

# The Seder Night Explanatory Survival Kit

Seder Night is up there as one of the most celebrated nights of the Jewish year. It celebrates the birth of our nation and the Divine kindness in taking us out of Egypt with miracles and instilling within us an internal quality of freedom. Seder Night has a special spiritual level and is a key to the transmission of our golden heritage to the next generation. Below is a guide to the background, laws and some insights of Seder Night to help us take advantage of this great opportunity. [The halachos are mostly from the Mihsnah Brurah and Rav Gershon Meltzer's shiurim in Mir; he was immensely kind in personally checking over most of the halachos in this Document].

## 0) Intro to Seder Night

During the course of Seder Night we fulfil three Torah mitzvos (discussing the Exodus, eating matzah, and [if one is full] birkas ha'mazon - and when Seder Night is on Friday night four, *kiddush*[i]), we fulfil three main Rabbinic mitzvos (eating marror, drinking the four cups and reciting Hallel[ii]), and many other general and subsidiary laws and accepted customs (*karpas*, leaning, washing hands, etc.). The Sfas Emes would note the irony in the name 'seder night' ('night of order'). On the night when we relive our supernatural Exodus we call the night *seder* (order). For the 'natural order' of the Jewish People is that of the supernatural. Reb Levi Yitzchak MiBerdichev asked why we call the festival *Pesach*: after all, the Torah constantly refers to it as *Chag Ha'Matzos*? He answered that Hashem and Klal Yisrael are like a married couple, so to speak - each wants to give credit to the other. Thus, Hashem calls the Yom Tov *The Festival of Matzos* as a tribute to our leaving Egypt in a hurry (and perhaps the korban pesach too). Whilst we ascribe the Exodus to Hashem's doing: we name the festival *Pesach*, after Hashem *passing over* the houses of the Jewish firstborns during *makkas bechoros*. The order of the seder night is very precise and forms a whole sequence: many recite in song each stage at the start of the evening.

## 1) KADESH - We make *Kiddush* on a cup of wine

**Background:** Kiddush sanctifies the day (or notes/recognises the holy day's arrival[iii]). This is also the first of the four cups of wine - a mitzvah whose essence is either a mitzvah 'to drink four cups to express freedom' or else 'to recite the important sections of the night over cups of wine to lend importance to them'. [iv] There is also discussion as to whether the four cups of wine are four separate mitzvos or one large mitzvah (which affects how many brachos we make)[v].

**Laws:** Everyone should hold a cup during Kadesh. Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that one should sit during *kiddush* on Seder Night (if Seder Night falls on Friday night one stands for the *Vayechulu* paragraph). Before Kiddush one should have in mind five things: a) to fulfil the mitzvah of kiddush, b) to fulfil the mitzvah of the first of the four cups, c) to fulfil the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov*. [If it is too hard to think of these three, then just think "I am fulfilling the mitzvah of my Creator."] d) that the bracha of *shehechyanu* applies to Yom Tov and the mitzvos of the seder e) that if you forget to lean that you want to drink another cup. Remember to recline comfortably to your left, even if you are a lefty. The cup should hold a minimum of 86ml. Ideally one should drink the entire cup, but the majority of the cup suffices. It is ideal to drink the entire cup without pausing, but one has up to four minutes to drink it. After Kadesh one should not eat; non-alcoholic drinks are acceptable (have them in mind first so one does not need to make a separate brachah on them). It is generally best for men to have wine for the four cups, but if this is hard or will ruin concentration during Maggid, one can dilute them slightly with grape juice. If one cannot even use a cup that has majority wine, or at least enough wine to be able to taste the wine, one can use grape juice. Though women are obligated in the mitzvah of the four cups there is a dispute among various *poskim* as to whether women are obligated to recline; certainly if they forget to recline they do not need to drink another cup.

