

Kisvei Rivash

The Practice of Living Free
Experiencing the Freedom of Seder Night
in a World of Trauma

YEHOSHUA GERZI

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A Note to the Reader
Lovingly and respectfully,

As you start this reading, please remember that life is an unfolding journey; your journey is to reflect as you discover and grow. May you test what is written here in your own life, allowing your inner soul-wisdom to guide you in healthful ways. As we listen to life's lessons, as we learn from the people we admire and respect, may we become beings of greater service in the ways of love, respect, strength, and compassion.

***May the ones who graduated from our world be
remembered and have an aliya!***

In memory of:

Mr. Yaakov Binyamin Meghnagi
Reb Yaakov Binyamin ben Rachamin Z"L

Mr. Ronnie Marks
Reb Reuven ben Natan Z"L

Mr. Arthur Bloomfield
Reb Aharon Yitzchak ben Shmuel Yochanan Z"L

Mr Albert Allen
Reb Avraham Ben Salcha Z"L

Mr. Yosef Newman
Reb Yosef Refoel ben Chaim Z"L

Mr. Allen Lehmann
Reb Moshe Ben Meir Z"L

Reb Shimon Le'ev Ben Gavriel Leiv

This document is an integration of a number of shiurim that were given between 2013 and 2025, in the time period between Purim and Pesach. Many of them are part of a greater set of shiurim that focus on a yearly cycle of healing.

וּבְרָא אֶת עוֹלָמוֹ בְּשִׁלְשָׁה סְפָרִים בְּסֵפֶר וּסְפָר וּסְפֹר

*He engraved and created His world with three ס-פ-ר:
with סְפָר (enumeration),
סֵפֶר (scroll),
And
סְפֹר (telling).
(Sefer Yetzira 1:1)*

Section one:
ספר—Enumeration

We Begin With ... Purim?

The scene is seder night, at midnight. The spiritual energy is indescribable. Our *chachamim* tell us that on that night, in the year 2448, *Am Yisrael* experienced the ultimate freedom that comes as part of the direct revelation of Hashem's Presence in our world. And the experience didn't stop there. On each *Seder* night, in every year that follows, including this year, we relive that first night. We tap into that same spiritual reality.

But do we actually feel this on *Seder* night? Unfortunately, the answer is not always yes. We live in a world of *galut*, in a world of trauma. Nationally and personally, we are all experiencing this reality, at least to some extent. We come to Seder night with joy but also with our pain, and with our fears. We might sit at the *Seder* table excited or exhausted, or both. However, even if we aren't surrounded by rowdy and whiny children and spilled wine, there are certain to be uncountable *matza* crumbs. Is this what the seder night is supposed to be?

The answer might be yes. Let's imagine what our situation was, as a nation, in the year 2448. We were in *Mitzrayim*, at the very end of 210 years of slavery, and untold amounts of trauma. We experienced that first *Seder* night in the majestic dining rooms of whatever shack we called home in the slave quarters of Goshen. We ate our first seder meal as a nation while still in the land of our slavery, dressed to travel, staff in hand, without any idea of exactly what the next day would look like. The tables in those homes were probably also covered in spilled wine and *matza* crumbs. From the very first year, the *Seder* has always been an experience of freedom and spirituality that exists in relationship with national and personal trauma and pain.

That first year, *Am Yisroel* came to the seder table prepared spiritually for greatness through the experience of the first nine *makkot*, Rosh Chodesh and the Korban Pesach. We, too, are meant to prepare for Seder night, and our preparation for Pesach ideally begins thirty days before the *chag*. If we take this directive seriously, and we open our calendars, we will notice something remarkable. Thirty days before Pesach is Purim. Experientially, we are

meant to enter Pesach through the doorway of Purim. It is for this reason that we find ourselves beginning this *kuntrus* about Pesach with some Torah about Purim.

Now, it is certainly possible you are reading this less than thirty days before Pesach. It may even already be Pesach. I invite you to continue reading anyway. You can create a little space, wherever you happen to find yourself in time, for the light of Purim to illuminate your Seder night and your experience of freedom.

In order to understand the connection between Purim and Pesach, we will focus on three spiritual gifts of Purim, which will be helpful in preparing us to meet Seder Night. They are: *mitzad hamekabel*, *aderabah* and *ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha*.

The First Spiritual Gift: Mitzad Hamekabel

Purim and Pesach are both holidays that commemorate miracles that saved us. However, the nature of these miracles was very different. The miracles of Pesach entirely superseded the system of nature. They were accompanied by open declarations of Hashem's Presence in the world. In contrast, on Purim, everything happens behind the scenes. Hashem's name isn't even part of the Megillah.

Many of us have an unconscious bias about these two holidays. We assume that the miracles of Pesach were greater than the miracles of Purim. However, the Chatam Sofer, in his *Drashot on Purim*, offers a different perspective. The miracles of Purim resulted in the *kabbalat haTorah* of Purim, mentioned in the megillah as *kimu n'kiblu*. According to the Chatam Sofer, that *kabbalat haTorah* was a greater acceptance of the Torah than what occurred at Har Sinai. He suggests that the miracles of Purim are greater than the miracles of Pesach, because the acceptance of the Torah on Purim was greater than the acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai, which followed the events of Pesach. How can this be?

In reality, the comparison is not really between the two holidays, but between the world of *Torah Shebechtav* and the world of *Torah Sheba'al Peh*. It's the comparison between

nevuah and a world where Hashem is hidden, between living in Eretz Yisrael and living in *galut*.

To be clear, the *gadlut* of Pesach, of the Torah, of *geulah*, is not up for debate. *Nevuah* was an unbelievable, overwhelming experience of Divine intelligence pulsating through every fiber of our being. *Mamesh*, we were *mevateil* to the Ein Sof. The heights we reached were incredible.

And yet, what happens if a person shines a very bright light into our eyes? Take a moment to think about it. If a dark room is suddenly flooded with very bright light, you can't actually see. *Nevuah* is so overwhelming that if the person receiving the *nevuah* is not Moshe Rabbeinu, they go into a trance. The Biala Rebbe explained that the *nevuah* and the miracles that happened from *Yetziat Mitzrayim* until the end of the first *Bet Hamikdash* created a world of such profound *emet* there was little room for creativity, or for anything else. Which meant there could not be a full relationship. Our relationship with Hashem had a *mitzad hanoten*, the perspective of the Giver, but the *mitzad hamekabel*, the perspective of the receiver, was barely developed. In order to have a fully formed relationship, there needs to be a *mitzad hamekabel*. We have to exist in the relationship.

And that is exactly what happened, as history progressed. When we lost *nevuah* as a nation, Hashem gifted us with a different method of being in relationship. Instead of receiving *Torah Shebechtav* we now create *Torah Sheba'al Peh*. Instead of *korbanot*, we have *tefillah*. Instead of *nevuah*, we have *torat hakabbalah*. All these new avenues are creative endeavors.

In Devarim 28:9, Hashem asks us to follow in His ways. We often understand this to mean following in the ways of the 13 *middot harachamim*. However, the Kommanar Rebbe expands this directive. He teaches that we should try to emulate all *middot* of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And the first *middah* that we know of we learn from the first *pasuk* of the Torah: *Bereishit Bara Elokim et Hashamayim v'et Haaeretz*. The first thing we know about Hashem is that He is creative. He created our world.

The world of *nevuah*, with all of its tremendous greatness, leaves less room for us to emulate Hashem's *middah* of creativity. In the *avodah* of the Bet Hamikdash, we stood at the focal point of the world, but there was not much space for our own expression. Where do we find intense, immense, profound creativity? In the world of *Torah Sheba'al Peh*, and in all the places where Hashem is hidden.

There is a profound teaching from Rav Kook in his *peirush* on the siddur, about the nature of darkness. Rav Kook teaches that sometimes in the darkness you can see more than in the light. To understand this, consider the night sky. When there is no sun, and no light from the ground, we can see untold amounts of stars that are light years away. When the sun comes up in the morning, our world comes into focus, but we lose the ability to see those stars. It's a paradox. A dichotomy.

Rabbi Meir Belsky explains that despite all the pain, there is *bracha* in *galut*. It allows us to see a bit differently. The *chisaron* we experience in *galut* allows us to have a deeper relationship with Hashem. In fact, the *chisaron* in the relationship is exactly where the relationship comes from. The *chisaron* that exists in our relationships is the mechanism, paradoxically, that brings us greater intimacy in the relationship.

Purim is about exile. And exile is about Hashem giving us the space and opportunity to find ourselves in our relationship with Him. *Galut* is very much about experiencing the self, and experiencing the opportunity to build ourselves and connect to Hashem more deeply.

The Second Spiritual Gift: Aderabah

Purim is the most *gashmidika* chag. In fact, the Baal Shem Tov teaches that this is the essence of the entire month of Adar, whose name can be read as *Aleph dar*, meaning that Hashem wants to dwell in this world. Hashem wants to be brought down into the *dira* of *gashmiut*. At the same time, the name Adar is also the language of *aderabah*, an Aramaic word that means "all the more so." The *aderabah* aspect of Adar asks us to think again, and to look from a different perspective. Purim immerses us in *gashmiut* and then asks us to look at that

physical reality in a different way. Physicality is not just physicality. It's the place where Hashem wants us to find Him.

In order to gain a bit more clarity on how this might be done, let's explore the nature of the way we function as human beings in this physical world. Hashem created us as spiritual beings in a physical body. This means that even when we are in our most spiritual state, we are always relating to the physical world. Even our language of *ruchniut* is a product of our physical world. We speak about spiritual worlds as if they take up space and exist in time. We do this even though we know there is no space or time, because we have no choice. All we have with which to relate to the world of *ruchniut* is our *gashmidikah* world. If we refuse to speak in the language of *gashmiut*, then all we have is silence. This is one *adarabah*: the recognition that as limited as our physical world might be, it is our one and only framework for accessing spirituality.

Another *adarabah*. We don't experience our physical world directly. What we actually experience is our mind's interpretation of the physical world. As we live, develop and grow, we learn how the world works. Based on this knowledge we create a series of beliefs that allow us to function in this world. Using those beliefs, we create the layers of our perception that help us navigate our world.

We experience reality based on the way our brain interprets the physical sensations we receive. And we experience events based on the assumptions and interpretations our mind creates. Our reality is a constructive reality that we create, based on our assumptions and expectations. It may include the wisdom from thousands of years of language and philosophies and culture. It may have layers upon layers of meaning. However, in essence we are always viewing the world through the layers of our perception.

All of life and all of reality is experienced through our framework of thinking, and our framework of thinking is built on what we believe. And we all believe in something. It could be just that gravity exists or that the sun will rise tomorrow. But we all use a system of belief to navigate our world. We are all believers. If we wanted to express this using a different

language, we could say that Hashem created all of us with a *koach haemunah* and *koach hadeveikut*. We are all always believing in something, and we are all always attached to something.

People often say, “I need more *emunah*, I need more *deveikut*.” In reality, we don’t need more *emunah*, because we already have it. We don’t need more *deveikut*, because we already have that as well. Our privilege, our superpower, is that we have the power to refocus our *emunah* and *deveikut*. We have the power to ask ourselves the following questions. What am I choosing to believe in? What am I connecting to? And why am I connecting to it?

If we don’t choose to ask these questions, we become unconsciously stuck in our frameworks of thinking. And this makes us most un-free. Purim, with all of its themes of revealing what is hidden, is an opportunity to recognize our limitations and where we are stuck, so that we can break free.

To illustrate this, I would like to share a story, a *ma’aseh*, from the Baal Shem Tov. It’s about a *chossid* who is working hard in *avodat Hashem*, building himself up, level after level. One day, he is visited by his Rebbe, who shares with him an incredible Torah. This Torah pushes down the walls of the *chossid’s* perception. It’s as if there is a backdrop on the stage of the *chossid’s* world, and the Rebbe just pushes it down. And behind that backdrop is revealed an even more beautiful reality. The *chossid* is overjoyed, the Rebbe continues on his way.

A few months pass, and the *chossid* continues building in his *avodat Hashem*, using his new perspective. And then the Rebbe comes to visit again. And again, he shares incredible Torah that pushes down the walls of the *chossid’s* perception. Again, the *chossid* is overwhelmed. He had thought he understood before, now he sees that there’s so much he didn’t understand. The Rebbe goes on his way and the *chossid* continues to work on his *avodat Hashem*. Until the next time the Rebbe comes to visit. And the same thing happens again. Three, four, five times, the Rebbe completely upends the *chossid’s* world.

