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The Passover Haggadah: Moses and the Human Role in Redemption[1]

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IT IS WIDELY ACCEPTED THAT THE PASSOVER HAGgadah attributes responsibility for the redemption from Egypt to God alone and leaves no room for a human role. Two proofs are said to confirm this:

- The words of the Haggadah itself: "The Lord brought us out of Egypt not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger, but by the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself..."
- The nearly universal belief that the traditional Haggadah makes absolutely no mention of Moses.

The following illustrates the common wisdom on this matter. The source is noteworthy–*The Israel Passover Haggadah*, a work by the great scholar of rabbinic literature, Rabbi Menachem Kasher.

> "And not by the hand of a messenger"–refers to Moses, for the plague of the slaying of the firstborn was effected only by the Holy One, blessed is He, and no other. The compilers of the Haggadah found no opportunity to quote even one saying or tale in praise of Moses. In fact, his name is not mentioned in the entire Haggadah. The compiler's purpose is to continually stress that thanks are due only to the Almighty for our miraculous redemption.[2]

The Hebrew in Kasher's Haggadah reads the same, but includes a footnote mentioning a biblical citation found in the Haggadah that indeed does mention Moses' name. Alas, the translation lacks this footnote!

This article examines the Haggadah's treatment of Moses and its understanding of the human role in the redemption from Egypt. Although the Haggadah certainly downplays his role in the Exodus, the traditional text has not entirely eliminated Moses: it refers to him twice, once by name and once obliquely. We begin by reviewing these references in light of the Haggadah's evolution and then turn to the Haggadah's midrash, "Not by an angel...." Reading this midrash against the backdrop of an ancient theological controversy–the "Two Powers in Heaven" heresy–and probing the likely sources of its language suggests that it argues against more than one *supernatural* participant in delivering the last plague and not against a

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human role in the Exodus. We then discuss the Haggadah's minimization of Moses as a precaution against tendencies to deify him. This historical background sets the stage for exploring the significance of Moses' *presence* in the Haggadah and of other passages in this text that point to the human responsibility in the redemption from Egypt. An excursus examines the origins of the myth of Moses' complete absence from the Haggadah. The notion derives from a comment by the Vilna Gaon and probably reflects his antipathy toward the Chasidic concept of the tzaddik.

Moses in the Haggadah

The Haggadah's two references to Moses are quite striking, actually: They frame the Exodus, marking the beginning and the end of the redemption. The first comes at the close of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush–when God sets the plan in motion for redeeming the Israelites. The second comes just after the Israelites have safely crossed the Red Sea–the grand finale of the Exodus.

The first reference to Moses is indirect. It consistently appears in Haggadot attributed to the early Gaonim.[3] "'And by signs': This is the rod, as it is said, '...And take with you this rod, with which you shall perform the signs'" (Exodus 4:17). The "you" refers to Moses, to whom God is speaking in the cited verse.[4] Today, this appears in all traditional Haggadot.[5]

An overt appearance of Moses' name occurs in the section of the Haggadah that quotes the M'chilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, a 3rd-century midrash. Rabbi Yose the Galilean argues that the Egyptians suffered 50 plagues at the Red Sea. He cites the following as his proof text: "And when Israel saw the wondrous power [literally, 'great hand'] which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord; they had faith in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).[6] As is often the case in rabbinic literature, this midrash quotes the beginning of the biblical verse and assumes familiarity with the remainder. The Haggadot of Amram Gaon (d. 875) and Saadia Gaon (892-942) included this midrash and followed the same convention of quoting only the beginning of the verse from Exodus.[7] However, illuminated European Haggadot from the early 14th century routinely included the full verse and, with it, Moses' name.[8] For the past 700 years, traditional renderings of the Haggadah have included this single explicit mention of Moses.

Of note, Maimonides (1135-1204) omitted the M'chilta's midrash on the plagues from his Haggadah because he believed it was not widely known, although he recited it at his own Seder.[9] But Maimonides hardly intended to exclude Moses from the Seder. His words are intriguing to say the least.

It is a mitzvah to inform one's sons even though they do not ask, as [Exodus 13:8] states: "You shall tell your son..." A father should teach his son according to the son's knowledge: How is this applied? If the son is young or foolish, he should tell him: "My son, in Egypt, we were all slaves like this maidservant or this slave. On this night, the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeemed us and took us out to freedom." If the son is older and wise, he should inform him what happened to us in Egypt and the miracles wrought for us by Moses, our teacher; everything according to the son's knowledge. [10]

According to Maimonides, as children become more mature, what we tell them about the Exodus should change. The young or foolish receive the explanation that God did everything. Those who are wiser learn about the deeds wrought by Moses.[11] In any case, since a number of non-traditional Haggadot have dropped the passage about the plagues at the Red Sea–perhaps following Maimonides' lead–some will indeed find that Moses' name *has* completely disappeared from the story. But this is a recent development.[12]

At this point, it is sufficient to note that claims of Moses' *complete absence* from the Haggadah are simply erroneous. Further on, we will consider the import of the Haggadah's two references to Moses. Now let us turn to the midrash "Not by an angel...," the other source of the contention that the Haggadah views redemption as a function of exclusively divine agency. (The three critical paragraphs are labeled, for further discussion.)

...Not by an Angel...

The Lord took us out of Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents (Deuteronomy 26:8).[13]

[A] The Lord took us out of Egypt not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger, but by the Holy One, blessed be He, in His glory, Himself.[14]

[B] As it is written: "I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night; I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I am the Lord (Exodus 12:12).

[C] I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, myself and not an angel;

I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, myself and not a seraph;

On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments, myself and not the messenger;

I am the Lord, I and none other.

–from the Haggadah's midrash on Deuteronomy 26:8[15]

Does this midrash preclude a human role in the redemption? I will argue that it remains silent on this question, but denies a role in the last plague to supernatural beings aside from God. In what follows, we will analyze the most ancient layer of the Haggadah's midrash as a polemic against the ancient "Two Powers in Heaven" heresy and then consider what we can learn by investigating some of the sources that may have inspired the language of this midrash.

At the outset, it must be noted that this passage evolved over a long period of time, with all but the last word of paragraph A constituting the oldest layer of the midrash and the elaboration on Exodus 12:12 (C) apparently representing the youngest layer.[16]

Turning to the content of the core of this passage (A), an observation by Freud seems particularly apt: "...The content of a repressed...idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is negated."[17] Probing what lies "repressed" beneath the Haggadah's repeated negations reveals a competing scriptural narrative in which God's agency seems far from exclusive.[18] In Exodus, we learn that God "heeded their outcry" and says, "I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land...." (3:7-8) Numbers 20:16 states: "We cried to the Lord and He heard our plea, and He sent a messenger[19] who freed us [literally, 'took us out'] from Egypt."[20] With regard to the last plague, we read: "For when the Lord goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and two doorposts, and the Lord will pass over the door and not let the destroyer (המשחית, *ha'mashchit*) enter and smite your home" (Exodus 12:23).[2] (Beyond the Pentateuch, the problem is only compounded. In Judges 2:1, an "angel of the Lord" addresses the Israelites saying, "*I* brought you up from Egypt and *I* took you into the land which *I* had promised on oath to your fathers" [italics added]. Elsewhere, God acts through the "angel of the Lord" to smite Jerusalem. In another case, God acts through the same figure to rescue the besieged city.[22])

During and after the Second Temple period, biblical passages such as these spawned Jewish theologies and literature that told the story of the Exodus in ways that vastly differed from that eventually adopted by the Haggadah. Thus, for example, the late 2nd century B.C.E. *Book of Jubilees* (49:2) ascribes the last plague to the prince of Mastema (literally, the prince of 'enmity'[23]), a quasi-independent supernatural being and object of human worship to whom God had given special powers over humanity. The Angel of the Presence and his colleagues intervene at key points to rescue the Israelites from the evil Mastema and the Egyptians. Philo's interpretation of the *mashchit* (משחית) in Exodus 12:23 also reflects a dualist view,[2] as does the Wisdom of Solomon (late 1st century B.C.E.). [2]