**Insight:** The four cups represent the four expressions of redemption. But *why* do we celebrate four separate expressions of redemption: surely these are just four promises of one redemption? The Netziv answers that the four expressions were actually four *different stages* of the redemption, and he then enumerates and defines these different stages. The first stage was *vehotzaisi*: "I will take you out of the **burden** of Egypt." This was achieved when Pharaoh relaxed the harshness of the slavery and

repealed the edict under which the Bnei Yisrael had to make their own bricks; the extra **burden** was removed. This stage of redemption occurred at the end of the fourth plague of *arov* (animal invasion). Nevertheless, the slavery still continued. The next stage of redemption was *vehitzalti*: "I will save you from your **work**." This was achieved when Pharaoh dropped all slave-labour, and started respecting Bnei Yisrael - the **work** had stopped. This occurred after the plague of hail - plague number seven. Next comes "I will redeem you with an outstretched hand," which refers to the Jewish People no longer being under Pharaoh's dominion and was fulfilled after the plague of the firstborns. Although all slavery had ended after the hail, the Jewish People were still technically subjects of Pharaoh and under his dominion. The plague of the firstborns meant that we were totally free from Egyptian rule - Pharaoh wanted us out. The fourth expression of redemption is *velakachti*: "I will take you for Me as a nation," which, the Netziv writes, is a reference to the giving of the Torah - our eternal covenant and 'bond' with Hashem.

## 2) URCHATZ & KARPAS – We wash our hands and then eat *Karpas*, dipped in salt water

**Background:** The prevalent custom is for everyone to wash their hands, though there is a rare custom for only the leader of the seder to do so (either way, no *bracha* of *al netillas yadayim* is recited<sup>[vi]</sup>). The dipping here is to encourage the kids to ask: that they notice something out of the ordinary that arouses their curiosity and therefore they begin to ask questions about all aspects of the seder night. For the main method of relating the story of the Exodus is via question and answer, as it says in the passuk *and when your child asks you...* (Mishnah Brurah 473:21). *Karpas* is a type of vegetable, and can be read as *samech parech*, which refers to the 600,000 Jews who were enslaved with hard labour (M.B. 473:20).

**Laws:** The salt water should preferably be made before Shabbos/Yom Tov. If not, then use a low concentration of salt (M.B. 473:21). Less than a *kezayis* of *Karpas* is eaten (for Ashkenazim at least), though how much a *kezayis* is here depends on which vegetable is used. The *Karpas* should be held with the fingers (it is thus preferable to use a type of vegetable that is normally eaten with one's fingers, i.e. not a potato) and no after-brachah is made. Before making the brachah of *ha'adamah* one should have in mind a) that the brachah should include the *maror* eaten later and b) to fulfil mitzvah of eating *karpas*. One may recline if one wishes.

**Insights:** Though not everyone seems to be careful to wash their hands before eating food dipped in the seven liquids all year round (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 158 for relevant laws), on Pesach most people are careful to wash their hands before *karpas*. Rav Yitzchak Merski<sup>[vii]</sup> posits that one can understand this via an insight of the Maharal. The Maharal writes that Chazal ascribed such importance to the mitzvah of washing one's hands because the hands are the 'first part of a person': the hands are the part of our bodies that reach highest, and indeed Adam's skin was initially made from fingernails. And the way we treat the beginning of any given process is most critical: for everything follows on from the start. Further, Pesach is also a 'start' – it is our national birthday, the time we became a nation. Thus, on the festival of beginnings we take a step up in honouring the sanctity of beginnings via washing hands before *Karpas*.

## 4) YACHATZ – The middle matzah is broken

**Background:** The leader of the seder breaks the middle matzah; half of it is returned to the table and the other (preferably larger) half is hidden for the *Afikoman*. In breaking the matzah we fulfil the description of matzah as 'a poor man's bread – eaten in bits' (M.B. 473:57).

## 5) MAGGID – We read the Haggadah and relate the story of the Exodus

**Background:** Maggid forms the crux of our seder night. Men, women<sup>[viii]</sup> and children are all summoned whilst we tell of the amazing story of the Exodus. Based on the text of the Rambam's Haggadah, some have the custom to act out parts of the seder. The overarching structure of this retelling is (as the Gemara rules) 'start with the bad times and end with the good times' (a purposeful thematic juxtaposition of the two: tragedy causes redemption – Maharsha). Thus, we begin from Avraham's idolatrous roots and end with the glorious Exodus. If some do not understand the Haggadah then it is crucial to translate and explain for them (see Rema 473:6).

