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Artistic assessment

Haggadah

Art of the ancient Southwest

Franco Maria Ricci



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Haggadah



*by David Goldstein
with a text by S. J. Agnon*





Haggadah

The earliest examples of illumination in Hebrew manuscripts date from the eleventh century and come from the Near East, particularly Egypt. They are very much influenced by their Islamic environment, consisting almost entirely of geometrical and floral ornamentation, without any representational elements, except pictures of the Jerusalem temple and its appurtenances.

In Western Europe, however, Christian manuscript illumination, with its uninhibited representation of the human form, had a strong influence – indeed, some Hebrew manuscripts were painted by Christians. Despite the misgivings of some rabbis, who wished to apply rigorously the strictures of the Second Commandment, Bibles (in codex form), prayerbooks, legal codes, and works of philosophy and science were frequently illuminated.

There was already a flourishing school of Hebrew manuscript painting in Castille in the middle of the thirteenth century, but Spanish Hebrew illumination reached its peak in Catalonia in the second half of the fourteenth century. Despite the disasters of 1391, when many Jewish communities were destroyed, schools of illumination continued to flourish in the Peninsula, a particularly productive center being Lisbon at the end of the fifteenth century, until the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal in 1497.

The production and illumination of Hebrew manuscripts in Western Europe was severely affected by the introduction of Hebrew printing at the end of the fifteenth century.

Nevertheless, Jewish law required that certain texts be written by hand – for example, decorated Ketubot (marriage contracts) and Scrolls of Esther – and thus the tradition of manuscript illumination continued. In recent years there has been a revival of Jewish manuscript art.



The Barcelona Haggadah

by
David Goldstein

“ . . . remember the day that thou camest out of Egypt all the days of thy life. . . . ” The Biblical injunction is obeyed in the great Jewish festival of Passover, rich in meaning, ceremony, tradition. David Goldstein discusses a fourteenth-century Spanish illuminated manuscript of the *Haggadah*, the anthology of prayer and narration used for the ritual celebration. A wry story by S. Y. Agnon offers a more personal view of the seder, the Passover feast.

The Manuscript

The Barcelona Haggadah, among the finest extant illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, is now in the British Library, London, and numbered Add. MS 14761. Dating from the middle of the fourteenth century, it is one of a number of illuminated Haggadot produced in Catalonia at this time. Since one of its illustrations shows a heraldic shield very similar to the arms of Barcelona, the manuscript was probably executed in that town. (An illumination in the Sarajevo Haggadah also incorporates the shield of the city.) We know there was a flourishing center of manuscript illumination in Barcelona, connected with the court and influenced by Italian and French styles. Yet both scribe and artist of this Haggadah are unknown.

The manuscript is of vellum and contains 161 leaves, measuring 255 x 190 mm. The Haggadah itself extends from folio 9 verso to 99 recto; the other leaves contain liturgical poems and other prayers for the Passover season. It was an expensive matter to multiply manuscripts, even of such a short text as the Haggadah, especially those illuminated as beautifully as this one. This manuscript is rendered in large, bold Hebrew script, a feature it shares with the Sarajevo Haggadah and the Golden Haggadah, which are contemporary with it and from the same geographical area. Some leaves bear only a handful of words, which allowed more than one person at a time to read. (Children in particular would need a large script.) One may compare the enormous ecclesiastical music manuscripts, intended to be read by several singers at the same time, that were produced in medieval Spain.

The Haggadah is the most frequently illustrated text in Jewish religious literature. Since it tells the story of the Exodus, with the particular purpose

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of conveying its importance to children, and involves a series of unique and picturesque rituals, it lends itself to reproduction in pictorial form. Despite the frequent burning of Hebrew manuscripts by hostile church authorities and the more normal depredations of time, about twenty illuminated Haggadot from Spain still survive.

Among those produced in Catalonia the Barcelona Haggadah is outstanding for the rich decorative and representational illumination spread throughout the text – practically every page is heavily ornamented. This is in contrast to the Sarajevo and the Golden Haggadot, for example, whose full-page illustrations are gathered together before the text, which is ornamented thereafter by the decoration of initial words, with only minimal pictorial elements. These long series of pictures illustrating the scriptural narration of the Exodus and the events that preceded it (the Sarajevo Haggadah begins with the Creation!) are not to be found in the Barcelona Haggadah, in which the illustrations of the Passover story are scattered throughout the text, giving them a much more direct impact.

Our manuscript is characterized by the abundant use of grotesques, typical of this period. Occasionally these fanciful figures appear to be participating in the ritual of the Passover ceremony, and birds especially seem to grow out of the Hebrew letters, which are particularly suited to embellishment because of the long down- and upstrokes some of them bear. (Hebrew script does not employ capital letters, and therefore whole words are decorated, not just their initials.)

The pictorial scenes, important in their own right, give us valuable information concerning Jewish life in medieval Spain and, indeed, medieval conditions in general. The

pictures of the meal take us straight into a Jewish home; in the synagogue scene the representations of building work reflect, of course, contemporary fourteenth-century conditions. Of great historical value are the pictures of musicians, one of which shows the matzoh (unleavened bread), a basic symbol of the Passover, nearly always illustrated in a grandiose symbolic manner in Spanish Haggadot. Other traditional features include illustrations of the five rabbis of Bnei Brak, the four sons, the story of Abraham breaking the idols, and the Exodus. The bitter herbs are also depicted, but by a different and inferior hand.

A manuscript as handsome as this must always have been a treasured possession, and we are fortunate to be able to trace some of its history through inscriptions on its pages. It was sold by Shalom Latif of Jerusalem to Rabbi Moses ben Abraham at Bologna in 1459 for fifty gold ducats. It bears the signature of an ecclesiastical censor: "Visto per me Fra. Luigi del ordine de San Dominico 1599." It was owned by Jehiel Nahman Foa in the seventeenth century, and by Mordecai and Raphael Hayyim, two members of the Ottolenghi family. The British Museum bought it in 1844 from Messrs. Payne and Foss for ten shillings.

The Text

The Bible instructs all Jewish families to observe annually the date of the ancient Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. This Feast of Passover, so called because the angel of death "passed over" the homes of the children of Israel as he inflicted punishment on the firstborn of Egypt, has been for centuries one of the most important occasions in the Jewish calendar. It is a time when families gather together and celebrate the freedom of the

Jewish people over a meal that involves the practice of many ritual elements, which must be carried out meticulously.