In the view of Resh Lakish, the 3rd-century sage, "When the Holy One came to take Israel out of Egypt, he did not send a messenger or an angel, but He Himself came, as it is written, 'And I will pass through the land of Egypt...' (Exodus 12.12), He and his entire staff (of angels)."[26]

These are some of the ambient theological notions to which it seems the Haggadah takes umbrage. More specifically, the oldest layer of our midrash–"*The Lord took us out of Egypt* not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger, but by the Holy One, blessed be He, in His glory"–belongs to a genre of rabbinic polemic[27] against what has been called the "Two Powers in Heaven" heresy (שתי רשויות בשמים, *shtei reishuyot ba'shamayim*).[2] In briefest terms, the heresy involved a theology affirming the existence of two independent divine actors, a heresy alluded to in rabbinic texts from the first seven centuries of the Common Era, the period when the oldest layer of this midrash developed. Although the targets of rabbinic polemics are rarely explicit, most scholars agree that they included certain circles of Jews, Samaritans, Gnostics and especially Jewish-Christians and, subsequently, gentile Christians.[29]

The debate revolved around whether One or Two Powers were involved in biblical accounts of creation and revelation and, to a lesser extent, in the redemption from Egypt. Because it was feared that speculation about the nature and characteristics of angelic mediators could lead to the belief in Two Powers, the rabbis forcefully argued against any such mediation in the pivotal moments of God's relationship with Israel.[30] It was fine to talk about angels, but not, for example, to assign them responsibility for Israel's redemption from Egypt. Most texts addressing this heresy appear in midrashic exegesis of scripture, but some pertain to "unorthodox" liturgical formulations that were seen as implying that God was only responsible for the good in the world while some other being deserved credit for suffering.[31] Some texts address the Two Powers Heresy explicitly; others do so implicitly.

The M'chilta provides an important example of an explicit Two Powers refutation in connection with the Exodus.[32]

> I am the Lord your God (Exodus 20:2). Why is it said? For this reason. At the sea He appeared to them as a mighty hero doing battle, as it is said The Lord is a man of war (Exodus 15:3). At Sinai He appeared to them as an old man full of mercy....Scripture, therefore, would not let the nations of the world have an excuse for saying that there are Two Powers, but declares: I am the Lord your God. I am He (אני הוא, ani hu) who was in Egypt and I am He who was at the sea. I am He who was at Sinai. I am He who was in the past and I will be in the future. I am He who is in this world and I am He who will be in the world to come. As it is said, See, then, that I, I am He; there is no god beside Me. I deal death and give life... (Deuteronomy 32:39). And it says, Till you grow old, I will still be the same (Isaiah 46:4). And it says, Thus said the Lord, the King of Israel, their Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts: I am the first, and I am the last (Isaiah 44:6). And it says, Who has wrought and achieved this? He who announced the generations from the start. I. the Lord, who was first and will be with the last, I am he. (Isaiah 41:4).[33]

This midrash takes up the question of whether the two different descriptions of God–at the Red Sea as the youthful warrior and at Sinai as the old man full of mercy–constitute evidence of Two Powers. Rejecting this, the midrash implies that these differences simply reflect two aspects of a single divinity. The midrash, however, also quietly indicates that it was God who acted *in Egypt*, as well. The cited passages from Deuteronomy and Isaiah were central in the rabbinic refutation of Two Powers theology.[3] They also contain the only biblical references to God using the phrase "I am He" (אני הוא), the penultimate expression in the Haggadah's midrash.[3]

The Babylonian Talmud includes another important illustration of Two Powers thinking in connection with the role of angels. Rav Idit (circa 290-350) was an acknowledged expert in refuting this heresy.[36]

> Once a Min [a heretic or sectarian] said to Rav Idit: It is written, Then He said to Moses, Come up to the Lord... (Exodus 24:1). But surely it should have stated, Come up to Me! It was Metatron [who said that], he replied, whose name is similar to that of his Master,[37] for it is written, [I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have made ready. Pay heed to him and obey him. Do not defy him...] since My Name is in him (Exodus 23:20-21). But if so, [the Min retorted,] we should worship him! Rav Idit replied however, that the same passage says: Do not defy him, i.e., do not exchange Me for him[38]....According to our beliefs, we would not accept him [Metatron] even as a messenger.[39]

What sources may have inspired the language of the core of the Haggadah's midrash? The contrast between the Masoretic text of Deuteronomy 26:8 and the Septuagint's translation (mid-3rd century B.C.E.) serves as a useful place to begin this inquiry. The Masoretic text reads: "The Lord took us out from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents." And now the Septuagint: "And the Lord brought us out of Egypt *Himself* with *His* great strength, and *His* mighty hand, and *His* outstretched arm, and with great visions, and with signs, and with wonders" (italics added). The Septuagint's repeated effort to eliminate any possible doubt regarding God's exclusive involvement surely addresses extant assertions to the contrary. Related concerns motivated the Haggadah's elaboration on this verse.

The phrase "not by an angel, not by a messenger" appears in the Septuagint's rendering of Isaiah 63:8-9, which dates from roughly the mid-

2nd century B.C.E.: [40] "He was their deliverer in all their troubles; no angel or messenger [but] His own Presence delivered them....He Himself redeemed them...." The Septuagint completely reverses the Masoretic reading (*k'tiv*): "He was their deliverer. In all their troubles he was troubled, and the angel of His Presence[41] delivered them...; He Himself redeemed them...."[42] Two verses later, Isaiah envisions Israel remembering their redemption from Egypt. Thus, these renderings bear precisely on the question of who deserves credit for the Exodus.

"Not by an angel, not by a messenger" first appears in rabbinic literature in the 3rd century M'chilta of Rabbi Ishmael, a critical source for understanding the Haggadah. The compilers of the Haggadah drew more extensively from this than any other midrashic text.[43] On Exodus 12:12, *I will strike down*, the midrash states: "I might understand this to mean through an angel (מלאך, *malach*) or through an agent (שליח, *shaliach*). But it says: 'that the Lord struck down all the first born' (Exodus 12:29)–not through an angel nor through an agent."[4] Both Segal and Boyarin view this passage in the M'chilta as refuting binitarian claims.[45] Rabbinic literature includes a number of cases in which similar terminology serves to clarify ambiguity about God's unmediated actions in relationship to Israel.[46] For example, Avot d'Rabbi Natan (B) comments on the opening phrase in Mishnah Avot, "Moses received the Torah from Sinai": "Not from the mouth of an angel, nor from the mouth of a *seraph*, but from the Holy One, blessed be He...."[47]

The Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 63:9 and these two passages from the M'chilta (on Exodus 12:12 and 20:2) may well have served as the source for the ideas and some of the language found in the "Not by an angel" section of the Haggadah's midrash.[48] Although the intensity of the Two Powers Heresy faded, concerns within Judaism over the possibility of confusing the roles of God and the Heavenly Host persisted.

In any case, all the texts we have considered seek to deny claims that other *supernatural* beings were involved with the Exodus; excluding *human* participation is *not* the issue. The same can be said of the Haggadah's midrash.

Why Minimize Moses?

Given his prominence in the biblical Exodus, what accounts for the Haggadah's minimization of Moses?[49] This question, too, is best understood against the backdrop of the Two Powers Heresy we have explored and to the existence–beyond and within Judaism–of tendencies to deify Moses.[50] Just as the Bible furnishes the basis for believing that Egyptian first born were slain by God working in conjunction with another supernatural being, it also supplies fertile soil for tendencies to deify Moses. Exodus itself (4:16 and 7:1) intriguingly refers to Moses as playing the role of God (אלהים, *Elohim*) to Aaron and to Pharaoh.[5]

At a time when nascent Christianity was constructing a religion that revolved around Jesus as a divine redeeming intermediary–in the Gospel of John (14:6), Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father but through Me"–the Haggadah emphasized redemption through an unmediated relationship between God and humanity.[52] Indeed, some scholars maintain that the high Christology of the Gospel of John is actually modeled on pre-existing Jewish beliefs about Moses.[53]

Likewise the status of Moses was precisely one of the issues of debate in the long-simmering conflict with the Samaritans, a sect that not only revered Moses as God's only true prophet, but elevated him to an almost God-like position: Moses served as humanity's intercessor before God and in the future would return to bring the final redemption. In the *Memar Marqah*, a fundamental Samaritan text from the 4th century, God tells Moses to "take from me divinity and with it make your prophethood strong."[54] Ayala Lowenstamm writes that with the advent of this text, "Samaritanism is 'Mosaism.'"[55]

Earlier Jewish sources reflect a similar tendency. *The Wisdom of Sirach* (45:2), written by a Jew in the second century B.C.E., says that God "made him [Moses] equal in glory to the holy ones" [angels]. Philo writes of a partnership between God and Moses that seems to blur the distinction between humanity and divinity.

