

NCSY Israel presents

# TORAH 4 TEENS BY TEENS

Haggadah Companion  
Pesach 2023



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## A Message from NCSY Israel's Directors

**W**hen discussing Pesach, the holiday of freedom and redemption, the words of Rav Kook and the teachings of Chassidic masters take on special significance. These great leaders of Jewish thought offer insights into the deeper meanings of the holiday and help us understand the spiritual significance of the Exodus from Egypt.

Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, taught that Pesach represents the renewal of the Jewish people, and the reawakening of our spiritual potential. He writes, "On Pesach, we celebrate not only the redemption from Egypt, but the redemption of our souls. We are reminded that we were once slaves, but now we are free, and that we have the ability to transcend our limitations and become great."

Rav Kook understood that the story of the Exodus is not just a historical event, but a symbol of our own personal journeys from darkness to light. Through the Seder, we reenact the story of our ancestors, and connect to the power of their experience. We relive the moment when they crossed the sea and feel the awe and wonder of that miraculous event.

But Rav Kook also recognized that the true meaning of Pesach goes beyond the personal and spiritual, and touches on the national and political. He believed that the ultimate goal of the Jewish people is to return to the land of Israel, and that the State of Israel is the beginning of the fulfillment of that goal. In his words, "The State of Israel is not only a political entity, but a spiritual one. It is a symbol of the redemption of the Jewish people, and the beginning of a new era in our history."

The Chassidic masters also understood the connection between Pesach and the land of Israel. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught that the Exodus from Egypt was not only a physical liberation, but a spiritual one as well. He believed that the true goal of the Exodus was to enable the Jewish people to enter the land of Israel and serve God there.

Rebbe Nachman wrote, "The land of Israel is the place where the soul can truly find rest. It is the land of redemption, where we can connect to the Divine in a way that is impossible anywhere else." He believed that the land of Israel was not just a physical place, but a spiritual one, and that by living there, we can come closer to God and fulfill our highest potential.

Similarly, Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotzk taught that the journey from Egypt to the land of Israel represents the journey from slavery to freedom, and from darkness to light. He wrote, "The journey from Egypt to the land of Israel is not just a physical journey, but a spiritual one as well. It is the journey from the narrow confines of our own limitations to the vast expanses of God's infinite love." Rebbe Menachem Mendel believed that the goal of the Jewish people was not just to be free from slavery, but to be free to serve God. He believed that the true freedom of Pesach is the freedom to fulfill our spiritual potential and come closer to God.

Over 350 of our NCSY'ers will celebrate a unique Pesach this year. A Pesach that is not just a historical event, but a symbol of our own personal journeys from darkness to light. A Pesach that is the fulfillment of the ultimate goal of the Jewish people, to return to the land of Israel, and that the State of Israel is a symbol of that redemption. A Pesach of true freedom; the freedom to serve God, and to fulfill our highest potential. May this Pesach be a time of renewal and reawakening and may we all merit to experience the ultimate redemption.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yosef Ginsberg".

Rabbi Yosef Ginsberg  
Regional Director



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Kahn".

Rabbi Michael Kahn  
Executive Director

## The Stories of Our Lives

Raphael Roshwalb  
11th grade, Ra'anana



Man is incapable of a sudden confrontation with his Creator. The overwhelming experience of such awareness is just too awesome. Truth, the stark Truth, must be camouflaged. Only then can the soul gradually absorb it.

God, so to speak, camouflaged Himself in stories. These are the stories of the Creation and of Adam and Chavah; the stories of the Flood and of the Avot; the stories of Jewish exile and redemption. God is hidden in all the stories of human history, and in the as yet untold stories of each and every human being—his trials, his tribulations, and his salvation.

At the Pesach Seder, we tell stories—maggid. We recount the stories of the exile in and the redemption from Egypt. These represent the collective stories of mankind. They typify the individual stories of each and every one of us. As we relate the details of these stories, we must relate to them. See the Hand of God in the stories of our own lives.

Through the telling of stories, we bring to life their stories. In turn, may God bring to life the story of our Redemption (LH, Nedarim 5:6-8) (The Breslov Haggadah, pp. 37-38).