Passover begins on the eve of the fourteenth of the Hebrew month Nisan. On this evening (and outside Israel on the following evening as well) the ceremony called seder (literally "order") is held. This ritual has evolved gradually over the years, and there are variations among different Jewish communities throughout the world, although the basic requirements are universal. Before the festival begins the house must be cleared of all traces of leavened bread (hametz), and during the eight days (seven in Israel) that the festival lasts no leaven may be eaten. During the seder itself it is obligatory to eat unleavened bread (matzoh). In addition it is necessary to have on the table, usually on a special dish, a shankbone (to commemorate the Paschal lamb), a roasted egg (as a reminder of the Temple sacrifice), maror (bitter herbs – in memory of the bitterness of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt), haroset, a paste usually made of apples, raisins, nuts, honey, and wine (to indicate the mortar which the Hebrews used for building Pharaoh's cities), and some green herbs. During the evening each participant drinks four cups of wine.

The basic purpose of the ritual is to narrate the story of the Exodus. The prayerbook used for the occasion is in fact called Haggadah, which means narration. It is the father's duty to explain to his children the great wonders that God performed for His children in Egypt. The father's narration is in response to questions that the children ask, and the questions themselves are prompted by the rituals that are performed. This is all in accord with the scriptural instructions: "You shall tell your son in that day: It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of

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Haggadah

Egypt. . . . When your son asks you in time to come: What is this? you shall say to him: By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt" (Exodus 13:8 and 14).

The story that the Haggadah tells is not, however, simply a series of historical facts. It is both narration and interpretation. The rabbis of ancient times (and those named lived in the second century A.D.) loved to expatiate upon the words of the scriptural text and to discover all kinds of hidden meanings there. Since the Bible was the word of God, His sole revelation to man, all wisdom and knowledge could be found there, if only one knew how and where to find it. Hence, the rabbis spent a great deal of time and patience examining and unravelling every phrase – every word – of the account of the Biblical Exodus, adding their own explanations. These explanations form a large part of the text of the Haggadah, and they would be supplemented by additional discussions of the Passover story by those seated round the table.

Naturally, the Haggadah also contains many quotations from the Bible, including the cycle of Hallel (praise) – Psalms 113-118 – and the Great Hallel – Psalm 136.

Instructions for performing the ritual, benedictions, prayers, and grace after meals, together with special Passover hymns, complete the Haggadah as we know it today.

The text of the Barcelona Haggadah contains all these essential elements. But the ritual is that of fourteenth-century Spain, and certain features current in Western Jewish communities today are not to be found in the text, either because they were later accretions, or because they were characteristic of the Franco-German (Ashkenazi) tradition and not of the Spanish (Sephardi). For example, the afikomen, which is that part of the first matzoh that is hidden and the

last thing to be eaten, is well attested from the very earliest rabbinic times.

The custom today is for the children to search for the afikomen and to receive a reward if they find it, or to try to take the afikomen by stealth from the officiant's chair and then restore it only in return for a gift. There is no mention of this custom in our Haggadah, although in the illustration the children do seem to be watching rather attentively while the afikomen is being concealed. In addition, our Haggadah mentions the fifth cup of wine, but does not relate it, as is the custom today, to the expectation of Elijah's coming, the harbinger of the Messiah. Nor is there any reference to "opening the door for Elijah." It was a medieval Ashkenazi custom (still practiced today) to remove one drop of wine from the wine cup as each plague is enumerated. Again there is no reference to this in our text.

The translation that we give below is of the Barcelona Haggadah, with additional and explanatory material supplied in reverse type.

The Passover-even service, known as the seder (order) because the ritual follows a prescribed order, begins with the recital of blessings and kiddush (sanctification) for the festival day.

Our Haggadah states that one pours a cup of wine and then recites:

Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine. Amen.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hast chosen us from all peoples, and exalted us above all tongues, and sanctified us by Thy commandments. Thou hast given us, O Lord, our God, in love festivals for joy, feast days and seasons for gladness, this day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the season of our freedom, in love, a sacred convocation, a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt. For Thou hast

chosen us and sanctified us from among all peoples. Thy sacred festivals in joy and gladness hast Thou given us. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who sanctifiest Israel and the seasons. Amen.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hast kept us alive, preserved us, and brought us to this season. Amen.

The Haggadah gives two alternative forms of kiddush: one to be used when the Passover coincides with the eve of the Sabbath, and the other when it falls at the close of the Sabbath. This latter ceremony includes havdalah (separation) in which a ritual division is made between the Sabbath and the Festival. The rites include the use of a twisted candle doused in wine, and this ceremony is illustrated.

After the kiddush, our text states that one should drink the wine while leaning to the left. This "leaning" symbolizes freedom because freemen reclined while eating, while slaves had to stand.

One should then wash the hands, and recite the blessing for washing the hands. Then take a small piece of green herbs (karpas) and dip it into a paste (haroset), made nowadays of apple and other fruits, and nuts and wine and before eating it recite the blessing: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the earth."

In front of the celebrant there is a dish or basket in which are placed three matzot (round cakes of unleavened bread), a shankbone and a roasted egg. He takes one of the matzot and breaks it, putting one piece between the two whole ones, and the other piece beneath the tablecloth. This latter is the afikomen, a small piece of which is the last thing to be eaten at the meal.

The second cup of wine is poured; the celebrant raises the dish, and proclaims:

This is the bread of affliction which



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מלך ה

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שבתובל מעלה



Haggadah

our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are in want come and celebrate the Passover. This year here; next year in the land of Israel. This year here, we are slaves; next year in the land of Israel, free men.

Why is this night different from all other nights? On all other nights we eat either leavened or unleavened bread; tonight only unleavened bread. On all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs; tonight bitter herbs. On all other nights we are not obliged to dip even once; tonight twice. On all other nights we eat either sitting or leaning; tonight we all lean.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not brought our fathers out of Egypt, we, our children, and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. And even if we were all wise men, full of understanding, advanced in years, and knowledgeable in the whole Torah we would still be under an obligation to narrate the Exodus from Egypt. Indeed, whoever narrates the Exodus from Egypt is to be highly praised.

Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Akiba, and Rabbi Tarfon, were once reclining together at Bnei Brak, and they went on discussing the Exodus from Egypt all that night, until their disciples came and said to them, "Masters, it is now time to recite morning prayers."

Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah said, "I am now about seventy years old, and I was never able to understand why the Exodus from Egypt should be narrated at night, until Ben Zoma explained it from the verse 'So that thou mayst remember the day that thou camest out of Egypt all the days of thy life' (Deut. 16:3) – 'The days of thy life' would signify the daytime, but 'all the days of thy life' indicates

the nights." The sages, however, interpreted it like this: "the days of thy life" indicates this world; "all the days of thy life" indicates that the days of the Messiah should be included.

Blessed is the Omnipresent. Blessed is He. Blessed is He who gave the Torah to Israel. Blessed is He. With reference to four sons does the Torah speak; one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask.

The wise one, what does he say?

"What are the testimonies and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?" (Deut. 6:20). And you in turn must tell him, as one of the laws of Passover, that "one should not disperse after the Paschal lamb for afikomen."

The wicked one, what does he say?

"What does this service mean to you?" (Ex. 12:26). "To you," not him. Since he excludes himself from the generality he has denied the basic principle. And you in turn must set his teeth on edge and say to him, "It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt" (Ex. 13:8). "For me," not him. If he had been there, he would not have been saved.

The simple one, what does he say?

"What is this?" (Ex. 13:14). And you shall say to him, "By strength of hand did the Lord bring me out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (ibid.). As for the one who does not know how to ask, you must broach the subject to him, as it is said, "Thou shalt tell thy son on that day, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt."

"Thou shalt tell thy son . . ." Perhaps one should explain the preparations from the beginning of the month? But Scripture stipulates "on that day." Perhaps then one should begin while it is still daytime? But Scripture stipulates "It is because of that," implying that you should not begin

until the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs are placed in front of you so that you can point to them.

At first our fathers were idol worshippers, but now the Omnipresent has drawn us near to Him, to worship Him, as it is said, "Joshua said to all the people: Thus says the Lord, God of Israel, Long ago your fathers dwelt on the far side of the river: Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor, and they worshipped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, and I led him through the whole land of Canaan. And I increased his descendants. I gave him Isaac; and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I allowed Esau to take possession of Mt. Seir. But Jacob and his children went down to Egypt" (Joshua 24:2-4).

Blessed is He who kept his promise to Israel. Blessed is He. For the Holy One, blessed be He, calculated the time so that He might in the end do that which He promised to our father Abraham at the covenant between the pieces, as it is said, "He said to Abram: Know this for certain, that your descendants will be strangers in a land that does not belong to them, and they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I shall then judge the nation to whom they are enslaved, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions" (Gen. 15:13-14).

This is the promise that has stood firm for our fathers, and also for us.

Because it is not just a single man that has risen against us to destroy us. But the Holy One, blessed be He, has delivered us from their hands.

Go and learn what Laban the Aramaean tried to do to our father Jacob. Pharaoh issued a decree only against the males, but Laban tried to uproot everything, as it is said, "An Aramaean tried to destroy my father, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, but



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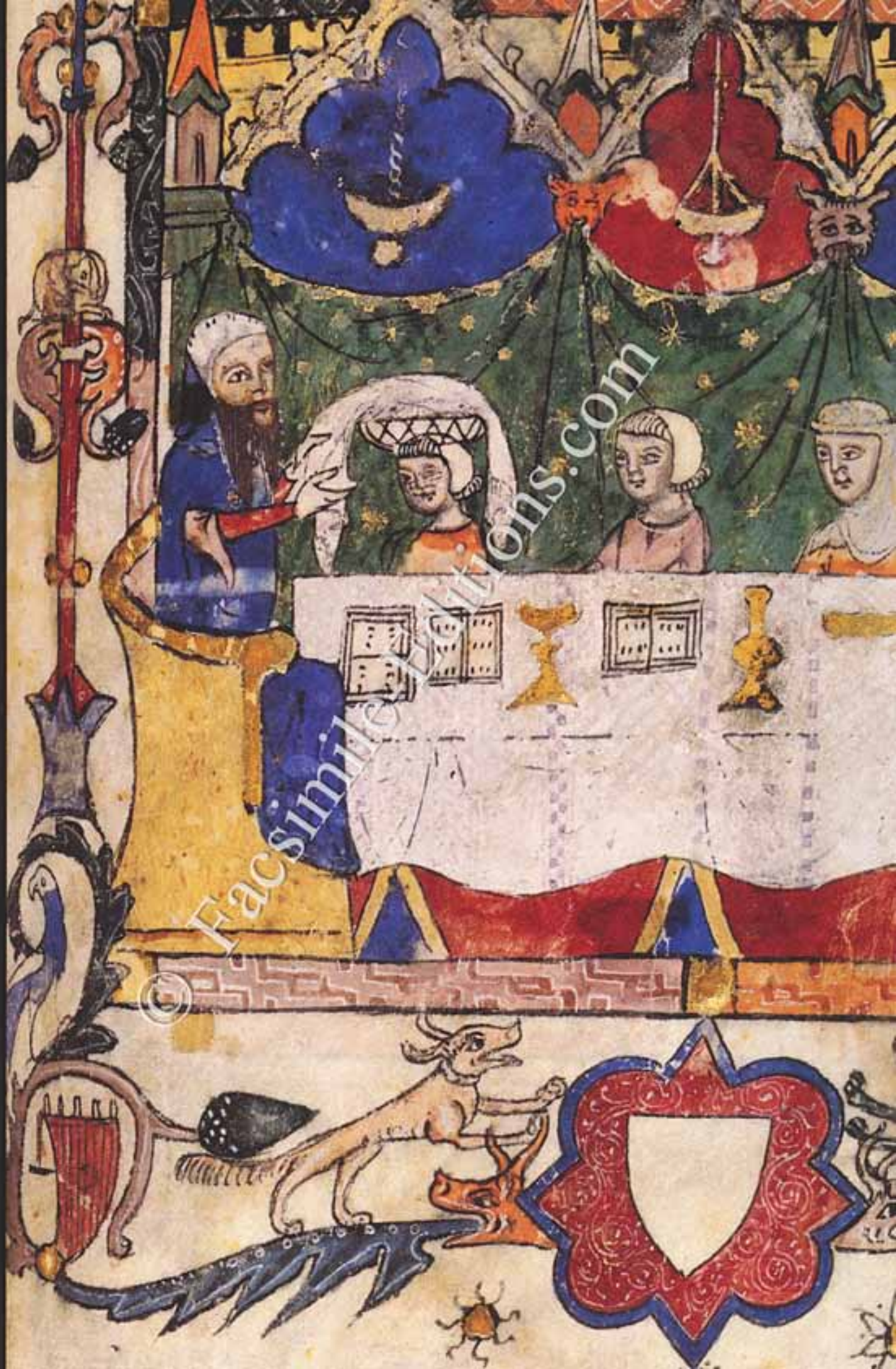
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Haggadah

