4. This claim is odd given other midrashim (e.g. Mekhilta, Bo, *Pisḥa* 14, s.v. Miketz; Vayikra Rabbah, 32:8) which assert that God's presence went into exile with the Jews. Moreover, in Avot 3:6 we learn that wherever Jews gather to study Torah, the *Shekhinah* is present. In Eikhah Rabbah (1:32–33) we read that the *Shekhinah* did not go into exile until the children were exiled.

5. Born 1423 in Hoechstadt, Bavaria. *Sefer Leket Yosher,* Yoreh Deah II: 85.

6. Berakhot 16b.

7. Prague, 1754–1826. *Teshuvot MeiAhavah,* I:172.

8. Semahot 4:13.

9. *Igrot Moshe,* OH 5:21.

10. *Tzitz Eliezer,* 17:7.

11. Personal communication.

12. I Chronicles 29:11.

13. This is the comment of Tractate Sofrim 21. One is not comforted over loss of the living, but the dead are eventually forgotten by the heart (Psalms 31:13). But as Rabbi Shimon ben Eliezer teaches in Mishnah Avot (4:18), *do not comfort your friend when his dead lie before him.*

14. God is described as reversing or regretting a decision in Exodus 32:12–14, and again in Samuel 15:35, regarding the coronation of Saul. Yet just a few verses earlier (v. 29), Samuel declares that God does "not regret, for He is not a man to regret."

15. See Bava Batra 60b; v.3, p. 946.

16. Shulhan Arukh, YD 388.

17. Moed Katan 27b.

18. Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 68:9, among other places.

*Daniel Nevins is senior rabbi of Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills, MI.*



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# Elaborating on the Exodus*

DAVID ARNOW

The Mishnah's vision of the Passover seder struck a brilliant balance between elements of the evening that were fixed and those that remained open for spontaneous elaboration. The seder's form and content reinforced one another to produce a powerful celebration of freedom. With time, that vital balance disappeared—the entire seder became formalized in the rituals and liturgy now contained in the traditional Passover haggadah.

Yet the haggadah still contains one section that at least alludes to the mishnaic seder's spirit of freedom. Just after *avadim hayinu,* the haggadah tells us that we are commanded to tell the Exodus story and that all who elaborate on the story deserve praise. The seder of the five sages who discuss the Exodus all through the night in B'nei B'rak follows and illustrates how to do so. This portion of the haggadah probably dates from the period between the closing of the Babylonian Talmud (around 500 C.E.)—where it does not appear—and prayer books attributed to the geonim of the mid-ninth century—where it occurs with only a few variations.[1] Although post-mishnaic, this passage reminds us of the era in which free elaboration on the Exodus was alive and well.

The first part of this article explores the development of the discussion of the Exodus story in the post-Temple Passover celebration and then con-

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siders the significance of the fact that the Mishnah prescribes an unscripted telling of the tale. That this represents a critical element of the mishnaic seder becomes clear by comparing it first with the Tosefta, which contains an earlier plan for the ritual, and then with the seder of the traditional haggadah as we know it today. Appreciating the Mishnah's approach merits not only historical interest but holds the key for reinvigorating Passover seders today. In the second part, I focus on the middle sentence below, with its explicit encouragement to elaborate on the Exodus. Because the origins of the precise wording of this statement have remained something of a mystery to scholars of the haggadah, I propose some answers to this question. As we'll see, although this represents one of the latest modifications to the traditional haggadah, it reflects a creative flair that exemplifies the Mishnah's understanding of freedom. Its striking resonance with other rabbinic texts suggests that the invitation to elaborate on the story deserves to be taken very seriously indeed because—again, very much in the spirit of the Mishnah—it touches on the central purpose of the Passover seder.

> . . . Even if we all were wise, and perceptive, experienced, and versed in Torah, we are commanded to tell about the Exodus from Egypt.
>
> **And all who elaborate on telling of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise.**
>
> It happened that Rabbis Eliezer, Joshua, Elazar ben Azaryah, Akiva and Tarfon were reclining in B'nei B'rak. They were telling of the Exodus all through the night until their students came and said to them: "Rabbis, it is time for saying the morning Sh'ma."

## 1. The Haggadah's Five Sages: The Significance of an Unscripted Telling of the Exodus Story

The destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and the end of the ancient practice of animal sacrifice forced cataclysmic changes in much of Jewish ritual, including the celebration of Passover. The Book of Deuteronomy (16:5–7) mandated the Temple as the exclusive locus for the paschal sacrifice: "You are not permitted to slaughter the Passover sacrifice in any of the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you; but at the place where the Lord will





choose to establish His name, there alone shall you slaughter the Passover sacrifice . . . You shall cook and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose . . ." The inability to fulfill this commandment left a gaping hole in the center of the ancient Passover ritual. Shaped by the broader cultural milieu and changes within Judaism itself, new rituals—e.g. telling the Passover story—gradually filled that void. In a sense, the haggadah represents an ever-expanding repository of responses to these developments.

