



I. Misunderstood Customs: 16 Drops of Wine (10 Plagues + Acronyms + Blood, Fire, Smoke)

1. The Family Participation Haggadah: A Different Night by Noam Zion and David Dishon, p. 101.

By spilling a drop of wine from the Pesach cup for each plague, we acknowledge that our own joy is lessened and incomplete, for our redemption had to come by means of the punishment of other human beings. Even though these are just punishments for evil acts, it says, “Do not rejoice at the fall of your enemy.”

2. Our Own Joy is Lessened and Incomplete”: The History of an Interpretation of Sixteen Drops of Wine at the Seder, *Hakirah*, by Zvi Ron

The disseminators of the “incomplete joy” explanation generally relate it to a reason given in the midrash for the recital on Sukkot of the full Hallel every day, but on Passover only on the first day, the rest having the abbreviated Hallel. The halachic reason for this, found in the Talmud (B. Arachin 10a, b), is that on Sukkot there are different Mussaf sacrifices offered each day, so each day of Sukkot is considered a distinct holiday, whereas on Pesach the same Mussaf sacrifice is offered each day. Another answer, however, is found in the midrashic literature....that the reason only an abbreviated Hallel is recited after the first day of Pesach is that the Egyptians drowned and “If your enemy falls do not exult” (Proverbs 24:17). This seems to be based on the episode mentioned in the Talmud (B. Megilla 10b, B. Sanhedrin 39b) that when the Egyptians were drowning in Yam Suf, God silenced the angels who wanted to sing, saying that it is not appropriate to do so when His “handiwork is drowning in the sea.” It should be noted, however, that the Israelites themselves did sing Shirat haYam at this point, and this was not viewed as problematic. Whatever the merits of this particular midrashic explanation for not reciting the full Hallel throughout Pesach, it does not seem to apply to the custom of removing drops of wine from the cup, since that is done on the Seder night when we do in fact recite the full Hallel and do not seem to limit our joy.

In the 1940s, 50s and 60s this explanation became ubiquitous in American Haggadot. The explanation is presented in the “Introductory Note” by Louis Finkelstein to a 1942 English-translation Haggadah: “The spilling of wine at the mention of the plagues is interpreted as a symbol of regret that the victory had to be purchased by the death of the Egyptians.” Finkelstein was “the dominant figure of Conservative Judaism in the twentieth century” and was chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary at the time he wrote that introduction. The Haggadah edited by David and Tamar De Sola Pool, first published in 1943 by the National Jewish Welfare Board “for members of the armed forces of the United States,” similarly explains that “a drop of wine of rejoicing is diminished from the cup in sign of pity for the suffering Egyptians.” This Haggadah, composed by a committee of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis for Jewish soldiers who were fighting in World War II, addresses the “compatibility of Jewish and American values.” The American value here is “the liberal ethic, believing that all people are essentially good,” so that punishing the Egyptians “seem s so vindictive and vengeful.” The Haggadah edited by Philip Birnbaum for the Hebrew Publishing Company in 1953 also states that the custom “is intended to stress the idea that we must not rejoice over the misfortunes that befell our foes.” The Birnbaum Haggadah was considered the standard traditional Haggadah for English speakers until the first Artscroll Haggadah was published in 1977 and, as noted above, also included this explanation....

3. Rabbi Eleazar of Worms: Drasha l'Pesach p. 101, Translation, Ron;

For each word a finger [goes] into the cup of wine and they spill out a drop, matching the sword of the Holy One, blessed be He, which has sixteen sides. And the sixteen mentions of plague in Jeremiah. [This custom] teaches us that we will not be injured. Based upon [this] our ancestors created this custom. And sixteen times the word hayyim [appears in Psalm 119], and sixteen people read the Torah each week, matching the sixteen lambs that are sacrificed in a week. Also, “She is [16 = כ"ו] a tree of life to those who grasp her” (Proverbs 3:18). And one should not ridicule the custom of our holy ancestors.

***Maharil** notes that we pray for G-d’s protection

4. “Our Own Joy is Lessened”

It would seem that the ultimate origin of the “incomplete joy” explanation is R. Yirmiyahu Löw. Although the “incomplete joy” explanation seems to express modern sensibilities and possibly political correctness, R.

Yirmiyahu Löw was not known for these characteristics, and in fact was known as a “recognized leader of Hungarian Orthodoxy” who was a vigorous opponent of Hasidism, Reform and Haskalah.

II. Deepening our Understanding of *Karpas*

5. Talmud Pesachim 114b

Why do we have two dips? So there be something noticeable for the young children.