there he became a great nation, powerful and numerous" (Deut. 26:5).

"He went down to Egypt" – unwillingly, at the divine command. "And sojourned there" – showing that he did not go down to settle permanently but to sojourn there, as it is said "They said to Pharaoh: We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Therefore, please allow your servants to dwell in the land of Goshen" (Gen. 47:4).

"Few in number," as it is said, "With seventy souls did your fathers go down into Egypt, but now the Lord your God has made you like the stars of heaven in multitude" (Deut. 10:22).

"There he became a great nation" – showing that Israel was distinguished there. "Great . . . powerful," as it is said, "The children of Israel were fruitful and multiplied and increased in number, and became extremely powerful, and the land became full of them" (Ex. 1:7).

"Numerous," as it is said "I made you grow like a plant in the field; you grew up and became tall. You reached a peak of beauty with firm breasts and flowing hair, whereas before you were naked and bare" (Ezek. 16:7).

"And the Egyptians dealt evilly with us, and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor upon us" (Deut. 26:6).

"And the Egyptians dealt evilly with us," as it is said "Come let us deal wisely with them in case they increase and then if we have to go to war they may join our enemies and fight against us, and so get out of the land" (Ex. 1:10).

"And afflicted us," as it is said "They set taskmasters over them in order to afflict them with their burdens. And they built store cities for Pharaoh, namely Pithom and Raamses" (Ex. 1:11).

"And imposed hard labor upon us," as it is said, "The Egyptians made the

children of Israel work with great rigor" (Ex. 1:13).

"But we cried to the Lord God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our trouble, and our oppression" (Deut. 26:7).

"But we cried to the Lord God of our fathers," as it is said "It happened in the course of many days that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel groaned because of the labor, and they cried out, and their protest at the labor ascended to God" (Ex. 2:23).

"And the Lord heard our voice," as it is said, "God heard their complaint, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex. 2:24).

"And saw our affliction." This refers to the fact that intercourse ceased, as it is said, "God saw the children of Israel, and God knew" (Ex. 2:25).

"And our labor." This refers to the children, as it is said "Every son that is born you shall throw into the river, but all the daughters you shall keep alive" (Ex. 1:22).

"And our oppression." This refers to the pressure, as it is said "I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them" (Ex. 3:9).

"And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand, and an outstretched arm; with great terror, with signs, and with wonders" (Deut. 26:8).

"And the Lord our God brought us out of Egypt" – not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by an agent; but the Holy One, blessed be He, in His glory, by Himself, as it is said, "I shall pass through the land of Egypt in that night, and I shall smite every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt, I shall execute judgments, I, the Lord" (Ex. 12:12).

"I shall pass through the land of Egypt" – I, and not an angel. "And I shall smite every firstborn" – I, and

not a seraph. "And against all the gods of Egypt I shall execute judgments, I, the Lord" – I, and not an agent. I am He, and no other.

"With a strong hand." This is the murrain, as it is said "Behold, the hand of the Lord is against your cattle that is in the field, against horses, asses, camels, herds and flocks, a very severe murrain" (Ex. 9:3).

"And with an outstretched arm." This is the sword, as it is said "With his unsheathed sword in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem." (1 Chron. 21:16).

"With great terror." This is the revelation of the divine presence, as it is said, "Has God ever attempted to come and take for Himself a nation from among a nation, with trials, and signs, and wonders, with war, and with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with great terrors, as all that the Lord your God has done for you in Egypt, in your very sight?" (Deut. 4:34).

"With signs." This is the rod, as it is said, "You shall take in your hand this rod, with which you will perform the signs" (Ex. 4:17).

"And with wonders." This is the blood, as it is said, "I shall show wonders in heaven and earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke" (Joel 3:3).

Another interpretation: "With a strong hand" – two; "with great terror" – two; "with signs" – two; "with wonders" – two. These are the ten plagues which the Holy One, blessed by He, brought against the Egyptians in Egypt, namely blood, frogs, lice, wild animals, murrain, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, slaying of the firstborn.

Rabbi Judah used to apply to them a mnemonic: DaTSaK ADaSH BAHaB, which gives the first letters of the Hebrew words for the plagues.

Rabbi Jose the Galilean said, "How can one deduce that the Egyptians suffered ten plagues in Egypt, and

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עָלֵינוּ לְסֵפֶר בִּיצִיאת מִ

ספר בן אשה

מִצוֹת וְכֻלָּה מִסֵּפֶר בִּיצִיאַת

מִצְרַיִם וְרִיזָה מִשׁוּבָח



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בַּסִּבּוֹתָם וַיִּבֶן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת

לַפִּרְעָה אֶת־פִּיתוֹם וְאֶת

רַעֲמֶסֶס



Haggadah

fifty plagues by the sea?

"What does Scripture say happened in Egypt? 'The magicians said to Pharaoh: This is the finger of God' (Ex. 8:15). And what does it say happened at the sea? 'Israel saw the great hand which the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and believed in the Lord and in his servant, Moses' (Ex. 14:31).

"How many did they suffer from the finger? Ten. Hence we may deduce that if they suffered ten plagues in Egypt they must have suffered fifty by the sea."

