The Sword Outstretched over Jerusalem: A Puzzling Allusion in the Passover Haggadah

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The Haggadah's midrashic exposition on Deuteronomy 26:5–8 has been the subject of much study, but one rather puzzling section of it has not received the attention it deserves.[1] The passage appears as an elaboration upon the second and third phrases in Deuteronomy 26:8: *"The Lord took us out of Egypt by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and with great awe."*

> *Mighty hand* refers to the disease among the cattle [*dever*], as it is written: *Behold the hand of the Lord strikes your cattle which are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks—a very severe pestilence* (Ex. 9:3). *Outstretched arm* refers to the sword, as it is written: *His drawn sword in his hand, outstretched over Jerusalem* (I Chronicles 21:16).[2]

This passage immediately follows the Haggadah's well known declaration that *"The Lord took us out of Egypt* not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger . . .," which argues that God alone slew the Egyptian firstborn and executed judgments against the gods of Egypt.

The passage under consideration raises numerous questions. Why associate God's mighty hand with the plague of pestilence brought upon cattle? And why are we suddenly reading about *dever*, the fifth plague, when we've just read in the Haggadah about the tenth plague, the slaying of the first born? Even more

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strangely, the passage links God's outstretched arm with a sword outstretched over Jerusalem. What is a sword over Jerusalem doing in the midst of a midrashic elaboration on the Exodus, a story in which swords over cities appear nowhere? Is there a connection between Chronicles' reference to a sword over Jerusalem—which comes from the story of King David's ill-fated census of Israel—and the text of the Haggadah?

These questions grow all the more puzzling if we consider how easy it would have been to have composed a midrash that would have avoided them entirely. Take this example, which I composed:

> *Mighty hand.* As it is written, "Because by a mighty hand the Lord took you out of Egypt" (Ex. 13:9). *Outstretched arm.* As it is written, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements" (Ex. 6:6).[3]

After all, this is precisely the style of midrash we encounter earlier in the Haggadah's exposition on the Wandering Aramean.

I believe that the key to understanding this perplexing passage lies not developing a more comprehensive view of the cattle plague or in ferreting out connections between swords and the plagues in Egypt, as many commentators have done. Instead, the key to making sense of this passage lies in two areas. First, we must analyze the broader context of the underlying source—the *Sifrei* on Numbers, *piska* 115—from which the Haggadah drew this particular passage.[4] Second, we must attend to the relationship between our passage and the material in the Haggadah that immediately precedes it. This analysis reveals a poignant message about the importance of maintaining faith even in times of exile and apparent abandonment by God. First we will touch upon the efforts of traditional commentators as well as modern scholars to make sense out of the passage and then turn to the contextual two issues: the context of the underlying midrashic source and immediate locus of this passage in the Haggadah itself. We conclude with an excursus on the theme of numbering the population of Israel in the Haggadah.

A Taste of the Classical Commentators' Struggle

While a complete survey of commentaries on this passage lies beyond the scope of this paper, let us sample two commentators: Shibbolei Haleket (thirteenth century) and Abarbanel (1437–1508).

Shibbolei Haleket (literally, "The Gleaned Ears," chief work of Zedekiah Ben Abraham Anav) illustrates the approach of many medieval commentaries even if he occasionally differs on specifics.[5] He is not satisfied with the common explanation[6] that attributes the link between *mighty hand* and *dever* to a reference to God's "hand" that appears in the description of *dever*, the fifth plague (Ex. 9:3): "Then the hand of the Lord will strike your livestock . . . with a very severe *dever*." Instead, Shibbolei Haleket cites the midrash on Psalms (78:16) which states that "with every plague that came upon the Egyptians, the plague of *dever* flooded over them."[7] Here, the commentary struggles to elucidate the perplexing connection between the *mighty hand* and the particular plague of *dever* suggesting that because *dever* was part and parcel of every plague, it therefore warrants association with God's *mighty hand*.[8] (Other interpreters allude to a midrashic tradition that more directly identifies the *dever* with the hand of God.[9] For example, Ruth Rabbah (2:19) states that "whenever the hand of God is mentioned it refers to *dever*. And the *locus classicus* is, *Behold the hand of the Lord strikes your cattle which are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks—a very severe pestilence* (Ex. 9:3)."[10] This approach left many commentators cold because the *Sifrei* on Deuteronomy clearly states that the *mighty hand* refers to the slaying of the firstborn.[11]

As to the connection between God's *outstretched arm* and the sword, Shibbolei Haleket cites a now partially lost text that identifies the sword of Moses with God's Ineffable Name, a source of great power to those such as Moses, who, according to legend, knew it and wielded it with stunning effect.[12] Indeed, this commentary asserts that Moses brought all the plagues upon Egypt through such a sword.