For example, many scholars have noted that the older parts of the haggadah, and particularly the story of the five sages, reflect the influence of the Greek symposium on the emerging post-Temple seder. The symposium, which literally means "to drink with," included the following elements: courses of dipped hors d'oeuvres eaten while reclining; a prayer to the gods; and a stylized conversation—accompanied by plenty of drinking—sometimes about the significance of particular foods.[2] Others have seen this passage as an expression of the desire to differentiate between competing Jewish and Christian narratives of the spring festival of redemption. Jews told the story of the Exodus from Egypt while Christians (initially Jewish Christians) reinterpreted the symbols of the Exodus to reflect the story of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.[3]

Without denying the influence of the Greek symposium or of evolving Christianity on the seder, it is also essential to note that the first sentence of this passage defines telling the Exodus story as a religious commandment rather than a mere custom which at best may have played a peripheral role in the Passover celebration when the Temple stood.[4] As the haggadah's allusion to the Hillel sandwich reminds us, in Temple times the Passover ritual involved a biblical triad of ingredients: "They shall eat it [the paschal sacrifice] with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (Numbers 9:11). According to the Mishnah (which the haggadah quotes), these are the three elements that Rabban Gamaliel enjoins us to explain. *Haggadah,* literally, "the telling," takes the place of the missing sacrificial ingredient. It is as if the haggadah rewrites the verse from Numbers to say: "They shall *talk* about the paschal sacrifice and *yitziat mitzrayim* with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." Words that come out of the mouth would replace the paschal sacrifice that went into it. Over time, the new commandment to tell the story would substitute for the ancient commandment to sacrifice the paschal lamb, a stunning redefinition of what it meant to celebrate the festival. Although a particularly dramatic example, the haggadah's substitution

of words for sacrifice is hardly unique: The Talmud asserts that when one dons tefillin and recites the Shema and the Amidah it is as if one "had built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it."[5]

But accepting this redefinition took time: old customs die hard. The last of the Mishnah Pesaḥim's three questions for the Passover seder—originally there were three, not four questions—referred to the custom of eating meat roasted rather than stewed or boiled on the night of Passover. Indeed the Mishnah (Pesaḥim 7:2) relates that Rabban Gamaliel himself ordered a lamb for Passover roasted in precisely the same manner as had been done in Temple times, an act which the Mishnah later barred.[6] By the ninth century, the question about roasted meat no longer appeared in haggadot of the gaonim, although it remained in haggadot from the Land of Israel through at least the tenth or eleventh centuries. A fragment from the Cairo Genizah contains a blessing recited upon eating roasted meat at the seder: "Blessed are You, Lord our God King of the Universe who commanded us to eat matzah, bitter herbs, and roasted meat to remember His might. Blessed are You, Lord Who remembers the covenant."[7] As Baruch Bokser observed, such customs reveal "the degree to which people felt the need to preserve whatever they could from the cultic celebration."[8] These practices also indicate less than complete penetration of the willingness to substitute words for the paschal sacrifice. The experience of merely talking about the Exodus paled beside the urge to actually consume a tangible—not to mention tasty—reminder of the Passover offering. This background helps explain the haggadah's need not only to define telling the story as a religious commandment, *mitzvah aleinu,* but to add that doing so merits praise.[9] The strength of the reminder points to the weakness of the practice.

This section of the haggadah also suggests *how* we tell the story: it models an unscripted telling of the tale and legitimates unrestrained conversation about the Exodus on the night of the seder.

A brief comparison between the two earliest Jewish law codes/teaching manuals, the Tosefta and the Mishnah, illustrates the point. Judith Hauptman has shown that the Tosefta (Piskha 10) contains a plan for the night of Passover during the period between the destruction of the Temple and the Mishnah. She notes that it describes a seder in which talking about the Exodus plays virtually no role.[10] The Tosefta lacks the interrogatory exchange between father and son as well as the requirement to expound on "My father was a wandering Aramean . . ." The ritual involves drinking





four cups of wine, dipping and eating symbolic foods, and properly reciting the *Hallel,* i.e., "without shortening or adding to it" (Piskha 10:8), part of which does, of course, refer to the Exodus. The night concludes with study. The penultimate passages include a sequence that parallels the haggadah's illustration of the five sages' all-night conversation about the Exodus.

> A person is obligated to occupy himself with the laws of Pesaḥ the night through, even if he can do so only with his son, or all by himself, or only with his student. It once happened that Rabban Gamaliel and the elders were reclining in the house of Boethus the son of Zonin in Lydda and engaged in the study of the laws of the Pesaḥ [offering] the whole night through until the cock crowed. They raised the table, stood up, and left for the house of study (Tosefta Piskha 10:11–12).[11]

The Mishnah envisions a strikingly entirely different seder and emphasizes recounting the story of the Exodus—in contrast to studying the laws of Passover—in a free and personal manner. Spontaneity is carefully balanced by fixed elements: the four cups of wine (including much of the language for the blessing over the second cup), reclining, dipping of herbs and haroset, Rabban Gamaliel's injunction to explain the meaning of the Pesaḥ offering, matzah, and maror, and recitation of the *Hallel.*

Aside from the terse explanations of Pesaḥ, matzah, and maror, the more substantive elements of telling the Passover story were left unscripted. For instance, careful reading of the Mishnah indicates that the "four questions" were not to be asked by children but were presented as examples of questions a parent might use to prompt a child who for one or another reason had failed to ask spontaneous questions.[12] The Mishnah intended that the night of the seder would be so different from all other nights that a child would naturally ask why. (This would have been more likely because in mishnaic times the evening began with an unusual series of dippings and special foods which would have prompted questions early in the evening's proceedings, before children began to tire.)

"And according to the child's level of understanding, the father instructs him." This phrase appears twice in Mishnah Pesaḥim 10:4, once in connection with the father's response to the child's questions, and again in the context of the instruction "to begin with shame and conclude with praise and to expound from *My father was a wandering Aramean* [Deut. 26:5] . . ." These

were the mishnaic seder's principle vehicles for telling the Passover story. Both were entrusted to the father whose telling of the story from year to year was to be tailored to the increasing level of his children's maturity.