Rabbi Eliezer said, "How can one deduce that every plague with which the Holy One, blessed be He, afflicted the Egyptians in Egypt really consisted of four plagues? Because it is said 'He sent against them the heat of His anger, wrath, fury and trouble, a mission of evil messengers' (Ps. 78:49). 'Wrath' – one; 'fury' – two; 'trouble' – three; 'a mission of evil messengers' – four. Hence we may deduce that in Egypt they suffered forty plagues, and by the sea they suffered two hundred plagues."

Rabbi Akiba said, "How can one deduce that every plague with which the Holy One, blessed be He, afflicted the Egyptians in Egypt consisted of five plagues? Because it is said, 'He sent against them the heat of His anger, wrath, fury, and trouble, a mission of evil messengers' – five. Hence we may deduce that in Egypt they suffered fifty plagues, and by the sea they suffered two hundred and fifty plagues."

How many reasons for gratitude has God given us!

If He had brought us out of Egypt without inflicting punishments on them, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had inflicted punishments on them without passing judgment on their gods, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had slain their firstborn without giving us their wealth, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had given us their wealth without dividing the sea for us, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had led us through it on dry land without drowning our enemies in it, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had drowned our enemies in it without supplying our needs in the desert for forty years, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had supplied our needs in the desert for forty years without feeding us manna, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had fed us manna without giving us the Sabbath, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had given us the Sabbath without bringing us to Mt. Sinai, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had brought us to Mt. Sinai without giving us the Torah, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had given us the Torah without bringing us into the land of Israel, – we should have been satisfied.

If He had brought us into the land of Israel without building the Temple for us, – we should have been satisfied.

We should therefore show doubled and redoubled gratitude to God. He brought us out of Egypt; He inflicted punishments on them; He passed judgment on their gods; He slew their firstborn; He gave us their wealth; He divided the sea for us; He led us through it on dry land; He drowned our enemies in it; He supplied our needs in the desert for forty years; He fed us manna; He gave us the Sabbath; He brought us to Mt. Sinai; He gave us the Torah; He brought us into the land of Israel; and He built the Temple for us, so that atonement might be made for all our sins.

Rabban Gamliel used to say,

"Whoever does not mention these three things at Passover has not fulfilled his obligation, namely, the Passover

lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs." Why should we mention the Passover lamb that our fathers used to eat in Temple times? We mention it because God passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt, as it is said "You shall say: It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, in that He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, and He saved our houses. And the people bowed down and prostrated themselves" (Ex. 12:27). Why should we mention this unleavened bread that we eat? We mention it because the dough that our fathers had did not have time to become leavened before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them immediately, as it is said "They baked unleavened cakes from the dough which they had brought out of Egypt for it had not become leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, and they had made no provisions for themselves" (Ex. 12:39).

Why should we mention these bitter herbs that we eat? We mention them because the Egyptians made our fathers' lives bitter in Egypt, as it is said, "They made their lives bitter with hard labor, with mortar and bricks, all kinds of labor in the field; all their labor which they imposed upon them with rigor" (Ex. 1:14). In every generation a man must regard himself as if he had come out of Egypt, as it is said "Thou shalt tell thy son on that day, saying: It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt" (Ex. 13:8). Not only our fathers did the Holy One, blessed be He, redeem, but us too did He redeem with them, as it is said "He brought us out from there in order to bring us into and give us the land which He promised to our fathers" (Deut. 6:23).

Therefore, it is our duty to thank,



חזקה ו
מזורא



ויזעאנו



במערסבד

ובזרועטויה וב



וַיִּקְדּוּ הָעַם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ



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praise, extol, glorify, exalt, magnify, celebrate and acclaim Him who performed all these miracles for our fathers and for us. He brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to gladness, from darkness to great light and from bondage to redemption. Let us therefore say before Him "Praise the Lord."

Then follow psalms 113 and 114.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who redeemed us, and redeemed our fathers, from Egypt, and brought us this night to eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs. So mayest Thou bring us, O Lord, our God, and God of our fathers, to other festivals and holy days. May they come in peace to us, and may we delight in the rebuilding of Thy city, and rejoice in Thy service. May we eat there of the Passover offerings, and sacrifices whose blood will reach the sides of Thine altar, acceptable to Thee. Then we shall thank Thee with a new song for redeeming us, and for delivering our souls. Blessed art Thou, who redeemest Israel. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine. Amen.

One drinks the second cup of wine, and washes the hands, with a benediction.

The celebrant then takes the piece of matzoh that is between the two whole ones and says the benediction: Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth. Taking the whole matzoh he says the blessing that must be recited before performing the commandment of eating matzoh on Passover: Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by Thy commandments, and commanded us to eat matzoh. And then both the matzot are eaten together.

Next the bitter herbs (maror) are

eaten, having been dipped in haroset, after the benediction: Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the universe, who hast sanctified us by Thy commandments, and commanded us to eat maror.

Matzoh and maror are then eaten together without a benediction, and without dipping in haroset, "in remembrance of the Temple, like Hillel" for so Hillel used to do.

The meal follows. After the meal a small piece of afikomen is eaten, and nothing is eaten after it.

One washes one's hands without a benediction, and the third cup of wine is poured in preparation for the Grace after meals. After Grace the fourth cup of wine is poured, and the Hallel Psalms are completed.

Vent thy fury against the nations who have not known Thee and against the kingdoms who have not called upon Thy name.

Then follow psalms 115-118.

They shall praise Thee, O Lord, our God, for all Thy deeds. And Thy pious ones, the righteous ones who do Thy will, and Thy people, the House of Israel, will in song thank, bless, praise, glorify, and exalt Thy name, our King; for it is good to give thanks to Thee, and it is pleasant to sing to Thy name, because for ever and ever Thou art God. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King, who art to be exalted in praises.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

The cup of wine is drunk while leaning to the left, and then the following benediction is recited: Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, for the vine and the fruit of the vine, for the pleasant, good and spacious land which Thou wast pleased to give to our fathers. Have mercy, O Lord, our God, upon Israel, Thy people, and upon Jerusalem, Thy holy city, and may we

bless You for it in sanctity and in purity. And may the remembrance of us rise and come before Thee on this day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for Thou art a good and beneficent God. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, for the land and for the fruits. If one wishes to drink a fifth cup one should say the great Hallel (i.e. Psalm 136) over it, and the prayer that begins "The breath of every living thing shall bless Thy name," followed by "May Thy name be praised for ever . . .," and then conclude with the benediction: "Blessed art Thou . . . who art to be exalted in praises." This is followed by the blessing over wine and then "for the vine and the fruit of the vine." After this it is forbidden to drink any wine for the rest of the night, in order not to obliterate the taste of the matzoh. But if one is thirsty one may drink water.