The biblical scholar Judah Goldin's careful analysis of a late 3rd century midrash on Deuteronomy 11:14 ("I will grant the rain for your land in season") also deserves mention here. The Sifre on Deuteronomy comments: "I will grant: I–not by means of an angel and not by means of a messenger."[57] After exhausting all other explanations, Goldin maintains that this midrash argues against a possible reading of the text that *Moses* would grant the rains. This midrashic clarification only makes sense in a milieu where notions of the divine Moses enjoyed a measure of currency.[58]

Later midrashic sources also preserve ancient Jewish notions about Moses' divinity. *Tanna Debe Eliyyahu*, in a comment on II Samuel 7:23, actually refers to Moses and Aaron as "divine beings."[59]

To sum up, the Haggadah downplays Moses not because it subscribes to a theology in which human beings play no part in the Exodus, but as a precaution against tendencies to deify Moses.[60] A variety of midrashim reflect the same concern when they stress Moses' personal limitations–his difficulty, for example, understanding certain matters "all of which God pointed out to him with His finger."[61] Summarizing these midrashic tradi-

tions, Goldin concludes that "all [the sages] took great precautions in their interpretations, lest the figure of Moses be magnified beyond human proportions."[62] Indeed, Midrash Lekach Tov asks why the grave of Moses remains unknown and answers flatly, "so that Israel would not go there and put up a Temple and make sacrifices and offer incense." [63]

To those who would deify Moses, the Haggadah offers a sharp rebuke. Their quasi-divine hero *almost* disappears from the story. But for those searching for the role in the redemption played by human beings–the human Moses and the Israelites–the Haggadah, as we will now see, offers subtle, but affirmative support.

Moses and the Human Role in the Redemption from Egypt[64]

Thus far, we have concentrated on the reasons for the comparatively small role the Haggadah assigned to Moses. Having considered the meaning of his relative *absence*, it is time to see what can be learned from his *presence.*

Even in his diminished presence, Moses offers a pointed challenge to the idea that deliverance from Egypt was purely a divine project. Whatever miraculous properties the staff of Moses[65] may have possessed, it did not walk into Pharaoh's palace on its own. God chose a human being to bring it there. The Haggadah invokes the hands of both God and Moses. God *and* humanity share responsibility for redeeming the world. We cannot forget the human contribution to the task–and the importance of leadership–even as we celebrate God's "strong hand and outstretched arm." Moses' staff in the Haggadah reminds us of the unique role in redemptive process that we each hold in our hands. The question is whether we can overcome the reluctance, as Moses eventually did, to fully embrace the work. The midrash asserts that every generation contains individuals like Moses.[66] Likewise, every individual can help to bring about redemption.

Now let us consider a number of other passages in the Haggadah that also quietly allude to the importance of the human role in the redemptive process.

The Covenantal Context of Redemption

The Haggadah clearly wants us to understand redemption in the context of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people that began with Abraham. That is why the Haggadah includes the passage from Genesis (15:13-14) known as the Covenant of the Pieces, in which God says to Abraham, "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years;

but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall leave with great wealth."

Minimally, this requires that after 400 years of slavery the Israelites would remain or become a distinct people. Indeed, the Haggadah notes, the Israelites "became a distinguishable people in Egypt," i.e., rather than assimilate and disappear, their identity grew more distinct. Had they assimilated–assuming that was an option–there would not have been a people for God to take out.[67] The Haggadah inveighs against the wicked son for excluding himself from the community, and states pointedly that had he been in Egypt "he would not have been redeemed." The point is that redemption was contingent on the Israelites' behavior. Baruch Bokser notes that "the retort to the evil child...further stresses the need to merit redemption."[68] By framing the redemption from Egypt in a covenantal context, the Haggadah reminds us that both partners shared responsibility for the outcome.

"In Your Bloods Live..."

A now common variant on the traditional text of the Haggadah further addresses the relationship between redemption and the deeds of the Israelites.

Since at least the 9th or 10th century, Haggadot following the Babylonian tradition have included Ezekiel 16:7, which pictures Israel as "naked and bare." Isaac Luria (1534-1572) added Ezekiel 16:6, which now appears in many Haggadot, including its final words, "I said to you when you were in your blood, Live! Yes, I said to you when you were in your blood, Live!"[69] The M'chilta once again provides the basic source for Luria's innovation. The time had come for God to fulfill the promise of redemption made to Abraham at the Covenant of the Pieces. The people, however, were

> bare of any religious deeds. Therefore [God] assigned them two duties, the duty of the paschal sacrifice and the duty of circumcision, which they should perform so as to be worthy of redemption....For one cannot obtain rewards except for deeds.[70]

According to kabbalistic tradition, the actions of God and of humanity are inextricably linked. As the Zohar put it: "Whoever makes an effort to purify himself receives assistance from above....For the upper world is not stirred to act until an impulse is given from the lower world."[71] Had the Israelites been unwilling to face the risks associated with circumcision and conducting the paschal sacrifice, presumably they would not have been redeemed. Remember that after the fourth plague Pharaoh proposed letting the Israelites offer sacrifices to God *in* Egypt. Because the Egyptians

apparently worshiped lambs and goats, Moses feared that the Israelites would be stoned and refused Pharaoh's offer (Exodus 8:22).[72] But before leaving Egypt this is precisely the risk the Israelites must take. Haggadot that include these two verses from Ezekiel forcefully express the view that the Exodus was contingent on the actions of both God and humanity.

"In every generation..."

The phrase, "in every generation" occurs twice in the Haggadah. "In every generation there are those who rise up to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand." Later we read, "In every generation, each individual should feel as if he or she had actually gone out from Egypt."

In the first instance, God plays the expected role of redeemer. In the second, God is missing and we are simply to see ourselves as if we had *gone* out of Egypt. We would have expected the Haggadah to say that we should feel as if we "had been *brought* out." The difference in language highlights the point that God and humanity both participate in the redemptive process. The M'chilta makes a similar point. "With an alertness/strength of their own Israel went out of Egypt. As it is said: 'This is how you shall eat it [the paschal sacrifice]: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand....'" (Exodus 12:11)[73] God obviously plays a role, but so do the Israelites.

Purim in the Haggadah

Now let us turn to one of the Ashkenazi Haggadah's most poetic and intriguing passages: "We praise...the One who has brought us forth from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to a festival, from darkness to great light and from bondage to redemption."

The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:5) only included the first expression, "from slavery to freedom." In the spirit of the Haggadah's dictum that "whoever elaborates on the story of the Exodus deserves praise," however, the passage grew, but in a surprising way.[74]

The phrase "from sorrow to joy, from mourning to a festival" occurs near the very end of the Book of Esther (9:22) in connection with the institution of the festival of Purim.[75] The Jews have just been saved from Haman's genocidal plan and Mordecai sends out instructions to annually observe Purim on "the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of "sorrow to joy and from mourning to festivity."

Why bring Purim into the Seder, albeit obliquely? In part because the climax of the Purim story unfolds during Passover. On the 15th of Nisan, the first night of Passover, Queen Esther arranged a "wine feast" for the King and approached him for a fateful audience. She requested his permission for a second wine feast the next night, at which she intended to engineer Haman's downfall. Esther's plan succeeded and the King executed Haman on the 16th of Nisan, the second day of Passover. As such, the allusion to Purim would seem to be the perfect illustration of the Haggadah's claim that "in every generation they rise up to destroy us, but the Holy One...saves us from their hand."

