



View from CENTRAL PARK

by **tehillar.goldberg**

ijn columnist

Seder night

In 1947, David Ben Gurion spoke before representatives of the UN who arrived on a visit to then Palestine. This is what he said:

“About 300 years ago, a ship sailed to the waters of the New World whose name was ‘The Mayflower.’ This was a significant event in the history of England and America. I wonder, however, if one British person exists who can state precisely when this ship set sail, and by the same token, how many Americans can say the same. Do they know how many people were on board this ship? Or what quality bread they sustained themselves with upon this voyage?”

“And yet, more than 3,000 years prior to The Mayflower setting sail, the Jews left Egypt. And every Jew in the world, be it in America or in Soviet Russia, knows precisely on what day that was: the 15th of Nisan. And everyone knows exactly what type of bread the Jews ate: matzah. And until this very day, Jews the world over eat this very matzah on the 15th of Nisan; in America, in Russia, and in many other countries, as they engage in the retelling of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, layered with the many painful stories of persecution the Jews endured since they were exiled.

“They always conclude with two expressions. ‘This year we are slaves, next year may we be *benei chorin*, free.’ And, ‘*Le-shanah ha-ba’ah bi-Rushalayim ha-benayah*, next year in Jerusalem, in Zion. In the land of Israel.”

It didn’t matter where we were or what situation we were caught in throughout the vicissitudes of our diaspora, be it the Spanish Inquisition, the exile in Ashkenazi and Sephardic lands, the ghettos of Europe, and even in Auschwitz. We remembered our story. We retold it. We kept our heart and eye on freedom, on Jerusalem. We always hoped for a better “next year.” Today I might be here . . . but next year . . . next year. There is always the optimism of “next year.”

Naomi Shemer penned a famous song, “*Bashana Ha-ba-ah, Next Year*.” As a child, I loved this song. Yet a certain sadness would overcome me when singing it. There was something melancholy about never being able to be joyous in the present, and constantly hoping for a redemption to come in the future.

As I got older, after years of living the Haggadah on the golden and mystical night of the seder, I came to appreciate the depth of choosing, against the odds, to live with such optimism and hope.

The Haggadah, in a tapestry of texts, a retelling of our foundational story as a people, paints a night with wisdom and hope.

Layered by the texts of the Torah, the Mishna, the Talmud and Lore, a story of our people is woven.

From child to elderly sage, each year we all utter the same story, the same words. We know each and every detail. We sing together, the cadences of all the different read-

ings, from all the different years, creating a new personal tapestry of text for each and every family.

Yet the core structure of the Haggadah remains unchanged.

While Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur are powerful private days of prayer, establishing a spiritual compass for the coming year, seder night is quite different. Instead of knowing only your own whispers of the heart, it is the voices of those all around you, synthesized into the sounds of the night, that make Pesach what it is.

A grandparent’s rhythm in reciting a particular paragraph time and again, a parent’s voice in how he or she might read or lead — an annual memory reawakened — a sibling’s comment or distinctive reading too, and of course the sweet singing of a beloved child’s *Mah Nishtanah*. Year after year, family after family, detail after detail, story after story, and a manifesto of the Jewish people lives on.

What is the secret of the Seder? Is it Elijah? Is it the matzah? The words? The songs? The bro-

ken, hidden and hoarded matzah? The Hallel singing? The bitterness, the salty tears? Is it the four sons — all the children in their complexity — all four of them? All of us? Or, is it the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s famous fifth of our generation, so present in his or her absence?

Is it the questions? Or perhaps the answers? Or maybe the Haggadah’s refusal to accept indifference in this world? Is it the budding spring? Or sense of continuity? Or the cogent conversations?

Maybe it’s the abundant wine, the abundant, amplified dreams and symbols for redemption? Is it the demarcation of good versus evil in this world? Of slavery versus freedom? Is it the psychological and mental state of freedom that is conveyed? Is it our faith . . . a faith that has stood us strong throughout the thousands of seders of our people’s lives? Is it the flatbread of our flattened spirits? Or the poor man’s bread of dialogue? Is it the endless, eternal storytelling of our holy sages? Is it the “*va-nitzak*” — the unbridled pain and cry of a slave? Or of the one who can no longer ask? Is it the gratitude so present and so overflowing?

Is it the Haggadah’s empathy and sensitizing us to the preciousness of life and to the tragedy of the loss of all human life via the act, the pause of a pinkie dipped into a goblet of wine? Is it the prayer on our lips? The conclusion, the *Nirtza*, on a note of renewing a bond with G-d?