Then follows a Passover hymn, and the Haggadah itself concludes with: Next year in Jerusalem. Amen.

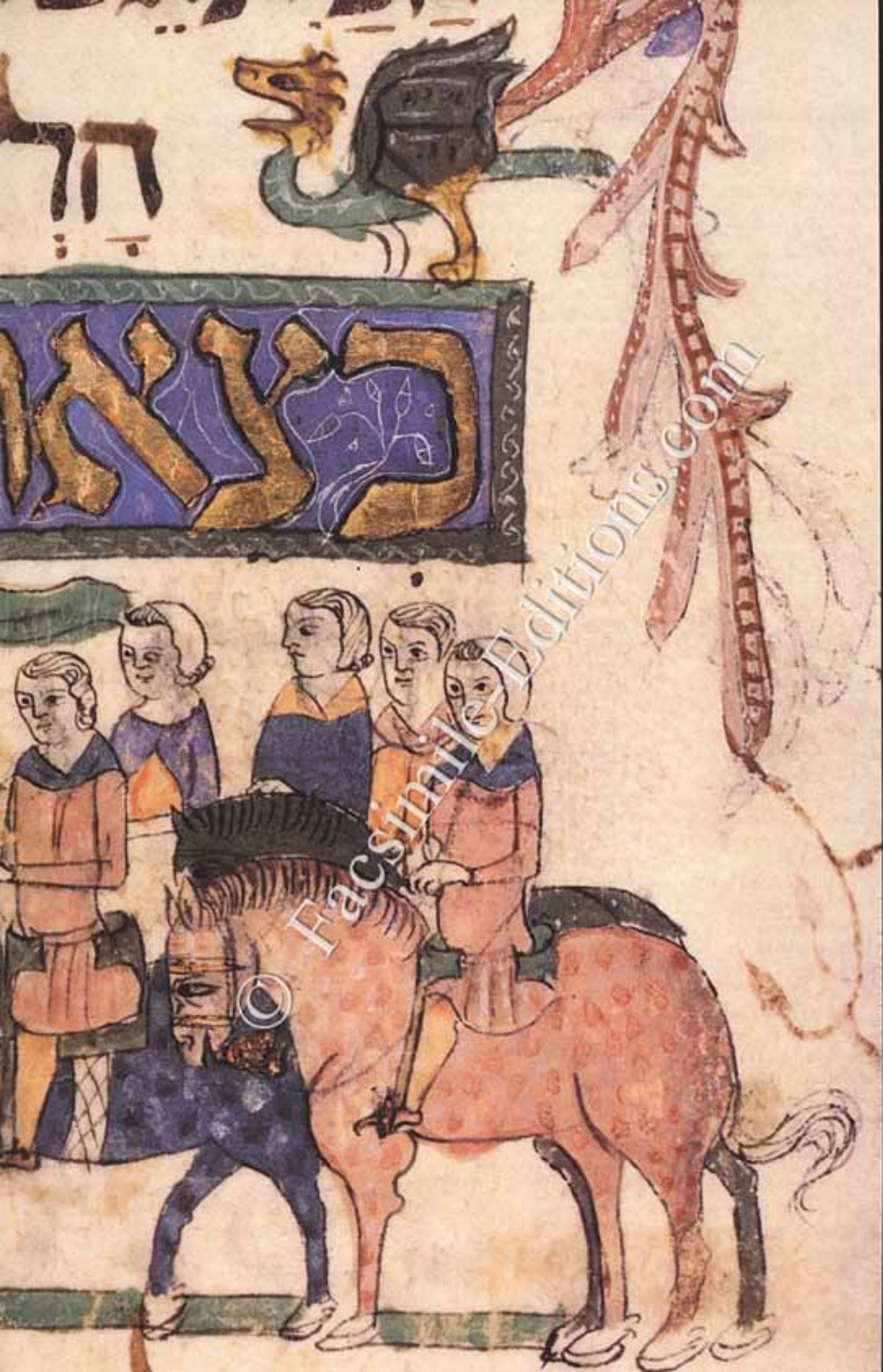
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Haggadah

The Passover Celebrants

by S. Y. Agnon

Passover is an expression of thanks for the Jews' deliverance from servitude in the land of Egypt and from the ten plagues visited by God upon their captors. Like all feasts of joy, it can be a time of bitter irony for those who still await deliverance from the latter-day plagues of life — solitude or the loss of a companion. A Polish-born Israeli writer and corecipient of the 1965 Nobel Prize for Literature, S. Y. Agnon here tells the story of Reb Mechel, a poverty-stricken beadle, and Sarah Leah, a wealthy widow, who are united by loneliness and their love for the sumptuous spirituality of Passover. Agnon skillfully draws a fine line between sacred and temporal love, concluding with a celebration of both.

There are many who have heard the tale of Reb Mechel, the beadle, and the wealthy Sarah Leah. At the same time there are as many who have not heard it; and for those who have not heard it, it is worth the telling. This is the tale of Mechel the beadle. When Mechel the beadle left the House of Study on the first night of Passover, his mood was cheerful. Blest be The Name, said he to himself, that the eve of Passover is over and done with so that I too can rejoice this night like other folk. But when he had locked the doors and found himself proceeding homeward his good mood left him. He knew that he went to no royal feasting hall but to a tumbledown dwelling; that he would be sitting not on a fine handsome couch but on a torn cushion unmended of woman's hand; and that he must trouble himself a deal to warm his food.