Upon closer inspection, however, Purim appears to teach a rather different lesson. In Esther, salvation is achieved, *but God is never mentioned.* Purim reminds us that in a world where God remains hidden, redemption lies in our hands. In placing an allusion to Purim at the heart of the Seder, perhaps the compilers of the Haggadah are subtly calling us to remember humanity's responsibility for the work of redemption at the very moment we celebrate God's role in the process.

Righteous Women, Apple Trees and Charoset

Rabbi Akiva expounds on another aspect of the Israelite contribution to the redemptive process. He argues "that Israel merited redemption because of the righteousness of the women of that generation."[76] The Haggadah alludes to Pharaoh's plan to destroy the Israelites by preventing them from procreating–"And [God] saw our affliction–the enforced separation of husband and wife." Rabbi Akiva credits women with thwarting Pharaoh's scheme by defiantly meeting their weary husbands in the fields under the apple trees, feeding them warm food, anointing them with oil, seducing them, and later stealing off to deliver their children. For Rabbi Akiva, women's unwillingness to forsake love and sensuality in the midst of degradation were the critical ingredients that human beings contributed to their redemption from Egypt.

His allusion to the apple tree finds its way onto the Seder plate. The Talmud explains that *charoset*–in many traditions made with apples–must be thick as a reminder of the clay from which the Israelites made bricks. But it must also be "tart to commemorate the apple trees" and the events that transpired beneath them.[77] *Charoset* reminds us of Pharaoh's oppression and of the human defiance without which the Exodus would have been impossible.

Like all great Jewish texts, the Haggadah loses much when its complex message is oversimplified. Likewise, the myth of Moses' complete absence leads to an unbalanced reading of the text–one that sees only God's hand in the Exodus. A more nuanced reading suggests that redemption hinges on the actions of *both* God and humanity. In articulating this

position, the Haggadah reflects a view found elsewhere in rabbinic literature. Midrash Tanchumah provides a poignant example: "Three of the plagues came by the hands (על ידי, *al y'dei*) of Aaron, three through Moses, three through God, and one through the united efforts of all three."[7]

We are hardly the first generation to live in times when the active hand of a redeeming God seems to have withdrawn from sight. The longing for God to return to the stage of history to redeem the righteous and punish the wicked is palpable throughout the Haggadah. But the Haggadah does not seek to foster human passivity and nostalgia for "the good old days" when God's actions on the stage of history may have seemed less hidden. Hence, the Haggadah reminds us, albeit in a quieter voice, that redemption cannot be left to God alone. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "The destiny of man is to be a partner of God....Every man is called upon to be a redeemer, and redemption takes place every moment, every day....The world is in need of redemption, but the redemption must not be expected to happen as an act of sheer grace. Man's task is to make the world worthy of redemption. His faith and his works are preparations for *ultimate redemption*."[79] The redemption from Egypt was no different. And if we use the Haggadah to teach our children that redemption–then and now–depends on God and humanity, *dayeinu*!

Excursus: Origins of a Myth

Let us now explore the origins of the myth that the Haggadah makes not a single reference to Moses and the historical circumstances that may have prompted the first commentary about the Haggadah's treatment of him. The earliest interpretation of the Haggadah's minimization of Moses seems to appear in the commentary of Elijah ben Solomon, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797, also known as the Gra), first published by one of his students in 1805.[80] The Gra comments on the phrase "in His glory, Himself" that appears in the Haggadah's "Not by an angel" midrash.

> ...With all the other plagues, only Moses was commanded to do something, and he did as God commanded him. But with regard to the slaying of the first born there was a command to all Israel to carry out the paschal sacrifice, for it was all-inclusive....But all the power required to carry out the slaying of the first born was from God, not from the people....And the revelation of God's glory, revealed to everyone, was by way of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, and he did not, heaven forbid, take glory for himself.... And therefore in the entire story of the going out of Egypt we don't have a reference, God forbid, to Moses.[81] Because we are forbidden to connect anything with "His glory and Himself." Praise does not rest upon Moses but only upon God alone. "And whoever associates the Heavenly Name with anything else is eradicated from the world" [BT Sanhedrin 63a]. And therefore scripture says, "...they had faith in the Lord and His servant [Exodus 14:31]. This is not said in regard to the greatness of Moses, but on the contrary, in regard to the belief of Israel and the modesty of Moses, that they believed that God did all this. And Moses was only his servant like all creatures in the world, all of whom must do His will. And therefore [at the Red Sea] "then Moses and the children of Israel sang," all of them together, all were equal in this miracle. And this is the meaning of "His glory, Himself," because all the glory and power they were really His. And this is the essence of our faith. And the praise of Moses our teacher who taught us Torah was that his spirit/ego was lower than one stricken with ugly boils.[82]

What led the Gra to take such a different view than Maimonides about Moses and the Seder?[83] I believe the Gra's comments need to be understood in light of his extreme rejection of the Chasidic concept of the tzaddik, a figure in many ways modeled on the biblical Moses. Dov Baer Ben Samuel, the author of the earliest collection of tales about Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, better known as the Baal Shem Tov (or by its acronym, the *Besht*; the term means "master of the good name"), Chasidism's founder and quintessential tzaddik, noted that "it is evident that [the *Besht*] was...the likeness of the soul of Moses."[8]

Chasidism taught that d'veikut (דביקות), cleaving to God, was the ultimate goal of religious life, a goal that the tzaddik could achieve directly but that the common person could reach only indirectly through cleaving to the tzaddik. To illustrate this concept, Yaakov Yosef of Polennoye, author of *Toledot Yaakov*, the first Chasidic book, repeatedly drew upon the very passage from Exodus that appears in the Haggadah–and contains the Haggadah's only mention of Moses' name: "And when Israel saw the wondrous power [literally, 'great hand'] which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord; they had faith in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31).

> The purpose of all is *and to Him shalt thou cleave* (Deuteronomy 10:20). However, the Sages (BT Ketubot 111b) interpreted this by saying: "Is it, then possible to cleave unto Him, about whom it is said that the Lord thy God is a devouring fire (Deuteronomy 4:24)? The verse means, then, cleave to Torah scholars. We must understand why the Sages explained the verse in a manner other than its plain meaning. For Scripture states and to Him shalt thou cleave, literally to cleave to God. Yet they interpreted that to mean that we must cleave to the scholars. However, this is not really a difficulty. For in man there exists a dwelling place for God, as it is written, And I shall dwell among them (Exodus 25:8). It is the righteous man (tzaddik) who is called "the temple of the Lord" and "the sanctuary of the Lord" in which the Lord

> dwells....Now when a man attaches himself to the scholar, in whom the Shekhina dwells, he is ipso facto attached to Him in actuality. Thus we may understand the verse "they had faith in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31). They believed in God by their faith and d'veikut in Him. But, as the Talmud asked, how is it possible to cleave to Him in d'veikut? Therefore Scripture explains: and in His servant Moses. For whoever believes in and cleaves to the "shepherd of Israel" is ipso facto in d'veikut with Him...[85]

The publication of Yaakov Yosef's book in 1780 led to calls that it be burnt and to the Gra's support of a new round of bans against the Chasidim the next year.[86] Earlier condemnations had been too mild. "If the decision had been mine," said the Gra, "I would have done to them as the prophet Elijah had done to the prophets of Ba'al."[87] Among many aspects of Chasidic "tzaddikology" that drew the Gra's ire, one stood out: the practice during prayer of transference of thoughts to the rebbe (מסירת מחשבה לרבי, *mesirat machshavah la-rebbe*). According to Chasidic belief, "the purpose was that the rebbe, in his great wisdom, direct the conscious thoughts of the supplicants and raise them to their source (God), even if the individual himself did not know how to do this." To the Gra, this constituted nothing less than "total idolatry."[88] In the mid 1790s, David of Makow (d. 1814), who viewed himself as an emissary of the Gra in the anti-Chasidic crusade, published attacks on Chasidism accusing the movement of claiming its founder was a "divine man," whose teachings obviated the need for studying Talmud.[89] In the eyes of the Gra, who valued learning above all else, nothing could be more profoundly disturbing than encouraging students to rapturously cleave to a tzaddik and forsake the primacy of study.