And then, after so many times, the *chossid* gets upset. He says to his Rebbe, “Rebbe, I don’t *chap peshat*. You constantly show me a new reality, and I think , oh that’s reality. But then you show me it’s not. I’m forever stuck in not-reality!”

And that’s the end of the story, because that is the nature of life. The nature of life is that right now, in this framework of reality, we’re always relating to an illusion. Always. People invest a lot of time trying to get to “it,” whatever the “it” may be. There is a perception that there is one truth, one situation, that will be our pinnacle, and that our goal need only be to get there.

The truth is, there is no “it” and there is no “there.” In *galut* I am always going to be relating to an illusion. I can break out of one illusion, but only into another illusion. Nevertheless, *aderabah*, it is in the midst of our illusions, in the midst of our *gashmiut* reality, that we are able to create our relationship with Hashem. Directly from the *chisaron* of living in a world of illusion comes the space we have to activate our creativity, to get to know ourselves, and to come more fully into an intimate relationship with Hashem.

On Purim we work on not getting trapped in one illusion, and one particular way of being or thinking. Every time we think, “I need to get there,” we can recognize that the “there” that we want to get to is only another level of illusion. And it’s okay. *Adarabah*. It’s more than okay. It’s exactly how we need it to be.

Purim is a time of being comfortable with the recognition that I’m always relating to my frames of thinking, and therefore I’m always relating to an illusion. We are *mekabel* that the “there” that I want to get to is an illusion just as the here where I am is an illusion. Nevertheless, I still want it. I want to be present and part of that relationship, and, actually, I can be happy in that reality.

The Third Spiritual Gift: Ve'ahavta Lere'acha Kamocha

On Purim, there is a clear focus on *mitzvot bein adam l'chavero*. Two of the four mitzvot of the day (*mishloach manot* and *matanot l'evyonim*) involve giving to others. The other two, listening to *megillah* and having a *seudah*, are usually experienced in a group. This is the *chag* of *ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha*. On Purim, that is exactly what we are meant to be experiencing. So let's take a moment to explore this mitzvah, and what this experience of *ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha* is meant to be.

The Torah chose very interesting language to express this mitzvah: *ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha*. *Chaverecha* is a much more common language for friend, yet the Torah chooses to use *lere'acha*. The root of *lere'acha* includes the *reish ayin* of *ra*, evil. Why are we commanded to love our friend using language connected to *ra*? And, even more fundamentally, what is *ra*?

The Hebrew word *ra* is connected to words that mean broken off or separated. It speaks to that which is unintegrated. More specifically, *ra* is unintegrated *kedushah*. It is a term for anything which has not yet been revealed as part of Hashem's system and plan. We are always in relationship with *ra*, because we are always trying to find a way to integrate it.

On Purim we drink until we don't know the difference between "*Baruch Mordechai, Arur Haman*" and "*Baruch Haman, Arur Mordechai*." In our world of action, we may need to react strongly against the forces of *ra*. We aren't allowed to be confused between Haman and Mordechai. However, on Purim, in our deepest (drunken) thoughts, we have permission to mix them up, because the good and the bad are both intrinsic parts of Hashem's system in this world. Everything emanates from the same place. Everything has its place in the progression of history toward ultimate good. In the end, Haman's grandchildren learned Torah in Bnei Brak. In some way, everything is integrated. That's the deep Torah of Purim. And this is meant to be not just Torah for our minds, but Torah for our whole self.

Purim is the first day of our thirty days of preparation for Pesach. It is on Purim that we begin to prepare ourselves for *cheirut*, spiritual freedom. What are we trying to free ourselves from? One answer, given in the Pri Etz Chayim on Pesach, is the imprisonment of our *da'at*, our consciousness, in our *nefesh*. In the next section we will discuss more in depth what this means. For now, we can describe this as being completely in the grip of our emotions and our fleeting thoughts. It is what happens when our emotions hijack our ability to express our self in the way we would like.

What does this mean for us, experientially, to lose our *da'at* in our *nefesh*? The *nefesh* is the seat of thoughts and our emotions. When we are stuck in our *nefesh*, we experience our thoughts and emotions very, very well, and we often get stuck in them. Unfortunately, this usually means that we experience a lot of negative emotions. And when we are stuck in those emotions, it's very difficult to see the bigger picture. It's difficult to suspend judgement. Instead, we become control freaks, willing to judge the people and events around us at will. We blame and attack others, and when something doesn't go our way, we label it as *ra*. And we do everything we can to label it and objectify. We try to create distance from it, but usually end up in an endless loop of dealing with it in an unhealthy way.

This is not the path of freedom. The true sign of freedom is the ability to integrate *ra* into our lives. The more we can hold judgement, the more we can observe, the more we can say, this is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* world, the more we can integrate. That's how we experience freedom, regardless of where our bodies happen to be.

We all know the story of Reb Zushia, who despite his intense poverty and suffering could say with all honesty that he saw no bad in his life. We may not be on the level of Reb Zushia, but we might be able to speak to the annoying person next to us with *lashon hatov*, words that integrate and nourish. We might be able hold ourselves back from speaking *lashon hara*, which is unintegrated speech, that causes more fracture and blocks us from *shefa*.

There's an experiential difference in living free. And the place where we feel that experiential difference most clearly is in challenging interpersonal situations. *Ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha* is a measure of our experiential freedom in the world.

The *avodah* of freedom on Pesach is an *avodah* of *echad*. Do we view everything as *echad*? And the way that we measure this *avodah* is by noticing what happens when something doesn't go our way. Are we quick to go into a place of judgment? Or can we hold space for an opposing view, recognizing that it also needs to be expressed in the world? When something unfortunate happens, however big or small, or if someone annoys us, do we view that experience as part of our direct connection to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*? Or do we experience it as something *ra*? When we notice our experiential *peshat*, we will know how free we are.

Real freedom is so much more than where our body happens to be. And it's more than being free to speak and act in whatever way we feel like. It's not enough to learn to express ourselves. It's not even enough to understand that we see the world through the layers and layers of *levushim* that we create. Hashem did not create us to live alone in the world. Everyone has their own *levushim*. Each person will express themselves in their own way. A *ba'al da'at* is free to listen to all of them, to let each one be, and to be in relationship to them. To turn each *re'acha* to *chavercha*.

The Jewish year is a deep and beautiful tapestry. As Purim moves into Pesach, the *Shulchan Aruch* guides us, among the very first *halachot* of Pesach, to begin collecting money for the poor. One of the first *halachot* is *V'ahavta l'reicha kamocha*, to make sure that everybody is included in our Pesach celebration. This mitzvah of *ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocha* is so prominent on Purim, exactly thirty days before Pesach. It is an opportunity, at exactly the time we need it, to measure our experience of freedom in this world. We can take that knowledge and use it to guide us in the thirty days leading into Pesach, in the cleaning, in the stress, in the worrying about those who have less than us.

And if we find ourselves judging, if it is difficult to fulfill *v'ahavta l'reicha kamocha*, that is excellent knowledge for us to have. We are in the perfect place to begin preparing for the true spiritual freedom of Pesach.

Section Two:

ספר—scroll

The Sefirot on Seder Night

We began by discussing the first seder night, in the year 2448. This was the first night of our “*zman cheiruteinu*,” time of our freedom, and we noticed that in the shackles of Goshen, freedom might not have looked quite how we might have expected it to. So, what was the freedom that we experienced that night, as a nation and individuals? And how can we access it at our own seder, over three thousand years later?

We can find some insight by exploring the *Torat Hakabbalah*, or *sod*. People often like to label this Torah as mysticism, a term which is correct, but also misleading. *Torat Hakabbalah*, especially as it is expressed by the Arizal, the Ramak and the Rashash, is more of a science. While kabbalah means “that which is received,” it is also connected to the word *makbil*, meaning parallel or corresponding. It is the received knowledge of how our world parallels higher spiritual worlds. And while *sod* can mean secret, in the Torah it also has the meaning of gathering together (see Yirmiyahu 6:11). The Torah of *sod* gathers and connects hidden patterns into a unified whole. What we call mysticism is the study of the underlying principles that animate reality.

The power of *Torat HaKabbalah* is that all of reality functions according to these principles. This means that once we’ve opened our mind, heart and eyes to see them, you can recognize these repetitive themes in almost everything, including mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and history. One of the main patterns of *Torat Hakabbalah* is the *sefirot*.

The *sefirot* are the pattern through which the *Ein Sof* reveals Itself in the world. These ten aspects express the ways in which Hashem relates to us. Since we are created *b’tzelem elokim*, in Hashem’s image, they also reflect the way we relate to the world. And then, they are further reflected in so many different aspects of our world. This means that when we speak about the *sefirot*, we might be talking about levels of consciousness, or colors, or textures, or parts of the body, or emotions. Recognizing these patterns invites us to navigate

and integrate all the parts of our world. The more we understand that everything fits into the system, life becomes more understandable in a very deep way.

Sefor, Sefer, Sippur

Sefer Yetzirah describes our reality, as it comes into existence through the *sefirot*, as existing in three simultaneous expressions. One is an objective reality, which *Sefer Yetzirah* calls *sefor*, or enumeration. This is the factual basis of our world, the part that could theoretically be quantified through a system similar to mathematics. The second expression, *Sefer Yetzirah* calls *sefer*, scroll or book, like the *sefer Torah*. It is the communication which Hashem gives us about the nature of our world, and it is a mix of Hashem's objectivity and our subjective understanding. The third expression is the *sippur*, story. This is the subjective narrative we create to interpret our world. We could call these the story, His story, and my story. On seder night we try to bring balance and integration to all these stories.

How does this relate to seder night? The first expression is *sefor*, the objective story. Now that we've realized that Purim is meant to pull down the backdrop of our reality, like the rebbe in the story from the Baal Shem Tov, we might approach this with a bit of caution. We can live with Hashem, but we can't fully understand Hashem's world. How are we meant to relate to a reality we can't fully access?

Actually, the seder is perfectly suited for doing this. Our chachamim tell us that there are two new years for the world. Rosh Hashanah reflects the world coming into existence as a thought, a plan. Pesach reflects the world coming into existence in reality, which was a process that happened through *tzimtzum*. *Tzimtzum* is the constriction through which Hashem made space for the creation of our world. The Borei Olam was *metzamtzem*, and *metzamtzem*, and *metzamtzem* again, in order to create the *makom*, the space for us to exist and be in relationship with Him. In that space, that *makom*, He holds us with *hashgacha pratit*.

On *Seder* night we can mimic this *middah* of Hashem. For our guests, for our family, and especially for our children, we can make space. As parents, we can echo for our children Hashem's relationship with us. We can be *metzamtzem* and focus the evening on making the space for those around us to express themselves in whatever way is best for them.

The second expression described in *Sefer Yetzirah* is the *sefer*, the scroll or book. It is tempting to assume that this is the Haggadah, the central text of the evening. However, the Haggadah is not your usual book. It's actually a very confusing text if we expect it to be giving us a clear communication about the historical events of the evening.

The Haggadah does not directly speak about the events of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. Instead, the Haggadah is all about the interpretation of those events. It is told from the point of view of people speaking about their experience, and trying to understand it. It's a communication about communication, which makes it not *sefer*, but *sipur*. The Haggadah is "my story." We're always relating to our thinking, feeling and physical sensations in the present moment. As we will discuss at length in the next section, the Haggadah asks us to recognize this, and to explore how and why we create the narrative that we live by.

What, then, is the *sefer* of the seder night? Even though it might not look like a book, our guide for the evening is the Seder Plate, which according to the Arizal is a collection of carefully placed items that reflect the *sefirot*. On *seder* night, the Seder Plate acts as *sefer*. It is an externalization of an internal story that we want to share, and because it is a reflection of the *sefirot*, it is also an externalization of the architecture of the soul. The *sefirot* are the different traits that we use to express ourselves in the world. Through the context of the Pesach story, the seder plate guides us to examine our internal world, and to consciously choose the way we want to express ourselves.

