

# The Rodef Shalom Seder

From the Pardes Beit Midrash to your seder table: a Pardes Passover Haggadah insert.  
Rabbi Daniel Roth, PhD, Director Pardes Center for Judaism and Conflict Resolution



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Institute of Jewish Studies

## Why Would One Nation Oppress Another Nation?

Interpreting Conflicting Narratives in the Haggadah and Society Today

### Table Topics

#### Read

Read the section from the Haggadah that describes Pharaoh's decision to oppress the Israelites.

#### Discuss

Why, in your opinion, did the Egyptians oppress the Israelites?

How might an Israelite and Egyptian spokesperson tell over the reason differently? (Ask for volunteers to play each side's spokesperson).

### 1a Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews. Book II, Chapter 9:1 (100 CE)

Now it happened that the Egyptians grew delicate and lazy, as to painstaking, and gave themselves up to other pleasures, and in particular to the love of gain. They also became very ill-affected towards the Hebrews, as touched with envy at their prosperity; for when they saw how the nation of the Israelites flourished, and were become eminent already in plenty of wealth, which they had acquired by their virtue and natural love of labor, they thought their increase was to their own detriment. And having, in length of time, forgotten the benefits they had received from Joseph, particularly the crown being now come into another family, they became very abusive to the Israelites, and contrived many ways of afflicting them.

### 1b Jubilees, Chapter 46 (200 BCE)

Makamaron, the king of Canaan, was dwelling in the land of Asshur, he fought in the valley with the king of Egypt. And he killed him there. And he pursued after the Egyptians as far as the gates of Ermon. And he was unable to enter because another new king ruled Egypt and he was stronger than he. And he returned to the land of Canaan

and the gates of Egypt were shut up and there was none who could leave or enter Egypt...And he [the King of Egypt] conceived an evil thought against the children of Israel so that he might cause them to suffer...Come let us act wisely concerning them before they increase. And let us cause them to suffer in slavery before war comes to us, or before they battle with us, or if not (that, then) they will mix with our enemy. And they will depart from our land because their hearts and their faces are upon the land of Canaan." ...And they (the Children of Israel) built all of the walls and all of the ramparts that had fallen in the cities of Egypt. And they made them slaves by force.

### From the Haggadah

#### The Egyptians treated us badly Deuteronomy 26:6

As it is said "Let us outsmart them so that they may not increase. Otherwise, in the event of war, they will join our enemies, fight against us and go up from the land." Exodus 1:10

#### וירעו אותנו המצרים דברים כו:

כמה שנאמר "ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף. ויאמר אל עמו הנה עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו. הבה נתחכמה לו פן ירבה והיה כי תקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם הוא על שנאינו ונלחם בנו ועלה מן הארץ." שמות א:ח-י

# The Rodef Shalom Seder

Continued

Rabbi Daniel Roth, PhD

## 2a Rashbam, Exodus 1:10 (1080-1160, France)

And they will fight us and leave the land: To return to their native land. It is not good for us to lose our slaves and be called “a truncated kingdom.”

## 3a Anchor Bible, Exodus 1:10 (W. Propp, 1999. p. 132)

“New King”: (means he) has not been king for very long. His headstrong action would exemplify the folly of youth upon attaining power...

Pharaoh’s paranoia is ludicrous, yet sinister. Demagogues often credit weak minorities with vast powers. Elsewhere, the Bible depicts the Egyptian ruling class as obsessively xenophobic. Egyptian sources attest to their tight control on immigration and emigration... We might expect the Egyptians to fear that Israel would conquer the land. But I am not sure we can or should rationalize Pharaoh’s concerns.