In assessing the Gra's commentary about Moses in the Haggadah, one other issue merits our attention. There seems to be a relationship between Passover–with its yearning for Elijah, herald of the messianic era–and certain key events in the Gra's war against Chasidism. The campaign began during the intermediate days of Passover in 1772. And years later, the Gra greeted the 1793 publication of *The Testament of Israel Baal Shem Tov*, a book attributed to the founder of Chasidism, with orders that it "be burned in front of Vilna's Great Synagogue prior to the burning of the leaven on the eve of Passover."[90]

The historian Arie Morgenstern suggests that the Gra's animus toward the Chasidic concept of the tzaddik lay in his fear that the tzaddik's irregular religious practices could dangerously *interfere* with the coming of the messiah.[91] If so, this would help explain why the Gra's animus toward

the Chasidim would be especially aroused at Passover. The dawn of the messianic era had long been associated with this festival.[92] The Gra may well have felt that Passover's optimal redemptive potential was squandered by the practices of the tzaddikim and their followers.[93]

Against this background, the Gra's comments about Moses in the Haggadah can reasonably be read as an anti-Chasidic polemic.[94] Moses is not an elevated figure to whom one must cleave, but a humble servant of God who merely must do God's will along with the rest of us. The stage for the last plague, which finally breaks Pharaoh's will, is set by the paschal sacrifice, a commandment for all Israel, not just the actions of its leader. Rather than casting him as the tzaddik without whom the drama cannot unfold, the Haggadah allows the unassuming Moses to recede into the background lest he detract from the praise due God. Rather than singing praises to God on behalf of the people, Moses and the children of Israel sing together. In contrast to the tzaddik who raises himself above the community, Moses lowers himself before all.

A full analysis of precisely how the Gra's commentary about Moses and the Haggadah evolved into the myth of the legendary leader's total absence from this text lies beyond the scope of this article. A few comments, however, are in order. The Gra's commentary on the Haggadah is among the most widely published, appearing in 124 Haggadot at last count.[95] Although the Gra was doubtless aware of the Haggadah's two references to Moses, the "take away" from his commentary on this subject has been the following: "...in the entire story of the going out of Egypt we don't have a reference, God forbid, to Moses." The Gra's reading of "the going out of Egypt"–a literal and perhaps idiosyncratic reading–excluded God's charge to Moses at the burning bush and the drowning of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, which are, as we have seen, the two points in the story where the Haggadah actually does refer to Moses. Alas, over the years, the Gra's commentary led others to conflate Moses' failure to appear in the "the going out of Egypt," at least according to the Gra's narrow construal–with his absence from the *entire* Haggadah.

The Gra's interpretation of the Haggadah's minimization of Moses reflects a set of concerns arising in a particular historical context, concerns that are not unrelated to those that initially led the compilers of the Haggadah to limit Moses' presence. Both stem from fears about the deification of human beings. But the Haggadah itself and many midrashic sources contradict the Gra's conclusion that any hint of joint participation of God *and* Moses (or the Israelites themselves) in the Exodus is tantamount to idolatry. With the bitter conflict between Mitnagdim and

Chasidim long behind us, there is no good reason to perpetuate the Gra's polemical interpretation of the Haggadah and no justification to spread the erroneous belief that the Haggadah makes not a single mention of Moses.

When opening the Haggadah, we would do well to follow one of the Gra's cardinal principles: "Use your own eyes and not the spectacles of others."[96]

NOTES

[1] Thanks to Professor Burton L. Visotzky, Rabbi Abraham Unger, Elie Kaunfer and Noah Arnow for their careful review of this article. Numerous conversations with Rabbi Jeffrey Hoffman and Dr. Jay Rovner also enriched my understanding of many issues. Interested readers may also want to see David Henshke, "'The Lord Brought Us Forth From Egypt': On the Absence of Moses in the Passover Haggadah," *AJS Review* 31:1 (April 2007). Henshke's work appeared a number of months after this article was accepted for publication.

[2] Menahem Kasher, *Israel Passover Haggadah* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1950), 108-109. See also Kasher's *Torah Shelemah* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1927-1992) Vol. 12, notes on 27-28. For a similar interpretation see Jacob J. Petuchowski, "Do This In Remembrance of Me (1 Corinthians 11:24), *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 295; Eugene Mihaly, "The Passover Haggadah as PaRaDiSe," *CCAR Journal* 53 (1966): 11. The Internet broadcasts the same message:

Non-denominational: MyJewishLearning.com–Holidays: Why Isn't Moses in the Haggadah? <http://hillel.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Passover/TO_Pesach_Seder/Haggadah/Moses_Haggadah.htm>.

Conservative: <http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/parashah/5761/tsav.shtml>.

Orthodox: <http://ohr.edu/ask_db/ask_main.php/147/Q2/>.

Reform: <http://urj.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2781&pge_prg_id=14422&pge_id=3724>.

[3] See for example the synoptic table presented in *Haggadat Hazal*, which compares Haggadot of three geonim: Amram, Natronai and Saadia. Shmuel Safrai and Ze'ev Safrai, *Haggadat Hazal* (Israel: Carta, 1998), 274. There are, of course, questions, especially with regard to Seder R. Amram Gaon, as to whether this consistency reflects later editing in the course of copying earlier manuscripts.

[4] This midrash in the Haggadah is an expansion of what appears in the Sifre on Deuteronomy (Ki Tavo, 5). Recent research by Jay Rovner indicates that this midrash developed slowly and only reached completion in the Gaonic era. See Jay Rovner, "Two Early Witnesses to the Formation of the *Miqra Bikkurim* Midrash and Their Implications for the Evolution of the Haggadah Text," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 75 (2004).

[5] Moses' name appears overtly in many contemporary translations–for example, "This is the staff *of Moses*." See for example, Philip Birnbaum, *The Birnbaum Haggadah* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1953), 85, and Shlomo Riskin, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: Ktav, 1983), 88.

[6] Jacob Z. Lauterbach, trans., *Mekilta d-Rabbi Ishmael* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1949) Vol. 1, 251 (B'shalach 7:110). Hereafter in notes, *MRI*.

[7] Shmuel Safrai and Ze'ev Safrai (*Haggadah of the Sages: The Passover Haggadah*, Israel: Carta, 1998), 275. Saadia includes this entire section as an acceptable addition. I. Davidson, S. Assaf, and B. I. Joel, eds., *Siddur R. Saadja Gaon* (Jerusalem, Rubin Mass Ltd., 2000), 143. The Makhzor Vitry (late 11th century) also included the midrash but only in summary, so we do not know whether it included Moses' name.

[8] See, for example, the *Sarajevo Haggadah* (circa 1350) or the *Ashkenazi Haggadah* (circa 1450).

[9] Masud ben Aaron Raccah, *Sefer Ma'aseh Rokeah* (1690-1768) reprinted in Jerusalem in 1976, Vol. 2. 125, and Yekutiel Kohen, *Haggadot Ha'Geonim V'HaRambam* (Jerusalem: Machon Otzar HaPoskim, 1997). Why Maimonides omitted this midrash from his Haggadah may have had less to do with the familiarity of this passage and more with the text on which he based his Haggadah. Maimonides' Haggadah shares many similarities with that of the Haggadah often attributed to Natronai Gaon (853 to 858). These similarities suggest that Natronai's Haggadah may well represent the text on which Maimonides based his own version.

[10] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah, 7:2.

[11] This is Maimonides' application of the Mishnah's direction that "according to the intelligence of the son, his father instructs him" (Pesachim 10:4). For Maimonides' understanding of Moses see Alfred Ivry, "The Image of Moses in Maimonides' Thought," *Proceedings of the Harvard-Hebrew University of Jerusalem Maimonides Conference*, in press.

[12] See, for example, *The Feast of Freedom* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1982). This Haggadah substitutes a selection of verses from the 14th and 15th chapters of Exodus. Ironically, they mention Miriam twice, but omit the traditional Haggadah's single mention of Moses' name. Haggadot recently published by the Reform (Sue Levi Elwell, ed., *The Open Door* [New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2002]) and Reconstructionist (*A Night of Questions* [Elkins Park, Pa.: The Reconstructionist Press, 2000]) movements tell the Passover story with more biblical narrative and as a result include numerous references to Moses.