**Laws:** Before Maggid one should have in mind to fulfil the mitzvah of telling over the story of the Exodus. This includes relating: a) the wickedness of the Egyptians, b) the sufferings they inflicted on

us, c) the miraculous plagues and d) our thanks and praise of Hashem. We do not recline during Maggid. During the spilling of the wine (at the ten plagues) one should think that Hashem should protect us from such terrible plagues and bring them upon our enemies. At the paragraph '*bechol dor vador*' one should visualise being in slavery in Egypt and then being redeemed by Hashem. The cup of wine should be held from '*lefikach*', but if this is difficult, at least from the start of the brachah of '*asher gaalanu*'. When drinking the second cup one should have in mind a) to fulfil the mitzvah of drinking the second cup, and b) if one will be drinking wine or grape juice during the meal, one should have this in mind too. Recline! If you did not recline, drink another cup immediately without a brachah. Note: many Sefardim have the practice to make only two brachos of *borei peri ha'gafen* on the four cups - on the first and third cups. Because either Ashkenazim hold that the cups are four different mitzvos or because there is too large a gap between the cups, Ashkenazim make separate brachos on each of the cups (see footnote 5).

**Insights: Ha Lachma Anya:** Note the ostensibly repetitive line 'this year we are here - next year in Eretz Yisrael. This year we are slaves - next year we will be free'. The two lines hint to the two parts of exile (*galus*), as outlined by the Ramban in his introduction to Shemos: physically being distanced from our Land and (the main facet) being spiritually enslaved to the *yetzer hara*: not reaching our real spiritual potentials. The line '*if we had not been redeemed we would still be slaves to Pharaoh*' refers to this spiritual enslavement: we'd still have the slave mentality that quashes our hopes and aspirations. No Jewish notion of *simcha* would be complete and genuine if others are unable to celebrate (hence our obligation to give money to the poor before each Yom Tov). Thus, we open our houses to the poor, saying '*anyone who is needy, let them come and eat.*'

**Mah Nishtanah:** The child asks four questions in the *mah nishtanah* on seder night - but when do we answer? The Vilna Gaon explains that there is really only one question being asked. The child notices a contradiction: on the one hand we behave like royalty (we lean and dip twice), but on the other hand we act like slaves (we eat *maror* and matzah). Thus, the child is asking why we do these things that give mixed messages? The answer is that we were slaves in Egypt - so we do things to remember the slavery - and Hashem took us out - so we do actions that express our freedom.<sup>[ix]</sup>

**The 4 Sons:** Why do we give the wicked son such a harsh response - after all, how is his question so different to that of the Chacham? The Chassam Sofer picks up on the word *zos* (which always means 'pointing with one's finger') in the question of the Rasha, and explains the following. When it comes to the sons' questions in the Torah, the pessukim say 'if your son shall ask you *tomorrow*'. The exception is the Rasha, where there is no mention of *tomorrow*. Accordingly, the Rasha's problem is that he stands there pointing to the Korban Pesach whilst it is being offered) and refuses to take part until he knows the reasons behind it. Whilst all the other sons are happy to ask *tomorrow* (after the korban has been offered), the Rasha cannot admit that there is something beyond his depth and understanding and therefore refuses to take part meanwhile. This is why we give the Rasha such a harsh answer - we make him realise that he is not the centre of the world: that there is higher logic than his.

### **The 10 Plagues:**

The following is mainly taken from the Me'am Loez, seasoned with some other sources too. Although many deeper ideas have been put forward, the basic purpose of the plagues was to show Hashem's mastery over all the elements of the world: water, land, sky, animals and people. Each plague also punished the Egyptians for their acts of cruelty to the Bnei Yisrael. There is a *machlokes* between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nechemiah in the Midrash as to whether each plague lasted for 7 days or 24 days.