There is a core aspect in Judaism of helping out another Jew. This helps elucidate a very interesting aspect of the Peasach observance. Every holiday is marked by mitzvahs. Yet, many of these mitzvahs are not equally fulfilled by all. For example, most of us hear the shofar from someone else who blows it, and on Chanukah, many have the custom that the head of the household kindles the menorah as a representative of the entire family. Yet, on Peasach, everyone must eat his or her own matzah. On Peasach, we are all equally significant.

The Exodus was the time when our people came together as one. Am Echad, Lev Echad, by loving your fellow Jew you truly love yourself. Leaving Egypt united as one people set the stage for the mitzvah that Hillel considered to be the core of the entire Torah: love for a fellow Jew. These stores teach us that each of us is complete only when we do all that we can to ensure that every single Jew is being taken care of as well.

This is why the Peasach Haggadah begins with an invitation, "All who are hungry, let them come and eat." Our table is complete only when it is open to others!

## Asking the Tough Questions

Rabbi Avi Berman  
Executive Director, OU Israel



There's no doubt that there are many special elements of the Seder. They include melodies, foods, the same questions or idea someone always shares, and other moments that are special to one's family Seder. One part of the Seder that everyone has memories from is the Ma Nishtanah.

When you learn the sources about why we say Ma Nishtanah, the reason stems from the pasuk:

"כי ישאלך בןך מחר לאמר..." ("When your son asks you tomorrow...").

There is an important Halachic element of the Seder that involves telling the story of the Exodus through questions and answers. Typically children ask the 4 questions, but the Gemara teaches that if there are no children at the Seder, an adult asks them. If someone is having Seder alone, they are even obligated to ask the questions to themselves. The centrality of questions on Seder night is the reason why we do so many different things to prompt the children to ask questions.

The majority of the time, we view the Seder through the eyes of the person leading the Seder and not through the eyes of the teenagers or the children. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the father (or whoever is leading the Seder) to ensure the younger generation seated around the table is asking questions.

What is the obligation of the teens at the Seder?

Throughout the year, there is a pattern of life that goes on and on. Many times we say to ourselves, "I really have this deep question, but is there someone I feel comfortable asking?"

I often hear from NCSY directors and advisors (both in Israel and in North America) that the teens ask incredible, deep, thoughtful questions to their advisors at NCSY Shabbatons and

events. I experienced this myself when I ran the Pacific Northwest region of NCSY based out of Vancouver.

What I'm hearing is that teenagers sometimes feel more comfortable asking questions about religion, faith, etc. to their advisors than to their parents or grandparents. Pesach is an opportunity for us to crack the normal pattern of life. Even if on a regular basis we wouldn't necessarily go over to our parents with a certain question, on Pesach Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu is asking us to open up.

Let's take a moment to look at our incredible mother and father who worked so hard in preparing to have the family together for the Seder. Whether it be flying children in, davening to Hashem and speaking to their IDF commanders for them to come home for the Seder, preparing Haggadah insights and obviously the Pesach cleaning, shopping, and cooking. Whether you are home or went away for Pesach, there's a special atmosphere in the air of Seder night for children, and especially teenagers, to open up to their parents and ask them the questions they have about their belief in G-d, about their belief in the Torah, and the challenges they grapple with.

Of course there's an obligation on parents to make sure we give our children the time, love, and attention that our children deserve. Parents must make sure their kids are engaged and showered with parental love. Parents may not have all of the answers. It may take a few days to get back to us with ideas and new approaches, but the process is meant to strengthen our family bonds and connections with each other and our Mesorah.

Let's make sure that everyone will finish the Seder this year with an even deeper memory of a beautiful answer they heard or a meaningful discussion that was started based on the fact we were able to open up and ask a question. Asking our questions at the Seder is exactly what will make Hashem smile at another beautiful Seder in Klal Yisrael.

## To Be Truly Free

Ian Schwartz  
Gush Etzion Chapter Director



When we read the 4 sons, it's hard not to be bothered by the stark contrast between the treatment of the חכם and the רשע. Especially since when one closely reads each of their questions they are seemingly almost identical in nature. They both essentially ask: Why are we doing all of this stuff? What is the purpose of eating an old cracker, some vegetables, and telling a story in such a specific prescribed order? What are we even trying to accomplish at the Seder? What is the point? It is the most basic fundamental question of the Seder night.