Shibbolei Haleket concludes his commentary with one more attempt to link the sword to the story of the Exodus. He cites a widespread midrash about the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn.[13]

> When Moses said, "And every first-born in the Land of Egypt shall die" (Ex. 11:5), Egypt's first-born pleaded with their fathers to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Their fathers replied, "Each one of us has ten sons: let one of them die, just so long as the Hebrews not be permitted to leave Egypt." The first born took their case directly to Pharaoh. He had them beaten. In a final

> desperate act to placate God and save themselves, "the first-born went out and slew six hundred thousand of their fathers [corresponding to the number of Israelite males in Egypt]. Of this it is written, "to Him that smote Egypt *with* [by means of, i.e., with the participation of] their first-born" (Ps. 136:10).

Although this midrash depicts slaying aplenty and it does relate to the last plague—which the Haggadah has just carefully ascribed to God—it makes no specific mention of swords or of outstretched arms. Fascinating in it own right, this midrash sheds no light on the Haggadah's reference to a sword over Jerusalem.

Abarbanel raised many difficulties associated with our passage:

> The midrashic explanation that "*Mighty hand* refers to the disease among the cattle [*dever*]" is difficult. Why not say that *mighty hand* refers to the slaying of the firstborn which is implied in the verse, "Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a greater might" (literally, *yad chazakah*, "mighty hand"). So I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt . . ." (Ex. 3:19–20). And it is known that the Exodus was actually brought about by the slaying of the firstborn . . . not disease among the cattle. [The continuation of the Haggadah's midrash] is also difficult because the Egyptians were not struck by a sword . . . and the verse that the Haggadah brings as a proof speaks of a sword over Jerusalem. How can it be proven from this that there was a sword in the plagues against Egypt?[14]

Suffice it to say, Abarbanel's answers are not as interesting as his questions. He mostly cites the commentaries of his predecessors and concludes that outstretched arm, *zroa n'tuyah*, refers to the angel of death slaying of the Egyptian firstborn with a sword. The author of the Haggadah's midrash, Abarbanel claims, proves this with a *g'zeirah shavah*, that is by bringing part of another verse that also contains the word *n'tuyah* and does in fact refer to an angel with a sword poised for slaughter: "David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth, with sword outstretched in his hand directed against Jerusalem" (Chron. 21:16). Abarbanel concludes that just as "outstretched" refers to a plague delivered by an angel with a sword in the case of David, so in the Haggadah it refers to the slaying of the Egyptian born by the angel of death wielding a sword. (The editor of this version *Zevach*

Pesach, Abarbanel's commentary, comments that this interpretation requires investigation because the Haggadah has just told us that God alone slew the first born![15]) Abrabanel then alludes to the midrash about Egyptian firstborn sons slaying their fathers with swords with which Shibbolei Haleket concluded.

In sum, for all their ingenuity, it is noteworthy that Shibbolei Haleket, Abarbanel, and other commentators uniformly manage to identify *Egypt* as the victim of the Haggadah's reference to pestilence and sword. On one level, this makes sense because the words in question appear in what is generally understood to be a midrash about the Exodus. But on another level, this identification illustrates a striking willingness to ignore the prototypical biblical context in which a people is sentenced to pestilence and sword. In virtually all these instances that people is *Israel* and the enforcer is either God or a divine agent.

A few examples illustrate the point. The Bible first mentions punishment by these twin disasters in the book of Exodus. In their first encounter with Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron request permission to go "a distance of three days in the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He strike us with pestilence (*dever*) or sword" (Ex. 5:3).[16] The motif next appears in Leviticus when God details the penalty should Israel renege on its commitments: "For it is to me that the Israelites are servants; they are My servants, whom I freed from the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 25:55). "And if you . . . refuse to obey Me . . . I will bring a sword against you . . . I will send pestilence (*dever*) among you, and you shall be delivered into enemy hands" (Lev. 26:21, 25).[17] Jeremiah 32:6–27, the Haftarah for this portion from Leviticus, echoes the theme. It chides Israel for having strayed from the ways of God who freed "Israel from the land of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror" (32:21). The punishment: "sword, famine and pestilence" (32:24). About two dozen such examples appear throughout Jeremiah and Ezekiel, almost always as part of the punitive trio—sword, famine, and pestilence directed against Israel. In two instances, these prophets expressly identify Jerusalem as the target of the sword and pestilence.[18]

The primary biblical referent to pestilence and sword is this: God's punishment of disobedient Israel. Why did medieval commentators on the Haggadah studiously avoid pointing this out? Perhaps because amidst a celebration of Israel's redemption from

Egypt, it strikes such discordant note.[19] Why mar the festivities with a prophesy of Israel's doom?

