



THE NESIYA INSTITUTE
Passover Study Guide
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NEXT YEAR IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL?



**וַיְבִיאֵנוּ אֶל-הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן-לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת,
אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ.**

**He brought us to this place and gave us this land,
a land flowing with milk and honey.**

– Deuteronomy 26:9

**השתא הכא, לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל!
Now we are here, next year in the Land of Israel!**

– From the Haggadah

Prepared by Tami Dayan, Charles Herman, Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield, Ami Landau, and Leah Solomon

The Nesiya Institute ♦ www.nesiya.org ♦ info@nesiya.org
33 Tchernichovsky ♦ P.O. Box 10111 ♦ Jerusalem, Israel, 91101 ♦ 011-972-2-561-1996
220 Fifth Avenue, #1301 ♦ New York, NY 10001 ♦ 212-951-7128

Sources for Reflection

TELLING THE WHOLE STORY

According to the powers of comprehension of the child, thus should his father teach him: he begins with disgrace, and concludes with glory; and he expounds the passage [Deut. 26:5]: "A wandering Aramean was my father," etc., **until he concludes the whole portion.**

- Mishna Pesachim 10:4

A POSSIBLE FIFTH CUP

And now, in our own time, when we have been privileged to behold the mercies of the Holy Name Blessed be He and His salvation over us, in the establishment of the State of Israel which is the beginning of redemption...as it is written: And I shall bring you into the land... It is fitting and proper that we observe this pious act, the drinking of the fifth cup, as a form of thanksgiving.

- M. Kasher, *Israel Passover Haggadah*, 1957

LIVING RICHLY IN TRANSIT

Far from resenting his status in the gentile communities or, more accurately, the armed camps of the diaspora, the Jew ought to welcome it. What he may have inherited of nomadic centuries, the remarkable antennae he has grown for linguistic adaptations, his skills as an agent of change, his fascinating ability to live in time as others live in concrete space – these have equipped the Jew to live “in transit.” To those who accuse us of harboring divided loyalties, we answer that our loyalties are as divided as the possibilities of right action. To those who denounce us that we have never fully accepted the hopes or purposes of the nation-state in which we are citizens, we say that no nation-state so far established has produced hopes or purposes fully acceptable. A marginal condition can be a richly creative one.

- George Steiner, 1970

THE FIVE REDEMPTIONS

⁶ Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the Lord. I will **free** you from the labors of the Egyptians and **deliver** you from their bondage. I will **redeem** you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. ⁷ And I will **take** you to be My people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I, the Lord, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will **bring** you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the Lord." - *Exodus 6:6-8*

FOUR CUPS FOR FOUR REDEMPTIONS

There are four redemptions here – "I will free", "I will deliver", "I will redeem", "I will take" – corresponding to the four rulings that Pharaoh decreed against them. The sages instituted four cups corresponding to [these four redemptions] in order to fulfill the verse, "I will raise the cup of redemption and call out in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 116).

- *Midrash Exodus Rabbah 6*

THE WHOLE PORTION (THE UNCUT VERSION)

5 ... My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. 6 The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. 7 We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. 8 The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and wonders. 9. **He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.**

- *Deuteronomy 26:5 - 9*

YEARNING FOR ISRAEL (IN THE MAGGID)

Now we are here, next year in the land of Israel.

He brought us out from there so that he might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore to our fathers (Deut. 6:23).

- *The Haggadah*

ISRAEL AND WORLD JEWRY

Israel has brought us out of the ghetto, out of a sectarian mentality. It has created a visible political reality that involves all Jews in a common destiny. In an important sense, all Jews live in Israel. The way in which we define our lives as Jews in the Diaspora is significantly influenced by the type of Jewish society we build in Israel. - *David Hartman, "Spiritual Possibilities in the Land of Israel", 1990*

PEOPLE WITHOUT A LAND

Jewish identity in Israel has to contend with all the elements of life via the binding and sovereign framework of a territorially defined state. And therefore the extent of its reach into life is immeasurably fuller and broader and more meaningful than the Jewishness of an American Jew, whose important and meaningful life decisions are made within the framework of his American nationality or citizenship. His Jewishness is voluntary and deliberate, and he may calibrate its pitch in accordance with his needs.

- *A.B. Yehoshua, Haaretz, 2006*

THE DREAM OF A UNIQUE STATE

The State of Israel will be different than other States... because it is an idealistic State from its founding and its role will be the fixing of the entire world (Tikkun Olam) and everything in it and it will be a light to all nations.

- *Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, Orot, 1921*

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, 'NEXT YEAR' ?

"When we beseech God, 'Next Year in Jerusalem,' we mean that we hope to be there in the fullest sense - in body, soul, and thought. We pray that our situation will be different than it is today, when people dwell in Jerusalem, but are preoccupied with planning trips to America to raise funds..."

- *Rav Kook on a visit to the US in 1924, quoted in An Angel Among Men by Simcha Raz*

Questions to Consider: Next Year in Israel?

- How do you relate to the hope expressed in the Haggadah “Next Year in Israel”? What role does Israel play in your life and the life of your family? What role do you want Israel to play in your future?
- Do you think what is happening in Israel today can become a tool for tikkun olam? How can we strengthen the land of Israel as a vital context for improving the world as well as the Jewish people?
- Do Jews need a land of our own? The Jewish people survived for thousands of years without Israel. Rabbi Kasher believed that Jews should now be filling a fifth cup of wine in gratitude for the return of the Jewish people to Israel during the last century. Do you think we should bless a fifth cup of wine at the Seder? If so, what should we pray for?
- How can we strengthen our personal connection to the future of the Jewish people in the land of Israel? How can we stay positively engaged when the realities challenge our sense of hope?