I think the Mishnah recognizes that without an array of fixed elements our seders would have nothing in common, obviously not a reliable approach to passing down a people's central story from one generation to the next. But the Mishnah wants us to realize that making each seder a clone of the last would squeeze the life out of the ritual. Hence, the crucial instruction that we "expound," *dorshim,* we draw out meaning and create our own midrash. The Mishnah understands that "the medium is the message," as Marshall McLuhan used to say. Egypt was about productivity, not creativity. The freedom with which we tell the Passover story mirrors our liberation from Egypt. In the creativity we bring to this task, we imitate God, the ultimate free creator, who, according to tradition, fashioned the world through ten utterances (Mishnah Avot 5:1).

The story of the Sages also provides a reminder that the night of the seder is not a time to honor brevity. Remember, the Bible's wisdom literature condemned extended talk: ". . . God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few. . . . a fool's voice is known by a multitude of words (Ecclesiastes 5:1–2); "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking; but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19); "He who has knowledge spares his words . . . Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise; and he who closes his lips is considered a man of understanding (Proverbs 17:27–28). The rabbis built on these values: "Rabbi [Judah ha-Nasi] said: Best of all is silence; as we have learnt in the Ethics of the Fathers: Shimon his son used to say: All my days I grew up among the Sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence". . . "Whoever indulges in too many words brings about sin, *(kol hamarbeh b'dvarim)*" . . . "Akiva said, 'A fence to wisdom is silence'" (Ecclesiastes Rabbah, 5:3, Mishnah Avot 1:17 and 3:17).[13] The all-night conversation of the Sages teaches that whatever the categories these warnings about brevity may have applied to, recounting the story of the Exodus at the seder was not among them! Participation in telling the story trumps worries about appearing wise or foolish.

Eventually, the haggadah added a scripted midrash in place of what had previously been "homemade." Likewise, recitation of the Four Questions replaced the child's impromptu inquiry. The story of the five Sages who talk about the





Exodus all through the night has become so familiar that our response to it is, "Yes, of course!" Yet this stands as the lone surviving portion of the haggadah that reflects the spirit of the Mishnah's embrace of spontaneous discussion.

Despite the haggadah's liturgical "hardening," this passage continues to warn against allowing the seder to be completely dominated by prescribed liturgy. Note its placement in the haggadah, just after *avadim hayinu,* the opening "answer" to the Four Questions. The Mishnah follows the interrogatory exchange between parent and child with the following directions about how to narrate the Exodus story: "and according the son's level of understanding, begin with shame . . ." Some manuscripts of ancient haggadot from the Land of Israel include neither *avadim hayinu* nor the passage we've been examining. Instead, just after the Four Questions they continue with these very directions from the Mishnah, incorporating them into the recitation of the haggadah itself rather than as a guide to parents about how to tell their children the story of the Exodus.[14] Our passage may have "suffered" a similar fate: having once been intended as a guide for preserving the spirit of spontaneity, it eventually became an ossified recitation.

Parenthetically, it's worth noting that the haggadah's story of the five Sages offers an important reminder that the night of Passover constitutes more than an opportunity for educating *children* about the meaning of the Exodus. The five sages at this gathering represent three generations and their students constitute a fourth. When the Temple stood, Eliezer and Joshua were students of Yochanan Ben Zakkai, the leading teacher of his time. Akiva studied with both Eliezer and Joshua. Elazar ben Azariah, the youngest, was born after the Temple's destruction. The Sages' all-night conversation models an important cross-generational dimension of the night of Passover centered on adults. The younger generation learns to take the seder seriously not only through having been properly engaged as children, but through witnessing the genuine involvement of older generations throughout the evening.

Over the centuries, the seder developed into a ritual that increasingly lost touch with the Mishnah's careful balance between fixed and creative elements: everything became scripted, nothing remained spontaneous. Reading the haggadah, a book that grew longer as time passed, replaced telling the story. Ironically, the shift amounted to a return to the style, if not the content, of the Tosefta's seder, a ritual composed of entirely prescribed liturgy. More broadly, the evolution of the seder and the haggadah reflect the virtually complete dom-

inance in Jewish ritual of *kevah,* fixed prayer, over *kavanah,* spontaneous prayer, two modes of prayer which had remained balanced even through the talmudic era. Thus for example, Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, the second century Sage, warned: "Be careful [i.e. precise] when you recite the Shema, but when you pray, do not make your prayers fixed . . ." (Mishnah Avot 2:13).

Having lost the Mishnah's recipe for creating powerfully engaging seders, for many Jews the ritual became a familiar but dull chore: aside from a few highlights it had become too opaque to really enjoy or even understand. When it came to explaining why so many American Jews continued to attend seders, sociologists were stumped.[15] The pioneering study by Sklare and Greenbaum conducted in the mid-1950s identified five factors to explain the festival's popularity: its message can be redefined in modern and universal terms; it takes place in the evening and does not require absence from work or school; it provides Jews with a spring holiday that represents an alternative to Easter; the Four Questions and the search for the *afikomen* make it unusually child-centered; and it occurs infrequently, annually rather than weekly.[16] Needless to say, these factors were light years from the Mishnah's vision of what would draw Jews to the seder table!

In the decades since Sklare and Greenbaum's observations, Passover seders (and Jewish life in general) have enjoyed something of a renaissance. Many popular modern haggadot and haggadah supplements include activities that restore the once central element of free-flowing conversation about the Exodus and how it relates to our lives. Much to the benefit of the Jewish people, our Passover seders have begun to give elaboration, improvisation, and creativity the role they deserve. This breathes life into the seder and makes it more likely that our story will indeed become one that our children will want to tell to their children. The haggadah contains a goal: that we should see ourselves as if we had come out of Egypt. It also contains the secret for achieving it: "All who elaborate on telling of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise."

