of the wicked child is expanded more defiantly: "What is this inconvenience (or 'trouble') with which you inconvenience us every year?" More significant is a change in the answers to the wise child and the simple child. The response to the simple child, here called "foolish" (*tippesh*), is to teach him the laws of Passover, whereas the wise child receives the answer assigned to the simple child in the other sources: "It was with a mighty hand that the LORD brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage." The reason for this change is not obvious. It is possible that this change reflects the difference regarding what is thought to be the proper mode of discussion on the Passover eve, as we noted above. The standard haggadah texts think that wise people should discuss the laws of Passover, whereas the Jerusalem Talmud thinks that even wise people should talk about the miracles of the Exodus. This left the answer about teaching the laws to the foolish child, presumably one who does not have the basic knowledge of how to fulfill the commandments of Passover.

For the most part, the *baraita* of the four children consists of quotes from biblical verses. Only in the section about the wicked child do we find midrashic expansion, and here we find it both in the question and the answer. An explanation is added to the question, enabling us to understand why his question entitles him to the title of wicked child, and an explanation is added to the answer, explaining how vitriolic it is. At the conclusion of the *baraita* we have a midrashic expansion of the verse about the child who does not know how to ask. This midrash, which explains that the proper time to tell about the Exodus is when matzah and *maror* are on the table, does not appear as a continuation of the *baraita* of the four children in either the Jerusalem Talmud or in the *Mekhilta* mentioned above. However, it does appear in another section of the *Mekhilta* (Pisha 17, p. 149) as an independent midrash on this verse.

As noted above, the *Eretz Yisra'el* version of the haggadah does not have this *baraita*, nor does it have the texts that preceded it. In the place of the *baraita*—that is, as an introduction to the story of the Exodus based on Joshua—the *Eretz Yisra'el* text has a quote from the Mishnah: "One teaches the child according to the child's ability." Functionally, this serves the same purpose as the *baraita*, explaining why various versions of the Exodus story are necessary. In a way, the *baraita* may be considered as just an expansion of this text.

The Plagues at the Sea

The midrash of Deuteronomy 26 ends by expounding the last verse as a reference to the Ten Plagues. In the associative manner common to talmudic literature, the haggadah appends here another midrash that compares the Ten Plagues to the breaching the sea for the crossing of the Jews. The thrust of the passage is that the affliction of the Egyptians at the breaching of the sea was

much greater than their suffering during the Ten Plagues. This passage is found in the *Mekhilta* and it is presented by Rav Saadiah Gaon as a passage that people were accustomed to reciting at this point in the seder. This is one of the three passages that Rav Saadiah notes that one is permitted to add, although he remarks that it is not obligatory.

The List of Thanksgiving (*Dayenu*)

The midrash that compares the breaching of the sea to the Ten Plagues is followed by an itemized list of the good things that God did for His people, beginning with the Exodus and concluding with the building of the Temple. The list appears not in the form of a story but rather in the form of an expression of thanksgiving to God for all the benefits He bestowed on His people. The list appears twice, first as a litany in which every phrase ends with the response *Dayenu* (It would have been sufficient), and the second time as prose. A litany is "A liturgical prayer consisting of a series of petitions recited by a leader alternating with fixed responses by the congregation."⁵² A litany is thus a communal song; and, at times, the sense of the text takes second place to the musical requirements. Thus the litany ends with the statement that it would have been sufficient for the Jews if God had brought them to the Land of Israel but had not built the Holy Temple. Some versions added an additional member to the list, inserting the Meeting Tent between the entrance into the Land of Israel and the building of the Temple. In either case, there is no formal expression of thanks for the final good—that is, the building of the Temple. Indeed, in this form of the litany the final statement would always include some benefice for which no gratitude would be expressed. Perhaps it was this that made it necessary to repeat the whole list in prose form.

Although the list begins with the Exodus, and would thus seem to be a continuation of that story, it includes a number of flashbacks that describe events immediately preceding the Exodus. A similar list appears in Psalm 136, also in the form of a litany, and it is part of the closing section of the haggadah.

It had been assumed for many years that the *dayenu* passage is one of the earliest elements of the haggadah. The reason for this assumption is that the list of benefits given by God concludes with the entrance into the Land of Israel and the building of the Temple. It was taken for granted that this meant that the list must have been composed while the Temple still existed for, otherwise, it was inconceivable that no mention would be made here of expectations for the return to Israel and the reconstruction of the Temple. Eric Werner, convinced of the antiquity of this passage, thought that a portion of Christian liturgy, known as the Improperia or Reproaches, was based on *Dayenu*. The Improperia, sung on Good Friday, were a reproach to the Jewish people for

52. Houghton Mifflin eReference Suite. CD-ROM ed. Based on *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000, 2004).

repaying the good things done by God for the Jews with evil actions. These reproaches were presented as the words of Jesus, dying on the cross. Thus, for instance, they were reproached: "I have opened the sea for you; and you have opened my body with a lance." The refrain of the litany was "My people, what have I done to you . . . ?" (Mic. 6:3). The good things listed were mostly connected with the Exodus from Egypt. Werner was the first to call attention to the similarity of this list of benefits to the list of benefits given by God to the Jews in *Dayenu* and, due to his dating, considered the Improperia as actually a Christian parody of this passage.⁵³ Recently, Yisrael Yuval rejected Werner's claim, noting that *Dayenu* is first documented in the tenth-century siddur of Rav Saadiah Gaon—as a voluntary text—making it very unlikely that a Christian text dated much earlier is a response to the presumably late *Dayenu*. Yuval accepted the connection between the texts but, due to his dating, argued that the relationship should be reversed: *Dayenu* is a response to the Reproaches.⁵⁴ However, since the text of *Dayenu* has not been found in any *Eretz Yisra'el haggadot*, its appearance in the Babylonian *haggadot* of the tenth century seems to imply that it is of Babylonian provenance. It is unlikely that Babylonian Jewry, who lived first under Sassanian rule and then under Muslim rule, should be involved in responses to Christian liturgy.

The Other *Maggid* Texts That Are Specific to Certain Communities

This section mentions expansions of the *maggid* section that are in use, or have been in use, in various communities but have not been universally accepted. It is the nature of the haggadah that people add selections from other texts and their own explanations that may, at times, become part of the family tradition. We discuss here only passages that have achieved broader acceptance, either by being included in manuscripts that have survived or by being printed in published *haggadot*. The order of the discussion follows the order in which the passages appear in the haggadah.

Mah Chbar

Many communities translated the haggadah into the vernacular. The Yemenite community added a section in Arabic that immediately followed the questions asked at the seder. It opened *Mah chbar hada elleila min gamia allieali* (How is this night different from all other nights?) and continued with a short description (less than a hundred words) of the suffering in Egypt, the Ten Plagues and the redemption. It closed with the introduction to the continuation of the haggadah: "This is the answer."

53. Eric Werner, "Melito of Sardis, the First Poet of Deicide," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966): 191–210.

54. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish Christian Dialogue," 104–105.