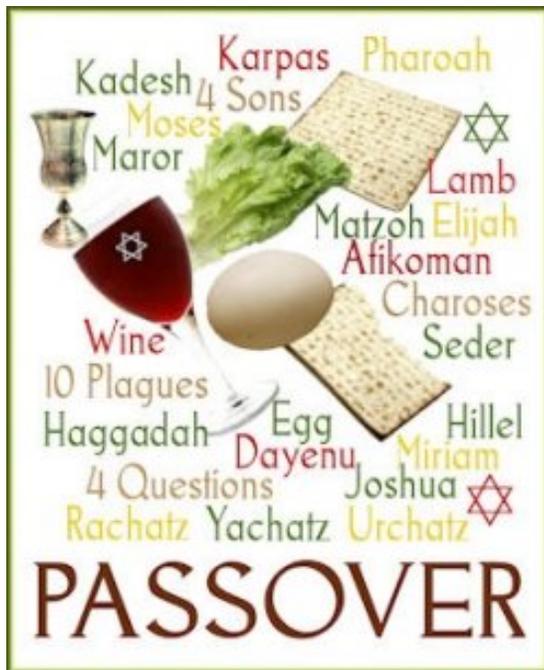




THE CARNEGIE SHUL SHOFAR

Dr. Larry Block, President
Michael Roteman, Editor

PASSOVER 5774 / 2014



Passover - the commemoration of the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. We retell the story every year at our Seder, the ritual meal at which we read from our haggadah, drink four cups of wine, and ask the four questions.

The story can be summarized fairly quickly. We were slaves in Egypt. Pharaoh was a cruel taskmaster. God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh to free the slaves. Pharaoh said no. God brought down ten plagues upon the Egyptians. The slaves were freed. Moses led the Jews out of Egypt. Pharaoh pursued and the Jews were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. God opened up the waters of the Red Sea to let the Hebrews pass, then closed the waters over the Egyptians, drowning Pharaoh's army.

Wow, the story of Passover in 75 words or less. But is it? If it is, then why is my haggadah 95 pages? And why do some seders last until 2 a.m.?

I am not going to comment on the entire Book of Exodus in this brief space, but I will attempt to shed light on some interesting aspects of this incredible story of rescue and deliverance, and will share some songs and stories that hopefully will make your Passover a little more enjoyable.

Let's begin with another short retelling of the Passover story, this time in the form of the old spiritual, Let My People Go.

When Israel was in Egypt's land, Let My people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let My people go;
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

The Lord told Moses what to do, Let My people go;
To lead the children of Israel through, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

The pillar of cloud shall clear the way, Let My people go;
A fire by night, a shade by day, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

As Israel stood by the water-side, Let My people go;
At God's command it did divide, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go.

President's Message

From Dr. Larry Block, President

Passover — the Festival of Freedom — marks the exodus of our People from Egypt and our movement towards Sinai and the receiving of the Torah. The late Yehuda Leib Gersht wrote that “whoever deeply reflects on the course of Jewish history can discern through all its stages and developments how the Divine Will is operative in history...The emergence of the Jewish People is a wondrous event without peer in the history of other peoples”: A family emigrates to a mighty, imperial country with an old, developed civilization, but rather than assimilating and eventually disappearing as a unique group, manages to maintain its separate identity and to increase its numbers. The success achieved by this unique people ultimately engendered resentment and hate among its neighbors that ultimately led to its enslavement and persecution.

In our own times we've seen people rise up and demand freedom.

Time and again studies of Jewish life confirm the importance of the Passover holiday to Jews as reflected in their participation in a Passover seder. In the Pew Research Center's survey of Jewish Americans in 2013, some 70% of respondents to the Pew survey said they participated in a Passover seder in 2012. I would hope that this year, 5774, marks an even more active and more fulfilling involvement in the Passover holiday.

We are obligated by the Torah to remove *all* chometz from our midst during the Passover holiday. If you haven't done it in the past, then this is the year to comply with this directive! Chometz can be removed in one of three ways:

- (a) nullifying your ownership of chometz, *i.e.* *Bitul chometz*;
- (b) selling your chometz, *i.e.* *M'chiras chometz*; and,
- (c) B'dikas chometz - searching and destroying (burning) chometz.

Haggadahs invariably include the procedures for nullifying chometz ownership and the ritual for searching for chometz on Erev Pesach and burning the chometz the following morning. Selling of chometz is another matter. That needs to be arranged in advance of the holiday. In the past, it was necessary to arrange for the sale of one's chometz with a rabbi, but it's possible today to make these arrangements on the internet.