## 2. "All who elaborate on telling of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise" Origins and Inspirations

*All who tell of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise.*

(Attributed to Rav Amram, Gaon from 858 to 871, and commonly found in medieval illuminated haggadot)[17]





*All who lengthen the telling of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise.*

(From a gaonic haggadah, and found in the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, 1135–1204)[18]

*All who elaborate on telling of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise.*

(Standard Ashkenazic and Sephardic haggadot)

The source of the now standard Ashkenazic and Sephardic text has both puzzled and confused haggadah researchers. Daniel Goldschmidt, one of the twentieth century's greatest scholars of the haggadah wrote: "I have not succeeded in finding the source and the particular language of this passage . . ."[19] Nor does Menachem Kasher's *Haggadah Shelemah,* which includes an extensive list of variants found in old manuscripts, clearly identify the original source of the now standard Ashkenazic and Sephardic formulation.[20] Studies of individual medieval illuminated haggadot also reflect the problem. For example, the facsimile edition of the beautiful mid-fourteenth century Rylands Haggadah (which includes the first variant) simply explains the deviation from the current text as a scribal omission rather than as a reflection of what was then the most common rendering.[21]

Let us now consider the origins and possible sources of inspiration for the above dictum. We begin with an interpretation from the Talmud of the phrase *lekhem oni,* the bread of affliction (Deuteronomy 16:3): "Samuel said: Bread of *[oni]* [means] bread over which we answer [or declare, *onin*] many words *[devarim harbeh]*."[22] This ancient source introduces language (*harbeh* and *marbeh* share the same root) and concepts that underlie the notion of speaking many words at the Seder.[23]

Next we turn to a difference between two Gaonic haggadot: *kol hamesaper b'yitziat mitzrayim, harai zeh meshubaḥ,* "All who tell of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise" versus *kol hama'arikh l'saper b'yitziat mitzrayim, harai zeh meshubaḥ,* "All who lengthen the telling of the Exodus deserve praise."

The first is from the haggadah included in Rav Amram's enormously influential siddur which seems to have been sent to Barcelona where it spread throughout Spain and the rest of Europe. His formulation became standard for Ashkenazic and Sephardic haggadot until the version found in our current haggadot slowly began to replace it in the sixteenth century. Maimonides adopted the second gaonic formulation and it remains standard in the Yemenite rite.

The question remains. Whence comes the now universal Ashkenazic and Sephardic version of the text?

Despite its wide circulation, medieval commentators found Amram's formulation problematic. The first difficulty arose from the fact that the Haggadah tells that us we are obligated to tell the story of the Exodus, *mitzvah alenu l'saper b'yitziat mitzrayim.* Since we are commanded to tell of the Exodus, doing so represents merely fulfilling one's duty—not something which merits special praise. Eliezer Ben Nathan of Mainz (1090–c.1170, Raban) offered the following interpretation which implicitly addresses this issue: "All who tell the story of the Exodus *more than his fellow* is to be praised, because doing so enlarges *(marbeh)* the glory of God."[24] Similarly, Yom Tov Ben Abraham Ishvili (c.1250–1330, Ritba) of Seville wrote, "We are commanded [to tell of the Exodus] in joy and thankfulness and all who elaborate *more* on the telling deserve praise," *'v'kol hamarbeh l'saper yoter . . .*[25]

The second issue concerned the story of the five rabbis who tell the story of the Exodus all through the night. Why are they bothering to do this, if they've presumably already fulfilled the commandment of telling about the Exodus through answering the questions of their children, making a midrash on "My father was a wandering Aramean," and explaining the meaning of the Passover offering, matzah and bitter herbs? Samuel Ben Meir (c.1080–c.1174, Rashbam) addressed this when he said that while the earlier portions of the seder satisfy the mitzvah to tell the story, "all who tell the story of the Exodus *after eating* deserve praise."[26] Raban took a different approach. When the haggadah says the rabbis "were telling of the Exodus" it means they were "elaborating through midrash," *marbim l'drosh.*

Writing in 1340 and well aware of his predecessors' concerns, the liturgical commentator David Ben Joseph Abudarham, also from Seville, spoke explicitly to both difficulties. Rather than simply offering a commentary on a problematic text, he forcefully emended it:

> This is the correct version of the text, "All who elaborate on telling of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise!" *'v'kol hamarbeh l'saper b'yitziat mitzrayim, harai zeh meshubah.'* The correct version is not, *'v'kol hamesaper b'yitziat mitzrayim . . .'* because when we are commanded to do something, we don't say, 'one deserves praise,' since one is obligated to do what one is commanded to do. But the version *'v'kol hamarbeh . . .'*





> makes sense. We are commanded to tell of the Exodus and even if one speaks of this minimally one fulfills one's obligation, and all who elaborate on telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise! The proof of this comes from the story about Rabbi Eliezer and his companions who were the greatest sages of their generation and even they tell the story of the Exodus all through the night.[27]

The boldness of Abudarham's emendation appears all the more striking in light of the fact that he rejected Maimonides' wording *kol hama'arikh,* "all who lengthen" etc.[28]

Why did Abudarham reject *kol hama'arikh* in favor of *kol hamarbeh,* despite the former's illustrious pedigree?[29] We can't know for sure, but several possibilities are worth considering.

First, the word *marbeh* shares the root *(reish, bet, hey)* of a number of key words in the haggadah's midrash on "My father was a wandering Aramean." These words (e.g. *va'yirbu, va'tarbi, yirbeh*) describe the extraordinary fecundity of the Israelite population in Egypt—even amidst oppression—a central feature of the Exodus narrative.[30] The fact that these words appear so prominently later in the haggadah may well have contributed to Aburdaharm's preference for *marbeh* over *ma'arikh,* a term that lacks any such intra-textual resonance.