The Nesiya Commentary

Why isn't Israel a bigger part of the Passover story in the Haggadah? How central should Israel be to our story and aspirations as Jews today? Should we make any blessings over a fifth cup of wine at our Passover Seders this year?

From the moment God first tells Abraham about the journey of his descendents from slavery to Eretz Yisrael, it is clear that the ultimate goal for the Jewish people is building a Jewish nation in Israel (Gen. 15:13-16). The Mishnah (the core text of the Talmud) also views Passover as the holiday which celebrates the Exodus from Egypt to Israel; the text (in Pesachim) prescribes that we tell the Passover story by expounding upon a passage in Deuteronomy (26:5 – 9) until one “concludes the whole portion.”

But what is “the whole portion”? The Haggadah seems to purposefully avoid expounding on the destination of the journey. The Haggadah elaborates on the verses from Deuteronomy which describe the liberation from Egypt (verses 5 – 8), but omits the final verse of the passage, which proclaims, God brought us to “this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (v. 9).

When we look closely at other passages of the Maggid section of the Haggadah, however, we see that the land of Israel is mentioned but only as a future aspiration.* The opening verses invoke a collective yearning: “Now we are here, next year in the land of Israel.” The closing section also links the Exodus only to the possibility of future settlement in Israel: “He brought us out from there so that he might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore to our fathers” (Deut. 6:23).

Why did the authors of the Haggadah go out of their way, it seems, to describe the journey toward Israel only as a future goal and not as an intrinsic part of our past? We can consider this question together with the mystery of a possibly missing fifth cup of wine in the Seder. What we learn leads us to wonder whether the Haggadah wants us to see Israel not even as a future goal but as a means to an even broader vision.

The meaning of drinking four cups of wine on Passover can be understood to minimize the Jewish people’s relationship with the land of Israel in both the past and the future. The Haggadah does not tell us why we drink four cups of wine. A legend (Midrash Shmot Rabbah) explains that the four cups

* There are two exceptions in the Maggid section which mention God having brought the Jewish people into the land of Israel. Both occur in the “dayenu” section, which are medieval additions to the maggid text, and neither quote the passage from Deuteronomy prescribed by the Mishna.

correspond to four terms of redemption which are expressed in God's promise to the Jewish people. (Exodus 6:6-7, "I will **free** you ..., and **deliver** you...I will **redeem** you..., and I will **take** you to be my people...") The midrash ignores the next Biblical verse, the culmination of the passage, which includes a fifth term of redemption and directly expresses the goal of the Exodus: "I will **bring** you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession" (Ex. 6:8).

An early story in The Talmud describes a Seder with five cups of wine. Based on this record, later commentators argue whether the Haggadah should have included a fifth cup; if there were a fifth cup, it would correspond to the fifth term of redemption, and the past and future settlement of the Jewish people in the land of Israel. But different sources record many disagreements regarding whether a fifth cup should be poured at all, and, if so, whether that wine should be drunk (as is permitted in the Sephardic tradition) or left symbolically on the table "until the time of Elijah" (as is common in the Ashkenazic tradition).

The Haggadah we read on Passover doesn't refer to a fifth cup. But the Seder includes a tradition of setting out a cup for the prophet Elijah, which some commentators believe takes the place of the missing fifth cup. The prophet Elijah, though, doesn't represent the settlement of the Jewish people in their homeland. Elijah's future role, according to Jewish tradition, is to herald the messianic redemption for the whole world. Instead of celebrating the Jewish people's journey to Eretz Yisrael, Elijah's symbolic presence expresses the yearning for a future in which all of humanity will benefit. With the inclusion of Elijah's cup, the particular and national story of the Jewish people on Passover expands to include the whole world.

The Passover celebration reframes the Jewish people's yearning to be in Israel as part of a greater universal vision. The Passover Seder views the land of Israel not as an ultimate goal, but as a vital means for improving both the Jewish people and the world.

But how can we possibly see Israel as a means to improve the world, when Israel is itself confronted by so many challenges? One response is that we can, and we do. By first taking care of ourselves, and our relationships with one another, we give greatest benefit to the world. We paradoxically make the greatest contribution when we are addressing needs and problems within our own family – both within and outside the land of Israel. This response, though, for increasing numbers of Jews, isn't satisfying. Many believe the Jewish people aren't playing a big enough role in addressing problems greater than our own. Some believe that precisely because the problems of the Jewish people and Israel are so entrenched, they find more meaning and can make a bigger difference addressing other crises in the world.

We hear in these differences the deepening debate today – throughout the Jewish world – over what role the land of Israel should play in our individual and collective journeys. On one hand, the land of Israel can no longer be the object of ancient and unrealistic yearning. On the other hand, the realities in Israel are far from the fulfillment of anyone's dreams.

We live during exceptionally challenging times, with equally exceptional opportunities. The relationship of the Jewish people with the land of Israel today challenges us to constantly define new goals and new responsibilities. We need to continue to dream, but we also need to act – even in the face of frustrating realities, some of which are deeply disappointing, and others which are terrifying.

Like the image of Israel in the Passover Seder, we need to maintain our optimism, and continue yearning for a future that is always out of reach. Like the Haggadah, we need to believe that our optimism is rooted in our past, but our greatest hopes for the future are still ahead of us.