The Experience of Freedom in the Torah

With the knowledge that we will be using the Seder Plate as an intellectual guide to give us insight into ourselves, and the Haggadah as an experiential guide to explore our

personal narrative, let's return to the big question of the evening. What does it mean that Pesach is *zman cheiruteinu*? What is this freedom that we are trying to experience? Just as with everything in life, if we want to understand the essence of something, the place to look is in the ultimate Sefer, the ultimate communication of Hashem to us about the nature of our world, the Torah. In *sefer Shemot*, the Torah describes for us the human experience of moving from constriction and trauma into freedom.

Part One: Stuck in the *Nefesh Habehami*

We begin at a low point. In the sixth *perek* of *Shemot*, Moshe wants to share Hashem's message of redemption with Bnei Yisrael, but they are too sunken into the trauma of slavery to be able to hear him. As we learn in *Shemot* 6:9, "Moshe spoke this to Bnei Yisrael, but they did not listen to Moshe because of the *kotzer ruach*, shortness of breath, and because of the hard labor."

What the Torah is describing is a nation immersed in a trauma response. We might call it fight or flight. Very often a person who's gone through a trauma becomes frozen, unable even to breathe a deep breath. In *Mitzrayim* there was a suffering that stifled the spirit. We couldn't breathe; we couldn't stretch out our lungs. We had only shallow, unhealthy breath.

In the language of the *chachamim*, this is called *mochin d'katnus*. It is a sense of constriction, where we become completely absorbed in our experience, and that absorption magnifies everything tremendously. In a state of trauma, there is no room for liberation because there is no room for anything apart from the monomaniacal focus on making sure that we are getting the work done, and making sure that we can keep our head above water. We can only take in little sips of air.

R' Yitzchak Grodinshky shared another description of this state of trauma from the world of Mussar. We could describe the slavery of *Mitzrayim* as the experience of the *da'at* being locked in the *nefesh habehami*. In our normal, healthy state, we are meant to be *medabek* to our *nefesh habehami* in a beautiful way. However, this is a situation where our

da'at does not have proper communication with the *nefesh*, for the simple reason that there is no space for it to do so.

We consist of five different soul parts which align with each other to connect us directly to the *kisei hakavod*. Spiritual health is a state of alignment and flow between all the parts of our soul. The *nefesh* is the most physical, grounded part of our soul. In the *Zohar* I:99b, R' Shimon Bar Yochai teaches that the *nefesh* experiences three primary states: *machshava*, *hirhurim* and *regesh*, which are thoughts, feelings and actions. Our ability to balance these three elements determines our ability to ascend spiritually.

When we are locked in our *nefesh habehami* in a negative way, our *nefesh* becomes our whole world. We lose touch with anything higher. And we live in reaction to stimuli, with no separation from it. Our stimulus and the response are practically one thing. We think something and then we immediately feel it so deeply. The pain. The stress. The anxiety. It is us, and we are it. There is no connection to a bigger vessel or a higher place with which to hold the pain.

If we listen carefully to the words of the Torah, we can hear the Torah diagnosing this state with exact language. "Moshe spoke this to Bnei Yisrael, but they did not listen to Moshe because of the *kotzer ruach*, shortness of breath." Two things jump out at us from the *pasuk*: Moshe, and our breath. The *Zohar* tells us that Moshe is the *bechina* of *da'at*. Being in trauma is disconnection from *da'at*. In *Mitzrayim*, *da'at* was in exile. The move toward redemption is a move toward reconnecting to our *da'at*.

What is *da'at*? For our purposes here, we can describe it as our awareness, or consciousness. *Da'at* is the conscious part of us which sits within *ruach* and gives us the availability to integrate and to heal. *Da'at* also acts as our negotiator between our *neschama* and our *nefesh*. We can use our *da'at* to shift into a state called *da'at tachton pnimi*, which is the decision to consciously and purposefully relate to our *nefesh*, and within our *nefesh* to our physical sensations, our emotions, and our thinking. We do this by the simple action of

non-judgmentally observing the thoughts, feelings and physical sensations that our *nefesh* experiences.

Da'at is crucial for creating freedom. Through the process of observing our *nefesh*, we open up a space between our experience, and our reaction to that experience. In that space we can breathe, and through that space, ultimately, we can connect to something far bigger than ourselves—the Borai Olam. Our *da'at* allows us to connect our *neshama* to our *nefesh*, so that light from our neshama can permeate every aspect of our life.

And the first steps toward creating this enormous shift are very small, and very simple. The Torah tells us, in slavery we couldn't breathe. If we want to move toward freedom, we begin by breathing. Breathing is the expression of our liberation. When we can breathe deeply, we can be grounded, centered, and feel safe in the present moment. As Rashi expresses in his comments to *Shemot* 31:17, rest is a vital part of reconnecting to our higher selves. "Every expression of *nefesh*, rest, is an expression of *nefesh*, soul, for one regains one's soul and one's breath when one rests from the toil of work. The first step of moving into a divine experience is getting out of *kotzer ruach*. It is only by first being fully present in our comfort zone that we can feel safe and authentic enough to start to shift out of our comfort zone and grow.

Part Two: Confronting the *Ra*

After the Torah gives us the picture of Am Yisrael in trauma, which we discussed above, Moshe's confrontation with Pharaoh takes center stage in the *chumash*. It is not until five *perakim* later that the *chumash* again brings our nation into the story, this time as Hashem makes a very interesting request from us. Hashem asks Moshe to "Please, speak into the ears of the *Am*, the people, and let them borrow, each man from his *re'ehu*, friend, and each woman from her *re'utah*, friend, silver vessels and golden vessels. (*Shemot* 11:2)"

Hashem uses the same language of "*ra*" which we discussed earlier, in connection to *ve'ahavta l'reicha kamocha*, to describe the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael, as an *Am*, as a people

working together, are asked to confront their oppressors. They are not asked to love them, or to exact punishment on them, or to interact with them for very long. But they are asked to take initiative in their own story, and to ask for something of value. Hashem offers us the ability and the option to take control of what we take from experiences. We are in control of the process of integration, and of finding and holding onto a bit of wealth from our bitter experiences.

It is in this moment that we are able to observe Bnei Yisrael moving from the world of the *nefesh habehami* to the consciousness of *Adam*. As we mentioned, in the world of the *nefesh habehami*, which mimics the animal world, there is only stimulus and response. It is in our form as *Adam*, as complete humans, that we can be aware of our feelings, and create a gap between stimulus and response. This is the beginning of being able to heal.

When we go through a negative experience, at first we are usually completely enveloped and wrapped up in the experience. Then, hopefully, as time goes on, we are able to be aware of our feelings. We can begin to create a space between our consciousness and our feelings. As we become present in the moment, we can exit our mind and start to look around. There is space to hold what's going on, and we can ask ourselves, how do I want to relate to this experience? The moment we ask that question, we take the first step from victimhood to hero-hood. We begin to create our own narrative, and we can choose to be the hero of that narrative.

Owning the narrative means making the decision to take what you want out of the experience. As a nation we took gold and silver out of *Mitzrayim*. As individuals, we can create strength out of our challenges. We can gain wisdom and compassion from our bitter experiences. Once we own whatever is going on in our life, it completely changes the situation. And the amazing thing is, this is a change that happens in one split second. *Yeshuot Hashem k'heref ayin*. A moment ago, I may have been in a mentality of victimhood, but the next moment, I can be the hero of my own story.

Hitchadshut

Once Bnei Yisrael have become empowered to be the heroes of their own stories, we are finally ready to receive our first national *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* of Rosh Chodesh. This *mitzvah* allows us to celebrate the constant renewal of the moon, and places time into our hands by giving us the ability to determine our calendar. It is this *mitzvah* that teaches us the power of *hitchadshut*.

Hitchadshut literally means renewal. More deeply, it's the recognition that there is a Borei Olam, who loves us, and who is recreating reality for us at every moment. Each and every moment is brand new, and we are invited to live each moment to the fullest, regardless of what happened before. As we build a better relationship with our *neshama*, and its ability to be free from the past, we are invited to internalize the knowledge that our biography is not our destiny.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, we all have a personal narrative, which is the story that we tell ourselves. Our narrative is influenced by our past experiences and external expectations. And it can either confine us, or it can set us free. Every day our thoughts, beliefs and assumptions become our internal dialogues. And this is what shapes our perception of reality, and therefore also how we experience each moment.

When we say that our biography is not our destiny, it doesn't mean we can't make space to allow for it to become our destiny, if it's good. However, if there are elements and areas in our lives that are less pleasant and they are holding us back, we are free to let them go. The past was the past. It doesn't exist now. The future also doesn't exist now. Wherever we are, right now, we're here. This is true on a macro level, but also on the smallest of micro levels. If we were angry or annoyed a moment ago, we are under no obligation to continue the argument or the bad mood. We are invited to create a relationship with our unpleasant experiences which allows us to let them go.

Hitchadshut is the knowledge that we are capable of change. We can design our experience of life by choosing how we want to relate to whatever situation we find ourselves in, even when we have no power to change the situation itself. When we are in the consciousness of *Adam*, we can use the space between trigger and reaction to rewrite and upgrade our narrative. And that's where the magic happens. That is where the healing occurs. That is what gives us the power to hold whatever is going on around us.

Shabbat Hagadol

Simply being in the present moment is a beautiful thing. But it is not the end of the story. We want not just to survive, and not just to be present, but to thrive, and to express our higher selves in the world. We are messengers and servants of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. In the language of our *chachamim*, this means moving from a *mochin* of *katnus*, a constricted consciousness, to a *mochin* of *gadlut*, a framework of greatness.

Nationally, we achieved this through the first *Shabbat Hagadol*. On that first Shabbat, we were commanded to take the lamb for the Korban Pesach and tie it up in our homes. Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook notices what an amazing sign of our healing this was. We had moved from *kotzer ruach* to a place of *mochin d'gadlut*. Instead of being afraid, we were empowered. This was the result of being present and taking responsibility for what was going on in our lives. Empowerment is the strength to question our expectations and assumptions, and the strength to hold all the different parts of ourselves, and to allow them to communicate with us.

Shabbat is *geulah*, and that is big. The Torah is big. Hashem is big. And we can be big, as well. This doesn't just mean understanding big ideas. We can move from an intellectually stimulating understanding of what we believe in, to being able to enjoy the experience of believing it. We can do this by using our breath to create calm in our bodies. We can make space between the world around us and our response to it. And in that space, we can choose. We can choose to feel good. We can choose to feel calm. We can choose to put a smile on our faces. We can choose to open ourselves up to a higher reality.

Dor De'ah

The journey of Bnei Yisrael out of *Mitzrayim* did not culminate at the moment we left the land of Egypt, or even at the splitting of the sea. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* culminated at the foot of Har Sinai, with the giving of the Torah. Similarly, our inner journey of freedom does not stop at the point when we create space between stimulus and response, or even at the point when we become empowered. Our measure of our freedom depends on what we choose to put into the space we create.

When we exist in the consciousness of *Adam*, we create a gap between trigger and reaction. That's our consciousness in the present moment. The question is, what do I choose to put into this gap? If I choose to remain an *Adam*, I can put sociological norms into this gap. Or, I could drop other people's views into that gap. Of course, there is no guarantee that these views are helpful or beneficial.

We are also invited to take the opportunity to put Hashem into this gap. We could put Torah into this gap, or halacha, or *hashgacha*. This is how we move forward, from an *Adam* to a *ben Torah*, a student of Torah. We can choose to live the Torah in each present moment of our lives. *Shiviti Hashem l'negdi tamid*. Everything in life is a communication from Hashem. The *nekudah* of *da'at* is the starting place and the key to awakening and connecting to our *middot* and our emotion. Into this gap we can choose and choose again, to put in Torah. And we could live very differently in the consciousness of a *ben Torah*.

The Slonimer Rebbe writes that Pesach is the Rosh Hashana for *emunah*. On Pesach we come back to understanding Who we are believing in, and why we are believing in Him. And then, in a state of *da'at*, we can work on becoming more positive. We can work on having gratitude. If we're in an uncomfortable place we might speak to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, and ask Him to help us see the situation as an opportunity for healing. We can ask, how is this an opportunity to shine our light more and more into the world? Because we matter. How do we know we matter? Because Hashem got us up in the morning.

A ben Torah lives differently from a place of *da'at*. The quality of our *da'at* determines how we meet all our experiences. It opens up new and unbelievable possibilities.