As a scholar of comparative Jewish liturgy, perhaps Aburdaharm also sensed that *kol hama'arikh* lacked the right *ta'am* or flavor for this particular context. The expression *kol hama'arikh* is quite rare in rabbinic literature and only refers to the lengthening of prayer itself, to drawing out the final dalet in the *Shema (eḥad),* and to the matter of not rushing one's *amen* at the conclusion of prayer.[31] Since the context of our passage in the haggadah refers not to prayer, but to telling a story, perhaps Aburdaharm felt that *kol hama'arikh* was not the perfect fit. In addition, *kol hama'arikh* is never accompanied by *harai zeh meshubaḥ.*

By contrast, the phrase *kol hamarbeh,* all who elaborate, often refers to verbal interchange and twice it is followed by *harai zeh meshubaḥ.* And as we shall see, the context of these cases sheds important light on the meaning of our passage in the haggadah. The first instance of this combination occurs in the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 5:2) in a passage that bears a striking similarity to ours. "All [judges] who elaborate [on the prescribed] questions when examin-

ing [witnesses in capital cases] deserve praise." The Mishnah immediately follows this with an illustrative story *(ma'aseh b')* of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, the leading sage of his time, just as the haggadah follows its statement about elaborating with an exemplary tale *(ma'aseh b')* of the five great Sages.

The second case appears in the Jerusalem Talmud (Moed Katan 3:8): "Whoever elaborates on the funeral of his parents deserves praise."[32]

These dicta share more than linguistic similarities. Both involve bearing proper witness, the first with respect to challenging testimony in capital cases, the second in regard to honoring one's deceased parent with extra rigor. In both contexts, the central figures (the accused and the deceased) cannot act on their own behalf and must trust others to preserve their life or the memory of it.[33] Analogously, the story of the Exodus, so full of hope and promise, cannot preserve itself. In every generation that task falls to the Jewish people. Whether the story will be remembered or forgotten, whether it lives or dies, depends on the passion with which we tell it.[34] And that cannot be left to books alone: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). When we tell the story of the Exodus, the Mishnah tells us "*maṯḥil b'gnut u'm'sayem b'shevaḥ,*" "begin with shame and end with praise" of God. As God merits praise for saving our lives and bringing us forth from the furnace of Egypt, those who keep the memory of the tale alive also deserves praise, *harai zeh meshubaḥ!*

Abudarham's emendation resonates powerfully with rabbinic usage, both in terms of its form and content. His emendation slowly amassed a following. In 1505, Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), the exiled Portuguese statesman and scholar, published *Zevaḥ Pesaḥ,* a commentary on the haggadah, in which he wrote: "The real formulation is, 'All who elaborate on telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt deserve praise' because the telling is a commandment and the elaboration on it, that is deserving of praise." Abarbanel's widely popular commentary was the first printed book to contain a haggadah accompanied by commentary and despite his interpretation, the text of the haggadah reads, "All who tell the story of the Exodus deserve praise."[35] Eventually, these emendations moved from the commentary to the text itself. (The copy of *Zevaḥ Pesaḥ* that belongs to the Dorot Jewish Division of the New York Public Library bears a correction to the haggadah in a seventeenth or eighteenth century hand to make it conform with Abarbanel's emendation.)[36]





While a definitive search of extant haggadot remains beyond my reach, extensive research supports the following tentative conclusion. What has been called the Constantinople Haggadah, printed between 1515 and 1535, may well represent the first appearance of our current formulation in the actual text of the haggadah, as opposed to commentary.[37] This haggadah's more well-known claim to fame lies in the fact that some scholars believe it is the first printed haggadah to have included illustrations, although no one seems to have noticed that it also contains what seems to be the first appearance of the text in question. Yudlov's bibliography lists this as the ninth printed haggadah, the earliest of which dates to about 1480. I've checked six of the eight earlier printed haggadot and facsimiles of numerous medieval illuminated manuscripts, none of which contains the current text. The "new" formulation seems to have developed from Spanish roots and was spread by Iberian emigrants initially to Constantinople or Salonika, then to Amsterdam and Copenhagen.[38] By the eighteenth century this rendering had become common, although still not universal, as it is now at least for Ashkenazic and Sephardic haggadot.[39]

The story of how this phrase found its way into the haggadah illustrates the fascinating process through which our texts develop. In the hands of those who love them, our texts have evolved in dialogue, as it were, with one another across the centuries. They live not only through our midrashic interpretations of them, but sometimes through subtle emendation which enables them to speak more clearly. Abudarham's emendation of the haggadah provides a particularly beautiful illustration of the ideal relationship between creativity and a "received text," a central theme in the Mishnah's instruction to midrashically elaborate on the Pilgrims' Prayer (Deut. 26: 5–10). The Mishnah (Avot 6:2) illustrates this relationship with a boldness Abudarham doubtless appreciated: "And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, carved *[ḥarut]* upon the tablets (Ex. 32:16). Read not *ḥarut* [carved] but *ḥerut* [freedom, i.e. the writing was freedom upon the tablets]!

## NOTES

1. It is difficult to determine whether the haggadot found in these prayer books represent the actual gaonic texts or if they were "updated" by scribes who subsequently copied them. See note 17. There are gaonic haggadot that omit the entire section under discussion. For example, Saadia Gaon's haggadah skips from a varia-

tion on *avadim hayinu* directly to the Four Sons. Likewise old haggadot from the Land of Israel are missing this, as well as other familiar sections of the haggadah. The story of the five Sages appears nowhere else in rabbinic literature. Yekutiel Kohen believes that the oldest version of this passage is preserved in the siddur of Shelomoh ben Natan who lived in southwest Morocco in the twelfth century. This siddur—known as the siddur of the Gaonim—includes two texts of the haggadah, one similar to that of Saadia and another with a version of the gathering in B'nei B'rak featuring somewhat different language as well as a different group of Sages: Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbis Elazar ben Azariah, Joshua, and Akiva. See Yekutiel Kohen, *Haggadat Ha'Gaonim V'HaRambam,* (Jerusalem: Maḥon Otzar HaPoskim, 1997) p. 96 and Sidur Rabenu Shelomoh be-Rabi Natan (Jerusalem: Sh. Hagai, 1995) pp. 149–150.