Holiday Services Schedule

This year, Passover begins on Monday evening, April 14, 2014; it ends on Tuesday, April 22, 2014. The first seder will take place on Monday evening, April 14, after *Maariv*; the second seder will take place on Tuesday evening, April 15, after *Maariv*. Traditionally, the first two days and the last two days of the holiday are subject to *Yom Tov* restrictions. Services at the Carnegie Shul will be held as follows:

Tuesday, April 15, 2014:
Passover, **1st day** — 9:20 am

Wednesday, April 16, 2014:
Passover, **2nd day** — 09:20 am

Tuesday, April 22, 2014:
Passover, **7th day** — 9:20 am

Wednesday, April 16, 2014:
Passover, **8th day** — 9:20 am

Please note that **Yizkor** (memorial service) is a part of Wednesday morning services on April 16. Please make every effort to attend services then, as well on all of the days of Passover — and Shabbos — to ensure that we have a minyan so that kaddish (and other prayers that require a minyan) can be recited, the Torah can be read, etc.

Chag Kasher v'Sameach!

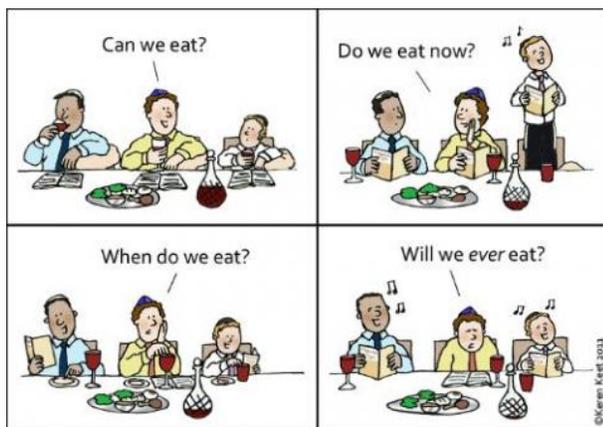
The Four Questions

We all learned the four questions when we were in Hebrew school and for many of us they are the highlight of our Seder, excluding of course the wine, matzoh ball soup, and chicken or brisket. The youngest son or child, depending upon your preference, sings the questions, after which the leader of the Seder responds with the answers from the hagaddah. But are there really four questions, or is there only one? Or are there actually five? I guess it all depends upon your perspective.

The first question, and the only question that is actually in the form of a question (thus it is acceptable if you are a fan of the TV show “Jeopardy”) is the familiar *Ma nishtana*, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” The next four questions, the traditionally accepted four questions, are not really asked as questions at all, but recited as statements of fact. Still they beg explanation.

1. On all other nights we may eat chametz and matzah, but on this night we eat only matzah.
2. On all other nights we eat many vegetables, but on this night we eat maror.
3. On all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night we dip twice.
4. On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night we all recline.

So how many questions are there, one, four or five?



The Four Questions of the Seder

The Family of Moses

We all know about Moses, the greatest prophet of them all. The man chosen by God to confront Pharaoh and lead the Chosen People to the Promised Land. But what of the remainder of Moses’ family?

Moses’s father was Amram, a son of Kohath, and grandson of Levi. He married his own aunt, Jochebed, Kohath's sister, by whom he became the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. From him were descended the Amramites, a Kohathite branch of the tribe of Levi. So how could this be? How could Amram marry his own aunt? Weren’t such marriages forbidden in the Torah?

According to notes in our Chumash, on page 234, “Marriage with an aunt is forbidden in Leviticus XVIII. Such marriages were not unlawful before the Giving of the Torah. That such a circumstance is not suppressed in regard to the family of the Lawgiver is eloquent testimony to the unsparing veracity of Scripture.”

So Amram was married to Jochebed, the mother of Moses. In fact Amram was not only married to Jochebed, but they divorced and later remarried. Why?

According to jewishencyclopedia.com, “when Jochebed, daughter of Levi—born on the day when Jacob entered Egypt with his family —was over one hundred and twenty years old, Amram, her nephew—born on the same day as she, according to the Testament of the Patriarchs, married her and she bore him a daughter called Miriam (*mar*=bitterness) because of the embitterment of life which had then begun for the Jews, and a son named Aaron (derived from *harah*, to conceive) because every expectant mother feared for her child. But when Pharaoh issued the edict that every male child was to be cast into the river, Amram separated himself from his wife, saying, ‘Why should we beget sons that are to be killed?’

His example as head of the Jewish high-court was followed by the others. Then his daughter Miriam reproached him, saying to him: 'Thy cruelty exceeds even that of Pharaoh!' Whereupon Amram celebrated for a second time his wedding with his wife, who, though one hundred and thirty years old, had under the nuptial canopy become like a young maiden.