Therefore, we must closely read the way they ask the question to understand why one is considered a חכם and the other a רשע. The difference which we seem to focus on is the pronouns which each of them use. The רשע uses the word לָכֵן "to you." The Haggadah focuses on this detail and explains that by using this term he is separating himself from the Jewish people, which in turn makes him undeserving of redemption. However, the חכם uses an almost identical word. He does not say בְּשִׁבְלֵנוּ אוֹ לָנוּ, he says "אֲתֵכֶם" which also means "to you." It's basically no different than the term used by the רשע!

I would like to suggest a different approach, which relates to the true nature of חירות. When asking his question the חכם describes the Seder as "עדות חוקים ומשפטים" "testimonies, statutes and judgments." His question is of someone who is seeking to understand the true meaning of the Seder. He is searching for the reason for all of these halachot. His question is an authentic voice of someone seeking to discover the purpose of Pesach. On the other hand, the רשע describes the seder in a narrow derogatory way, he calls it an "עבודה" "work." His entire concept of the Seder is a chore, a compilation of random tasks and texts. That is what makes him a רשע, his approach towards the Seder.

On Pesach we celebrate חירות which we often translate as freedom. In our Western cultured minds we view freedom as the ability to think, say, and do whatever we want, whenever we want. However, the true essence of freedom is the actualization of our inner selves, of the neshama. The Seder is all about unlocking our true selves and being truly free. Not just from the physical slavery of Egypt, but the spiritual slavery of the world we live in. This understanding is the difference between the חכם and the רשע. We should be zoche to create a Pesach Seder that allows us to feel truly free on all levels.

## We Will Go On

Moriah Goldsmith  
Ra'anana Chapter Director



On February 26th, 2023, Hallel Yaniv and his brother Yagel Yaniv were murdered by a terrorist whose sole purpose was to kill Jews and wound the Jewish people. The following day, the brothers were buried in Har Herzl.

A viral video was circulating of Rachel Yaniv, the younger sister of the brothers, reciting a prayer out loud called "Mizmor letoda," a chapter in Tehillim that praises Hashem, just before the funeral. She explains that we need to continue to love and thank Hashem for everything he has done for us. Rachel also emphasizes the importance of staying in Israel because it is our home and we should never leave it.

That morning, as thousands were making their way to Har Herzl, suddenly a crowd started singing the song "Tefillah L'ani," a song that was commonly sung during the devastating times when Gush Katif was being evacuated. The words of the song are so powerful, saying that we can always call out to Hashem, and we want Him to hear our voice loud and clear, and for Him not to turn His back on us.

The very next day, on February 27th, Elan Ganeles was also murdered by a terrorist. He was an American who made Aliyah on his own and volunteered and served in the IDF. During his funeral, his friends and family expressed

how much he loved the land of Israel and the Jewish people. He gave up so much to be here and is now a true hero for all of Israel.

Ever since the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, we have been pushed around, murdered, and hated by the world. In 1948, the State of Israel was born, and we stand proud and strong of what we have accomplished in these 75 years. We are strong, and our spirit is unbreakable.

These events occurred recently, just two months before Pesach. Only the Jewish people could witness a sister reciting a chapter of Tehillim at her two brothers' funeral and a crowd breaking into a song that serves as both a prayer and an expression of yearning to connect with God. Only the Jewish people could feel the pride for an American boy who sacrificed everything to serve in the IDF and become an Israeli.

This Pesach, we lift up our heads and say proudly and with a strong voice:

"And it is this that has stood for our fathers and for us, that not one alone rose up against us to destroy us, but that in every generation there are those who rise up against us to destroy us; and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand."

## Lavan Wanted to Destroy it All

Simona Weil  
Jerusalem Madricha



The Hagaddah explains that Lavan was worse than Pharaoh because Pharaoh only wanted to kill the males, but Lavan wanted to destroy everyone. Where do we see that Lavan wanted to try to destroy Yaakov? A simple reading of the pasukim would seem that Lavan didn't intend to cause harm to the family of Yaakov.