[13] In place of the phrase, "took us out," the JPS translation regularly uses "freed." I prefer the more literal "took us out," because, although the Israelites were taken out of Egypt, it took years of wandering in the desert for them to become free of the experience of servitude in Egypt. "Took us out" appears in many Haggadot, including the Conservative *Feast of Freedom* and the Reform *Open Door*, as well as in ArtScroll's Tanach translation.

[14] The Haggadah's three mediators seem to reflect an effort to "cover all the bases" with respect to ruling out intermediaries. As we will see, there are instances in rabbinic literature that refer to various combinations of these intermediaries. While these figures may not be identical, there is reason to believe that as symbols of mediation, they could be used interchangeably when the sages sought to stress the importance of direct action by God. For example, the Babylonian Talmud tractate Ta'anit 2a notes that the key to timely rains was not entrusted to a messenger. Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:6 contains the same midrash, but says the key was not entrusted to an angel or a seraph. The Sifre on Deuteronomy (Sifre 42) excludes the angel and the messenger from delivering timely rains. Thus it should come as no surprise to find examples of early Haggadot that refer to different combinations of mediators. For "angel and seraph" see *Haggadat Hazal* at 140. The authors claim that there are no Haggadot that fail to mention the seraph. However, for a 12th-century Haggadah that was amended to correct for the missing seraph, see *Sidur Rabenu Shelomoh be-Rabi Natan* (Jerusalem: Sh. Hagai, 1995), 86.

[15] The translation from section B to the end of the passage is the author's.

[16] See the table in *Haggadat Hazal* (273) for a clearer picture of the development of the passage.

[17] Sigmund Freud, "Negation," *The Complete Works of Sigmud Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961) Vol. 19, 235. Daniel Goldschmidt asserts that the midrash does *not* seek to spread a particular theological view but aims only to explicate the superfluous phrase, "I am the Lord" or

"I the Lord" at the end of Exodus 12:12 (*The Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History*, [Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1960], 45). This seems strikingly at odds with scholarly opinion. In fact, Goldin believes that Goldschmidt "has disposed of the problem too cavalierly." See Judah Goldin, "Not by Means of an Angel and Not By Means of a Messenger" in *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988): 165, note 13. Loewenstamm likewise rejects Goldschmidt's view. See Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press/Hebrew University, 1992), 215, note 46. See my note 28 for scholars who have regarded this passage as a theological polemic.

[18] Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam, 1085-1174), known for his commitment to a plain reading of the text, explains the meaning of *pesach* (Exodus 12:11) in a manner diametrically opposed to the Haggadah's midrash: "[It is called *Pesach*] because the angel will skip over the Israelite homes and leave them alone when he goes to strike down the first-borns in the gentile's homes." Martin I. Lockshin, trans., *Rashbam's Commentary on Exodus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 110 and note 42.

[19] "Messenger" is the JPS translation here of the Hebrew *malach*, which also can be translated, and often is, as "angel," which is how JPS translates it in Judges 2:1. See the next note.

[20] In the Bible, *malach* can refer to a supernatural or a human being (including an emissary of other humans [see Numbers 21:21]), or to an object (such as the burning bush [Exodus 3:2], or pillar of cloud [Exodus 14:19]). In rabbinic literature, it refers only to a supernatural being. See Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 741, note 5.

[21] A source-critical approach to the preceding three passages is not particularly illuminating. For example, Richard Elliott Friedman attributes all three passages to J (*Who Wrote the Bible*, New York: Harper and Row, 1989), while William Propp (*The Anchor Bible Exodus 1-18* [New York: Doubleday, 1999], 376) assigns Exodus 12:23 to E.

[22] II Sam. 24:16, I Chronicles 21:16 and II Kings 19:35. Part of the verse from Chronicles actually appears in the Haggadah's elaboration of the phrase "outstretched arm." But the Haggadah's midrash omits any reference to the angel (מלאך המשחית, *malach ha'maschit*!) and seems to place the drawn sword over Jerusalem in the hand of God rather than an angel.

[23] As a word, rather than a name, *mastema* appears only twice in the Bible–Hosea 9:7, 8.

[24] Philo, *Questions and Answers: Exodus Book I*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 32. We might read the Haggadah's energetic defense of God's exclusive hand in slaughtering the Egyptian first born as a rebuke to dualists who would prefer to praise God for redeeming the Israelites, but to blame another power for killing the first-born, an act that the midrash (e.g. Exodus Rabbah 18:10) itself struggles to justify.

[25] David Winston, trans., *The Wisdom of Solomon* (New York: The Anchor Bible/Doubleday, 1979), 313. See also Jubilees 49:2.

[26] Jerusalem Talmud tractate Sanhedrin 2:1,10a. The translation of the last phrase follows Marcus Jastrow with "of angels" parenthesized. See *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1996), 321. The 10th century Exodus Rabbah (17:5) also acknowledges different views about whether God acted alone in the last plague.

[27] See Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1977) and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 129-147. See Segal for a good review of the Two Powers literature. Segal and Boyarin use the same rabbinic texts, but understand the issue very differently. Segal assumes that rabbinic Judaism had developed a monotheistic orthodoxy against which it appraised the belief in Two Powers as heretical. Boyarin argues that "binitarian" thinking was initially not alien to many of the rabbis and that

only in reaction to the development to Christianity did the sages begin to identify such beliefs as heretical. The notion that the Haggadah would engage in anti-sectarian polemics should come as no surprise. It labels the wicked child a כופר בעיקר (*kofer b'ikar*, a term commonly used to denote heretics) for putting himself outside the community by denying one of its central principles.

[28] Scholars have long noted the polemical quality of this passage, though none of these early researchers explicitly interpret it in terms of the Two Powers Heresy. See I. Abrahams, "Some Egyptian Fragments of the Passover Hagada," (*Jewish Quarterly Review* 10 [1898] 49, note 2); Louis Finkelstein, "The Oldest Midrash: Pre-Rabbinic Ideals and Teachings in the Passover Haggadah," *Harvard Theological Review*, 31:4 [1938]: 307). David Daube ("Two notes on the Passover Haggadah," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 50 [1949]: 57) notes that the term השליח (*ha'shaliach*, the messenger) in the concluding section of the Haggadah's midrash "may well have arisen when Christianity had to be combated; 'the messenger' probably is Jesus." Contemporary scholars have also commented on the midrash's polemical quality. See for example, Shlomo Pines, "From Darkness to Great Light" (*The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines* Vol. 4 [Jerusalem: Magnes Press/Hebrew University, 1996], 50); Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 92 and Israel J. Yuval "Easter and Passover As Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue" in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 109-110.

[29] Boyarin, 130.

[30] Segal, 64.

[31] BT M'gillah 25a and BT B'rachot 33b.

[32] For brevity, I have omitted sections of this text, including references to Daniel 7:9, which, although central to the Two Powers heresy, are not essential to this discussion.

[33] *MRI*, Vol. 2, 231-232 (Bachodesh 5:20). For easier reading and to conform to JUDAISM's style, I have substituted the 1999 JPS translation of the Bible in place of the 1917 version that Lauterbach usually used. Boyarin (342) also quotes this text, but not in relationship to the Haggadah. The new JPS translation, however, does not translate אני הוא of the final citation, preferring an "as well" to "I am He."

[34] Segal, 148. See also J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, "The Use of Deuteronomy 32:39 in Monotheistic Controversies in Rabbinic Literature" in *Studies in Deuteronomy*, eds. F. Garcia Martinez et. al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

[35] Section C of the Haggadah's midrash probably developed after the Two Powers Heresy ceased to be an active issue. Still, this passage from the M'chilta may have inspired the concluding language of the Haggadah's midrash.

[36] BT Sanhedrin 38b. His comments are recorded as part of a larger discussion, beginning on 37a, of the issue.

[37] As Rashi notes on BT Sanhedrin 38b, the numeric values of Metatron and Shaddai are both equivalent to 314. See BT Sanhedrin 38b and 39a for more on the refutation of dualism.