Amram's example had a good effect upon all, but upon Miriam came the spirit of prophecy, and she said: 'My mother will give birth to one who will redeem Israel from bondage!' And when, at the birth of Moses, the house was filled with light as on the first day of Creation when God spoke, 'Behold, it is good!' Amram exclaimed: 'My daughter, thy prophecy is being fulfilled!'

But when Moses was placed by his mother in an ark in the river, Amram again cried out: 'O my daughter, what has become of thy prophecy?' Wherefore Miriam remained standing on the shore watching what 'would be done unto him in the far-off time.'"

Of course, what would be done unto him was that he would grow into Moses, the lawgiver and deliverer.

Jochebed, herself, was the chief Jewish nurse in Egypt. According to Chabad.org, "She was a great lover of Jewish children, and devoted all her time to helping young Jewish mothers and their newly born babies. Her daughter Miriam, then still a little girl, only five years old, was helping her.

Pharaoh sent for Yocheved and Miriam and told them that it was up to them to see to it that his order (to cast every male child into the river) was carefully carried out. Miriam perked up her nose and waved her finger at the cruel king, who was worse than a beast. Pharaoh would have ordered the little girl killed, but her mother pleaded for her life, saying that she was only a child and didn't know what she was talking about. After leaving the king's palace, Miriam said: "Mother, what are we going to do? You are not going to kill little babies, are you?"

"Heaven forbid!" Yocheved replied. "Our father Abraham taught us to help people live, even strangers. He set up inns at the crossroads to provide shelter and food for everybody. We are going to work harder than ever to see that every Jewish child should be saved."

"But Pharaoh will kill us!" Miriam exclaimed.

"We will have to take that chance, even if it costs us our lives," Yocheved said with determination.

From that day on, Yocheved and Miriam worked day and night. They helped young Jewish mothers. They gathered baby clothes and baby food from the richer Jews to give to the poorer ones. They brought real help and courage to the enslaved and suffering Jewish people. They were real angels of mercy. And G-d was good to them and protected them. They found one excuse after another for Pharaoh, and he did not kill them.

When Pharaoh gave out that cruel decree, Yocheved and her husband, Amram, decided to separate. "What is the use of raising a family if the children are to be thrown into the water?" they said. But Miriam said to her father, "What you are doing will hurt our people even more than Pharaoh can hurt us. For Pharaoh wants to destroy our baby boys only. But if all Jewish parents would follow your example—and you are, after all, the greatest and wisest leader of them all—there would soon be no Jewish people left at all, for no one would want to raise a family!"

Yocheved and Amram saw that their little girl was right. "We must do our duty, and let G-d do His," they decided, and they remarried again. Once again Miriam prophesied: "I'm going to have a little brother who will save our people!" And again she was right . . . For soon little Moses was born, and the whole house was filled with light. Three years earlier Aaron had been born, when Miriam was two years old.

For three months after Moses was born, Yocheved hid him from Pharaoh's officers, who went from house to house to search for Jewish baby boys. Then she knew that she could no longer hide him. Rather than give up the boy to the cruel Egyptians, Yocheved decided to entrust him to G-d. She made a little box out of wood, made it watertight, and

placed it among the reeds in the Nile, with a prayer to G-d to save him.

When little Moses was placed in the water, the stargazers of Pharaoh thought that the boy who was to be the champion of the children of Israel had been drowned, and it was not necessary to throw any more children into the water. Let them grow up and be slaves to Pharaoh, they said.



Well, you know what happened to little Moses, and how he was saved by Pharaoh's daughter Bitya. Little Miriam, who stood by to see what would happen, came up to the princess. She didn't tell her that it was her little brother, but she said that she had better get a Jewish nurse for him, for he would have no other. Then she ran to her mother, and so Moses was actually nursed by his own mother without any stranger knowing about it.

You can well imagine what good care Yocheved gave to little Moses. When he grew up, she told him who he was. She taught him to be brave and risk his life to save his brethren, just as she and Miriam had done. And that is how Moses grew up to be the great man, the greatest man that ever lived. And the very first day he went out to help his brethren,

he risked his life to save a fellow Jew from a cruel slave-driver . . .

Yocheved was known by two other names. In the beginning of the book of Exodus (Shemot) she is called Shifrah, which means "Beautiful." She was so called because she would make Jewish children beautiful and healthy by the good care she gave them. In the book of Chronicles (Divrei Hayamim) she is called Yehudiyah, the Jewess, because she risked her life to save the Jewish people.