Nefesh Habehamit—Adam—Ben Torah

To summarize, we've described the human experience from inner slavery to inner freedom as a process of three different stages of growth. We begin in a state where our *da'at* is enwrapped in our *nefesh habehamit*. We exist within our experience, in an unhealthy way, and can not free ourselves from it. As we develop and mature, we can reach the state of *Adam*. In the consciousness of *Adam* we can become aware of being separate from our thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. And we can realize that we are empowered to rewrite our narrative, and to be the hero of our own story. Finally, we can choose to move into the consciousness of a Ben Torah. As *Pirkei Avot* 6:1 teaches, a *ben Torah* is a person who is free. We can consciously choose to bring Hashem into our lived experience. In this way we can choose to live a life that is filled with gratitude and joy. We can lean on our *bitachon* in Hashem. We can meet the difficult moments of our lives with grace, strength and dignity. We can meet the calm moments with joy. Inner freedom is the ability to thrive, presently and fully, in each moment of our lives.

Stages of Freedom Chart

<i>Beheimah</i> <i>Kotzer Ruach</i> <i>Nefesh</i> Stimulus and response are one.	<i>Adam</i> <i>Rosh Chodesh</i> <i>Ruach</i> There is a gap between stimulus and response.	<i>Ben Torah</i> <i>Shabbat Hagadol</i> <i>Neshama</i> We consciously place Torah into the gap.
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Creating Conscious Competency

What we have seen is that our journey from Mitzrayim to Kabbalat HaTorah is deeply connected to our becoming *ba'alei da'at*, as is every journey we take from *galut* to *geulah*. Moshe Rabbeinu, the first redeemer shared *da'at* with us. The final redeemer will share a new connection to *da'at* as well.

On Pesach we are celebrating that which occurred from a historical perspective, but we are also accepting an invitation to journey into our own *Yetziat Metzrayim* from our own personal *kotzer ruach* of negative feelings of hurt, shame, guilt or anxiety, which come from our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. When we learn to move into a space of *da'at*, we can separate from these emotions. Ultimately, we can learn to hold them with compassion. The goal is that all of our soul parts, from the highest down to and including the part we call our body, will be aligned. And the first step towards this freedom is a small internal shift we can choose to make at any moment.

This is the invitation that is in front of us on Pesach. Pesach is the world of *da'at* meeting *nefesh*. On Pesach we are invited to move away from what is unhealthy in this relationship, and into what is healthy. Fundamentally we should know that we *can* develop a healthy relationship with ourselves. What we are speaking about is not necessarily difficult, it is different. It's a different way of experiencing. However, when we get to know how we work from a more integrated holistic perspective, often things become more manageable. And we become more effective at living better.

What I want for us is conscious competency, which is the ability to speak about these ideas, and to consciously implement them. Unconscious competency is when a person achieves something, but they don't know how they did it. Conscious competency is when we have the experience of something, but we are also able to share it and have the ability to communicate it. The journey of the Haggadah is a journey of cultivating conscious

competency in understanding our *nefesh*, and using that skill to rewrite our personal life narrative. The textbook for this is the seder plate. It's an externalization of the different tendencies and abilities within us which are so important to be in communication with as we grow our own self-knowledge.

The Seder Plate

The Plate Itself—*Mochin*

As we begin to examine the Seder plate, one of the first things to notice is that everything is sitting on an actual plate. We don't just place everything that we need on the table, we find a plate, expansive enough to hold all of them, and carefully frame them. The seder plate is related to the idea of *mochin* (also *malchut*, but we will discuss that later). What is *mochin*? There isn't a great English translation, but we can think of it as a mentality of spiritual, mental and energetic expansion. From this perspective, it is connected to our *da'at*. It's our intellectual framework that acts as a *kli*, allowing us to take the many parts of our seder and ourselves, make space for them, and hold them together as a unified whole.

On Pesach, the Rosh Hashana of emunah, we draw upon ourselves a new *mochin*. The seder plate is a recognition that can receive something new. It invites us to breathe deep and make space for all the messy parts of ourselves and our lives, with faith that in time we will be able to tap into a spiritual framework that we can use to relate to our whole self in a new and integrated way.

Three Matzot—*Keter, Chochma, Bina*.

The three matzos reflect the different facets of our intellectual higher functioning: *keter*, *chochma*, and *bina*. These are our essential desires, our flashes of inspiration and our mind's ability to apply the knowledge we know. Interestingly, the *matzot* could either be placed either underneath the seder plate, or above the seder plate on the table. This is because the relationship between our mind and our body is a cyclical one. As we change our thought patterns, we have the ability to change our physiological state. It is transformative to powerfully ask the question, what do I believe in? At the same time, the state of our body

affects our mind. Our mental state is changed by our experience as we interact with *chesed*, *gevurah*, *tiferet*, *netzach*, *hod*, and *yesod*.

The Matza, and specifically its placement as part of the seder plate, invites us to explore the idea of our mind and our body as one unit, working together to move us forward.

Zeroa—Chesed

The *Zeroa* is a shankbone, reminiscent of an outstretched arm. It reflects the *middah* of *chesed*, which is expansiveness. *Olam chesed yiboneh*, the world is built on loving kindness. On a personal level, *chesed* is the aspect of ourselves that is yearning to reach out, through caring, sharing and supporting. In the right way, this *middah* is the greatest of the great. However, there is also a negative side to *chesed*. When we are caught up in the expansiveness of *chesed*, it is so easy to overstep boundaries. We can do it with ourselves, through self-criticism which expands over the boundaries of dignity and self-respect. We can do it to our spouse. We can do it to our parents. We can do it with our children. Whenever we overstep another person's boundaries, we turn *chesed* into an abusive *middah*.

On a national level, the *zeroa* is the symbol of the *Korban Pesach*. This was an expansive Korban, shared by all Jews, in family units. The first of the national *korbanot*, it reflects the expansiveness of our loving relationship with Hashem. In the religious sense, it is a symbol of that aspect of worship which is spontaneous, loving, emotional, and can also sometimes lead to laxity and overstepping the boundaries of *halacha*.

The *zeroa* invites us to ask ourselves if the expansiveness, goodness and kindness in our lives is being expressed in the proper measure.

Beytza—Gevurah

The egg on the Seder plate represents the *Korban Chagiga*, which was given alongside the Korban Pesach. It reflects the *middah* of *gevurah*, which is strength through boundaries. *Gevurah* breeds distinction, and differentiation. And while *gevurah* might sometimes seem

harsh, when used in the right way it is a very powerful, positive *middah*. It's through *gevurah* that we build a *kli* to receive the wisdom of the *Ein Sof*. *Gevurah* is knowing when to hold ourselves back. It's the ability to give space for others to exist. In today's world we often witness both the breakdown of *gevurah*, and the loss of self that comes with that. Breakdown of distinction and boundaries is one of the best ways to destroy a society.

The egg is an amazing symbol for the power of *gevurah*, because of its ability to get stronger and stronger the longer it is cooked. At the same time, the egg is also a symbol of mourning. Why? Because every time we express discipline, we sacrifice something. Every boundary leaves something on the other side.

On the other hand, the Ropshitzer taught that any time we express discipline in our lives we are saying to ourselves, "I love me." The breaking of the middle matza is a symbolic breaking of *gevurah*. And yet, from the pieces of *gevurah* we create the *afikomen*, which is *geulah*. *Geulah* comes from *gevurah*.

The *beytza* invites us to ask what might be borne out of the boundaries and constrictions that we now find so challenging in our lives.

Maror—Tiferet

It seems a bit counterintuitive that the *maror* is *tiferet*, balance, and not *gevurah*. The bitterness of the *maror* seems so fitting for that *gevurah*. However, there is deep significance to the connection between *maror* and *tiferet*. It is often the twinges of bitterness in our lives that help us to maintain our balance.

Although we might assume that *chesed* is the *middah* we need to help us maintain our balance, it's not actually very good at keeping us centered. When everything is going well, we're not usually motivated to notice if we're veering off track. We become complacent and blind. Too much *chesed* blurs our thinking.

However, a little bit of bitterness is often just what we need to wake us up from our stupor and force us to notice if we are moving out of balance. *Maror* is the vehicle that holds our balance in place. Rabbi Yitzchak Issac Shapira used to teach this with the image of a tightrope walker. What keeps him balanced? It's not stillness, but rather a very slight swaying from side to side. If he moves slightly too far in one direction, he will feel the bitterness of being a bit off kilter and then know that he needs to move back in the other direction. Balance is the practice of constant correction.

On the level of our middot, *tiferet* is the fine tuning of *chesed* and *gevurah*. It's actually an incredibly quick and subtle blending. It is the *maror*, the bitterness, of noticing when we've moved too far in one direction, that allows us to hold what looks like a steady position.

Tiferet is not only balance, it's also *emet*, truth. In our world, truth means having the ability to oscillate between a number of different points. This is because our reality consists of many different perspectives, existing simultaneously. If I'm stuck in one state, I'm now missing out on another state. We create a truer structure the more perspectives we are able to include. If we want to hold a truer picture, we will have to create a more expansive consciousness that can hold many different views.

All this takes effort. When we listen to another person, we listen to their words, but we also hear our own point of view. Listening well means making sure the other person feels seen and heard. At the same time, we are tapping into our own wisdom. So we jump from our *nefesh*, into our *da'at* , into that person's *da'at*, and into that person's *nefesh*. The better we are at listening, the more easily we can jump between these different positions.

Tiferet is the beauty of harmony and synthesis. It takes a lot of effort. And the effort is bittersweet. We have to stretch ourselves and others in order to fit everything together. However, the more we can do it gracefully and integrate that bitterness, the more beautiful it is.

Maror invites us to embrace the bitterness of life, and especially our response to that bitterness, and values it for its ability to keep us centered and balanced.

Charoset—Netzach

Charoset is the mixture that symbolizes the mortar the Jews used to cement bricks together in *Mitzrayim*. Essentially, it's a building material, and it's glue. At first it seems so far away from the *sefirah* of *netzach*, eternal victory, which it reflects. However, the truth about our future is that it can often be read in our present thinking, rituals, habits and practices. We build our future by gluing together all the small actions of our present.

Charoset invites us to examine the ways in which we use our whole being, and all our small actions, to build an eternal future for ourselves.

Karpas—Hod

According to the Arizal, the simple vegetable which we dip in salt water for *karpas* is representative of our *guf*. It reflects the *sefirah* of *hod*, which paradoxically means both splendor and confession or submission. We might not think these ideas integrate well, until we consider them in the context of gratitude. *Hod* is the splendor and glory of a life lived in real gratitude. When we are humble enough to accept what life gives us, and to be grateful for it, we move into a place of splendor. In our simplicity, we grow.

When we dip the *karpas* in the salt water, we can imagine dipping in a mikvah, and submitting ourselves to the complete newness, *hitchadshut*, of the seder night. We could allow the simplicity of accepting the moment for what it is, and the submission to and acceptance of whatever Hashem gives us, to move us to a place where we can feel gratitude coursing through our body. Real gratitude is a physical feeling. We can feel it in our *guf*. And when we do, it enables us to create a new future for ourselves.

Karpas invites us to give ourselves over completely to the splendor of the present moment and allow that to move us forward into a more meaningful future.

Chazeret—Yesod

Chazeret comes from the same root as *lachzor*, returning. This second portion of *maror* is what we use to create the Hillel Sandwich. It reflects the last of the sefirot on the seder plate, *yesod*, which is the foundation for our actions in this world. In the context of the Hillel sandwich, the *maror* becomes part of something bigger than itself. Its bitterness brings out the taste of the other components of the sandwich.