Rabbi Marcus Lehmann asks another question: Why are we using the word לעקור. Wouldn't it be more fitting to use the word לאבד? He brings a source from the Gemara which explains that עקור means idol worship. It says in the Haggadah "ולבן בקש לעקור את הכל". This can be understood as Lavan wanted to cause them all to become idol worshippers. Lavan wanted to uproot Am Yisrael not through physical destruction, but rather by causing Am Yisrael to stop serving Hashem, which would cause their spiritual destruction.

Avraham and Yitzchok both only had one son who continued in their path of service to Hashem. Yaakov was the first of the Avot that had all his sons continue his path in the service of Hashem. Yaakov always had a fear that one of his sons might stray from the path. When Lavan was around, there was the possibility that Lavan might try to influence Yaakov's sons to serve idols. The Haggadah

says "וירד מצרימה" that Yaakov went to Egypt to escape Lavan, but we know that before going to Egypt, Yaakov returned to Eretz Yisrael. The reason it is written this way in the Hagaddah is to teach us that only in Egypt were they safe from the harmful influence of Lavan.

The Artscroll Haggadah further illustrates this point by presenting the Rashi on the words "עם לבן גרתי." Rashi explains that גרתי has the same gematria as תריג. Yaakov was saying I lived with Lavan, but I still succeeded in keeping the 613 Mitzvot. This shows how hard it must have been to keep Mitzvot in the environment of Lavan's house. It was very important to Yaakov that his sons would not assimilate from Lavan's values. He surely did not want to live in the house of Lavan when he was raising his children.

The Vilna Gaon explains that spiritual threats are sometimes hidden by a facade of kindness and therefore they are often very effective. Unlike Pharaoh, Lavan did not seem like he was trying to harm Am Yisroel, but his goal was to spiritually destroy us. In our generation we still have Lavan type of personalities. There are many people who are not out to physically harm us but want to bring us away from Hashem. We can learn from Yaakov how serious these threats are and how important it is to protect ourselves from them.



## Measure for Measure

Hillel Smolarcik  
12th grade, Efrat



Everyone that has learned about the Exodus from Egypt will agree that the Ten Plagues are one of the most central parts of the story. Even if you were to just read through it, these miracles are sure to catch your attention.

Water turning to blood, frogs multiplying as you hit them, flaming chunks of ice falling from the sky- it almost sounds too crazy to believe. But what do these plagues represent? Why did G-d choose these specific methods of punishment for the Egyptians? And why did we need ten of them anyways?

In maggid, the section of the Haggadah where we tell over the story of the Exodus, we read that Rabbi Yehudah divided up the Ten plagues into three separate groups. If we take the first letter of each plague in the way he separated them, we get the words "ש באח"ב דצ"ך. In the Torah, the plagues are grouped in the same way: Moshe gives Pharaoh warnings before the first, fourth, and seventh plagues. That's the simple explanation.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch suggests a different idea. He found that the nature of the three groups of plagues closely resembles the three types of suffering the Egyptians inflicted upon the Jews: Alienage/גרות, Enslavement/עבדות, and Affliction/עניו. The first plague in each group, Blood, Wild animals, and hail, were meant to show this concept of alienage to the Egyptians. God began each group of plagues with these to show the Egyptians that they were like strangers in their own land, just like the Jews were strangers in Egypt. The Nile

river, their source of water, became blood, totally undrinkable. Wild animals not native to the land suddenly roamed their streets. Fire and ice, total opposites, were falling from the sky. Everything the Egyptians thought they knew about their land was switched.

Rav Hirsch then states that the second plague from each group is meant to symbolize enslavement. He explains that these plagues (frogs, pestilence, and locust) showed the Egyptians the foolishness of their own pride and haughtiness. It was this pride and haughtiness that caused the Egyptians to believe they were fit to be masters over slaves. The frogs invaded their homes and jumped down their throats. All the livestock died out, leaving the rich Egyptians without animals. The locusts devoured every single crop, destroying all of the food. The rich Egyptian society and economy fell to ruin.

The third and final group symbolizes affliction. The Egyptians, beyond working the Jews as hard as they could, also beat them mercilessly. This final group of plagues, which contains lice, boils, darkness, and death of the firstborns, afflicted the bodies of the Egyptians in a physical manner. Through these plagues the Egyptians understood the physical torment of the Jews. We see that Hashem used these specific plagues on the Egyptians because they symbolize the same methods of torment used by the Egyptians on the Jews! Hashem is giving them punishment מידה כנגד מידה - measure for measure.