Modern Scholarship

Modern scholarship on the Haggadah has not shed much light on our understanding of this passage. Louis Finkelstein, not one to hesitate in putting forth bold interpretations of the Haggadah, called this "the most obscure" section of the Haggadah's midrash. With regard to the allusion of a sword over Jerusalem, he wondered, "Why should such a memory be brought in at the feast of the Exodus?"[20] Daniel Goldschmidt, one of the last century's greatest scholars of the Haggadah, flatly states that the midrash cited by Shibbolei Haleket about the Egyptian firstborn slaying their fathers is not the source of the passage in the Haggadah under consideration.[21] Goldschmidt further observes that although our passage is similar in form to other sections of the Haggadah's midrash, it offers no proof of God's power regarding the Exodus from Egypt.[22] He does however quote its midrashic source and stresses the importance of understanding it as a unified perspective on two phrases—*mighty hand* and *outstretched arm*—rather than as two independent comments. The seemingly poor fit between the content of the passage and the Haggadah's unfolding discussion of the Exodus led Goldschmidt to suggest that the passage was a relatively late addition to the Wandering Aramean midrash. Hoffman's analysis of the midrash makes no particular comment on our passage beyond agreeing that it was likely added somewhat later than material that directly precedes it. [23]

Shmuel and Ze'ev Safrai maintain that though our passage comes from a single midrashic source, it combines two ideas. First, in identifying the *strong hand* with *dever* it embodies the midrashic traditions (already discussed) that equate them. Second, it identifies *outstretched arm* as a divine sword by means of the word *n'tuya*, "outstretched," which appears both in Deuteronomy 26:8 and I Chronicles 21:16. Here the Safrais follow Goldschmidt in citing *Midrash Lekach Tov*'s explanation of the relationship between these two verses: "We learn 'outstretched' [in one verse] from 'outstretched' [in the other verse]."[24]

Jay Rovner's study of the Wandering Aramean midrash includes an important observation on our passage. "The fact that

those augmentations [of *mighty hand* and *outstretched arm*] do not really fit the present context or its spirit, because rather than depicting the Egyptian bondage as culminating in redemption, they illustrate with doom prophecies foretold against Jerusalem, only serves to indicate that they most likely had been added by, e.g., a scholarly liturgical midrashist."[25] Rovner concludes that these additions clearly originated in Babylonia where he believes the Wandering Aramean midrash reached completion by the time of Natronai Gaon, circa 850. As we will see, the fact that this addition likely arose in Babylonia is significant.

Two researchers touch upon contextual issues regarding our passage. Heinrich Guggenheimer makes only a short comment here, but hints at something very important that we shall soon discuss. He observes that we should understand this passage in light of what precedes it. In the preceding passage we read that God alone is responsible for the bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, so here we should note that God alone stays the sword over Jerusalem.[26] Joshua Kulp follows Goldschmidt and the Safrais, but mentions (without additional comment) a noteworthy point, that the *Sifrei* on Numbers (*piska* 115), the original source for this section of the Haggadah's Wandering Aramean midrash, is an exposition on Numbers 15:41, "I, the Lord [*ani Adonai*], am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I, the Lord your God."[27] As we shall see, this verse shares important language with the preceding section of the Haggadah's midrash that deals with God's exclusive responsibility for the last plague.

Two Aspects of Context: Midrash and Haggadah

The Midrashic Context

To make sense of our puzzling passage we will look first at the context of the underlying midrash itself and then consider the position of the passage within the Haggadah. These two approaches roughly correspond to what Boyarin has described as intertextual and intratextual readings.[28]

The midrash in *Sifrei* is textually complex. It revolves around a text from Ezekiel, which itself includes a quotation from Deuteronomy. First the passage from Ezekiel:

> And what you have in mind shall never come to pass—when you say, "We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, worshiping wood and stone." As I live—declares the Lord God—I will reign over you with a strong hand and with and outstretched arm. (Ezek. 20:32–34).

Ezekiel borrows the phase *with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm* from the book of Deuteronomy where it recurs three times (4:34, 5:15, and 26:8), all in connection with God's redemption of the Israelites from Egypt.

As noted, the midrash from *Sifrei* begins with Numbers 15:41—"I, the Lord [*ani Adonai*], am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I, the Lord your God." The midrash is puzzled by the fact that the verse includes the phrase *ani Adonai* twice. It uses a story to explain that the repetition refers to two contexts: when the Israelites fulfill the commandments and when God punishes them for straying. Suffice it to say, when they flaunt the commandments and worship alien gods, God's rule becomes manifest through pestilence and sword. The *Sifrei* illustrates the point with a story about the prophet Ezekiel, active in the time of the First Temple's destruction and the Babylonian exile. He railed against the people for defiling themselves with the "fetishes of Egypt" and following false prophets. The midrash elaborates on a conversation between the prophet and "certain elders of Israel" (Ezek. 14:1) who argue with Ezekiel that they are no longer bound by God's commandments:

> They said to Ezekiel, "If a master sells his slave doesn't the master lose his authority over the slave?" "Yes," he answered. They said to him, "Since God has sold us to the nations of the world, are we not exempt from God's authority?" Ezekiel said to them, "But if a master rents out his slave on the condition that the slave return, is the slave no longer subject to his master?" [The midrash now quotes from a subsequent chapter in Ezekiel that repeatedly refers to God's redemption of the Israelites from Egypt.] "And what you have in mind shall never come to pass—when you say, 'We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, worshiping wood and stone.' As I live—declares the Lord God—I will reign over you with a strong hand and with and outstretched arm" (Ez. 20:32–34). [The midrash now elaborates with the passage that the Haggadah later borrowed from it.] "With a strong hand"—this refers to the pestilence (*dever*)[29] as it is written, " . . . Then the hand of the Lord will strike your livestock . . . with a very severe pestilence" (Ex. 9:3 as quoted in the Haggadah).