2. See Siegfried Stein, "The Influence of Symposia Literature on the Haggadah," *Journal of Jewish Studies,* 1 and 2 (1957), pp. 13–44 and Blake Layerle, "Meal Customs in the Greco-Roman World," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times,* edited by Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

3. In the same volume see also, "Easter and Passover As Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue" by Israel Yuval. See also Yuval's "Haposchim al shtei ha'se'ifim: ha'haggadah shel pesach v'hapascha ha'notzrit." *Tarbitz* 61:1, 1995 (Hebrew).

4. In the story of the story of the five Sages, many have also seen an allusion to planning the Bar Kokhba rebellion, which began in 132 C.E. It is said that the Sages had gathered deep in a cave, which explains why they didn't realize morning had come. Several factors undermine this interpretation. Rabbi Joshua's last involvement in public life dates to 115 and his successful effort to forestall a revolt against Hadrian. Elazar ben Azariah and Eliezer are thought to have died before the Bar Kochba rebellion. And for about the last fifteen years of his life, Eliezer had been placed under a ban that would have precluded his participation in such a gathering.

5. B. Berakhot 15a.

6. See Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 101–106, Appendix A: Roasted Meat or Sacrifices after 70 C.E.?

7. I. Abrahams, "Some Egyptian Fragments of Passover Hagada," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 10 (1898), p.46. See also Joseph Tabory, "Towards a History of the Paschal Meal," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times* edited by Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p. 71.

8. Bokser, p. 101.

9. A search of the latest Bar Ilan Responsa Project's CD-ROM (version 14+) finds that the earliest occurrence of the phrase *mitzvah alenu* appears in Amram Gaon's ninth century Passover haggadah. See note 16. Indeed, it may well be that this phrase originates in the haggadah.





10. Judith Hauptman, "How Old is the Haggadah?" *Judaism,* 51:1 (Winter 2002), p. 6. Hauptman argues that rather than being a commentary on the Mishnah—as is usually thought—the core of the Tosefta is an earlier code that the compiler of the Mishnah reworked. See also Hauptman's "Does the Tosefta Precede the Mishnah: Halakhah, Aggada and Narrative Coherence" *Judaism,* 50:2 (Spring, 2001), pp. 224–239. For Hauptman's complete treatment of this question, see her *Rereading the Mishnah* (Tubinger: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

11. See Sagit Mor, "The Laws of the Paschal Sacrifice or The Story of the Exodus: Two Traditions of Designing the Night of the Passover Celebration After the Destruction of the Second Temple," *Tzion,* 68, 2003. Mor provides a detailed contrast between the Tosefta's description of Rabban Gamaliel in Lod and the gathering of the five Sages as depicted in the haggadah. Among other things, she argues that the study session of Rabban Gamaliel and company on the laws of the paschal sacrifice followed a Passover meal featuring a lamb roasted precisely as it had been when the Temple stood. Indeed, when Rabban Gamaliel orders his lamb to be roasted for the holiday, he refers to it as "ha-pesaḥ" (Mishnah 7:2), the term used to refer to the paschal offering. The haggadah's passage about the five Sages represents a repudiation of this transitional/substitutional approach to celebrating the festival.

12. I've used the Kaufmann manuscript of the Mishnah, which dates from the thirteenth century and is considered the best such manuscript. It lacks additions from the haggadah that have found their way into the "standard" Mishnah. See Bokser, pp. 29–32, 108–110. This manuscript of the Mishnah, for example, includes only three questions, in contrast to the Kehati Mishnah, or the Mishnah that accompanies the standard Vilna edition of the Gemara that includes four questions. On the matter of the child's spontaneous questions see the young Abaye's question in B. Pesaḥim 115b and Jay Rovner, "An Early Passover Haggadah According to the Palestinian Rite," *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* 90:3–4 (January-April, 2000), p. 350.

13. For other examples see B. Megillah 18a, B. Ḥullin 89a, J. Berakhot 4:1, Ecclesiastes Rabbah 10:15. Maimonides suggests that these concerns pertained to discussion of Torah and not just idle chit chat. In Hilkhot De'ot (2:4–5) he writes, "When speaking about matters of Torah or knowledge one's word should be brief, but rich in content. This is what the Sages meant when they said, 'One should always teach his students with brevity' (B. Pesaḥim 3b) . . . 'A fence to wisdom is silence.' Therefore, one should not hasten to answer, nor speak at length" *(v'lo yarbeh l'daber).*

14. Manuscripts based on this tradition do not include the Four Children, but follow the Four Questions with "Your ancestors lived beyond the river . . ." (Joshua 24:3). See for example, Daniel Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1960) p. 78 and Jay Rovner, "An Early Passover Haggadah According to the Palestinian Rite," *The Jewish Quarterly Review,* 90:3–4 (January–April 2000), p. 372. To view the manuscript included in

Goldshmidt's book go to http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so_id=2242&PagePosition=8&level=4 and see page 4v. For Geniza fragments that follow this form see I. Abrahams, "Some Egyptian Fragments of Passover Hagada," *Jewish Quarterly Review,* 10 (1898), fragments 2, 8, and 10.