1) **Dam** (blood) - Rabbi Nechemiah says that all forms of water turned into blood. Even saliva turned to blood, and the Egyptian idols filled up with blood too. In addition, the Egyptians' clothes were stained by their beds having collected blood. Bnei Yisrael became wealthy by selling water to the Egyptians. The plague of blood punished the Egyptians for banning Jewish women from immersing themselves in the *mikveh*, as well as for throwing the Jewish babies into the river. When Pharaoh's magicians copied this plague by creating their own blood it was only an optical illusion. They never created real blood - the fish in their 'blood' did not die.

2) *Tzfardeya* (frogs) - even a cup of water which an Egyptian was holding filled up with frogs. The frogs managed to break through walls to get into people's houses. They even went inside some people's bodies and made them impotent, as a punishment for banning the Bnei Yisrael from having children. According to Rabbi Akiva there was one giant frog which split in two, and each subsequent frog would split in two when struck, until the land was full of them. Why did the Egyptians continue hitting them? The Steipler Gaon answers that anger completely circumvents logic. The word *tzfardeya* comes from the Aramaic words *tzafra* and *da* (meaning 'morning' and 'know') for the frogs had croaking shifts, and it would be clear to all when morning had arrived because the night-shift frogs stopped croaking and handed over the baton to their morning-croaking colleagues. The plague of frogs punished the Egyptians for preventing Jewish women from giving birth - Jewish women had to give birth in secret and could not scream to alleviate their labour pains. Therefore, the Egyptians themselves were disturbed by the incessant croaking (screaming) of the frogs. This was also a punishment for the cries of Bnei Yisrael after seeing their babies mercilessly thrown into the river.

3) *Kinnim* (lice) - there were either 14 or 24 types of lice which wreaked havoc in Egypt, and the smallest one was the size of a chicken egg. The lice attached themselves to the bodies of the Egyptians so tightly that even showering did not remove them. This plague punished the Egyptians for forcing the Bnei Yisrael to sweep the dust off the streets, as well as for not allowing Bnei Yisrael to shower.

4) *Arov* (wild animals) - many different types of animals came to Egypt for this plague, and even those which would not normally live together made peace with each other to bombard the Egyptians. The Egyptians realised that the animals did not attack the Jews, and began asking Jews to escort them wherever they went. However, the animals were given the capability to discern between Jews and Egyptians, so they still attacked the Egyptians. When the Egyptians saw this violent herd of beasts approaching they closed their doors and windows to make sure that they could not enter their houses. Therefore Hashem sent some form of sea beasts to break open the houses and expose the Egyptians to the marauding herds. Many Egyptians were killed by the wild animals. This plague punished the Egyptians for sending Bnei Yisrael out into the forests to trap wild animals so that the animals would attack them. It was also a punishment for Pharaoh's mass slaughter of 300 Jewish babies in order to bathe in their (mixed together) blood when he contracted *tzaraas*. Finally, the mingled herds of all different animals punished the Egyptians for their widespread sexual immorality and adulterous practices; the society was one of over-mingling.

5) *Dever* (animal epidemic) - the domesticated Egyptian animals died in this plague. No Jewish cattle died at this time, and even animals which were dying anyway survived for the duration of the plague so that it would be clear that the plague did not affect the Jews whatsoever. This plague punished the Egyptians for forcing Bnei Yisrael to shepherd their herds for obscenely long hours in order to give them no opportunity to have relations with their spouses in order to procreate. It also punished the Egyptians for stealing the Jews' cattle.

6) *Shechin* (boils) - the boils suffered by the Egyptians included *tzaraas*, and took up residence on every part of the Egyptians' bodies, so much so that it became too painful for them to bathe. Pharaoh's magicians actually died from these boils, for it was upon their advice that the Jewish babies were thrown into the river. This plague punished the Egyptians for forcing the Jews to clean the Egyptians in the bath. Furthermore, as a punishment for intentionally preventing the Jews from having babies, these boils prevented the Egyptians from having relations with their spouses.