> "And with an outstretched arm"—this means the sword, as it is written, " . . . His drawn sword in his hand, outstretched over Jerusalem" (I Chronicles 21:16).[30]

The *Sifrei*'s midrash raises a crucial question about the status of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, and it does so in the language of slaves and masters that resonates strongly with the Exodus. The Temple has been destroyed, the people live in exile under the rule of a foreign king. The elders of the decimated community compare the people of Israel to a slave who has been sold to a new master and thus has no obligation to its former master (God). Ezekiel counters that Israel has not been *permanently* sold to a new master, but has only been *temporarily* "rented out." Israel must therefore remain loyal to God, its true master. The midrash raises a question faced by Jewish communities in exile over the millennia: "Must Israel remain loyal to God, if God no longer appears loyal to Israel?" The answer is unequivocal: "Yes!" And if Israel wavers, it will face the age-old prescribed divine punishment—pestilence and sword. If Israel wavers, the very powers—the *strong hand and outstretched arm*—with which God redeemed Israel will be used to punish it. Thus Ezekiel borrows these phrases—*strong hand and outstretched arm*—from Deuteronomy, and the *Sifrei* transforms them into pestilence and sword to be turned against rebellious Israel.

The addition of the *Sifrei* passage to the Haggadah's midrash on the Wandering Aramean occurred in circumstances that echo those of Ezekiel following the destruction of the First Temple. The addition took place in the geonic era with the Second Temple long in ruins and with yet another author writing in Babylonia—not Ezekiel the prophet, but a scholar contributing to the Haggadah. As in Ezekiel's day, the people of Israel once again lived mostly in exile. Yet again they were surrounded by temptations to relinquish their loyalty to a god who seemed to have forsaken them. (Among others, the religious options in Babylonia during the geonic era surely included Islam and Zoroastrianism.) The scholar who brought the *Sifrei* into the Haggadah must have felt that Ezekiel's message deserved repeating. For those inclined to plumb the depths of this passage the message is unmistakable—although not necessarily comforting. Forsaking the God of Israel may be tempting, but it is not the way to salvation. To the contrary, as the *Sifrei* makes clear,

abandoning God will only make matters worse by subjecting Israel to the archetypal expression of divine ire—plague and sword.[31]

The Context within the Haggadah

As noted previously, our passage derives from a tannaitic midrash (pre-third century C.E.), the *Sifrei* on Numbers (*piska* 115), which explicates, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord your God" (Num. 15:41). The similarity between this verse and the words that precede it in the Haggadah is striking. Here is the preceding passage from the Haggadah in full:

> *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. 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* (Ex. 12:12). *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.[32]

Both the Haggadah and the verse from Numbers assert that God brought us out of Egypt and both twice include the expression *I am the Lord* (*ani Adonai*). (The immediate background of the verse from Numbers refers to the institution of *tzitzit*, an aid to remembering God's commandments in the face of errant inclinations. Two chapters earlier in Numbers, the Israelites had just decided to return to Egypt rather than enter the Promised Land. This verse from Numbers is the last one that appears in the third paragraph of the *Sh'ma*.) In this section of the Haggadah, first we have (a) the "not by an angel" passage polemicizes against beliefs that quasi-divine intermediaries, rather than God alone, actually slew the Egyptian firstborn. Then we come to (b) the *Sifrei*'s midrash, which is built around a verse from Numbers in which the Israelites once again need to be reminded of God's role in the Exodus. Both passages (a and b) reflect a common matrix of concern: The people of Israel cannot be counted on to remember God's redemptive hand in the Exodus.

Having seen that the fragment of the *Sifrei*'s midrash that appears in the Haggadah is a divine threat directed against Israel

rather than an elaboration on the Exodus, we can begin to appreciate its position in the liturgy of the seder. The midrash from *Sifrei* extends the Haggadah's theme of the punishing God of Israel. We've just encountered the God who passes through Egypt and strikes its firstborn. Now we learn that God's wrath is not necessarily confined to the Egyptians; it can equally be visited upon Israel should it turn from God.

In the *Sifrei*'s midrash, Israel imagines itself under the control of a new master, tempted to become "like the nations and tribes of other lands who worship wood and stone." The *Sifrei*'s midrash implies that wayward Israel is flirting with the possibility that more than one "master" exists. The placement of the *Sifrei*'s midrash at this point in the Haggadah allows the Haggadah to quietly continue its argument against belief in more than one divine agent, now pointing to the consequences—plague and sword—of adopting such ideas. The way the midrash selectively quotes from Chronicles 21:16 is instructive: "*Outstretched arm* refers to the sword, as it is written: *His drawn sword in his hand, outstretched over Jerusalem*" (I Chronicles 21:16).