Is it the transmission of Judaism onto the wings of the children, another living Jewish generation? Is it the inventive sense of time travel and original experience of “virtual reality”? Is it Jerusalem? The yearning for Jerusalem? Is it the *Korech*, Rabbi Hillel’s sandwich, of life’s different moments enmeshed and bound up together, both the sweet and the bitter?

As this *Leil Shimurim*, this Night of Protection, fades, as the mystical, sleep recitation of *Shir ha-Shirim* gives way to daybreak . . . it is all of it, in its broken wholeness of the Haggadah of seder night, that keeps us remembering and living our Jewish voyage wherever our ship might sail.



A page from the Arthur Szyk Haggadah.

Wikimedia



Reflections Reflections

by **amy.lederman**

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A time to celebrate ‘Dayenu’ moments

Passover is a time of year when Jews tell the core narrative of the Jewish people which goes like this: We were slaves for over 400 years in Egypt, then G-d brought us out of Egypt “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” to become a “kingdom of priests and a holy

nation.”

The Passover story is a powerful account of redemption through revelation which reminds us annually of our deep-rooted connection to G-d, freedom, community and Torah.

But it’s interesting to note that

within the first few weeks of freedom, the Jews begin to complain bitterly about how rough life is in the desert. Food was scarce, nights were cold and no one seemed happy with their new life. Definitely a lot of *kvetching* for a group who, just weeks before, had been building pyra-

mids under the yoke of Egyptian bondage!

Perhaps a way to understand the *kvetch* part of our story is to view it as a reflection of the tendency never to be fully satisfied with our lot. The Exodus story suggests that its part of human nature to complain about what we don’t have rather than to be grateful for what we do have.

We spend most of our lives in relationship with others so it’s natural to compare ourselves to those whom we know, admire, live or work with.

But often, comparing ourselves to others leads to our own dissatisfaction because somehow, others just seem happier, richer, more popular or successful. Just like in the movie “When Harry Met Sally,” we think to ourselves: “I’ll have whatever she’s having!”

The issue of being unhappy with what we have and always wanting more has been around since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve are a great example: G-d tells them they can eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden but the Tree of Knowledge. Bingo! Eve goes straight for the apple from that tree.

Over 2,000 years ago, the rabbis discussed this problem and gave us this bit of wisdom: “Who is rich? One who is happy with his lot.”

Passover is a great time to renew our commitment to become more aware of what we have.

The seder can provide an opportunity to reflect on and share our appreciation for the people and things for which we feel grateful.

During the seder, we sing the upbeat song “Dayenu,” which is over 1,000 years old. *Dayenu*: “it would have been enough.” *Dayenu* is the quintessential Jewish Gratitude Song.

It reminds us, over and over again, that whatever we have, it is enough. Each additional blessing is a gift, a bonus, from G-d.

Dayenu: “If G-d had brought us out of Egypt, and not punished the Egyptians, Dayenu! If He had fed us manna in the desert but not given us Shabbat, Dayenu! If He had brought us before Mt. Sinai but not given us the Torah, Dayenu!”

It’s hard to imagine Jews saying it would have been enough had we not been given the Torah — and yet that is what we sing. From this we understand that Dayenu doesn’t literally mean, “it would have been enough; as in no more, you can stop now, game over.”

Rather, the words remind us that no matter what we might not have, we should be grateful for all that we have. In Dayenu, we thank G-d for each step of the journey and all that happens in between. Dayenu focuses our attention on what we have rather than what we lack.

This year at your seder, consider creating Dayenu moments. You can use a simple statement about gratitude and let your family and guests fill in the blanks.

For example: It would have been enough if . . . my son graduated college, but he also got a job. Dayenu! Or: It would have been enough that . . . I reached my 65th birthday, but . . . my parents are also alive. Dayenu!

Another way to celebrate Dayenu moments is to have a discussion with your family so that members and guests can share what they are grateful for at this point in their lives.

Even if everyone doesn’t participate but you begin a new seder tradition. Dayenu.



I - lu ho - tzi ho - tzi - a - nu, ho - tzi - a - nu mi - mitz - ra - yim,



ho - tzi - a - nu mi - mitz - ra - yim da - yei - nu.



(Chorus) Da - da - yei - nu, da - da - yei - nu, da - da - yei - nu, da -



yei - nu da - yei - nu da - yei - nu. yei - nu da - yei - nu.

The sheet music for the universal Dayenu melody.