[38] In Hebrew, the phrase is אל תמר בו (*al tamair bo*), which is also translatable as "do not rebel against him." Rav Idit, however, reads *tamair* as "exchange," deriving this from the root מור, rather than מרה.

[39] Or "letter carrier" or "guide." Jastrow, 1217.

[40] Isaac Leo Seeligmann, *The Septuagint Version of Isaiah* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948), 89.

[41] See James C. VanDerkam, "The Angel of the Presence in the Book of Jubilees" (Dead Sea Discoveries 7:3 [2000]).

[42] The Septuagint's translation reflects the *k'tiv* (לא—*lamed aleph*, "not") whereas the Masoretic text follows the *k'rei* (לו—*lamed vav*, "he") and renders ציר (*tsir*, messenger) rather than צר (*tsar*, trouble). For a helpful discussion see Michael Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 316. See *MRI* Vol. 1, 113 (Pischa 14:90). See also James R. Davila, "The Macrocosmic Temple, Scriptural Exegesis and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice," *Dead Sea Discoveries*, 9:1 (2002): especially 12-17.

[43] *MRI* contains one of the ancient versions of the four children (Vol. 1, 166, Pischa 18:119), the clarification that the Exodus is to be recounted on the night of Passover rather than at the beginning of Nisan (Vol. 1, 149, Pischa 17:96) and the elaboration of the plagues at the Red Sea (Vol. 1, 251, B'shalach 7:109).

[44] *MRI*, Vol. 1, 53 (Pischa 7:28). See page 97 for an almost identical interpretation of Exodus 12:29 for which the proof text is Exodus 12:12.

[45] Segal, 64, and Boyarin, 134.

[46] Goldin, "Not by Means of an Angel and Not By Means of a Messenger."

[47] The denial of a role for the seraph here and in the Haggadah (and elsewhere in rabbinic literature) is curious and warrants an explication not practicable in this limited space.

[48] The passage from the *MRI* that asserts that it was indeed God who acted in Egypt as well as at the Red Sea may also have led the compilers of the Haggadah to incorporate another passage from the *MRI* that describes the plagues that God visited upon the Egyptians at the sea (Vol. 1, 251, B'shalach 7:109). The Haggadah thus removes any question that a different figure carried out the last plague in Egypt and punished the Egyptians at the sea.

[49] Michael Avioz, "The Fifth Question: Why is Moses Missing," (on the web at <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/metzora/avi.html> and Avigdor Shinan, "Why Is Moshe Rabenu Not Mentioned in the Passover Haggadah," *Amudim* 39 (1991), 172-174 (Hebrew). Despite their titles, both articles recognize the presence of Moses in the Haggadah and very briefly address factors that may have contributed to minimizing him. I have expanded upon their general approach.

[50] See, for example, Israel J. Yuval's "Easter and Passover As Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue" in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 109-110.

[51] On these verses, Rashi reflects the traditional rabbinic view when he suggests that Moses is the lord, master, judge or chastiser of Pharaoh. Simply understood, in these verses, God seeks to calm Moses' fears about being able to fulfill his mission by noting that just as he may speak only that which God tells him, so Aaron will speak only that which Moses tells him.

[52] Daube writes: "[In the Haggadah,] Christian potentialities are suppressed...the figure of Moses, dominating the Biblical narrative of the exodus from Egypt and, naturally, at one time prominent too, in the celebration of that deliverance on Passover eve, is radically eliminated...A fantastic *tour de force*: but there must be no human Mediator." David Daube, "He That Cometh" (lecture, St. Paul's Cathedral, London, October 1966): 12.

[53] See Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet King: Moses Traditions and the Johanine Christology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1985) and John Lierman, *The New Testament Moses: Christian Perceptions of Moses and Israel in the Setting of Jewish Religion* (Tubingen; Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

[54] John MacDonald, ed. and trans., *Memar Marqah: The Teaching of Marqah* (Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1963), Vol. 2 (the translation), 1:1, 4.

[55] *Encyclopedia Judaica*, volume 14, 740. Also see, ed. Alan D. Crown, *The Samaritans* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), 324.

[56] Philo, *On the Life of Moses* (1:158-9). For a review of these and other sources, see "Moses as God and King" by Wayne A. Meeks in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968) and Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1998). For a view that interprets Philo's "deification" of Moses as metaphorical, see "Is Philo's Moses a Divine Man?" by Ian W. Scott, *Studia Philonica Annual* Vol. 14 (2002). Note that Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 3:180) also calls Moses a "divine man."

[57] Sifre 42. Goldin op.cit.

[58] The worry that some would attribute timely rains to Moses rather than God resonates with the story of Moses bringing forth water from the rock. Based on Rabbeinu Chananel, Nachmanides (Numbers 20:1) argues that the great sin of Moses and Aaron here was their saying "Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?" (Numbers 20:10) instead of "shall *God* get you water." Moses and Aaron sinned by creating the impression that they, rather than God, would bring water from the rock. Numbers 20:12 would seem to support this when God says to Moses and Aaron, "you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people." For midrashic traditions on this theme see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968) Vol. III, 311 and notes 490 and 613.

[59] William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, trans., *Tanna Debe Eliyyahu* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981), 268. For another example from rabbinic literature, see Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:4.

[60] A similar concern is reflected in the explanation of the fact that Moses' name does not appear in the weekly Torah portion known as *T'tzaveh*. "...[T]he traditional date of Moses' death...always falls during the week in which *T'tzaveh* is read; they see his absence from the Torah reading, like his virtual absence from the Haggadah, as part of an effort to assure that no cult of Moses worship would ever arise." See *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly/United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2001) 503. For an explanation that focuses on the logic behind the division of portions in this section of the Torah, see Menahem ben-Yashar, "Why is Moses Absent from Parashat Tetzaveh? Or Is He?" <www.biu.ac.il/jh/parasha/eng/tetzaveh/yas.html>.

[61] *MRI*, Vol. 1, 15-16 (Pischa 2:3).

[62] Judah Goldin, "The First Chapter of Abot De Rabbi Nathan," (Appendix) in *Mordecai M. Kaplan Jubilee Volume: On the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1953), 278-279. Also see Goldin's "The Death of Moses: An Exercise in Midrashic Transposition" in his *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature.* Pages 183-184 discuss rabbinic safeguards against tendencies to defy Moses.

[63] *V'zot Ha'brachah* 61b. See Samuel E. Loewenstamm, "The Death of Moses," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (Missoula, Montanta: Scholars Press, 1976), 185-186.

[64] This section is an expansion of my "Reappraising the Haggadah's Vision of Redemption," that appeared in *The Reconstructionist* (Fall 2003, Vol. 68), 72-76.

[65] A careful reading of Exodus reveals the sometimes the staff is called the "staff of Moses" and sometimes the "staff of God." For a discussion of this, see "Rod of Moses or Rod of God?" in Propp, 227-229. His conclusion (228) is important: "The ambiguity is not surprising. Moses, after all, is the Deity's vicar. Whereas the ordinary prophet only speaks for God, Moses also acts for God."

[66] Genesis Rabbah 56:7.

[67] *MRI* (Vol. 1, 34, Pischa 5:14) highlights four ways in which the Israelites became or remained distinctive–they were above suspicion with regard to chastity, they refrained from tale-bearing, and did not change their names, or give up their language.

[68] Jacob Neusner, gen. ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation,* ed. and trans. Baruch Bokser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), Vol. 13, 496.

[69] Goldschmidt does not mention this variant, but see Menahem Kasher, *Haggadah Shelemah* (Jerusalem: Torah Shelemah Institute, 1967), 37, in the section dealing with textual variants. Once mostly found in Chasidic Haggadot, this now appears widely.

[70] *MRI,* Vol. 1, 33-34, Pischa 5:6.

[71] Soncino Zohar, Bereshit, Section 1, 77b.

[72] *MRI,* vol 1, 39 (Pischa 5:69).

[73] *MRI,* Vol. 1, 141 (Pischa 16:171).