Based on this, one would certainly assume that it was God who wielded the sword over Jerusalem. But the complete verse from Chronicles tells a very different story: "David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand, outstretched over Jerusalem."[33] In light of concerns about the Two Powers heresy (see n. 32), the excision of the angel of the Lord, from both the midrash and the Haggadah makes sense. The Haggadah has just argued that "*The Lord took us out of Egypt* not by an angel . . ." so introducing the angel of the Lord would hardly have fit the bill, especially because in Judges (2:1) the angel of the Lord says, "I brought you up from Egypt . . ." Bringing in the angel of the Lord in I Chronicles (21:15), also known as a destroying angel (*malach ha'mashchit*) would likewise have evoked "the destroyer," (*ha'mashchit*) of Exodus 12:23. This verse credits the *mashchit*, not God, with slaying the Egyptian firstborn. In omitting the *malach ha'mashchit*, the *Sifrei*'s midrash may well betray at least a sensitivity to, if not similar concerns, to those that gave rise to the Haggadah's need to assert that God brought Israel out of Egypt—"not by an angel."[34]

In sum, the *Sifrei*'s midrash in the Haggadah sounds a warning. Pharaoh disregarded God and paid the price—the plagues

culminating in God's slaying the firstborn. If Israel fails to meet its obligations to God, even in exile, even when the redeeming hand of God appears remote, it too will face grave consequences. Amidst the festivities of the seder, this warning is jarring. No wonder commentators strained to interpret it as an elaboration of God's punishment of Egypt, to turn the sword, as it were, away from Jerusalem.

Excursus: On the Theme of Counting the Population of Israel in the Haggadah

So far one issue remains unexplored with regard to the *Sifrei*'s midrash, namely the relevance of the fact that one of its proof texts—*His drawn sword in his hand, outstretched over Jerusalem* (I Chron. 21:16)—refers to the punishment meted out to Israel as a result of the census King David conducted. In brief, David conducts a census which angers God—not clear exactly why[35]—and when offered a choice of punishments he elects three days "of the sword of the Lord, pestilence in the land" (I Chron. 21:12). Scholars have probed many questions involving the story—for example, why is David incited to "number Israel"?[36]

But for our purposes a question of a different kind arises. Is there anything in a story about enumerating the population of Israel that may have added to the appeal of including a textual allusion to it in the Haggadah? At first blush, no connection emerges. However, a closer look at the Wandering Aramean midrash reveals something interesting: it includes many references to the magnitude of the Israelite population.

> *He went down to Egypt and sojourned there few in numbers and there he became a great and very populous nation* (Deut. 26:5).
>
> *Few in numbers,* as it is written: *With seventy souls your ancestors went down to Egypt, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the heaven* (Deut. 10:22). *There he became a nation* means that they became a distinct people in Egypt. *Great and very populous,* as it is written: *The children of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and became mighty, and the land was full of them* (Ex. 1:7).
>
> *And very populous,* as it is written: *I made you as populous as the plants of the field . . .*

. . . *The Egyptians dealt harshly with us* as it is written: *Let us deal with them wisely lest they multiply.*

The fact is, the story of Israel in Egypt represents a partial fulfillment of God's covenantal promise to Abraham that his descendents would be as "numerous as the stars in heaven." That is precisely what unfolds in the proliferation of the seventy souls that go down to Egypt with Jacob to the mighty people that eventually fills land.

Over the difficult centuries of the Haggadah's evolution, fulfillment of God's pledge of a vast population must have appeared remote at best. In fact, dwelling on the reality of a diminutive Jewish population could well undermine faith. Indeed, the Talmud (*N'darim* 32a) asserts that Israel was enslaved in Egypt as a punishment for Abraham's doubting of God's covenantal promises regarding his fecundity and inheritance of the land. The allusion in the Haggadah to David's ill-fated census may have embodied yet another subtle appeal to the scholar who added it to the Wandering Aramean midrash. If numbering Israel proved destructive in the days of David, worrying about our numbers in subsequent generations could hardly be a good idea. Hence the Talmudic dictum—upon which numerous customs still rely: "It is forbidden to count Israel even for [the purpose of fulfilling] a commandment" (*Yoma* 22b).[37]

Curiously, the story of David's census underlies another element of the Haggadah, the song "Echad Mi Yodei-a." Again, the scholarly debate on the origins of this song is considerable. The consensus had once viewed the song as simply an entertaining Jewish adaptation re-purposed to keep sleepy children awake at the seder.[38] More recent scholarship tends to take it more seriously, perhaps as a catechism of sorts. The fact it appears in the seventeenth-century files of the Inquisition on the island Majorca, a converso community that had been cut off from other Jewish communities from the late fourteenth century, may support this view. Likewise a reference to the song, which some date from the fourteenth century, mandates that it (and "Chad Gadya") be sung on the "night of vigil" (*leil shimurim*, Ex. 42:12) "for all generations."[39]

Safrai and Safrai note the relationship between the song and tale that appears in three midrashic parallel sources. Here it is quoted

from *P'sikta Rabbati* 11:3, a midrash compiled in the land of Israel between in the sixth or seventh centuries:

> As a consequence of his prayer, the penalties to be imposed for David's numbering Israel were successively reduced . . . the three days of pestilence were reduced to thirty-six hours [by counting the days and not the nights]. Besides, good pleaders appeared in behalf of mercy for Israel. There came the seven days of week, the eight days prior to circumcision—thus fifteen; the five books of the Pentateuch, and the three patriarchs—thus twenty three. And according to Rabbi Tanchuma the Ten Commandments and the Two Tables [tablets] of the Covenant—a total of thirty five. Others suggested that in lieu of Commandments and the Tables, the heads of the twelve tribes appeared. In any event there remained only one hour of pestilence. But, behold, how many hosts died out in that brief time [i.e., 70,000].[40]

The midrash plays with the idea of counting, implicitly contrasting sinful David's numbering of Israel with the perfectly acceptable enumeration of the concepts Israel holds sacred. Although the midrash is not identical to the current version of the song, it may well have been known to the composer of "Echad Mi Yodei-a." In any case, to a tiny people to whom God promised great numbers, this midrash and the song it may have inspired remind us to count what matters most, not the magnitude of our population and size of the armies we can muster, but the touchstones of our faith.

Notes

1. For example David Henshke explores the midrash from a purely formal perspective and says nothing about the oddity of the sword over Jerusalem. David Henshke, "The Midrash of the Passover Haggadah," *Sidra* 4 (1988): 33–52. Joshua Kulp's extensive discussion of the Haggadah's midrash notes the oddity, but makes no attempt to address it, beyond suggesting that the passage wasn't part of the original midrash. Joshua Kulp, *The Schechter Haggadah* (Jerusalem: The Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2009), 231. Joseph Tabory's new commentary *The JPS Commentary on the Haggadah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008) says nothing about this passage at all. In *My People's Passover Haggadah*, vol. 2, I briefly allude to the interpretation that here receives a more complete analysis. Lawrence Hoffman and David Arnow, eds., *My People's Passover Haggadah*, vol. 2 (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 43–44.

2. Editors of Haggadot published by the CCAR have omitted this passage for many years. It does not appear in the 1907 *Union Haggadah*, the 1923 *Revised Union Haggadah*, *A Passover Haggadah* (1974, with drawings by Leonard Baskin), *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah* (2002, edited by Sue Levi Elwell with drawings by Ruth Weisberg) or *The New Union Haggadah: Revised Edition* (2014, edited by Howard A. Berman and Benjamin Zeidman). It does appear in all "traditional" recensions of the Haggadah. See Heinrich Guggenheimer, *The Scholar's Haggadah: Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Oriental Versions* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995). As noted above, *My People's Passover Haggadah* likewise includes the passage.
3. The Conservative Movement's Haggadah, adopts a somewhat similar approach and omits the curious section of the midrash we are considering. Rachel Anne Rabbinowicz, ed., *The Feast of Freedom* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1982), 55.
4. *Avot D'Rabbi Natan* B, chapter 11 contains a parallel source.
5. His commentary appears in Mordechai Leib Katznelenbogen, ed., *Torat Chayim Haggadat Shel Pesach* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1998).
6. E.g., Orchot Chayim (Rabbi Aharon Ben Rabbi Jacob Hakohen of Lunel, Southern France and Spain, thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) and others.
7. *Sh'mot Rabbah* 10:2 makes a similar assertion.
8. Cassuto makes an important point when he notes that Exodus 9:3, the verse in which a reference to God's hand appears in connection with the plague of *dever*, contains an unusual form of the verb "to be" (*ho'ya, hey, vav, yud, hey*), which "contains an allusion to the original signification of the Tetragrammaton" (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1997, pp. 110–111). The point is that not only is God's hand identified with *dever*, but so is the Ineffable Name itself. This provides a subtle, but fascinating justification for linking *dever* not just with God's *hand*, but with the *mighty hand*.
9. Perush Kadmon in *Haggadat Torat Chaim*, 110.
10. Daniel Goldschmidt notes that early *piyutim* also connect *dever* with the last plague. *Seder Haggadah Shel Pesach* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1947), 42 n. 1. Two examples appear in the siddur of Saadia Gaon. The first occurs in Saadia's version of *Ezrat Avoteinu*, a prayer that precedes the *Shacharit Amidah*: "All the firstborn of Egypt You slew with *dever*." Our version of the prayer differs somewhat from Saadia's and omits the reference to *dever*. The second instance appears in a *piyut* that Saadia includes as an optional addition to the Passover seder. It states that "All their firstborn were handed over to slaughter, the firstborn in the womb with

great *dever*." See I. Davidson et al., eds., *Siddur R. Saadja Gaon* (Israel: Rubin Mass, Ltd., 2000), 16 and 144.