7) *Barad* (hail) - the hail miraculously contained both ice and fire. Moshe warned the Egyptians of the plague of hail and told them to bring their belongings indoors. Although Pharaoh sent messengers ordering the Egyptians to leave everything outside, some people feared the word of Hashem more than that of Pharaoh (Meshech Chochmah). In fact, Hashem made the hail fall only in outdoor areas - it did not fall on anything covered by a roof (Brisker Rav). When the Egyptians saw that their cattle was doomed they slaughtered their animals, hoping at least be able to eat them. However, as they were carrying the animals home on their backs to eat, huge birds came and snatched the carcasses from their owners. The Egyptians who did stay outside were frozen to death by the hail's ice and then burnt by its fire. This plague punished the Egyptians for forcing the Jews to plant gardens and vineyards. Additionally, because the Egyptians stoned the Jews and made them cry out in pain, they were pelted by hailstones and shaken by the loud booming of the thunder.

8) *Arbeh* (locusts) - all seven types of locust took a trip to Egypt to devour the Egyptian crop for this plague. Normally, locusts do not enter houses, but the locusts in this plague knew no bounds - they went into houses too. This plague punished the Egyptians for forcing the Jews to attend to their fields.

9) *Choshech* (darkness) - normal darkness does not have an existence in and of itself; it is simply an absence of light, but the plague of darkness was a new creation, a tangible form of darkness which could not be removed by lighting candles (Sforno). The plague was even more painful because no Egyptian helped his friend out (Chidushei HaRim). More than that, it cut the Egyptians off from their material possessions, which formed the basis of their self-image (Rav Lippa Rabinowitz). During the final three days of this plague the darkness was so thick that it stifled movement. The Bnei Yisrael were unaffected by the darkness; they had light wherever they went. This plague punished the Egyptians for forcing the Jews to work late into the night, as well as forcing them to hold torches for them in the streets at night.

10) *Makkas Bechoros* (the plague of the firstborns) - all Egyptian firstborns died in this plague. Since many children were born as a result of adulterous relationships, many Egyptians found out who their real children were in this plague. Why is *makkas bechoros* the only plague which has the prefix '*makkas*'? The Midrash (quoted in Tosafos Shabbos 87b) notes that when the firstborns heard Moshe's warning about the imminent plague of the firstborns, they rebelled against Pharaoh to try and force him to let the Jews go free, and many firstborns died in this rebellion. It is this rebellion that we hint to with the extra word '*makkas*' (Birkas Chaim). The *Ohr Hachaim* gives a profound explanation as to why Hashem 'personally' performed the plague of the firstborns. Evil can only survive if it is connected to good. Otherwise, it is severed from Hashem and has no survival or existence in this world. In the plague of the firstborns, Hashem revealed Himself to the Egyptian firstborns, and every spark of goodness in the Egyptians automatically flew out to its Source - Hashem, leaving plain evil, which cannot exist if detached from good. So the 'natural' result was death, hence the way the Torah phrases the procession of events in a passive tone (*at midnight I will go out in Egypt, and all firstborns will die* - Shemos 10:4-5), for the natural outgrowth of Hashem revealing Himself was death. The Egyptians' shortfall was their refusal to admit truth, and their antidote and ultimate punishment was unequivocal exposure undeniable truth.

**Datzach Adash Be'Achav:** Rabbi Yehudah ascribed a mnemonic to the ten plagues: *Detazah Adash Be'Achav*. Why break them up into these three groupings? The *Haga'os Maimoniyos* cites several explanations: the Ra'avan writes that the first group were performed via Aharon, the second group via Moshe without his staff, and the third via Moshe with his staff. The Abarbanel explains that the groups represent the progressive submission of Pharaoh: for the first group Hashem had to command Moshe to 'wake up early in the morning' to catch Pharaoh. For the next group it was sufficient to tell Moshe to 'go to Pharaoh,' and by the final group of plagues no introduction was necessary (by the end Pharaoh was searching for Moshe). Others focus on the different goals of these three groups and how they showed Hashem's supremacy over all aspects of the physical world.