6. Talmud Pesachim 116a

You pour the second cup, and here the child asks his father... “On all nights we dip one time [alt. we are not even obligated to dip one time]; on this night, we dip twice.

7. Tosafot, Pesachim 115a

- A. Anonymous: It is only to be something noticeable.
- B. R. Yosef Tov Elem: To exempt Maror from the blessing.

8. Rabbi Chiyzkiah de Silva, Pri Chadash to Orach Chaim 473

Even though we have nothing to answer to their question “why we dip before the meal,” nevertheless, because of it all, they will wake up to ask about other changes that they see...

9. Rabbi Yoel Sirkes, Bach to Orach Chaim 473

- A. For people are not accustomed to eating a vegetable before the meal... so the dipping before the meal is a way of [expressing] freedom, as free people dip before the meal to increase one’s appetite.
- B. We dip now for a taste, before the meal, so we won’t have to wait that whole time without eating at all.
- C. Citing **Maharal of Prague**: So that it will be noticeable when we do the second dipping for the commandment of Maror.

10. Rabbeinu Manoach, Hilchot Chametz U-Matzah 8:2

- A. “We have the custom of *Karpas* to commemorate the colourful coat that Jacob made for Joseph, that because of it the story devolved and our forefathers descended to Egypt [note: one of the colors was *Karpas*]...”
- B. “It could be that greens indicate military victory... and one early sage wrote: early warriors and men of valor used to carry grass on their heads. One hero would make a crown/wreath on his head after he defeated his enemies...”
- C. It is healthy and awakens us – the Jews had been sick and weak from slavery.

11. Rabbi David Brofsky, The Role of Karpas at the Pesach Seder (<https://ots.org.il/karpas-at-the-pesach-seder/>)

This confusion, regarding whether karpas functions as a symbol of freedom, or bondage, has other halachic ramifications. Is one to lean while eating karpas? Is it dipped in charoset, which according to the Talmud Bavli, reminds us of mortar, and according to the Talmud Yerushalmi, of blood (coat dipped in blood!)?

However, it seems that this confusion is typical of the seder night, as we vacillate between two themes of freedom and slavery. While these two themes are themselves independently important, apparently, they also cannot be separated from one other: one worthy of freedom is one who understands bondage. They aren’t separate messages, but one complex message- central to the seder experience.

12. Implications (R. Yehoshua Grunstein): Could you: A) Do something else to express freedom? B) Do you specifically need a light food? C) A vegetable? D) Something dipped? E) Can you just do something strange?

13. Suggestions:

- A. Rabbi Elazar Preil, Rabbi Pinchas Teitz: Use Bananas to prove blessing is *ha’adama*.
- B. Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss: Sing *Maoz Tzur*

My soul was sated with misery, My strength was spent with grief. They embittered my life with hardship, When enslaved under the rule of Egypt. But God with his mighty power Brought out His treasured people; While Pharaoh's host and followers Sank like a stone into the deep.	רעות שבעה נפשי, בגון כחי קלה חיי מררו בקשי, בשעבוד מלכות עגלה ובידו הגדולה הוציא את הסגלה חיל פרעה וכל זרעו ירדו כאבן במצולה.
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III. To see ourselves as if we left Egypt...

14. Talmud Pesachim 116b

In every generation a man is bound to see himself [להראות את עצמו] as though he personally had gone forth from Egypt, because it is said, and you shall tell your son in that day, saying: it is because of that which the L-rd did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.

15. Text of Maimonides

In every generation a man is bound to make himself look as if [להראות את עצמו]...

16. Seder Scenes by Professor R. David Golinkin <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/seder-scenes/#>

There is a widespread custom among Sephardic and Oriental Jews, according to which various members of the family at various points in the seder dress up as if they had just left Egypt. Other family members ask formal questions and “the wandering Jew” explains that he has left Egypt and is on his way to Jerusalem. These ceremonies differ in various details; what follows is a representative selection:

1) Benjamin II (Yisrael ben Yosef Benjamin) described such a ceremony “in Asia” ca. 1853. They dress up a young man in “*kley golah*” (Ezekiel 12:3: “gear for exile”) and before the recitation of the Haggadah, he appears before the participants with his staff in hand and his satchel on his shoulder. The father asks him:

“From where do you come, O pilgrim?”

“From the land of Egypt,” says the lad.

“Did you go out to freedom from the bondage of Egypt?”

“Yes indeed,” replies the lad, “and now I am a free man.”

“Where are you going?”

“I am going to Jerusalem,” he replies.

With great joy the participants begin to tell the story of the Exodus.