11. *Piska* 357, near the end. *Ritba* (Rabbi Yom Tov Ben Abraham Ishbili, Saville, c. 1250–1330) cites this source and goes on to imply that it makes no sense to identify the *mighty hand* with *dever*, which is why the verse from Exodus 9:3 expressly avoids this expression, instead referring to just to the *hand* of God.
12. Such legends can also be found in classical midrashic sources. For example, *D'varim Rabbah* 11:10 says that Moses' "prayer was like a sword which tears and cuts its way through everything, and spares nothing, seeing that his prayer was a form of the nature of the Ineffable Name."
13. A similar story appears in *P'sikta D'Rav Kahana*, 7:6/9, *Tanchuma* on Exodus 11:5, *P'sikta Rabbati* 17:5, Midrash on Psalms 136:6, and, among others, in the Haggadah commentaries of Orchot Chayim and David ben Joseph Abudarham (Spain, fourteenth century). It may have appealed to compilers of midrash and commentators because of its theological utility: it shifts responsibility for much of the carnage during the last plague from God to the Egyptians themselves. Ritba's commentary goes in a different direction. He suggests that the sword actually is a metaphor for God's vengeance against the Egyptians just like the sword over Jerusalem is also an expression of divine vengeance against sinners and rebellious ones.
14. Abarbanel, *Zevach Pesach*, ed. Yisrael Meir Farser (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 2007), gates 72 and 73, 190.
15. Ibid., 191, n. 3.
16. Again the difficulties of some commentators in accepting that divine pestilence and sword directed at Israel is apparent. Rashi (on Ex. 5:3), for instance, says that "What they meant was, 'Lest He strike *you* [i.e. Pharaoh].' But they were treating the king with respect."
17. Perhaps it is not surprising that the language of Ezekiel, a priest, resonates so strongly with that of the book of Leviticus, also attributed to the Priestly sources and reaching a degree of completion not much earlier than the Babylonian Exile. See Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2005.
18. Jer. 44:13 and Ezek. 14:21.
19. It is worth considering other explanations as to why none of the leading Rishonim who wrote commentaries on the Haggadah mention anything about the *Sifrei* on Numbers in connection with this passage. They feel quite free to interpret the passage in light of other midrashic sources, but apparently not the *Sifrei*. Two obvious possibilities must be eliminated. First, did the Rishonim actually

have access to the *Sifrei* on Numbers? A quick search of the Bar Ilan Judaic Library reveals that Rashi, Ramban, and Abudarham all quoted it. The second possibility is that perhaps the manuscripts of the *Sifrei* in possession of the Rishonim had variant readings of the text that did not include all or part of this particular midrash. That too seems not to be the case because the critical edition of the *Sifrei* reports no major differences among manuscripts with respect to this particular midrash. See Saul Horovitz, *Sifre de-ve Rav* 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1966), 128.

20. Louis Finkelstein, "The Oldest Midrash: Pre-Rabbinic Ideals and Teachings in the Passover Haggadah," *The Harvard Theological Review* 31, no. 4 (1938): 314–16. Scholars now reject most of Finkelstein's assertions about the age and meaning of the Haggadah's Wandering Aramean midrash. See, e.g., Joshua Kulp, *The Schechter Haggadah* (Jerusalem: The Schechter Institute, 2009), 221.
21. Goldschmidt, *Seder Haggadah Shel Pesach*, 42.
22. Daniel Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1960), 45.
23. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 103.
24. On Deuteronomy 26:8. Shmuel and Ze'ev Safrai, *Haggadah of the Sages* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1998), 141.
25. Jay Rovner, "Two Early Witnesses to the Formation of the *Miqra Bikurim Midrash* and Their Implications for the Evolution of the Haggadah Text," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 75 (2004): 99.
26. Heinrich Guggenheimer, *The Scholar's Haggadah* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), 300.
27. Joshua Kulp, *Schechter Haggadah*, 230.
28. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Study of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
29. Rather than referring specifically to the fifth plague, the midrash uses the term pestilence (*dever*) more broadly to indicate a punishment that God would mete out to wayward Israel. In the *Sifrei* on Numbers, Ezekiel promises a third chastisement, famine. As noted, this triad of divine discipline—pestilence, the sword, and famine—appears frequently in the prophesies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Exodus 5:3 alludes to the fact that God will punish the Israelites only by pestilence and sword.
30. The figure in I Chronicles 21:16 holding the sword in his hand is none other than "the angel of the Lord," a key term in the Two Powers in Heaven Heresy. Perhaps that helps explain why the verse is not quoted from the beginning in either the *Sifrei* or in the Haggadah. As quoted in the Haggadah, one would certainly have the impression that it was God whose hand was outstretched over Jerusalem as it had been over Egypt. Here it is worth noting that

David's decision to conduct a census is the cause of divine punishment, an issue that we shall discuss in the final section of this study.