15. According to the 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Survey, sixty-seven percent of American Jews attend a seder, making it the second most observed ritual. Seventy-two percent light Hanukah candles. For these findings, see http://www.ujc.org/njps

16. Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier: A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1967), pp. 57–59.

17. As previously noted, the antiquity of the wording found in medieval copies of Amram's siddur has been questioned because copyists seem to have "updated" the siddur to reflect local contemporary practice. This helps explain differences among the various surviving manuscripts of the siddur. See *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer,* by Stefan C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 186–187. Two facts argue for the genuine antiquity of the form of our passage as it appears in Amram's siddur. First, none of the manuscripts differ on this passage. See *Seder Rav Amram Gaon,* by Daniel Goldschmidt (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1971), p. 114 (Hebrew). Second, the same formulation appears in fragments found in the Cairo Genizah which predate the updating of later copyists. See *Ginzei Schechter* by Louis Ginzberg (Jerusalem: Hotzaot Hermon, 1928), Vol. 2, p. 259 and I. Abrahams, "Some Egyptian Fragments of Passover Hagada," *Jewish Quarterly Review,* 10 (1898), p. 51, fragment 13. (Thanks to Dr. Jay Rovner for deepening my understanding of this issue.)

18. Some scholars have identified this text with the haggadah of Rav Netronai, Gaon from 853 to 858. The text of this haggadah appears in "Seder v'Haggadah shel Pesach l'Rav Netronai Gaon" by Raphael Lehmann in *Sefer Yovel: L'chvod Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchick,* edited by Shaul Yisraeli, et al (New York and Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook and Yeshiva University Press, 1984). Shmuel Safrai and Ze'ev Safrai (*Haggadah of the Sages: The Passover Haggadah,* Israel: Carta, 1998) also reproduce this text and attribute it to Netronai Gaon. In a personal communication, Dr. Jay Rovner points to a number of aspects of the text that indicate a later date, after Saadia Gaon (882–942) but before Maimonides. Some manuscripts of Maimonides' haggadah read: "All who lengthen the Exodus . . ." and omit the word *l'saper* while others omit *hama'arikh* and read *kol hamesaper* as in Amram's siddur. In *Sefer HaMitzvot* (positive commandment 157) Maimonides also quotes the haggadah a la Amram: "All who tell the story of the Exodus deserve praise." Yekutiel Kohen (p. 71) alludes to a statement attributed to Maimonides' son from which Kohen concluded that at seders the Rambam used either *kol hama'arikh* or *kol hamarbeh.* However, the text in question only indicates that Abraham ben Maimon used both words in commenting on his father's *drash* on the multiplication of plagues suffered by the Egyptians at the Red Sea. "And about this and things like





it, it is said that all who elaborate and all who lengthen (*kol hamarbeh v'kol hama'arikh)* the story of the Exodus deserve praise." See *Sefer Ma'aseh Rokeah* by Masud ben Aaron Raccah (1690–1768) reprinted in Jerusalem in 1976. See Vol. 2, in the Haggadah following *Hilkhot Hametz U'Matzah* and Yekutiel Kohen, *Haggadat Ha'Geonim V'HaRambam* (Jerusalem: Mahon Otzar HaPoskim, 1997). The fact that Menachem Kasher (*Haggadah Shelemah,* Jerusalem: Torah Shelemah Institute, 1967, p.185) only discusses this statement by Abraham ben Maimon in connection with the midrash on the plagues and not in relationship to our passage, strengthens the view that it cannot be used to imply that Maimonides himself occasionally used either *hama'arikh* and *hamarbeh* at his seder.

19. Daniel Goldschmidt, *The Order of the Passover Haggadah According to the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Custom* (Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House, 1947), p. 30, note 1 (Hebrew). Goldschmidt suggested that the passage may have come from a now lost collection of mitzvot. See Goldschmidt's *The Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1960), p. 17 (Hebrew). Elsewhere Goldschmidt seemed to feel that medieval haggadot which included Amram's version of this text represented "deviations from the usual text." See *The Birds Head Haggadah of the Bezalel National Art Museum* (Jerusalem: Tarshish Books, 1965), introductory volume, p. 115. What Goldschmidt saw as a deviation found in many medieval haggadot seems to have been the norm, as far as I can see.

20. *Haggadah Shlemah,* p. 15 (in the section that includes the text of the haggadah). As far as I've been able to confirm, Kasher's list of the second and third variants includes only texts which read *kol hamesaper.*

21. *The Rylands Haggadah: with Introduction, Translation and Notes by Raphael Loewe* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), folio 22a, "notes to translation," note 8, p. 36.

22. B. Pesahim 36a and 115b. Isaiah Di Trani the Elder (c. 1200–1260) and Simeon Ben Zemah Duran (1361–1444) brought this interpretation in their haggadah commentaries. See *Haggadah Torat Chaim,* pp. 12 and 36. While contemporary editions of the Talmud follow this reading, some old manuscripts omit the word *harbeh.* The mid-fifteenth century manuscript held by the London Valmadonna Trust (9), does reflect the current reading. Available on line at website of the Jewish National and University Library.

23. Yekutial Cohen, op. cit. p. 70.

24. *Haggadah Torat Chaim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1998), p. 36 (Hebrew).

25. Ibid. p. 36. Ritba also says, that after finishing the four cups of wine the sages "lengthened," *he'erikhu,* on the matter of the Exodus" (p. 36).

26. Ibid. p. 36.

27. Ibid. pp. 36–37. (The text here matches that found in the 1566 printing of *Sefer Abudarham* published in Venice by Giorgio dei Cavalli, p. 81.)