## 3b Rav Shmuel David Luzzato, Exodus 1 (Italy 19th century)

“And a new king arose” ...Pharaoh that was in the time of the Exodus from Egypt, was of the family of Ramses, and the kings from the family of Ramses annihilated two hundred years beforehand the ‘shepherd kings,’ that came from the lands of Arabia and conquered the Egyptians and ruled over them for a hundred years.... Yosef and afterwards his entire father’s house that came down to Egypt during the time of the Kingdom of the Shepherds. And the ‘Shepherd Kings’ loved them since they were all of the children of Shem and from Asia and spoke a language very similar to Hebrew...And behold, Pharaoh, in the times of Yosef, who used to love the Hebrews, settled the children of Jacob in the best part of the land in the land of Ramses, and this land...was the homestead of one family in Egypt who were called the family of Ramses. And the children of Israel took all of their inheritance or most of it, and settled it. And two hundred years later, it happened that the people of Ramses rebelled against the foreign kings from the shepherd families, and annihilated them, and ruled in their place. And since this family hated the Israelites for taking their land, and also since they were the allies of the shepherds, Pharaoh decreed upon Israel what he decreed.

## 2b Rashi Exodus 1:10 (1040-1105, France)

And he will go up out of the land: against our will. Our Rabbis explained that they spoke like a person who is pronouncing a curse against himself but attaches the curse to others (because he does not wish to use an ominous expression of himself), so that it is as though Scripture wrote “and we shall have to go up out of the land” and they will take possession of it.” (Sotah 11a).

## Table Topics

### Discuss

How might a third party rodef shalom/mediator be able to understand and retell the story in a way that would ring true for both sides?

(Ask for volunteers to play the role of rodef shalom/mediator.)

How can we attempt to better understand conflicting interpretations of conflicts in the world today?

## Further Reading/Listening

<http://bit.ly/Elmad-Roth-Shemot>

# The Social Justice Seder

From the Pardes Beit Midrash to your seder table: a Pardes Passover Haggadah insert.  
Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy, Director of the Social Justice Track



## Passover: the Jewish Social Justice Holiday

Love the stranger because you were strangers in Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

### From the Haggadah

A person is obligated to see himself as though he went out of Egypt.

חַיֵּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם

I remember clearly the testimonies of African refugees during the first annual Pardes Social Justice Track trip to South Tel Aviv. Six years ago, students could not provoke asylum seekers to criticize Israel.

“We were running out of the fire into the darkness, and tough as it was, we found not only physical safety but a community that helped us settle,” said one. “It was the first time I met a soldier who did not kick me,” said the other.

Now in 2014, these positive experiences are mixed with other sentiments as well. The combination of deteriorating socio-political conditions in Eritrea and Sudan and the relative accessibility of Israel led to an unprecedented flood of refugees from those countries by way of Egypt.

There are now more than 53,000 African refugees in Israel, with the vast majority competing for jobs and apartments with each other and already vulnerable Israelis in a few square kilometers in South Tel Aviv. The government grasps for ways to stem the tide.

What started out as an opportunity for Israelis to prove ourselves as “doers of kindness from a long chain of doers of kindness” (B.Ket.8b) has become a major societal challenge for a Jewish and democratic state.

While the formulation of a coherent state policy on this issue is of the highest priority, seder night is perhaps better spent on the related existential questions raised by this challenge.

## Table Topics

### Discuss

How does our encounter with recent trekkers through Egypt to Israel offer us a unique opportunity to inform and be informed by our own experience as strangers and refugees?

### “Out of Egypt”

Lyrics by Alma Zohar

There is always war in Africa  
Our luck that it's far away  
That from here, we don't see it or hear of it  
I also walked once upon a time  
On the paths of suffering  
From Egypt to Jerusalem  
In the desert, for many days  
With no water  
With the same question in my eyes  
I also encountered evil  
That slaps with no distinction  
People who are innocent  
People who are defenseless  
Who have no home  
With small children in their arms  
They knock on your door  
They weep a weepy cry  
Don't say: What are these people to me?  
These are foreigners  
Because in every generation  
One must see oneself as one  
who came out of Egypt