31. Of course whoever added this midrash to the Haggadah was aware of how perfectly it fit from a formal point of view. As Rovner ("Two Early Witnesses," 99 ff) notes, the expression *kemah/kemo she'nemar* (as it is said) appears relatively rarely (twenty-six times) in tannaitic/halachic midrashim, the midrashic sources from which the Haggadah borrowed. In fact, the Haggadah includes sixteen such expressions. So the presence of this expression in the *Sifrei* focusing on *strong hand* and *outstretched arm* obviously made it a candidate for inclusion in the Haggadah. But it is hard to believe that this passage found its way into the Haggadah mechanically, on purely formal grounds alone. The content must also have made sense on some level as well—which it does.
32. As I've discussed elsewhere, the Haggadah's polemic that it was God alone who slew the Egyptian firstborn reflects both the language and theological concerns found in Rabbinic literature seeking to refute what was known as the Two Powers in Heaven heresy. See David Arnow, "The Passover Haggadah: Moses and the Human Role in Redemption," *Judaism* 55, nos. 3–4 (2006): 4–28. In brief, as its name implies, this heresy involved beliefs that God acted through quasi-divine independent intermediaries, that heaven was inhabited by more than one divine actor, and that Israel's fate was not solely determined by God.
33. As it happens this description of the angel represents an advance in the evolution of angels as depicted in the Bible. It is the first angel portrayed as able to hover in the sky. See Paul Evans, "Divine Intermediaries in I Chronicles 21: An Overlooked Aspect of the Chronicler's Theology," *Biblica* 85, no. 4 (2004): 545–58.
34. It is worth noting that although the *Sifrei* on Numbers does not refer specifically to two powers in heaven (*shtei reshuyot*), it does include material that comes close. For example in *piska* 143, the use of *YHWH*, in connection with the descriptions of sacrifice in the Torah, and the absence of names of God such as *Elohim*, *Shaddai*, and *Tz'vaot* is explained so it won't give the *minim* room to argue that there are multiple divinities. Teppler actually includes this passage in his discussion of "Two Powers in the Midrashei Halakhah." See Yaakov Y. Teppler, *Birkat HaMinim: Jews and Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 336. Adriel Schremer ("Midrash, Theology, and History: Two Powers in Heaven Revisited," *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 39 [2008]: 230–54), does not.
35. It is too simple to assume that the problem with David's census was that he failed to conduct is as prescribed in Exodus 30:12., i.e., counting directly as opposed to requiring each individual eligible for enrollment in the census to contribute a half shekel. This

requirement is missing in the general census in Numbers 1:2 and of the Levites and firstborn males in Numbers 3:15 and 40. Suffice it to say, the matter has spawned a vast literature. For an extensive review of midrashic and other sources see Menachem Kasher, *Torah Shlemah*, vol. 21 (New York: American Bible Society, 1927–1992), 1–11 and app. A, 161–68 (Hebrew). For fascinating treatments of the subject from the perspective of comparative ancient Near Eastern taboos surrounding the census see E. A. Speiser, "Census and Ritual Expiation in Mari and Israel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 149 (1958): 17–25.

36. In I Chronicles 21:1 Satan incites him, but in II Samuel 24:1, "The anger of the Lord again flared up against Israel; and He incited David against them saying, 'Go and number Israel and Judah.'"
37. The Talmud does not expressly state this in regard to David, but it quickly follows up with an allusion to two of David's sins, one of which was the census.
38. E.g., Goldschmidt, *Seder Haggadah Shel Pesach*, 76.
39. For a lengthy discussion of the song, see Menachem Fox, "About the History of the Songs Echad Mi Yodea and Chad Gad Ya in Israel and Among the Nations," *Asufot* 2 (1988): 201–26 (Hebrew). See also Shmuel and Ze'v Safrai, *Haggadat Chazal* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1998), 193–95. For an English overview see Tabory *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah*, 64–67. I think Tabory too easily dismisses the midrashic substrate of the song.
40. *P'sikta Rabbati* 11:3. See also the midrash on Samuel 31:3 and midrash on Psalms 17:4. These midrashim elaborate on the story as it appears in II Samuel 24:12–17. Virtually the same story appears in I Chronicles 21:10–16.

Kosher, Kashrut, and Little Piggy

Reeve Robert Brenner

As teaching tools, in advance of consideration of the core content of the conversation on kashrut and the stout-bodied mammal with cartilaginous snout, two images or metaphors register as particularly useful. However, before offering the two relevant mental pictures, the one prior issue that must be set aside at once is the notion that "Do you keep kosher?" is a useful question because it suggests a yes or no response when the question(s) should be formulated such that a range of answers better reflects reality. ["What are the ways you keep kosher? What are the dietary practices that you would characterize as your personal level of 'keeping kosher'? What would you refrain from feeding yourself and household?" and the like].

Reform Judaism's *Gates of Mitzvah* "does not take an 'all or nothing' approach"[1] and we are so informed as well in the collection of *American Reform Responsa*.[2] Anyone refraining from any food on a smorgasbord for reasons encompassing even the most minimum self-conscious adherence to Jewish dietary observances may rightfully lay claim to "being kosher" or "keeping kashrut." Without having to add, one may contend, "to a certain extent" or the like, which is to be taken for granted.

The first of the two images is that of a "mansion of kashrut" upheld by four posts or columns. The second image is one we might identify as "the kosher step pyramid" with the pig—pork, ham and bacon—at its apex on the tippy top of the no-no edifice. Glatt kosher, observing *shatneiz*, ritual bathing, and attention to the six-hour wait before consuming dairy after meat meals might constitute other levels of the kosher step pyramid. If someone observes certain dietary and other practices at a level which is self-identified as highly punctilious in "keeping kosher" one would expect that

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