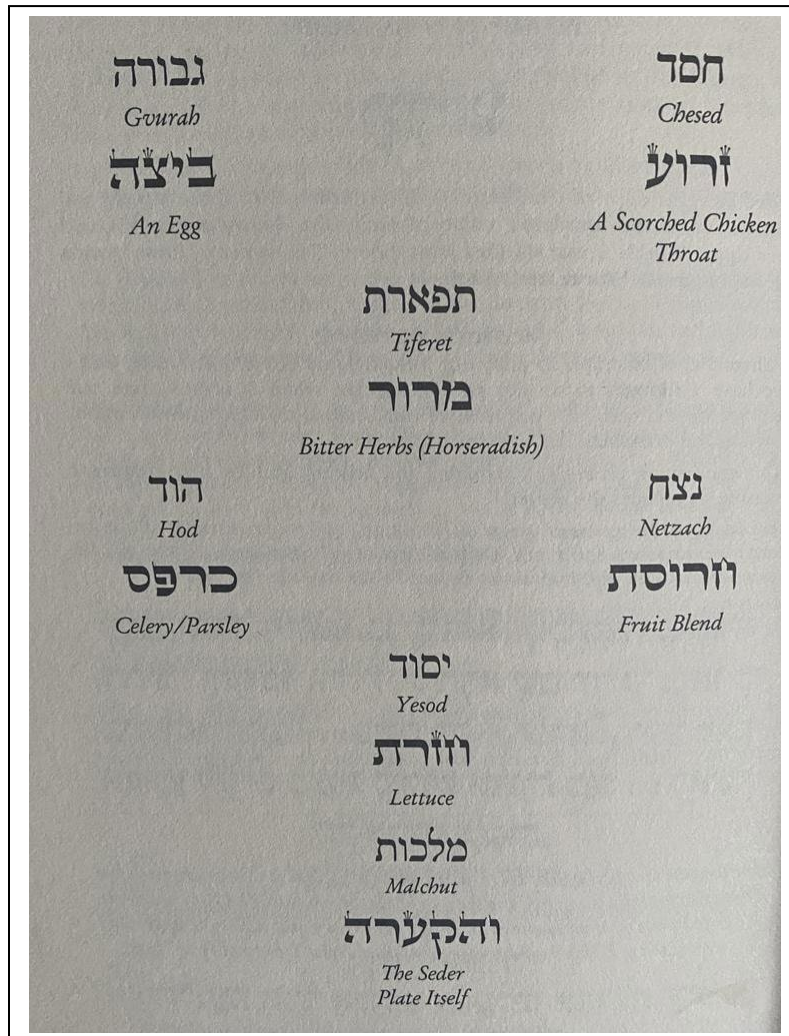
Yesod is the *sefirah* of resilience. It's the ability to work, in practice, with the *maror* in our lives, and to create something meaningful with it. With the *chazeret*, we make a space for the bitterness in our lives which allows it to be framed, highlighted and made meaningful. As we eat the Hillel sandwich, we can taste the balance, physically, and allow it to move us into a bit of a hero pose. Unlike when we eat the *maror* on its own, here we can lean into the experience. We can make it our own. We can experience the *maror* with our body, without going into fight or flight. We can hold our bitterness with acceptance, creativity and flexibility.

The *chazeret* invites us to channel the experience of our pain into something positive, and to find a bigger picture which allows us to experience it with resilience.

The Seder Plate—*Malchut*

In the end, we return to the seder plate, but we see it in a new light. It is not just *mochin*, but also *malchut*, the *sefirah* of royalty, which channels all the higher sefirot into actuality. We can use the seder plate itself to lift all its component parts as one and place it wherever we choose. Malchus is our crown. It's the space we make for ourselves, and the hug we give ourselves, as we express ourselves in the world.

Malchut invites us to make space for all of our middot to coexist in a beautiful harmony, and for us to express that unique blend, our full self, freely.



Section Three:

רפּוֹר—telling

The Stories of the Evening

Now that we've "read" our seder plate, we can open up the *Haggadah*, which we have realized is not meant to be read like a standard book at all. It leads us through an experience we call the "*Seder*" which does not appear to be *b'seder*, in any clear order. We begin with *kiddush*, and only afterwards invite our guests to the meal. Instead of the historical narrative we are expecting, there are some questions, a few *vortlach*, and some backstory. When we do finally get around to telling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the text we use is not the obvious choice of *Shemot*, but is instead the words of the farmer in Eretz Yisrael, generations later, who is bringing *bikkurim* to the *Mishkan*. After the meal, the evening comes to a close with children's songs. As a book, the *Haggadah* is confusing. As a narrative that guides us into a multi-faceted, transformational experience, it's perfect.

The *Haggadah* is filled with narratives. On *Seder* night we find ourselves speaking about other people speaking about Pesach. And this is very much on purpose. We are using the context of the historical event as an invitation to tell a story. Which story we choose to tell is up to us. We can tell the story of a tribe of slaves being reborn into an eternally free nation. We can tell the story of a people traveling through history toward *moshiach*. We might tell the story of a collective national *neschama* which touched ground on that first Pesach night, and which is integrated slowly into our national consciousness as we grow and develop as a nation over time. We are also invited to tell our own personal story, to write or rewrite the narrative of our journey to personal freedom.

The essential experience of *Seder* night is the experience of creating a narrative around what it means to be so intrinsically free that we can celebrate our freedom even in the land of our enslavement. It begins with reclaiming our *keilim*, our spiritual tools, of which the most fundamental one is our *da'at*, our ability to consciously notice and even choose how we are experiencing ourselves and our world. What *da'at* teaches us is that our experience is malleable. We can be the *ba'al habayit* of our own minds. With that superpower in hand,

we can begin to recognize the different parts of our self that reside in our *guf* and our *neshama*, and integrate them.

Through *da'at* we move forward, toward freedom, but it's not a linear process. It's an experiential process that takes time. The *Haggadah* speaks to all the parts of the human experience: the spirit, the mind and the heart. It speaks to our hope and our acceptance. The first part of our story is the exploration of what it means to take ownership of our internal world. The second part is using that ownership to come to a place of *bitachon* and integration.

Part One: Taking Ownership

The *Zohar* tells us that the speech of *Am Yisrael* was imprisoned in *Mitzrayim*. Our *da'at* was in exile. Now, as we open the *Haggadah*, we realize that the *roshei teivot*, the first letters of the Hebrew words, *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, are *safah*, language. Pesach is a time of using our language to create stories. It's all about stories, and every story is a *mashal*.

Our personal narrative is the story we tell ourselves about who we are and what we're capable of. The *Seder* is an invitation to use our *da'at* to consciously engage with this narrative. In the *Zohar*, the phrase "*leit machshava tefisa bei klal*," is used to describe how human intelligence cannot even begin to comprehend Hashem's essence. The Biala Rebbe applies this phrase, with a twist, to us as humans who are created in Hashem's image. He reads the phrase as, "there is no thought which can grasp you or imprison you at all." What the Rebbe is communicating is that when we understand our own inner tools we can develop a relationship with ourselves where we can guide our thinking. We can consciously choose not to engage certain thoughts, and instead to fill our world with the narrative we choose.

In this vein, there is a famous *mashal* which I heard from Rav Mordechai Tzukerman. It's deceptively simple. He taught that if you want to eat an apple, but you plant an orange seed, you're going to grow an orange tree, and you're not going to get to eat your apple. And if you want a banana but you plant a pepper seed, you will get a pepper instead of a banana. The same is true in our lives. If we plant seeds of defeat, we're going to grow trees of defeat. If we plant seeds of depression, of sadness or of negativity, those are the trees that are going

to grow. And that is the fruit we're going to eat. What Rav Tzukerman would often say was, be careful with your words. Our speaking, our seeds, grow into trees, and we are going to eat those fruits. Choose words to speak that can grow strong, healthy, positive trees.

We manifest our reality through our thinking, our creativity, and our speech. Our everyday speech is what leads us to the life that we are living. We could let our physical sensations, emotions and thoughts guide us, or we could lead them. We could allow the traumas, big and small, of our past to form our narrative, or we could challenge what we've come to believe. If we want to eat the fruit of inner freedom, we are invited to plant that seed.

Our biography is not our destiny, not as an individual, as a family, as a community or as a nation. The *Haggadah* is an invitation to transform and upgrade our inner dialogue. For this reason, it makes space for our national pain, hurt, and suffering. There is space in the narrative of *seder* evening to notice our old and comfortable patterns of thought, and to wonder if they are still serving us well now. There is space to wonder if our challenges have pushed us to be more understanding, compassionate and loving toward others. The faculty we can use to have these conversations is our *da'at*.

We learned from the *Zohar* that on a national level, Moshe served as the faculty of *da'at* for *Am Yisrael*. And yet, despite how important *da'at* is for us on *Seder* evening, Moshe is only mentioned in passing once. Instead of giving us a clear, "official" narrative, the *Haggadah* challenges us to create our own narrative. And instead of giving us Moshe to guide us, on *Seder* night each of us is invited to grow, expand and find our own inner Moshe. On *seder* night, the *Haggadah* offers us the invitation to create our own narrative, and to be the hero of our own story.

Emunah. Bitachon. Integration.

The *Haggadah* is a wonderful mechanism for looking directly at our national and personal trauma, holding it, owning it, interpreting it and then moving on. As we move through the *Seder* evening, there is an invitation to shift from "fight or flight" to "rest and

digest". Just as *Bnei Yisrael*, in *Mitzrayim*, longed for a ventral freedom and liberation from bondage, we are also yearning and wanting a liberation from the internal chains of our doubts, our negative habitual patterns, and the narrative that holds us back from filling our potential. Our story begins with empowerment and growth and then moves into resilience and the capacity to give and to serve. Even while acknowledging our failings, we can become excited about life and excited about our place in history.

The Slonimer Rebbe writes that Pesach is the Rosh Hashana for *emunah*. We have three dimensions of Emunah, and we are invited to cultivate all of them on Seder night so that we can come to feel fully free. We want to cultivate our intellectual understanding of Hashem, which we do through deep conversations with others and with ourselves. We want to cultivate our emotional relationship with Hashem, so that it's mature and intimate. And in the body itself, we want to educate our physiology to connect to Hashem.

We began the Pesach story in *Mitzrayim* in a place of trauma, of *kotzer ruach*. We described this as a state where our *da'at* was completely sunk into our *nefesh*. The overwhelming trauma of the slavery in Egypt put us, as a nation, into a reactionary state. Pesach is the *chag* where our *da'at* learns to meet our *nefesh* in healthy relationship. With *da'at*, we can create a space between the triggers in our lives and whatever has become our automatic response to those triggers. The first step is to create that space, the second is to use it as a path for communication between our *neshama* and our *nefesh*.

The *Haggadah* is a full body and soul experience. The word *haggadah* is connected to the word *egged*, which means bound together. Through the *Haggadah* we bind together our *neshama*, *ruach* and *nefesh* aspects of our soul, in order to find our place in Hashem's creation. This is what forms the structure behind the apparent non-structure of the *Haggadah*. Instead of giving us a set narrative, the *Haggadah* is a series of prompts that invites us to move from a state of our *da'at* being sunk into our *nefesh*, to a place where our *da'at* becomes the mechanism for our *neshama* to be in relationship with our *nefesh*. In this place of relationship, we can move into an expanded consciousness, where we can see ourselves as an integral and important part of something much bigger than ourselves.

Looking at this structure from the perspective of a broad overview, what we notice first is that the *Haggadah* begins with *Kiddush*. *Kiddush* offers us a vision of our higher selves. It speaks to our desire, and our heart, challenging us to integrate that vision, and to live for something bigger than ourselves. Shortly after this we move into *Maggid*, which speaks to our mind, and asks us to examine our interpretations and assumptions. In this section, we don't shy away from anything. We include all our children, including all our wayward inner children. We speak to the *avodah zara* that we've indulged in. We speak to the slavery of *Mitzrayim* that we fell into. We meet all this head on, with the promise that the more we speak these things out, the more we will shine. As the *Seder* progresses, we begin to heal. We come into relationship with our *guf* and purposefully include our *guf* in our healing process. We point with our fingers. We eat. We lean. We use our faculty of imagination together with our bodies to experience the slavery, and also to create a vision of a better future. And in the end, we sing in gratitude, not just about our own experiences, but about and with the entire cosmos. We involve our whole body in living out the life we pictured in the beginning at *kiddush*.

This integration within ourselves, of all the parts of ourselves, in the context of Hashem's creation, is what it means to heal. This is where *emunah* and *da'at* are meant to lead us. The deeper aspect of *emunah* is that it does not take away the uncertainty from our lives. Instead, *emunah* helps us navigate with certainty through the uncertainty.