<http://makomisrael.org/blog/album/selected-alma-zohar/#out-of-egypt>

# The Social Justice Seder

Continued

Dr. Meesh Hammer-Kossoy

## From the Haggadah

### 1 כָּל דֹּכְפִין יִיתִי וַיִּכְלֵל<sup>2</sup>

**All who are hungry let them come and eat**

As Rabbi Israel Salanter said, “The material needs of my neighbor are my spiritual needs.” The seder begins by symbolically opening the door to welcome in the needy and ends with opening it again for Elijah, the harbinger of the Messiah. In doing so, we are imitating God, (as we cite later in the Haggadah): וַנִּצְעַק אֶל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וַיִּשְׁמַע יְיָ אֶת קוֹלֵנוּ “We cried to the Lord, God of our fathers, and He heard our voices.”

When we open ourselves to hearing the cries of the needy as God does, we become deserving of Elijah and final redemption. But there are potentially millions of refugees from Africa, and the Talmud is clear that, “the poor of your own city take precedence” (B.BM 71a). Most of the African refugees have chosen to settle in South Tel Aviv. As a result, the relatively socio-economically weak population of that area has suffered many consequences: more intense competition for low paying jobs and the accompanying erosion of salaries, higher rents and less safety on the streets.

Can we really open our gates to all of them? And at what price to the already vulnerable Israeli population in South Tel Aviv? Is it fair to dismiss the residents of South Tel Aviv as racists? The local Bialik-Rogozin school is full of children who have been raised here as native Hebrew speakers. At what point do these people qualify as “the poor of [our] own city”?

### 2 וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, עֲצוּם וְרַב<sup>3</sup>

**We became a huge, strong and numerous nation there.**

It was demographic fear that Pharaoh used to justify the enslavement of the Jews (Exodus 1:9). Of course we are concerned with the numbers of refugees flooding our borders, but how should our experience in Egypt inform our discourse?

### 3 מַצָּה זֶה שְׂאֵנוֹ אוֹכְלִים, עַל שׁוּם מָה...? וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהַתְמַהֵמָה<sup>4</sup>

**Why matzah? Because we could not tarry.**

Why were we in such a rush to leave Egypt that we could not wait for the bread to rise? Or HaHayim (Exodus 3:7-8) teaches that as strangers in Egypt, the Jews were at rock bottom. Had God waited any longer, we would have sunk to depths of immorality from which there was no return. Rabbi Eliezer suggests that this behavior is characteristic of the stranger: “סוֹרוֹ רַע” what we might call “at-risk” (B.BM 59b). Precisely to avoid this potential downward spiral, says Rabbi Eliezer, the Torah repeats thirty-six times the imperative of caring for the foreigner.

Some have accused the African refugee population of reducing safety by bringing crime, violence and alcohol to South Tel Aviv. Without affirming or denying the accusations, can our past experiences as strangers in a strange land help us find compassion for the refugees in our midst? How does their experience inform our understanding of our own exile?

## What's Next?

- Attend a seder with asylum seekers:  
[http://www.panim.org.il/p-12\\_news-1784](http://www.panim.org.il/p-12_news-1784)
- Learn more and help:  
<http://hotline.org.il/en/main>
- Watch a film:  
<http://www.strangersnomoremovie.com>

1. Deuteronomy 10:19; 2. Haggadah; 3. Deuteronomy 26:5, Haggadah; 4. Exodus 12:39, Haggadah



## Passover: The Festival of Active Learning

The Rambam relates that "it is a positive command of the Torah to recount on the eve of the fifteenth of Nisan the miracles and wonders that were wrought for our ancestors in Egypt" (Mishne Torah, Zemanim, Chametz uMatza 7:1).

While this mitzva is concisely mentioned in the Torah on four occasions (Exodus 12:26 – 27, 13:5, 13:14 – 15, Deuteronomy 6:20 – 25), it was only later during the Mishnaic, Talmudic and medieval periods that the exact procedures of the Seder night including the story of the Exodus were crystallized into a liturgical text: the Haggadah.