For at the time, Mechel the beadle was a widower; there was no woman in his home to prepare his table, make his bed or cook his meals. Truth to tell, many of the householders had wished to invite him to celebrate the Passover feast with them. Reb Mechel, they had said, tonight the whole world is rejoicing and all Israel feasts with their households, so why should you celebrate on your own? Be happy, Reb Mechel, that the demons have no

power on this night; but even so there is a period of sadness, which is as much prohibited on the Passover as leaven, the Merciful One deliver us. Yet Mechel refused all offers of hospitality, for he did not wish to burden another's table at the festival. The streets had emptied, and all the houses of the town shone with Passover light. The moon was bright and gracious, and a spring breeze blew. Mechel began to turn his mind away from himself and enjoy the wonders of the Creation, jingling the keys of the synagogue like a bell. But hearing the sound of the keys he grew sorrowful and began to remind himself bitterly how he was the beadle of the House of Study, toiling hard and doing all sorts of work; and how, when he had completed his work and returned home, he remained cramped and lonely between the walls, never even tasting cooked food; since if he put food on to warm he would be asleep before it was cooked. So he would stay his hunger with an onion roll or some bread and radish, or the potato a woman might bring to the House of Study so that he should pray for the souls of her near ones to rest in peace. But what you may do all the year round, and rest satisfied, you may not do on a festival when we are bidden to rejoice.

On the way home he noticed that one house had a window open; looking again, he saw that it was a window in the house of Sarah Leah, the widow. She herself was standing at the window looking out. Mechel bowed to her with the greeting, "Festivals for joy, Sarah Leah."

"Holidays and appointed times for gladness, Reb Mechel," responded Sarah Leah. "Whence and whither, Reb Mechel?"

"I am coming from the House of Study," said Mechel, "on my way home to prepare my table and sit and celebrate."

Sarah Leah nodded her head and

sighed. I see she would like to say something to me, said Mechel to himself, and stood waiting. Seeing Mechel standing waiting, she said, "I just opened my window to see if it were time to leave, for I am celebrating at my neighbor's. I've prepared all sorts of good things, by your life, and I'm short of nothing in order to celebrate the Passover down to the last detail, and all the same I have to leave my own home and burden myself on others. It's not enough that I go burdening them every Sabbath and festival, when I suddenly appear among them for the Hallowing and the *Habdalah*; I have to go bothering them on Passover as well."

"Well, it may be a bother in your eyes," said Mechel, "but others regard it as fulfilling a commandment."

"A commandment, d'you say, Reb Mechel," responded Sarah Leah. "Do you suppose such commandments come easily to those who perform them? Here's a man who's busy all day long and never sees his wife and children; Passover comes, a time of rest; he wishes to sit quiet with his family when in jumps that widow all of a sudden, and sits down among them. May it be His Will that I shouldn't sin with my words, the years grow less and the world grows wearier and weaker. In times gone by a Jew would bring any number of guests home with him and there'd be room enough, and nowadays there's no room even for a lonely widow like me. I remember Passover at father's, may he rest in peace, when we'd have ten Jews and more there. And was my husband, may he rest in peace, accustomed to celebrate Passover without a guest? And I have to leave my home now. And am I short of anything here? If it's wine a body wants, here's wine and enough to spare for an extra glass; and if it's *matzot*, here are the extra special *matzot*; if it's meat, here's a turkey cock whose wings were absolutely

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hidden by fat. Why, what did the neighbors say, 'Sarah Leah, don't tie him to the foot of your bed or he'll drag you across Sambatyon River. That's no bird, that's an aurochs.' But as long as a woman's in her husband's house it's all worth while; and once he's dead even the whole of the world isn't worth while. At first I was thinking of inviting a guest, only folk would say, 'That old woman's a fiend from Hell, wants a man for to serve her well.'"

Mechel smiled, sighed and quoted the Talmud, "'Tis better to dwell in trouble than to dwell in widowhood." And although the saying was in Aramaic, a tongue Sarah Leah did not understand, she nodded her head like a person saying, "You've said it well and true." Mechel's an upright man and assuredly has some good thought in mind. And she added, "There's everything here, but if there's no master in the house what is there in the house? I often ask myself, 'Sarah Leah, what are you doing here and whom have you here?' I have reared children to their full size and they forsook me, so now I am bereft and forsaken, as a table after a feast. I thought of ascending to the Land of Israel to be near the holy places, and not to be thinking all the time of my loneliness; but then I am again faced by the difficulty — how can a woman go alone to a place where she is not known? All Israel are brethren, but nevertheless my heart troubles me at the thought of ascending alone." Mechel felt full of pity for her. He took hold of his right earlock and wished to say words of comfort to her. Yet he could get nothing out, began stammering and at last said, "Woman, is my luck any greater than yours? You, God be praised, are adorned as a bride and eat fine foods, while I am chidden and mourning as a widower. But no man in Israel has other to depend on than the loving kindness of the Holy and Blessed One. What has

any living person to grumble at? The festival should not be degraded." And from seeking to comfort her he began to feel sorry for himself and he said, "And what is a man? Something bare in the waste. Blessed be He that did not make me a woman. Blessed be His Name that I know how to hallow the wine and prepare for the Passover according to the Law. But now go to a tumbledown dwelling and warm up half-cooked food and sit on a broken bed, and then sit on a torn cushion and think you're like a king. It was with good reason the *Yalkut* says, 'All sufferings are hard to bear, but those of poverty are hardest of all; all sufferings come, and once they are gone leave things as they were; but poverty dims the eyes of a man.' I'm only saying this to balance your saying, 'I'm a woman.' And what's more the Holy and Blessed One has brought a bad cough upon me, may you never know its like, which takes away my breath and steals the life from me and will drive me out of the world." And before ever he finished speaking he had begun coughing. "Reb Mechel," said Sarah Leah to him, "don't stand out in the cold; winter may have gone but it's still chilly. Better come into the house and not stand about in the open." Mechel bowed his head between his shoulders, entered and found himself in a fine dwelling with handsomely decked cushions to recline upon, and a table covered with silverware in the middle of the room, and a bottle of wine on the table, candles burning in all the candlesticks and every corner of the room gleaming and shining with festival. His first words were in honor of the place, for he said, "How fine this room is where the hands of a woman have been employed." Sarah Leah at once rushed to show him all she had ready for the table. *Matzot* and bitter herbs lay there, parsley and *haroset*, eggs and a sheepshank and flesh and fish and a fat pudding and

borsht red as wine.

