

**To Be Seen or Not To Be Seen: Learning Part II**

The very unusual situation in the world this year has given me a new appreciation of stories about experiences that my grandparents had. In light of that I am sharing some questions about a passage in the Haggadah that speaks to me:

After telling the story of going out of Egypt (not merely reading it!) we are instructed:

**Text: Haggadah**

*In each and every generation a person is obligated to see (lir'ot) him/herself as if s/he personally went out of Egypt, as it is said "And you shall tell your child on that day, saying: It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I went out of Egypt" (Ex. 13:8).*

- What is the difference of experiencing something vs. appreciating someone else's experience?
- Is it possible to view oneself as having had an experience that we have not experienced? How might we achieve that? What actions and elements do we have at the Seder that give us an experience, not only verbal remembering?

**Alternative text: Rambam (Maimonides) Hilkhhot Chametz Umatzah 7:6**

*In each and every generation, a person must present (lehar'ot) him/herself as if s/he, himself, has now left the bondage of Egypt, as it is said: "and us He took out from there." (Deuteronomy 6:23).*

- Rambam gives a different instruction; rather than *Lir'ot* (to see) he instructs the participant to *Lehar'ot* (to present oneself, to be seen). How might this change the way we fulfill this instruction?
- Both the Haggadah and Rambam bring proof texts from the Torah. How do they differ, and how does the difference match their different instructions?
- What family stories from previous generations have received a new light this year under the new and unexpected and unforeseeable conditions? Do you see yourself or do you present yourself in those experiences?

*At the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem, we offer students of all backgrounds an opportunity to engage with Jewish texts in a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative environment. We help students gain the skills necessary for Jewish learning and spiritual growth as individuals and in their communities in North America, Israel, and around the world.*

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# Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center

## Conservative Yeshiva

# TORAH SPARKS

## Pesach 5780

**April 9-16, 2020 | 15-22 Nisan 5780**

Torah and Haftarah Readings for First and Second Day of Yom Tov  
Exodus 12:21-51 (Yom Tov Rishon) Leviticus 22:26-23:44 (Yom Tov Sheni)  
Maftir: Numbers 28:16-25 (both days)  
Haftarah: Joshua 5:2-6:1; II Kings 23:1-9, 21-25

**This week's Torah Sparks is a special edition of text learning for Pesach, written by Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Bible instructor at the Conservative Yeshiva. We hope it helps you celebrate the Seder wherever you may be.**

**Text Learning****Who Is My Aramean Father?**

The central text of the Haggadah is a passage from Devarim. It is the statement made by a person who brings his first fruits to the Temple.

**Text: Haggada /Deut 26:5-8**

*(5)...My father was an Aramean about to perish/a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt, and he sojourned there with a few people, and he became there a great and mighty and multitudinous nation. (6) And the Egyptians did evil to us and abused us and set upon us hard labor. (7) And we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our abuse and our trouble and oppression. (8) And the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and portents.*

- Why do you think that these details were chosen to be told in this concise “history of the Jewish people” that is the basic text of the Haggadah? Why do you think that these words are recited by a person bringing the first fruits?
- Who is the father who is called a perishing Aramean? Why do you think that he was described in this manner?
- In Shmot (Exodus) 2:23 we are told “*the Israelites groaned from the bondage and cried out, and their plea from the bondage went up to God.*” Compare that with the statement in v. 7 of our text. Who was the addressee of the cry according to each of these texts? How would you explain the discrepancy?
- Who is completely missing from the description of taking us out of Egypt? Why do you think that he is missing from the story told in the Haggadah?

**The opening line of the Torah text is vague and can be understood in several ways as we will see in the commentaries: (The translation is that which fits with the comment).**

**Commentary: Rashi Devarim 26:5**

***An Aramean perished my father*** – He mentions the loving kindness of the Omnipresent saying, *An Aramean perished my father, which means: "Laban wished to exterminate the whole nation" when he pursued Jacob. Because he intended to do it, the Omnipresent accounted it unto him as though he had actually done it, for as far as the nations of the world are concerned the Holy One, blessed be He, accounts unto them intention as an actual deed.*

- Why do you think that Rashi (following a rabbinic reading) assumed that the father referred to by the Torah is Yaakov?
- Reading the text as Rashi does, what aspect of the Pesach story does this text highlight?

**Commentary: Rashbam Devarim 26:5**

***My father was a wandering/lost Aramean:*** *i.e., my father, Abraham, was an Aramean, who wandered as an exile from the land of Aram.*

*So it is written [that God said to Abraham] (Gen 12:1) "Go forth from your native land," and it is written [that Abraham said] (Gen 20:13), "When God strayed me from my father's home." ... In other words, [verse 5 means that] our forefathers came to this land from a foreign country, and God was the one who gave it to us.*

Aram is in Syria of today. Is it possible to define Avraham as an Aramean?

Reading the Torah text, is it possible to read the passage about Avraham? Why do you think that the Haggadah preferred to assume that the father is Jacob?

**Commentary: Ibn Ezra Devarim 26:5**

***Lost (oved)*** *is an intransitive verb. If the 'Aramean' referred to Lavan, then the verb would be in the transitive hif'il or pi'el form. Besides, what sense is there to say, "Lavan tried to destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt"? Lavan never considered going down to Egypt! The plausible interpretation is that 'the Aramean' refers to Yaakov, as if Scripture had said, "When my forefather was in Aram, he was lost" — meaning, he was a pauper, without property. Compare, "give strong drink to him who is lost" [Proverbs 31:6], where it is immediately followed by, "let him drink, and forget his poverty" [Proverbs 31:7]. Thus the 'lost Aramean' was my forefather. The intent of this passage is: I did not inherit this land from my forefather, for he was a pauper when he came to Aram, and he was a stranger in Egypt, where he was few in number. Afterwards, he became a great nation; and you, God, brought us out of slavery, and gave us the good land...*

- Which commentary is Ibn Ezra criticizing? What is his argument?
- According to Ibn Ezra's reading, what aspect of the Pesach story does this text amplify?

**And a final question (The Seder is all about questions):**

We are not instructed to read the story but rather ‘*lidrosh*’ (to exegete) the story. Why? How do you do it? What do you add to the model of the Haggadah?