It is instructive to note that the grammatical root of the noun Haggadah (literally "the telling") and the infinitive להגיד (literally "to tell") is actually נ.ג.ד. This root is more commonly employed in its prepositional form signifying "opposite" and sometimes "in opposition" and is always used in a relational sense. For instance, when we sit at a table opposite a friend, we are positioned נגדו (masculine singular) or נגדה (feminine singular).

**We may therefore more accurately translate the term *Haggadah* not as "the telling" but rather as "the discussion that occurs between people who are in lively conversation with each other."** While a סיפור is a story that is told to a listener who listens, a הגדה is a conversation that takes place between two or more active partners.

The particular pedagogic strategy that the Haggadah employs to foster this conversation involves asking probing but open-ended questions that are suitable for all ages ("Why is this night different?", "What is this?", "What did Lavan seek to do to our ancestor Ya'acov?", "Why do we eat the maror?"), offering general responses, which are intended as starting points for further conversation, and encouraging us to experience the evening through multiple modalities.

To refer to the evening's telling as the הגדה rather than, for instance, the סיפור, is to suggest that our retelling of the Exodus story is not intended to be a detached, historical account communicated frontally to an audience of passive listeners but rather a dynamic, vigorous exchange of ideas that engages all of the participants in active dialogue.

### From the Haggadah

ואפילו כלנו חכמים, כלנו נבונים, כלנו זקנים, כלנו יודעים את התורה, מצווה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים. וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח.

Even if all of us are knowledgeable, all of us are wise, all of us are educated, all of us are well versed in the Torah, we are obligated to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Whosoever expounds upon the story of the Exodus from Egypt at length is deemed praiseworthy.

# The Educators' Seder

Continued

Rabbi Michael Hattin

## From the Text

### 1 Talmud Bavli Pesachim 115b

Why is the matza referred to as "לחם עוני" (Deuteronomy 16:3, literally "bread of affliction")? Answered Shemuel (by employing a play on words): because it is a kind of bread that encourages conversation (לחם שעונין עליו דברים הרבה – literally "bread concerning which we recite many things").

### 2 Rambam, Mishne Torah, Zemanim, Chametz uMatza 7:3

It is a mitzva to tell the children (the story of the Exodus) even if they do not ask...The parent must teach the child in accordance with his capacity. How so? If the child were young or unschooled, he should say to him: "my child, all of us were slaves in Egypt just like this maid or servant and on this night God redeemed us from bondage and we went free." If the child were older and intelligent, he informs him what happened to us in Egypt and the miracles performed by Moshe our master. Everything is in accordance with the capacity of the child.

## Discuss

On the eve of liberation from Egypt, you have an opportunity to take a (Halakhically-permitted) "selfie".

- Who is in the picture with you?
- Who or what is in the background?
- What are your thoughts and dreams as you snap the photo?
- What indelible memories did you freeze in the single frame?

## Table Topics

- How does the particular mitzva of retelling the story of the Exodus on Seder night differ from the twice-daily mitzva of remembering the Exodus that is enshrined in the third paragraph of the Shema?
- Why are even accomplished scholars obligated to tell the story of the exodus if they already know it perfectly?
- The "four sons/children" of the Haggadah highlight the importance of differentiated learning. But why does our response to the wicked son seem to reject rather than embrace?
- Is there an underlying literary structure to the Haggadah and/or a detectable progression?

### 3 Rabbi Aharon HaLevi, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzva #21

The matter of the mitzvah is to recall the miracles that were wrought for our ancestors at the time of the Exodus from Egypt and how God executed vengeance on our behalf. Even one who is alone for the Seder must audibly tell the story of the Exodus to himself so that his heart will be inspired by the matter, because inspiration is a function of verbalization.