The great sage Rabbi Judah Hanassi (who gathered and arranged the Oral Law into the six volumes of the Mishnah), when speaking of Yocheved, said: "There was a Jewish woman who was the mother of 600,000 children." He meant Yocheved, who gave birth to Moses, who was worth as much as all the people of Israel who came out of Egypt.

The Jews of Italy used to say a special hymn in honor of Yocheved on the day of Simchat Torah. They sang her praises on the day of rejoicing with the Torah, because she was the mother of Moses, who received the Torah from G-d for our people.

Yocheved lived to see her daughter Miriam lead all the Jewish women in praise of G-d after the crossing of the Red Sea, and her two sons Moses and Aaron receive the crowns of royalty and priesthood. What great *nachat* (joy) she enjoyed from her children! May all Jewish mothers be like her."

But Miriam was also a human and like her human brothers Aaron and Moses, was not perfect. She led her brother Aaron to speak against Moses over a matter involving a Cushite woman he had married (Zipporah, or possibly a second wife) (Num. 12:1). They also objected to his leadership, noting that he had no monopoly on Divine Communication (Num 12:2). For this, Miriam was punished with tzaaras (an affliction generally translated as leprosy) (Num. 12:10). However, Aaron pled on her behalf, and she was cured (Num. 12:11).

Like her brothers, Miriam died in the desert before the people reached the Promised Land

And then there was Aaron. Yes, Moses was the one chosen by God to lead the Children of Israel out of

Egypt, receive the Ten Commandments and the Torah, and to take them to the Promised Land, a land that he himself would not be allowed to enter. But where would he have been without Aaron?

Aaron was Moses' older brother. According to jewfaq.org, "He was born in 2365, three years before Moses, before the Pharaoh's edict requiring the death of male Hebrew children. He was the ancestor of all koheins, the founder of the priesthood, and the first Kohein Gadol (High Priest). Aaron and his descendants tended the altar and offered sacrifices. Aaron's role, unlike Moses', was inherited; his sons continued the priesthood after him (Num. 20:26).

Aaron served as Moses' spokesman. Moses was not eloquent and had a speech impediment, so Aaron spoke for him. Contrary to popular belief, it was Aaron, not Moses, who cast down the staff that became a snake before Pharaoh. It was Aaron, not Moses, who held out his staff to trigger the first three plagues against Egypt. According to Jewish tradition, it was also Aaron who performed the signs for the elders before they went to Pharaoh.

Aaron's most notable personal quality is that he was a peacemaker. His love of peace is proverbial; Rabbi Hillel said, "Be disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and drawing them near the Torah." According to tradition, when Aaron heard that two people were arguing, he would go to each of them and tell them how much the other regretted his actions, until the two people agreed to face each other as friends.

In fact, Aaron loved peace so much that he participated in the incident of the Golden Calf, constructing the idol in order to prevent dissension among the people. Aaron intended to buy time until Moses returned from Mount Sinai (he was late, and the people were worried), to discourage the people by asking them to give up their precious jewelry in order to make the idol, and to teach them the error of their ways in time (Ex. 32:22).

Aaron, like Moses, died in the desert shortly before the people entered the Promised Land (Num. 20).

Moses was, of course, married to Zipporah, one of the seven daughters of the Midianite priest Jethro. Moses and Zipporah had two sons, Gershom and

Eliezer, then began the journey back to Egypt at God's direction to confront Pharaoh.

While in transit to Egypt, an incident occurred that many people are not aware of. According to myjewishlearning.com, "On the road, they stayed in an inn, where a mysterious incident took place.

The Bible tells us that God came to kill Moses. Zipporah quickly circumcised Gershom with a sharp stone and touched Moses' legs with it, saying, "A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision." After that event, Moses sent Zipporah and the children back to her father in Midian, and he continued alone to Egypt."

So why would God seek to kill Moses? According to the commentary found on page 221 of our chumash, Moses had tarried at this inn, lacking in confidence as to his ability to carry out the mission that God had given him in going to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and God was displeased. Additionally, Moses had postponed the circumcision of his sons until their thirteenth year, perhaps due to Bedoin custom, another case of disobedience to God.

The chumash tells us that "sought to kill" is "an anthropomorphic way of saying that Moses fell suddenly into a mysterious illness."

And what became of Gershom and Eliezer? According to Chabad.org, "when the time came to choose a successor for Moses, our Sages relate that Moses requested one of his sons be appointed. G-d responded, "Your sons sat and did not occupy themselves with Torah. Joshua, who served you, is fitting to serve Israel."