"And who," said Sarah Leah to Mechel, "needs all this array? I'm just about to go off and bother somebody else, but it's hard for me to forget that I'm a housewife, so I prepared a Passover for myself as though my husband were still here and he and I were celebrating like all other folk." Mechel's heart warmed within him, and he wished to say something but a furious fit of coughing overcame him. Sarah Leah stared at him with her two eyes and said, "Don't eat too much bitter herbs and don't eat sharp foods, Reb Mechel; you cough too badly. You know what you need? It's a glass of hot tea you need. But who have you at home to make something hot? Wait a few minutes and I'll put the kettle on for you."

But scarce had she finished her sentence when she struck herself on the mouth, crying, "What a silly head I have, to forget that we have to hallow the festival first. Maybe you'll celebrate here?" And since the thought had found expression in words she repeated, "Maybe you'll celebrate here?"

Mechel saw all the goodness of the housewife and could not move, as though his limbs were fastened to the spot where he stood. He began stammering and swallowed his indistinct answer. And Sarah Leah began preparing the feast as had been her wont when her husband was still with her.

So Mechel took the keys of the House of Study and put them away somewhere, staring meanwhile at the white cushions that Sarah Leah had prepared for reclining on during the celebration as though the Higher Light shone from them. Within a few moments he had let himself down among them, by reason of the thought that the woman would again ask him to celebrate with her. When she saw him at his ease she filled a glass of wine. With one eye on the wine and

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one on the household ware, he thought to himself, "What a fine spot this is, where a woman's hands do the tending." While thinking, he found the glass of wine at his hand, and his lips of themselves began repeating the hallowing of the wine.

Sarah Leah sighed with satisfaction; her face grew bright; her clothes were suddenly filled with her body, as happens with a rejoicing person, and she thought to herself, "How fine is a Jew's voice when he utters holy words." And within a moment she had brought him a ewer of water. He washed his hands, took a leaf of greenstuff, dipped it in salt water, broke the *matzot* in half, put one half in a cloth and hid it away for the dessert, lifted up the dish and began reciting, "This is the bread of affliction, the which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt."

And Sarah Leah wondered at herself, saying, "Just a little while ago I was preparing to leave my house, and now here am I sitting at home." And she watched Mechel's hands, observing how accustomed his hands were in holy things, until her face grew red and she lowered her eyes in shame. Then she filled the glasses afresh and uncovered the *matzot*. Mechel made her a sign. Sarah Leah blushed like a child, dropped her eyes to the prayer book and recited the Four Questions to their close, "This night we all do recline."

Thereupon Mechel set the dishes back in place and repeated in a loud and joyful voice, "We were the slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt"; and he continued reciting the Relation of the Departure from Egypt as far as the feast, interpreting to her in Yiddish all that required interpretation and seasoning the entire narration with parables and tales of wonders. His sufferings and troubles far from him, his head resting on the cushion, sweat caressing his earlocks and the cushion growing deeper beneath him, he continued.

His blood beat through his limbs and his heart might have leaped forth; a single hour here was preferable to his whole life in This World.

The Order of Passover came to its appointed end. The whole town was silent; the moon spread a canopy of light over the house of Sarah Leah. Mechel tunefully sang, "May His House soon be built," and Sarah Leah responded, "Speedily, speedily, in our own day soon." From the other houses of the street came the chorus, "God rebuild, God rebuild, rebuild Thy House soon." And the fantasy that is root and branch of Man led them to imagine that here was a strip of the land of Israel, and they were calmly and happily singing the Song of Songs.

The night passed. The morning birds rose to repeat their portions of song. In the home of Sarah Leah could be heard the voice of a man chanting the Song of Songs.

Here ends the tale of Mechel,
On whom God did bestow
The wealthy lady Mistress
Sarah Leah, the widow.

S. Y. Agnon

Illustrations

Title page. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hast kept us alive, preserved us, and brought us to this season." Detail of Fol. 24 recto.

Page 94. The blessing over wine and the sanctification (kiddush) of the festival, preceding the havdalah. Fol. 25 recto.

Page 95. The havdalah (separation) ceremony, held when the eve of Passover falls at the termination of the Sabbath. At the foot, a man with a cup of wine stands in front of a child holding a twisted candle; the lower panel contains the letters YKHNH, a mnemonic for the order of the rituals to be practiced at this time. Fol. 24 verso.

Page 96. The beginning of the havdalah. A man with a cup of wine sits in front of a child with a twisted candle. Detail of Fol. 26 recto.

Pages 98-99. Drinking the first cup of wine while leaning to the left. (However, the participants are not all leaning in the same direction.) Detail of Fol. 19 verso.

Pages 100-101. The celebrant breaks the matzoh for the afikomen. At the other end of the table a figure puts half the matzoh beneath the tablecloth. Detail of Fol. 20 verso.

Page 103. The blessing pronounced when the eve of Passover falls on the Sabbath. Fol. 21 verso.

Page 104. "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hast kept us alive, preserved us, and brought us to this season." Fol. 24 recto.

Pages 106-107. Detail of Fol. 24 verso, page 95.

Pages 108-109. "This is the bread of affliction." The celebrant on the left lifts the napkin from the basket of matzot that the boy next to him carries on his head. Note copies of the Haggadah on the table. Detail of Fol. 28 verso.

Pages 110-111. "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." The Hebrews build cities for Pharaoh. The artist has pictured a typical medieval scene. A governor on horseback, with an attendant, encourages a taskmaster to whip the slaves. Below bricks are being made, which are then raised by pulley. Detail of Fol. 30 verso.

Page 113. The five rabbis of Bne Brak who were so engrossed in the story of the Passover that they discussed it all night, until their disciples came to remind them that it was time for morning prayers. Fol. 31 verso.

Page 114. "They set on them hard labor." The Hebrew slaves build cities for Pharaoh. Fol. 43 recto.

Pages 116-117. "The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand." Detail of Fol. 46 recto.

Page 118. "This matzoh." A large symbolic and elaborately decorated matzoh, within which arms similar to those of Barcelona may be seen. A bearded man sits above with a matzoh in each hand. Below, within an arcade, are five musicians playing, from the left, pipe and tabor, viol, lute, bagpipes, and nakers (a type of kettledrum). At the four corners putti blow on trumpets, giving the appearance of the winds at the four corners of the world. Fol. 61 recto.

Pages 120-121. "When Israel came out of Egypt." Psalm 114. The Exodus is led by a walking figure carrying a banner, with another banner held by a mounted figure behind. Detail of Fol. 66 verso.