We experience our lives as a reflection of our inner narrative. In our heads, we can be free, or we can be slaves. The *Haggadah*, with its emphasis on narrative, asks us to look at our *emunah* through the lens of our conversations. What quality of conversation do I have with my friends? What conversation am I having with myself as I go about my day? The essence of freedom is having the ability to think higher level thoughts and to have higher level conversations, regardless of our situation. When situations come up that don't fit into our plan, as they are certain to do both in life and on *seder* night, we are invited to ask ourselves: what will we do with that *ra*? If something uncertain comes my way, can I work with it, and

not against it? Am I hoping for the miracle, or am I recognizing that every moment is a miracle? Do I know that I am the miracle and that everything is a Divine kiss?

The Pesach experience is one of liberation, where we can be in a place of *echad*, regardless of where we physically find ourselves. Why do we want to experience this liberation? Because it's good for us, and because we feel better. This is an important point that is not mentioned enough. Part of healing is that we feel better. We deserve to feel good. Growing and developing, becoming more integrated and healthy, is good for us. It allows us to feel more centered. We can hold life's circumstances with greater ease. We can feel a deep sense of fulfillment and purpose and pleasure. Healing involves feeling good and experiencing more focus, and we want it for us and for everybody else, because then our entire world functions better.

We live in two worlds. One world is the world of self. This is the world of my thinking, my feelings, and my physical sensations. In this world there is shame, there's pain, there's anxiety, there's depression, and there's sadness. If we can become present, exit the mind and enter the present moment, we can shift ourselves to a second world. That second world is where we are all connected. That's the world of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

When we place our attention on our breath, and we learn to become more present, we become sensitive to the silence that's behind all things. We enter the world of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, and we become part of the collective. Our experience begins with an experience of mindfulness, but eventually we enter into a deep spiritual experience of *echad*. Throughout the *seder* we are rebirthing ourselves, spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically, into a consciousness of unity. We want to be on the same page with our own *neshama*, and with Hashem, in Hashem's world. That's what we want to have as we sing the last songs of the *seder*, and that's what our desire could be as we go into the *seder*.

The Structure of the Haggadah

When we look at anything through the lens of *Torat Hakabbalah*, which reveals the underlying patterns and unity of our world, we expect to find patterns that repeat across many different realms. This is exactly what we find when we look at the Haggadah. The number of the evening is the number four: four names for the holiday, four cups of wine, four expressions of redemption, four questions and four sons. We could also divide the Haggadah into four parts, and then notice this fourfold pattern echoing across a number of different realms.

In Kabbalah we find a pattern of four that echoes across time. It begins in *Bereisheit Rabbah* 8:2, which says that the Torah existed for 2000 years before the creation of the world. *Chazal* then divide the timeline of our created world into three parts: 2000 years of *tohu vavohu*, 2000 years of Torah, and 2000 years of *yemot hamashiach*. What is the nature of each of these stages? The 2000 years of Torah before the creation of the world we might think of as a vision statement, an expression of purpose and the unbreakable connection of creation to its Source. The 2000 years of *tohu vavohu*, of confusion, is the era from creation until Avraham Avinu, when humanity was trying to find itself with principles that were not yet fully defined. The 2000 years of Torah is the era from Avraham Avinu to Rebbe Akiva, from the beginning of our nation until the destruction of the Second Temple. In this period, we received the Torah, an entire system of *halacha*, and built the *Mishkan* and two *Batei Mikdash*. Our relationship with Hashem existed in the framework of clearly established rules. The final 2000 years of *yemot hamashiach* are not, of course, the actual time of Moshiach. Rather, in this period, which happens to be our era, our consciousness and our focus shifts from what came before, to what will come next. Focusing on the days of Moshiach that lie ahead, we are working on bringing our physical and spiritual worlds into alignment.

We can also understand these eras as an expression of the nature of time itself, as we experience it. It begins with a point that is beyond time, and then we have the three stages of past, present and future. This pattern is also reflected in the global human experience. We come into this world at first in utero, existing in potential, with all of our genes, but not

actualized in the world. That is parallel to the 2000 years of Torah before the existence of the world. Then we exist as young children, in the world of *tohu vavohu* where our focus is on figuring out who we are. As we mature, we move into the world of Torah. We become responsible adults, expressing ourselves in relationship to rules and sociological norms. At some point we will recognize that there is an eternal part of us that exists beyond the everyday frameworks of this world. As we shift our consciousness to come into alignment with that aspect of ourselves, we move into wise old age, parallel to the era of *yemot hamoshiach*.

It's important to note, as we know well from life, that these states are very fluid. We never quite lose our childish aspects: not the wonder and playfulness, and not the ability to break down. We live sometimes comfortably within the rules, and sometimes on autopilot. And even if often we are sometimes able to live the mindful, purpose driven life of *yemot hamoshiach*, most of us don't stay there all the time. Our experience of life is constant movement from one state to the other.

This pattern of four is also reflected in the personal cycle of growth that we experience repeatedly throughout our lives. We begin in the ideal state, parallel to the 2000 years before creation, when things are going well, and we are comfortable, aligned and healthy. Inevitably, there is a point when we will begin to drift out of that alignment. We move toward the childlike aspects of breakdown, and *mochin d'katnus*, constricted consciousness. Then, we begin to find the structure that will pull us out of this state. In this state of Torah, structure and principles guide us to be in relationship with ourselves and to express ourselves. Finally, we can move into the place of thriving where we can be grateful for the challenges we've had, and in alignment with our essential selves.

This pattern of four is also reflected in the national process from slavery to growth which we spoke about in the previous section. For these purposes, however, we begin a bit earlier than the *kotzer ruach* stage. When Moshe first arrives in Mitzrayim, and performs the first signs for Bnei Yisrael, in *Shemot* 4:31, Bnei Yisrael are able to listen to and believe in everything that he wants to communicate. At this point, before Moshe has the disappointing first meeting with Pharaoh, Bnei Yisrael are able to hear Hashem's promise to them. This is

the first, ideal stage. Afterward, as Pharoah makes their slavery even more oppressive, they begin to breakdown, unable to integrate the horrible circumstances of their lives with Hashem's promise. This is the second stage, what we called *da'at* enslaved in the *nefesh habehamit*, or *mochin d'katnut*. Afterwards, we watch as Bnei Yisrael became empowered to become the hero of their own story. On Shabbat Hagadol Bnei Yisrael grew into greatness through the *mitzvot* they kept. The final stage of the *yetziah* is at *Yam Suf*, when the entire nation reaches the level of *nevuah* and spontaneously bursts into songs of gratitude to Hashem.

Of course, we can see these four stages playing out in the broad strokes of the Haggadah as we move through *Seder* evening. The Haggadah begins with *kiddush*, which is an expression of our mission statement, reflective of the 2000 years of Torah before creation. From there we move into the world *maggid*, which is the unstructured world of the child, who is trying to find himself amidst the chaos of the world. Then, we move into the structured eating of the *shulchan orech* section of the *Haggadah*, where we bring our essential selves into relationship with our *nefesh*. Finally, we have *Hallel* and *nirtza*, an expression of song which focuses on the experience of our relationship with Hashem, and our future.

In the *Haggadah*, as in our lives, we are constantly moving through these steps, oscillating back and forth, while also moving forward linearly. This is true of the cosmos, the world, human beings, *Am Yisrael*, and the self. Into this broad pattern of four, the Haggadah places the fifteen steps of the *Seder*, which guides us through a process of reclaiming and rebirthing ourselves as we move through the *Seder* night.

Pattern of Four in Different Frameworks

Framework	1	2	3	4
Cosmic	2000 Years of Torah before Creation	2000 Years of <i>Tohu Vavohu</i>	2000 Years of Torah	2000 Years of <i>Yemot Hamoshiach</i>
Time	Beyond Time	Past	Present	Future
Human Lifecycle	In Utero (potential)	Childhood (no rules)	Adult (lives with rules)	Wise Old Age (conscious living)
Human Growth Cycle	Health and Alignment	Breakdown and Mochin d’Katnut	Healing through Structure	Gratitude and Joy
Experience of Soul	<i>Neshama</i>	<i>Ruach (Sechel)</i>	<i>Nefesh (Guf)</i>	<i>Lev</i> (heart and mind together)
National	Torah as the Vision for the World	Creation until Avraham Avinu	Avraham Avinu to the destruction of <i>Bayit Sheni</i>	From <i>Bayit Sheni</i> to <i>Moschiach</i>
<i>Yetziat Mitzrayim</i>	Unquestioning Belief	<i>Kotzer Ruach</i>	<i>Shabbat Hagadol</i>	<i>Shirat Yam Suf</i>
Haggadah	<i>Kadesh U'rchatz</i>	<i>Maggid</i>	<i>Shulchan Arech</i>	<i>Hallel/Nirtza</i>

The Fifteen Steps of the Seder

Kadesh U'rchatz

The uplifting words of *kiddush*, which we say over wine, speak to our *neshama*. *Nichnas yayin, yatzah sod*. The wine of *kiddush* is an invitation to be open to the possibility of looking at the world in a different way. With its simple and direct words, *kiddush* reminds us of important, simple things. Hashem loves us. He chose to have a relationship with us. We have an eternal bond with Him. And it was from this place of tremendous love that He gave us this uplifted moment to enjoy and to celebrate our freedom.

This is our mission statement, a vision of love and spiritual freedom that is available for us on *Seder* night if we choose it. This moment, at the beginning of the *Seder*, is what will hold us through the *Seder*, and what can hold us through the challenges of life. When we have a dream of what we want to achieve, then today's difficulty can be held by tomorrow's reward.

Interestingly, what we notice about the fifteen steps of the seder is that every step stands alone, except for *rachatz*. *Kadesh* and *rachatz* are joined by a *vav*. There is clearly a fundamental connection, but what exactly is it? The connection between *kadesh* and *rachatz* is the connection between mind and heart. We've already spoken about *kiddush* as connected to our *da'at*, as a conscious expression of what we believe. Kabbalah uses different languages to describe *kiddush*: as light, and as *abba*, father. On the other hand, *Rachatz* is described in kabbalah as a *kli*, a vessel, or *ima*, mother. *Rachatz* is a way of preparing our hands for all the things we want to accomplish in the world. Using our hands, we become the vessels through which Hashem's Will is expressed in the world.

In Kabbalah these two aspects of *abba* and *ima* are never separated. In the metaphysical realm, the light of our mind becomes like a father, and our heart becomes the vessel, the mother, that accepts this light. Of course, our heart can't directly bring this light out into the world. And so, our hands become the extension of our heart. We act on what we

desire. We're constantly filling up our vessels with our thinking and that is what we birth into the world.

We begin the *Seder* with this union of heart and mind. Another, more down-to-earth, way to say this is that we emotionalize our thinking. Whatever thoughts we've chosen to emotionalize—those are the thoughts that will lead us. Those are the thoughts that our hands will bring to life in this world.

Hashem gives us the ability, the letters, and the language, with which to create our world. What we do with our language is up to us. In *kadesh u'rchatz* we express the ideal of a complete union between a vision of connection to Hashem, and the ability to express that in the world. At the end of *Kiddush*, after we've sketched the vision for ourselves in our minds, and then committed to emotionalizing it in our hearts, we say the *bracha shehechianu*. It's a statement of recognition. I'm here. I'm present. I'm ready for whatever comes next.

Karpas

As we pick up the *karpas*, we are now on the third of the fifteen steps of the *Seder*. This step moves us into the world of *tohu vevohu*, or what we often call, "real life." We've all experienced this shift. It's that feeling of having everything under control, until, seemingly all of a sudden, we don't. We find ourselves born into a world of challenges.

Karpas, which is often a young green plant, represents personal and national youth. Think about a baby, a little child. On the one hand, there's the cute little baby cheeks, the innocence, the wonder, and the absolute joy of a young child's laugh. On the other hand, there's the crying, the waking up in the middle of the night, and the full throated, on the floor, kicking screaming fit in the middle of a packed supermarket over a piece of candy. Children are real. They're messy. They break things. They're awkward. And they're completely amoral. An emotionally mature adult is aware that there are no good or bad babies, there are just real babies. With children, there's a lot of joy and a lot of tears.

Each step of the *Seder* is an invitation. *Karpas* is an invitation to taste the full, sensory experience of childhood. Nationally, the dipping of *karpas* brings us back to the brothers, the original “children” of Yaacov, and the horrible mistake they made in selling Yosef and dipping his multi-colored coat in blood. It also brings us back to the birth of our nation, to the first mitzvot we received, and how we dipped the bundles of hyssop in the blood of the *Korban Pesach*, and painted our doorposts, without actually knowing how exactly we would end up free.