[74] The earliest relatively complete printed Mishnah (Naples: J. S. Soncino, 1492) includes the Haggadah's version of the text. Standard versions of the Mishnah now feature this reading, but in all the best manuscripts of the Mishnah (Kaufmann, 13th century; Parma, 13th century; Cambridge, c. 1400) only the phrase "from slavery to freedom" appears, as it does in the so-called autograph manuscript of Maimonides' Mishnah commentary. The Haggadah's subsequent elaboration upon the Mishnah eventually replaced the original Mishnah!

[75] JPS renders: "...the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy."

[76] BT Sotah 11b (sometimes attributed to Rabbi Avira).

[77] BT Pesachim 116a. Akiva's midrash quotes the Song of Songs (8:5): "Under the apple tree I roused you; it was there your mother conceived you, there she who bore you conceived you."

[78] Midrash Tanchumah (Warsaw), chapter 14 on Exodus 8:16. See also Exodus Rabbah 12:4. The midrash uses the phrase על ידי, the same phrase the Haggadah uses to deny the participation of supernatural intermediaries in slaying the first-born.

[79] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), 312-313 and 380.

[80] This is the only source Kasher cites for his commentary on this question. Were there earlier sources, the encyclopedic Kasher would surely have mentioned them. Kasher, *Israel Passover Haggadah,* 108, 109. My review of commentaries on the Haggadah by many of the Rishonim and later commentators also failed to reveal anything earlier, but I make no claim to have checked *all* extant Haggadah commentaries. Isaiah ben Mali di Trani, the Elder, (c 1200-1260) made one of the few early comments on Moses in this context. He said that "Moses was a messenger only in terms of speaking to Pharaoh. But he did not have the power to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Only God, Himself could do that." This of course does not deny a human role in the redemption, but merely claims that humanity could not have done it without help from God. See Mordecai Leib Katznelbogen, ed., *Haggadat Torat Chayim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1998), 105. For the Gra's commentary see Yitzhak Eliyahu Landa, ed., *Hagadah shel Pesah Yekarah Mi-peninim: Im Perush She-Hiber Eliyahu mi-Vilna* (Jerusalem: Otsar HaPoskim, 1998), 55-56.

[81] The Gra must have had a narrow reading of "the going out of Egypt," since later he mentions the Haggadah's reference to Moses in connection with events at the Red Sea.

[82] For the comparison between the modesty of Moses and one stricken with boils see Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 56. (9:27). The Gra paraphrases this source. The Gra's evocation of boils is ironic because that is the plague that Exodus Rabbah 12:4 attributes to the joint activity of Moses, Aaron and God.

[83] Because the Gra was known to differ sharply with Maimonides on a number of issues, one cannot look to this fact alone as evidence of his polemical motivation.

[84] Dan Ben-Amos and Jerome R. Mintz, eds. and trans., *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1993), 6.

[85] Yaakov Yosef of Polennoye, *Tzafnat Pa'ane'ach,* ed. Gedalyah Nigal (Jerusalem: Institute for the Study of Hasidic Literature, 1989), 128. The translation of this passage comes from Norman Lamm, *The Religious Thought of Hasidism* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999), 306-307. See Lamm's note 225 on 306 for corrections of some of Yaakov Yosef's sources. For a similar text by Yaakov Yosef, see 161 in Lamm. The last line paraphrases *MRI* Vol. 1, 252 (B'shalach, 7:124) on Exodus 14:31. Reliance on such interpretations of this passage from Exodus remains central in Chasidism's self understanding. See for example, Avraham Greenbaum, *The Wings of the Sun: Traditional Jewish Healing in Theory and Practice* (New York: Breslov Research Center, 1995) 58: "Chassidism had restored to the forefront of Judaism the concept of the Tzaddik as a spiritual leader who guides people in healing the maladies of their souls and fires them to serve God. It was an ancient idea: after the exodus from Egypt the Jewish People 'believed in God *and* in Moses His servant' (Exodus 14:31)."

[86] Elijah Judah Schochet, *The Hasidic Movement and the Vilna Gaon* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994), 15.

[87] Mordecai L. Wilensky, "Hasidic-Mitnaggedic Polemics" in Gershon David Hundert, ed., *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to Present* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 263.

[88] Wilensky, 250-251.

[89] Wilensky, 264. The Hebrew translates as "divine man." For the source of the Hebrew see Wilensky, note, 244 and note 124, 270.

[90] Schochet, 21. The *Testament* was actually written by a member of the school of Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch. See Harold Irving Stern, *The Testament of the Baal Shem Tov* (1976 Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University), iii.

[91] Arie Morgernstern, "An Attempt to Hasten the Redemption," *Jewish Action* (Fall 1997), 58:1.

[92] It would not be unreasonable to speculate that psychological factors may also have been at play here. The Gra was born on Passover and his parents named him Elijah. Whatever their expectations may have been at his birth, by the age of six it was already obvious the boy was a prodigy. As Morgenstern suggests, the Gra also believed that through his unique understanding of Jewish texts he had a special role to play in ushering in the messianic era. That the Gra should find himself in bitter opposition to the Chasidic tzaddikim, many of whom were also seen as messianic figures, at least raises the question as to whether unconscious feelings of rivalry contributed to his stance. In any case, despite his critique of the Chasidic tzaddik, as Lamm observes, "the respect of the Gaon's disciples for their master was so intense, so rhapsodic and extravagant, that it rivals the attitudes of the Hasidim to their Zaddikim...." See Norman Lamm, *Torah For Torah's Sake* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1989), 5.

[93] For an illuminating contrast with the Gra, see the commentaries on the passage in the Haggadah that mentions Moses' name (Exodus 14:31) collected in Shalom Meir Wallach, ed.,

Haggadah of the Chasidic Masters (New York: Mesorah Publications/ArtScroll, 1990), 71-73. One, for example, concludes that "'The righteous man shall live in his faith' (Habakkuk 2:4), can be interpreted, 'Through his faith in the *zaddik* a man will live.'"

94 See Hayyim Hillel ben-Sasson, "The Personality of Elijah, Gaon of Vilna, and His Historical Influence" *Zion* 31 (1966), 39-86 and 197-216 (Hebrew). In particular see, 204-211, in which Ben-Sasson argues that some of the Gra's commentary on the Book of Proverbs uses language that is similar to anti-Chasidic tracts emanating from his circle in Vilna and certain commentaries express his revulsion toward the tzaddik in Chasidism. Lamm concurs that this "is quite possible, even probable." (*Torah For Torah's Sake*, 333). None of the Gra's works were published during his lifetime. It is noteworthy that he left specific instructions that his commentary on Proverbs should be his first posthumous publication. See Yeshayahu Vinograd, *Otzar Sifrai HaGra* (Jerusalem: Kerem Eliahu, 2003), ix and 20.

95 Yitzhak Yudlov, *Otsar Ha'Hagadot: Bibliografyah shel Hagadot Pesah* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1997), 345-346.

96 Louis Ginzberg *Students, Scholars and Saints* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945) 126.

YAKOV AZRIEL

The Stutterer

And Moses said to the Lord, "Please, O Lord, I am not a man of words ...
I am heavy of speech and heavy of tongue." (Exodus 4:10)

Of course you stutter, our teacher Moses;
How heavy
Is the Word of God, this mountain
Which leaves you panting
As you carry it on your back and shoulders,
This mountain in whose mines you extract
Diamonds and rare ore.

Of course you stutter, our rabbi Moses;
How deep
Is the Word of God, this ocean
In which you dive
And which sweeps you in its currents,
This ocean whose waters fill your lungs
When you converse with blue whales.

Of course you stutter, our master Moses;
How elusive
Is the Word of God, this cloud
Which envelops you
And whose mists you embrace,
This cloud in which your voice echoed
And echoes still, in its rain, in its dew.

You stutter, our prophet Moses;
For you the Word of God is a rainbow,
An angel's wing,
A chariot descending
And ascending beyond the moon and sun and galaxies of stars.
Yet from the Word's shadows, you hand us
Light.

YAKOV AZRIEL is an award-winning poet specializing in bilblical themes. A volume of his poetry, *Threads from a Coat of Many Colors: Poems on Genesis*, was published in 2005.