2) R. Ya’akov Sapir described the custom in San’a, Yemen in 1858:

The seder is observed as is the custom among all Jews. One of the members of the family takes a matzah and ties it in a scarf on his shoulder and walks around the house. The others ask him: “Why are you doing this?” And he replies: “So did our ancestors when they left Egypt in haste.”

3) The Jews of Morocco had the following custom:

After reading the Haggadah, all of the men put a stick with a bundle on their shoulders, and they leave the house in haste, running and shouting: “So did our ancestors leave Egypt, ‘their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders’” (Exodus 12:34).

4) Nahum Slouschz describes a similar custom in Libya before the seder and concludes:

“This custom is widespread in almost all oriental lands, and in every country there is a different *nusah* [melody].” Indeed, this custom was observed in the Caucasus, Iraq, Kurdistan, Djerba, Syria, and among the Sephardic Jews of Seattle.

However, surprisingly enough, this custom is first mentioned in Germany 650 years before Benjamin II described it in Asia, and it is documented in Poland in the 16th century and in Germany and Hungary in the 20th.

Rabbi Asher of Lunel states in his Sefer Minhagot written ca. 1210 in Provence:

I heard that in Allemagne (Germany), after eating *karpas* [green vegetable], they uproot the table and take the matzot and wrap them in coverings and bear them on their shoulders and walk to the corners of the house, and then they return to their places and recite the Haggadah.

R. Shlomo Luria (Lublin, 1510-1573) devoted one of his responsa (no. 88) to the laws of the seder:

After the meal he [the person leading the seder] takes out the hidden treasure, i.e. the *afikoman* as is, wrapped

in a cover, and he drapes it behind him and he walks approximately four cubits in the house and says: "So did our ancestors go with 'their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks.'"

In 1951, Prof. Alexander Scheiber documented similar customs among his students at the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest, who came from the Hungarian towns of Szatmar, Zemplen, Vatz, Tisfolgar, and Puntok. In the latter town, when they reached *Yahatz* [breaking the middle matzah], the father would wrap the afikoman in a scarf, put it on his shoulder, stand up, and say to his family in Yiddish: "*geimir, geimir!*" (Let us go! Let us go!).

This custom has survived among German Jews until today. When I lectured on this topic in Jerusalem before Pesach in 1991, a woman told me that in Karlsruhe, in southern Germany, her father would put the matzah wrapped in the *sedertuch* (white matzah cover) on his shoulder and say: "*So sind die Kinder Jisroel aus Mizraim gegangen, so war es*" (Thus did the Children of Israel leave Egypt, so it was).

IV. Giving out Candy

17. Talmud Pesachim 109a

It was related of R. Akiba that he used to distribute parched ears and nuts to children on the eve of Passover, so that they might not fall asleep but ask [the 'questions']

18. Wikipedia: Passover Seder

Families will follow the Haggadah's lead by asking their own questions at various points in the Haggadah and offering prizes such as nuts and candies for correct answers.

19. Rabbi Yoel bin Nun (my recollection from last year in Alon Shvut): The Talmud said that you give out nuts for good **questions**. So, on Seder night in the shul, R. bin Nun had people circulate giving out nuts to children who asked good questions, and he attempted to answer them.

V. Leaning

20. Talmud Pesachim 99b

Even the impoverished in Israel may not eat until he leans.

21. Wikipedia: Ancient Roman Cuisine

The dinner was consumed in a special dining room, which later was to be called triclinium. Here one would lie down on a specially designed couch, the lectus triclinaris. Around the round table, the mensa, three of these lecti were arranged in the shape of a horseshoe, so that slaves could easily serve, and a maximum of three diners would recline at each lectus. During the kingdom and early republic, the only people allowed a place on a lectus were men. By the late republic and imperial times, and especially among the aristocracy, women were permitted to recline during meals. Traditionally, women would dine sitting upright across from their husbands or fathers in chairs. More tables for the beverages stood beside the couches. All heads were oriented towards the central table, with left elbows propped on a cushion and feet at the outside of the dinner-couch. In this fashion at most nine people could dine together at one table. Further guests had to sit on chairs. Slaves normally had to stand.

22. Tur Orach Chaim 472, citing Raavyah (translation from R. Reuven Spolter)

Nowadays, as we are not accustomed in our land to lean, one sits in the normal manner and is not required to lean.

23. Rabbi Yosef Karo in Beit Yosef Orach Chaim 472 (translation ibid)

"[Ra'avyah's] is an individual [opinion] in this matter; meaning that the position of all the poskim is that one must always lean even nowadays."

24. Many people (I know of R. Yaakov Medan), mimic the ancient custom and use couches.