Personally, *karpas* invites us to connect to our childlike side, in actual age, or in temperament. The invitation here is to experience, without judgement, who we really are, and I would add, perhaps, who our nation really is. The reality is that Hashem created us as imperfect. And that leads us, inevitably, into *yachatz*.

Yachatz

Yachatz is the inevitable fall from grace. Like all kabbalistic patterns, it echoes across so many realms. As the world was created, the original vessels shattered, and we are still picking up the broken pieces. In Gan Eden, Adam and Chava sinned and forced us into a broken world. Nationally, we ended up in slavery in Egypt, and again in *galut*. Personally, nationally and globally, we all experience breaking.

In *yachatz*, however, we take ownership of this process. We don’t just experience the breaking, we’re actively breaking. The matza represents our intellectual faculties. Sometimes we get so caught up in ourselves that we block the connection between the *neshama* and the *nefesh*. In this step we break open our preconceived narrative, so that we can open up space for something else.

The breaking on *seder* night is real, but it’s purposeful. Out of the breaking of *yachatz*, the *afikoman* is created. Breaking is what drives us to grapple with a challenging reality and to find a way to recover our piece and our peace. We break the *matza*, and then immediately

begin to look for it. We grow and become wiser. And at the end of the seder, it is our children who bring the *afikoman* back to us.

The invitation here is to allow ourselves to break, trusting the process that the break will open up something new for us.

Maggid

From our broken places, we enter *maggid*. When we realize we've broken, when we've made a mistake, or we've fallen, what do we do? We start to speak. We reflect. We share with ourselves, we share with someone else, we share with Hashem. The first step of healing is to share the story. *Maggid* is an invitation to communication.

Maggid is by far the longest part of the *seder*. That is because this is the place where we begin our healing. Healing is different than information and inspiration. Information and inspiration can be shared quickly. We can sit for a few minutes, maybe an hour, and experience our intellect moving, and our heart stirring. Transformation, on the other hand, takes time. We are invited to give ourselves the space and time to explore and to move slowly.

As *yidden*, our deeper truth is that we are always leveraging everything that happens to us to bring greater light into this world. We speak, but our words are not just words. As we mentioned, each word that we say is a seed. We are meaning makers. We are creating meaning through our thoughts. We are creating our world through our speech.

What happens as we tell our story is that our own understanding of our story deepens. And as our understanding changes, sometimes our story changes a bit as well. The invitation here, in *maggid*, is for narrative therapy. We are invited to describe ourselves to ourselves in a healthier, truer, more spiritually productive way. In *Maggid* we give ourselves room to allow this to happen. The nonlinear aspects of the Haggadah invite us to give space to all the different ideas that want to be shared.

As we move through *maggid*, we make space for five healing aspects to emerge:

1. **Understanding our own inner dialogue.** We make space to become aware of the constant inner dialogue that runs through our mind. By observing these thoughts, without getting caught up in them, we can begin to understand how they are shaping our perception and emotions. Ultimately, we can move into a healthy relationship with them.
2. **Release past experiences.** When we hold on to our past experiences and emotions, they can create blockages in our energy and hinder our personal growth. By letting go of these attachments we can free ourselves from the burden of the past and open up to new possibilities and experiences. When we speak about the past, and give it the respect it needs, we can find ourselves ready to let go and allow the past to be.
3. **Living fully in the present moment.** By focusing on the here and now, rather than worrying about the past or the future, we can experience life more fully. We can feel the ground under our feet. We can listen to the loudest and quietest sounds. We can look around, notice, and be grateful. From that place, we can find peace, contentment and joy.
4. **Embrace inner freedom.** True freedom comes from within. It's the practice of remaining balanced, regardless of what's going on around us. This we do through cultivating our *da'at*, our ability to consciously separate from our circumstances, and choose how we want to respond.
5. **Surrender and trust the flow of life.** Everything happens for a reason. By relinquishing the need to control every aspect of our lives, we can experience a

profound sense of peace, alignment and wellbeing. We can find our place in the greater, interconnected whole.

Maggid is not a linear process. Instead, as we go through *maggid* we touch on all these things in different ways. We make space for each of them. There is not one set process, no one path that is universal. As we travel through *maggid*, we can be open to discovering our own personal process, our own order, and our own *seder*.

Inside Maggid

Ha Lachma Anya

The healing on *seder* night is a healing that we do together. The whole of *Am Yisrael*, together, is greater than the sum of its parts. The national redemption began with Moshe gathering and speaking to *Am Yisrael*. The *Korban Pesach* was brought in groups. So too, we begin the *seder* with an open invitation to our nation. The moment the nation buys in, the moment we work together, is the moment everything changes. Just as we began the *seder* as a whole with the mission statement of *kiddush*, we begin *Maggid* with this recognition that we are part of something larger than ourselves. We are connected to all of *Am Yisrael*, from the beginning of the nation into the future. *Maggid* begins with an expansive vision of unity, that helps us to create an expansive vision for the future: *l'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalayim*.

Ma Nishtanah

As we begin to explore our inner dialogue, we begin by exploring the value of a question. There are no answers to the four questions given directly in the *Haggadah*. *Ma nishtanah* is not about answering questions. It's about listening to the questions. It's about being with the questions.

When we think about questions in the framework of *galut* and *geulah*, from one perspective, we can see the question as an expression of *galut*, and the answer as an

expression of *geulah*. After all, the pain and the uncertainty is in the question, the relief and the certainty is in the answer. However, the Ropshitzer had a different way of looking at things. He felt that when we ask a question, we place ourselves into a mindset of freedom, because the path forward is open to new possibilities. We open ourselves up to drawing down new *shefa* from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. When we answer the question, we close our mindset and close off that *shefa*. We've boxed ourselves into wherever we are, until we can open up a new question.

As we begin *maggid* we're interested in listening to questions and creating curiosity. We will quickly come to realize, when we open the floor to questions, that we are not able to answer all our children's questions. And that is okay. We can hold the question, and explore the question, together with our children, and that is more than enough.

Avadim Hayinu

We begin to explore our challenges, our trauma, our negative experiences. "I was a slave. I messed up. I fell." In our slavery, our more intelligent self suffers because we allow our less intelligent self to make decisions for us. Without a higher consciousness, and without help from Hashem, we remain stuck. However, as we begin to speak about what's holding us back, we simultaneously begin the process of releasing our past experiences. The more we speak about it, the more free we become.

Maaseh Shehayah b'Bnei Brak

After teaching that everyone has to explore the *Haggadah* on *Seder* night, even those who are very wise, we now bring examples, and possibilities. We bring it into action. We are bringing home the point that the seder night is not an intellectual exercise. It's a full body experience. It applies to everyone, at all times. We are invited to allow ourselves to get swept away and lose ourselves in the experience.

Four Sons

We began the *Seder* with *karpas*, the sensory experience of being a child. Now, we revisit this idea of childhood, but instead of the child, we have become the parent. We've created a space between ourselves and our children. This is part of our movement out of a state of *da'at* that has fallen into our *nefesh*, and into a place where we can create space to understand our children. This is true about our real children, and our ability to see them honestly, with all of their varied personality traits. It is also true about our inner children. The *mussar sefarim* say that when a thought comes up, it's like a little child wanting our attention.

Da'at tachton pnimi is the name given to our internal awareness. It's our ability to be aware of our narrative, and to understand how it is created through our thoughts, our feelings and our physical sensations. It is how we become aware of our expectations and our assumptions in the present moment.

When a thought comes into our mind, it is an invitation to see what it's come to share. It's an invitation to hold it, lovingly, and give it space. There is no reason to be nasty or critical to ourselves. We are big. We are layers and layers of soul that reach up to *shamayim*. And we are big enough to hold all our children, inside and out.

Yachol Mi'Rosh Chodesh

Once we move into a space of internal awareness, we begin to see that we are not trapped. Our thoughts have no power to imprison us. We are free to create a new story. We begin to move into questioning and wondering. Perhaps the freedom of Pesach began on Rosh Chodesh, when Hashem gave us the first mitzvah, and taught us about the power of *hitchadshut*? Perhaps. Although the experience of Pesach is more than just *hitchadshut*. It is the full body experience of the *Seder*. We are not satisfied with just a new story, we want a new story of integration, which is where the *Seder* is leading us.

Mitechila Hayu Avoteinu

We return, again, to our trauma, and to different aspects of our slavery. Each time, we try to find something new. Throughout the *Haggadah* we are in conversation with all of the elements of our enslavement. Most other cultures want to let go of the fact that they were slaves. They move into denial. They become angry. We speak about it and we don't become angry. It's part of who we are. We can accept that we had fallen, and we are now healed.

Vehi She'amda

The freedom of Pesach is both a historical reality and an ongoing personal quest for liberation, together with others. Through embracing this dual understanding, we honor our ancestors' struggles, while acknowledging our continuous journey for growth and inner freedom. The Arizal writes that we have multi-generational trauma and healing. We are holding a connection to thousands of generations within our bodies. We are invited to take responsibility as a nation for multigenerational healing. This is something we do together. By embracing this dual understanding, we honor our ancestors' struggles while acknowledging the continuous work of freeing our inner selves.

Arami Oved Avi

After so much preparation, we finally get to the narrative of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. It is layers of story upon story. We are one generation, reading the story about another generation, as told by a third generation. The narrative is stopped at almost every word with the insights and additions of yet other generations. We are asked to hold layer upon layer of narrative, because we are part of this multi-generational story. And we are challenged to discover what unique insight we have to add to the discussion.

Makkot

The slavery of *Mitzrayim* was an attempt to imprison two peoples in a completely false narrative of reality. The ten plagues begin, literally and metaphorically, with Pharoah in denial, standing in the Nile, and claiming that he is a god. The process of the ten *makkot* was both a destruction of the Egyptian false narrative and a revelation of Hashem's narrative of the world's creation, the ten *ma'amarot*. They are a strong statement of the truth of His Story, meaning Hashem's perspective on reality.

And yet, this clear list of ten plagues immediately becomes complicated in the *Haggadah*. We find ourselves caught in a disagreement about how many plagues there actually were. Perhaps 10, perhaps 40, and perhaps 50. Perhaps there were multiples more at the sea.

We understand this by recognizing that every *makkah* is an event that births many stories. Events can be told in many ways. We may be forgiven if we are left wondering how it is possible to hold all this multiplicity and fracture that arises from our experience?

Dayenu

The Haggadah prompts us to answer this question through *Dayeinu*. At first glance we have a poem that makes no sense. It was enough to split the sea, but not bring us through it? It was enough to give us the *mon*, but not Shabbat? It was enough to bring us to the foot of Har Sinai and not give us the Torah? Why break up every miracle, every good narrative, into little pieces? Why label each tiny piece of the narrative as enough?

Dayenu is a response to the reality that in this world we simply never have the full picture. We never know the whole story. Even so, it is enough. It's enough for us to say thank you to Hashem. It's enough for us to be in relationship with Hashem. It's enough for us to create our own narrative. It's enough for us to experience joy and be present in the moment.

Dayenu is an invitation to be present with our whole selves, and to experience with joy whatever piece of the story is our own.

Pesach. Matza. Maror

As we near the end of *maggid*, we begin to look for integrated ways to create a narrative for ourselves. To this end, we use physical props for *matza* and *maror*. We point with our fingers. We use our speech. At this point we are trying to incorporate our speech to bring our *avodah* all the way down to the *gashmiut* level.

The *seder* is all about using our speech to create our narrative, and therefore to impact our experience of life. We are now expanding this by using our speech to assign meaning to our food. In this way we, begin the process of bringing our *avodah* all the way down to the *gashmiut*. We are preparing to move into the deepest, deepest level. And we begin by using food as symbols. We can play with meaning, because that is our unique skill set as humans. Our lives are created out of the meaning we manifest. On Pesach, *peh sach*, our mouths speak. We recognize that we can play games of meaning, and in fact that's what we do all the time in life. We mention the Pesach, and perhaps think of what we want to skip over, and with what we choose to engage. Perhaps we think of how we can be of service in this world. We hold up the *matza* and perhaps think of how we can use our *da'at* to transform moments of challenge into moments of everlasting freedom. We hold up the *maror* and perhaps think about the balance that is born from the uncomfortable moments of realizing when we've overstepped our bounds. We are constantly creating the world that we live in, and we have not completed our *seder* until we've spent time thinking about the meaning behind the symbols that surround us.