28. For Abudaharm's familiarity with his predecessor's commentaries see ibid. p. 16.

29. It is, of course, possible that Abudarham's "emendation" in fact expressed a preference for a then extant haggadah using the formulation "*kol hamarbeh.*" While such a haggadah could simply have been lost, that seems unlikely unless it were a unique specimen that no one copied. It seems more likely that *kol hamesaper* had long been recognized as a troublesome formulation, but one that was so deeply entrenched that it took more than a hundred and fifty years to give way in the face of commentary suggesting the need for emendation. For example, a seventeenth century haggadah with the Ritba's commentary (the Ritba, 1250–1330, was Abudarham's predecessor) reads *kol hamesaper* even though his commentary uses the phrase *kol hamarbeh l'saper yoter.* . . . (See the British Library's Or. 10680. Thanks to Ilana Tahan, the library's Hebraica curator, for investigating this for me.)

30. These terms appear in Ex. 1:7, Ezek. 16:7, Ex. 1:10.

31. The expression occurs once in the Jerusalem Talmud (12b) and five times in the tractate of the Babylonian Talmud devoted to prayer [Berakhot 13b, 32b (twice), 47a, and 55a].

32. There is one other text that comes close to this formulation. It involves a male's checking himself for signs of signs of *zivah,* an abnormal seminal discharge—"whoever examines himself more than his fellow deserves more praise than his fellow" (J. Niddah 2:1). Here too issues of life or death loom large. With regard to such discharges, Leviticus 15:31 warns, "You shall put the Israelites on guard against their impurity, lest they die through their impurity by defiling My tabernacle . . ."

33. The expression *harai zeh meshubaḥ* occurs a number of times in connection with prayer: kneeling at the proper time (Berakhot 34b); saying "amen" to ones own prayer (Berakhot 45b); interrupting one's reading of the haftarah for translation (Tosefta, Megillah 3:18); or whether one should include in one's Yom Kippur confession sins for which one has already atoned (Tosefta, Yoma 4:15). But if there is a *locus classicus* for this expression, it is certainly B. Yoma 84b. Here the Talmud uses the phrase five times in connection with the situations for which one should eagerly violate Shabbat. Each involves saving a life!

34. Again the connection between *marbeh,* in the context of elaborating on the story in order to keep it alive and term's deep resonance with prolific human reproductive capacity should not be overlooked. *Ravu,* 'multiply' (Gen. 1:22) is God's second word to humanity! See also Gen 16:10 in which three forms of the same term appear in connection with the angel's promise of numerous offspring to Hagar.

35. Abarbanel's comment is obviously reminiscent of Abudarham whom he does not cite here. Abarbanel was aware of Abudarham's commentary as evidenced by the explicit reference to it in the section of *Zevaḥ Pesaḥ* discussing the passage "God took us out from Egypt, not by means of an angel." See *Otzar Perushim v'Tziurim el Haggadah Shel Pesaḥ* edited by J. D. Eisenstein (Jerusalem: Or Hakodesh, 2005 reprinting) p. 103, bottom left column.





36. Based on the character of its Sephardic script, Michael Terry, Chief Librarian of the Dorot Jewish Division of the New York Public Library, suggests the period of the correction. A 16th century manuscript of a Bukharian haggadah with a text that follows that of Saadia Gaon entirely omits the passage we've been discussing. But notes subsequently written on the side of page include the missing text exactly as it appears in our haggadot of today. Shlomo Tal believes it is not possible to assign a date to these notes. See *Nusaḥ Ha'tefilah shel Yehudai Paras,* edited by Shlomo Tal, (Jerusalem: Ben-Tzvi Institute, 1981, Hebrew), introductory page 42 and page 118 of the manuscript itself. This manuscript is also mentioned in *Haggadah of the Sages,* p. 116 (Shmuel Safrai and Ze'ev Safrai, Israel: Carta, 1998).

37. For a facsimile see Alexander Scheiber, "New Pages from the First Printed, Illustrated Haggadah," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore,* Volume 7, 1965, p. 31. See also, A. M. Haberman, "Mi Hedpis et haHaggadah haMtizuyeret [Kushta? 1515?], *Kiryat Sefer,* 47:1, December 1971, pp. 159–160, plus facsimile; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Haggadah and History,* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975), plate 1; Alexander Scheiber, "*Mi Hedpis et Ha'Hagaddah Ha'Mitzuyeret Ha'Rishonah,*" *Kiryat Sefer, 57:1, 1982,* pp. *185–186;* Yitzhak Yudlov, *Otsar Ha'Hagadot: Bibliografyah shel Hagadot Pesaḥ* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1997), p. 2. Three pages of this haggadah are in the collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary and between 1962 and 1982 Scheiber and Haberman discovered nine additional pages among fragments from the Cairo Genizah in the collection of the University of Cambridge. Scholars are divided over the precise date of publication, the publisher and the place of publication.

38. Early examples of this formulation appear in the 1569 *Ḥukat Pesaḥ* by Moshe Bekhor Hayim ben Shem Tov Pisanti, printed in Salonika, the 1635 Siddur of Menashe ben Israel (Amsterdam) and the 1657 Copenhagen Haggadah (JTSA MS 4480). Isaiah Horowitz (1565–1630) indicated that this was his *nusaḥ* but noted that the former version was commonly used. *Sh'ne Luḥ ha-Berit,* Masekhet Pesaḥim, Fifth Homily, section 5 (Davka Judaic Classics version).

39. See for example the Venice Haggadah of 1716.

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*David Arnow, Ph.D, is the author of* Creating Lively Passover Seders: A Sourcebook of Engaging Tales, Texts & Activities *(Jewish Lights, 2004), and is co-editor of* My People's Passover Haggadah *(Jewish Lights, 2008).*