And while Moses' physical progeny did not live up to his example, Aaron's sons—who succeeded their father as priests—did carry on the noble traditions of their father and uncle. G-d considered Moses' nephews as his children, for he was the one who taught them Torah. This is reflected in Numbers (3:1), which begins "These are the descendants of Moses and Aaron..." but only lists Aaron's four sons.

Thus G-d reassured Moses, explaining that even Joshua would need to confer with Aaron's son, the High Priest, to know G-d's will."

The Plagues



Another highlight of the Passover seder is the recitation of the ten plagues. As we mention each of the plagues we remove a bit of wine from our cup and allow it to drip to our plate. The ten plagues were, of course, blood, frogs, wild beasts, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the first born. But the death of the first born was not confined to just the first born sons of the Egyptians, it was also applied to, according to our chumash, “all the first born of the land of Egypt, both man and beast; against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment.”

Why the beasts? According to the commentary on page 255, “In smiting the firstborn of all living beings, man and beast; God smote objects of Egyptian worship. Not a single deity of Egypt was unrepresented by some beast.”

Hardening Pharaoh’s Heart

Time after time, Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh and demand that he let their people go. And though Pharaoh at times appears to be ready to comply, we are told that, “god hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” and the people were not allowed to leave.

If God wanted Pharaoh to let the people go, why would he harden Pharaoh’s heart?

This recent article, from the Jerusalem Post, provides an excellent explanation.

Why Pharaoh’s Heart Hardened

By MOSHE DANN

But Pharaoh’s refusal to allow the Jews to leave is complicated by God’s intervention: He “hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” (Exodus 7:3) It would seem, therefore, that Pharaoh did not have true free will.



The Pyramids at Giza, Egypt Photo: Rhikal/Wikimedia Commons

The dramatic duel between Moses and Pharaoh in the Torah is depicted in the Ten Plagues which God inflicted on the Egyptians to convince Pharaoh to allow the Hebrews, as they were then called, to leave Egypt, become a free and independent nation, receive the Torah and resettle in their homeland, Eretz Yisrael. But Pharaoh resists until the last plague, even though he acknowledges God.

Biblical commentators have understood the process as a growing awareness by Pharaoh and his court, the Egyptian people and the Jewish people of a revolution in the history of mankind: freedom and the importance of human dignity. But Pharaoh’s refusal to allow the Jews to leave is complicated by God’s intervention: He “hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” (Exodus 7:3) It would seem, therefore, that Pharaoh did not have true free will.



Rashi notes that the process of increasing punishments was necessary to demonstrate God's power – not only to the Egyptians, but to the Jews. He notes that, during the first five plagues, Pharaoh himself was responsible for his hardening heart. In addition, Pharaoh's heart was "strengthened." (Exodus 7:13) and then became "heavy." (Exodus 7:14) Why does the Torah use three different words to describe what amounts to a single description of his stubborn obstinacy? We will answer this shortly.

Rambam, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, (Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva) insists that everyone has free will; one can choose to do good, or evil. The ability to choose freely defines us as human beings; our choices define us as individuals. Freedom to choose is an essential and inherent right, but it is not absolute; there are consequences to actions.

This explains why three different words are used to describe Pharaoh's heart. He changes his mind, perhaps from lack of awareness and fear of losing a valuable commodity. It's understandable, given his position. That is what is meant by "hardening," and "heavy." He refuses to change, even though he recognizes God's existence. But then he becomes recalcitrant and arrogant – which is described as "his heart was strengthened."

The key to understanding this psychological debilitation – and what Torah teaches – is Pharaoh's lack of self-criticism. The ability to choose, to exercise free will without honest self-evaluation and

introspection, is self-destructive and destructive to others. In Pharaoh's case, he led his army and his nation to disaster.

Persecuting Jews, however, is not unique to Pharaoh.

There will always be Jew-hating pharaohs and those who serve them. They can be overcome by our unity, by caring for each other, and by our commitment to the ideals and principles that have guided the Jewish people for millennia.

Rather than despair, the story of the Exodus suggests that we watch the "hand of God" at work, and never forget that – despite difficulties – we are not alone. A modern miracle, the Jewish people has returned to its homeland, established Jewish sovereignty, and are building the third Jewish civilization and commonwealth.

We have much for which to be thankful. We are blessed with wise and caring teachers and with courageous soldiers who risk their lives to defend and protect us. Millions of true Zionists refuse to be intimidated by threats from foreign enemies.

Many good, decent people throughout the world want our Isaiah nation not only to survive, but to prevail. We are, after all, in God's hands.
The author is a PhD historian, writer and journalist.