Hallel

As *maggid* comes to a close, we end in gratitude. In this first part of Hallel, we tell the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* yet again, but this time from a completely different perspective. Suddenly, we are no longer stuck in our own story. As *Bnei Yisrael* leaves *Mitzrayim*, it's no

longer just about *Am Yisrael*. The ocean, the river and the hills have become integrated into our story. Our narrative is expanded, and perhaps we have even begun to be thankful for all that we have gone through.

Rachtza

As *maggid* draws to a close, we begin to move from the world of *tohu vavohu* into the world of Torah. From a more mature place, we return to the beginning. We wash our hands again, but this time, with a *bracha*. It's *teshuva*. Repentance. I stop and say, *mamesh, Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, I want to return to you. I want to start to do *teshuva* and build myself. And we get another chance. We do it again. This time, we are prepared to actualize our mission statement. After *maggid*, we begin to have deeper healings.

Motzi

The *bracha* of *hamotzei lechem min ha'aretz* is fascinating, because on its surface it appears to not be an accurate description of reality. Bread does not come directly from the ground. To the contrary, there were eleven different *melachot* that were involved in making the bread for the *Mishkan*. Bread takes a lot of work. Specifically, it takes a lot of work that is called *melacha*. *Melacha* is a specific type of work that is an expression of a specific intention. A *melacha* is only considered as having been done if the actions of the person doing it reflect his intentions. For example, if a person intended to pick a black date on Shabbat, and a white date was picked instead, no *melacha* was done.

On Shabbat we refrain from *melachot*, which are the creative process through which the world was brought into being. *Chazal* describe the creation of the world as *sof ma'aseh, b'machshava techila*, meaning that the final created product reflects our Creator's first intentions. We humans were the last creation, and also a reflection of Hashem's first intention. Each of us is an expression of Hashem's original desire. And our quintessential food is bread, which the farmer has in mind as he plants a seed in the ground and follows through with all eleven *melachot* that bring his original intention to fruition.

This moment of *hamotzi* is a moment when we are invited to recognize that the entire complicated process of our lives, which seem so out-of-seder, are all part of Hashem's plan. We are *beseder*. From the moment of our creation and birth into this world, we are always *beseder*. Everything in the world is an expression of the *Borei Olam's* Will. Hashem works through our life, in order to ultimately bring the world into a higher spiritual reality. We recognize this when we eat our bread, or in this case, our matza. We invest a huge amount of labor and then thank Hashem for bringing bread from the earth. We know that whatever we do, it is Hashem's doing.

Matza

This second *bracha* over matza gives us an opportunity to move a bit deeper into our *avodah*. Seder night is the only time of year when there is a specific *mitzvah* to eat for which we say a full *bracha* including *asher kiddishanu*. In this part of the *seder* we move into a series of conscious eating exercises.

Eating is much more than taking food into our mouth. We eat when we feel we are missing something, and eating is our ability to fill that lack. As we mentioned, it is those places of lack that are the seed from which relationship is born. Eating is a beautiful opportunity. When we eat properly, healthfully, and with intention, we can create and heal relationships. We bring ourselves into alignment and bring new light into our soul.

The relationship that we are healing, as we eat the matza, is our relationship with ourselves and Hashem that happens through our *da'at*. The matza of *Mitzrayim* became the *mon* of the dessert. It was the food that was given to *Am Yisrael* in the merit of Moshe, who was our national *da'at*. *Mon* was food we ate that was directly connected to our thoughts. It expressed in its taste, whatever we were intending.

The name *mon* sounds very similar to our arch-enemy from Purim, Haman. The connection between these two is that they stand in opposition, one to the other. It was the

nation of Amalek, Haman's literal and spiritual ancestors, who were the first to attack us in the desert. The world view of Haman and Amalek on one hand, and the worldview of the *mon* and the matza on the other, are diametrically opposed.

Haman wanted us to buy into his false narrative of the world. He was attempting to deaden, and ultimately to completely destroy, our *koach* of thinking. *Mon* is the exact opposite. It's an expression of the power of our thoughts to directly impact our experience of the world. Whatever we are thinking about as we eat the *mon* is what it tastes like. What do we think about as we fulfill this *mitzvah* of eating matzah on seder night? Matza is *emunah*. We are praying that we can express in this world what Hashem wants us to express in the world. We pray to live and actualize our intentions and Hashem's intentions.

This is not theoretical. We eat the *matza*, and we taste our intentions. We think, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it's all You. I can't do it without You." And we bring that into manifestation, all the way down in the physical world. We eat the matza, and it becomes a part of us.

Maror

As we eat the *matza*, and we bring ourselves fully into our relationship with Hashem, we experience something called *teshuva* upon *teshuva*. This higher level of *teshuva* occurs when we use the *maror* as a tool for creating balance and healthy relationship. *Maror* is the bitterness of recognizing where we've overstepped the bounds in our relationship. *Charata*. It's the sharpness of recognizing that we've created something unhealthy, that in some way we've damaged the relationship.

The *maror*, as we discussed at length in Part 2, is Tiferet. The bitterness is not a punishment. It's just the way we become aware of how we can adjust to bring ourselves and the relationship back into alignment. It's an invitation to heal.

Korech

The *maror*, with its invitation to move into alignment, prepares us for *korech*. The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that *korech* is an expression of our ability to hold paradox. Halachically, this combination of healing bread and bitter herb exists in uncertainty. Do we lean as a free man when we eat it? Do we sit straight as we did when we ate the *maror*?

Korech is the experience of simultaneous faith in redemption and pain over the past. It is our faith that Hashem is good, together with the pain of present life. It's the recognition of the brokenness of exile, together with the recognition of the blessings that flower from the experience. It's the knowledge of all the places we've fallen short, together with a secure trust in our ability to move forward.

Korech is an invitation to embrace the paradox of real life, because it is from our ability to embrace paradox that our resilience is born. We take all the broken pieces of our experience, and we put them together into a tasty sandwich.

Shulchan Orech

Food is an expression of our desire. At *shulchan orech* we taste the sweetness of bringing our desires into actuality. We open our eyes to the sweetness of our world. We call the world around us *olam hateva*, natural, because it runs according to specific set of principles. However, nature is an expression of Hashem's Will, just as a miracle is an expression of Hashem's Will. We can choose to experience our *olam hateva* as an *olam hapella*, a world of wonder. Just taking a moment to recognize the wondrous reality of the natural order moves us immediately into *olam hapella*.

At *shulchan orech* we begin to live in the world of integration. We can use whatever comes our way to serve Hashem. We can manifest living with purpose. We can enjoy our world with consciousness. The Baal Shem Tov teaches, "The place where your thoughts dwell, that is where you are (*Tzava'at HaRivash* 46)." Our task is to dwell in the now. In

shulchan orech, we experience pleasure now, in real time. We use the blessings of this world in the way they should be used, to best serve the Creator and Designer of it all. We are experiencing and enjoying this moment that Hashem is giving us.

Tzafun

As we now reach for the *afikoman*, we begin to move into a place of reaching beyond our conscious mind. As we find the *afikoman*, we also find hidden parts of ourselves that we can now experience directly. We are not only in relationship with our *nefesh*, we begin to be in relationship with our *neshama*. The *afikoman* is a symbol of personal and global *geulah*. And it is the children that bring it. Hashem empowers humanity, and each set of parents empowers the next generation.

It is here that we experience what can be called the hardest and highest part of the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*. We accept that our *avodah* has been done. The Rambam tells us that once we've gone through the different stages of *teshuva*, our *avodah* is that we believe our *teshuva* has been accepted. *Tzafun* is about recognizing that we are whole. We recognize that however our *seder* ended up, it is all *beseder*. It is always good. We can move out of the process of healing and into the process of thriving. It is at this point in the *seder* that the matza, which began as *lechem oni*, is now transformed into the bread of a free person.

Barech

After *afikoman*, we move into *Birkat Hamazon*. We recognize that we are always drawing down everything from Hashem. In the present moment, we don't know what will be in the future. But we can be conscious of drawing everything down from Hashem. And we can be whole with that. *Birkat Hamazon* is much more than just offering gratitude to Hashem. We place ourselves into a state of *deveikut*, and we draw bracha down into our consciousness. We bless Hashem for the healing resources He brought into our life, for orchestrating our healing path, for wanting, allowing, assuring, and enabling us to heal. We move ourselves fully into the present moment.

We began the seder with a dream, along with the reality of our *da'at* immersed in our *nefesh*. Through the process of the *seder* we've created space within ourselves to hold all our different parts, and to be in a healthy relationship with our *nefesh*. Now, we begin to open up to the possibility of expansion, to the possibility of moving into a new level of integration. We can use our *da'at* to connect and negotiate between our *nefesh* and our *neshama*. This allows us to move into a world where we are now listening to our *neshama*. All our parts are invited to recognize that we are part of something much bigger.

There's a level of integration that takes place which allows the fullest expression of self through the integration of all parts. In this integration, each person understands their importance within themselves, while at the same time shifting their consciousness to the whole. The whole is both far greater than the sum of the parts, but also great because it is the sum total of all the parts. This integration is how we move toward a future of redemption, where the whole and the self will be integrated completely.

Of course, we have not yet moved into the future redemption. However, the moment that we make the shift in our consciousness, and begin to open ourselves up to integration, we begin to draw the future redemption into the here and now. *Olam Habah* is not something that is going to come; it is something that is already in the process of coming now. It's a state we can tap into now. The last two parts of the Haggadah prompt us to begin the process of acclimating ourselves to this state, which we are already able to experience. It is therefore at this point in the seder that we lift up the *kos shel Eliyahu*, and physically and spiritually open up our doors to allow Eliyahu Hanavi into our lives.

Hallel

Hallel is the natural consequence of *tzafun*. After searching and searching, we make the decision to let go. *Hallel* is an invitation to anchor in the present moment and recognize its inherent expansiveness. It's also an invitation to recognize our own expansiveness. We are whole as we are. And as we experience the expansiveness of ourselves in connection with

all of creation, the natural consequence is, we just want to praise Hashem. We want to thank Hashem. We want to sing. This is the natural consequence of developing our consciousness.

Hallel moves us into a gratitude that involves all the parts of ourselves. Driven by our desire to connect, our breath moves our body out into the world. At least for a moment, our life becomes a *shir chadash*, a song of praise and celebration.

Nirtza

We have now reached the end of the *Seder*, and nevertheless, this destination at which we have arrived is most mysterious. And that is because the *seder* evening, like each of our lives, is not about the destination. We come into life to fulfill a *tafkid*, but our *tafkid* is not our destination. Our *tafkid* is the process of our potential flowering through the circumstances of our lives. The Haggadah gives us fifteen steps, which are signposts that help point us in the right direction. The *Nefesh Hachaim* teaches that the full integration of our *tzelem elokim* creates an alignment of our different soul parts that forms a ladder coming from Earth, that reaches up to the highest heavens. But we don't ever really know the end point of that ladder. There is no destination we can put into our navigation device, because life is not about the destination.

At the end of the Haggadah, we return to the beginning, but in a new way. The childlike songs we sing in *nirtza* are a return to innocence. We become children again, but in an entirely different way. We've now created and rebirthed ourselves, and we're once again children. In the terminology of Kabbalah, we've gone through the highest *sefirah* of *keter* and now we've rebirthed into a new *malchut*. On *seder* night there's a simultaneous rebirthing on multiple levels. There's a rebirthing process from a cosmic perspective, a global perspective, a human perspective, a national perspective, as well as within the self.

When we return to the innocence of childhood in *nirtza*, what we realize is that we are always free, even in the deepest experiences of exile. Children live with vulnerability, in the moment. They take risks, and they have the resilience to let go of their past mistakes and

pain. They walk in *temimut* with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, on the path that He places before them.

In *nirtza*, the only thing we know is that we don't know. And that is enough to be in deep relationship with Hashem. This relationship is the sweetest pleasure and makes all the back-breaking, soul-crushing descent into exile absolutely, without a doubt, worthwhile. The consciousness acquired in the process gives us a whole new capacity to know Hashem, and we can experience the deep joy and intimacy of seeing and being seen, knowing and being known.