## Overcoming Our Own Personal Mitzrayim

Lauren Shore  
Bet Shemesh Madricha



"In each and every generation one is obligated to see himself as though he had left Egypt."

Not only did Hashem redeem our forefathers from Mitzrayim, but he also redeemed us together with them as well and is constantly redeeming us. In the Mishna, Rabban Gamliel elaborates upon the meaning of this mitzvah of reciting the Haggadah each year. Ideally, he explains we should be recounting the story of Yitziyat Mitzrayim as an event of our own personal experience each year.

How is this possible for us? We were not physically there so how are we able to relate to this story as a chapter in our own life story? And what does it mean that "Hashem redeemed us together with our fathers" when the event took place over 3,000 years ago?

We as individuals are all assigned a task in which we are uniquely qualified for 3,300 years after the historical event of Yitziyat Mitzrayim. But the essence of our being and purpose for our existence are bound with the unified soul of the nation that came into being on that night. The constant push for freedom and the desire to perfect the world in the divine image that is within a Jew today, stems from the same continuous energy

that the Jewish people had when leaving Mitzrayim.

The idea of Yitziyat Mitzrayim is even more prevalent in today's day and age now more than ever. Individually and collectively Hashem is constantly guiding us in overcoming the inner challenges that each of us face with the Yetzer Hara and the external threats that surround the world around us. Whether it is trying to fight the urge to get that extra hour of sleep, spending hours a day on your phone instead of taking advantage of your friends and those around you, or pushing yourself away from your true potential and saying you are not "good enough" to do something. Our Yetzer Hara is a constant battle that we deal with and half the time we are not even aware that we are losing. We all go through challenges in our day-to-day lives and this line in the Haggadah is here to remind us that no matter what we are going through or what we are scared about Hashem will always be there for us. Just as he redeemed the Jewish Nation 3,000 years ago from Mitzrayim, so too will we be redeemed from the inner Mitzrayim within ourselves and break away from the slave mentality that is dragging us down from reaching our full potential and purpose in this world.

## The Different Levels of Slavery

Yehuda Sunshine  
11th grade, Ra'anana



The Rabbis say that whoever doesn't say פסח מצה ומרור during the Seder, doesn't fulfill his obligation. פסח, to remember the קרבן פסח that was eaten in the בית המקדש and that Hashem passed over our houses. מצה, to remember the dough that did not have time to rise when we left Egypt. And מרור, to remember the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt. But why in this order? It should say פסח מצה ומרור, because that is the chronological order of the events. We were slaves, the dough didn't have enough time to rise and only then did we eat the קרבן פסח, and Hashem passed over our houses. So why do we say פסח מצה ומרור and not מרור מצה ופסח?

In order to answer this question, we must understand the different levels of slavery. The first level of slavery is slavery of a Jew, to a non-Jew. This slavery has been part of our history for a thousand years. It was also the slavery that the Jews experienced in the Holocaust. The second level of slavery is when a Jew enslaves another Jew. An example of this, were the Kapos in the Holocaust. The final level of slavery is slavery that we impose upon

ourselves. Of all the levels of slavery, this is the hardest to identify, because a lot of the time, we don't even realize we are enslaved. It's only after we take ourselves out of this situation, do we understand that we were a slave to it. For example, how hard is it to stop a bad habit, or addiction? How hard is it to put down our phone? With this knowledge, we can better understand the situation that the Jews experienced in Egypt.

The Jews in Egypt were slaves to non-Jews. But after leaving Egypt they still carried a slave mentality which needed to be broken in order to appreciate their freedom. This is the reason we say the order of מצה ומרור פסח, because only after Hashem took us out and we experienced freedom, could we understand how bitter the slavery was.

As we come to sit at our פסח Seder, we should take time to identify those things that enslave us today. This way we can each achieve our own personal יציאת מצרים.

NCSY Israel is the premier organization in Israel,  
dedicated to connect, inspire, and empower  
teen olim to the Land of Israel by encouraging  
passionate Judaism through Torah and Tradition.

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