#### 6) RACHTZAH - We all wash our hands

**Background:** Washing hands before eating bread (matzah in our case) is either an added facet of cleanliness and *kedusha* or else a Terumah-inspired measure to ensure that Kohanim (will) eat their Terumah in a state of ritual purity (see M.B 158:1). Even if one has washed their hands already for *karpas*, one still washes them again due to the time-lapse during Maggid (see M.B. 473:6). All the laws for the next stages of the seder should be recounted now.

**Laws:** One may not speak from washing hands until after *korech*, unless it involves these mitzvos.

#### 7) MOTZI, MATZAH -We eat the Yom Tov *lechem mishneh* and we fulfil the Biblical mitzvah to eat matzah on the 1st night of Pesach

**Laws:** One should have in mind to fulfil one's *bracha obligation* by listening to the brachah, and the leader of the seder should have in mind to include everyone in his brachos. Have in mind to fulfil the Torah mitzvah to eat matzah on the first night of Pesach - if you did not have this in mind you should eat the matzah again. On the first night one must eat at least 25g, but it is a mitzvah to eat a full two *kezeisim* (30g). It's best to eat a little more, since some matzah gets stuck between the teeth. For a young child or ill person, 17g is enough. (On the second night in the Diaspora it is enough to have 15g, while a child or ill person only needs to have 10g). Have in mind that the brachah applies to *korech* and the *afikoman* too, and do not forget to recline! If one did not recline, another

must be eaten, this time reclining! One should eat the matzah within two minutes, but four minutes suffices. Note that according to several Rishonim all matzah eaten on Seder Night is a mitzvah (even beyond the normal obligation); the Gra holds that the same holds true of the entirety of Pesach. According to strict halacha, only the Seder Night matzah must be *shmurah*.

**Insights:** In *ha lachma anya* we call the matzah ‘the bread of affliction that we ate in Egypt.’ The Egyptians fed us matzah as a cheap, filling diet. Yet when we left Egypt we left in such a hurry that we could only bake matzos. The Sforno notes that (in a microcosm of the central theme that pain and suffering are footsteps to redemption) the very symbol of our slavery became the symbol of our freedom. Similarly, Rabbi Isaac Bernstein zt”l noted that *matzah* & *chametz* are comprised of the same ingredients. Yet one is a Torah mitzvah and ingrains one with *emunah*, whilst eating the other carries a hefty punishment. The lesson is that we all have talents and skills – but our success depends on how we employ them.

#### 8) MARROR – We eat bitter herbs, dipped in *charoset*

**Background:** The Marror represents our bitter slavery, whilst the *charoset* represents the cement that we worked with in Egypt - this is why one should make a thick *charoset* (Rema 473:5). The *charoset* is made from fruit that represent Bnei Yisrael in Shir Hashirim, such as apples, figs, nuts and pomegranates (Rema *ibid.*)

**Laws:** One should eat 27g, not reclining, as quickly as possible, but in no more than 4 minutes. Before the brachah have in mind a) to fulfil the mitzvah to eat *maror* and b) that the brachah should apply to *korech* too. One may use lettuce for Marror (in many ways this is easier to eat such quantities) for when left for a while it becomes bitter-tasting: for this reason the Chazon Ish used to insist on buying older lettuce. Do not use any bitter herbs that might be too dangerous due to their bitterness.

**Insights:** Someone asked their friend ‘do you eat your matzah with joy?’ ‘Of course I do – it’s a mitzvah and I’m happy to fulfil it.’ ‘So do you eat your marror with joy too?’ Sometimes even though times are hard the fact that we know that Hashem is looking after us and guiding history to its goal, should imbue us with a sense of joy too.

#### 9) KORECH – We eat a sandwich of matzah and marror (the McHillel)

**Background:** Here we fulfil Hillel’s view that the mitzvah is to eat matzah and marror together (the verse *on matzah and marror one should eat it* is to be taken as a literal command to eat the three simultaneously). Yet this is only a remembrance of what we’d do in Temple times - for due to an intricate Talmudic discussion, one cannot actually fulfil a combination of matzah and marror nowadays: for matzah is Biblically-mandated, whilst marror is of Rabbinic obligation (until we have the korban pesach, *bimheira be’yamaeinu*), see M.B. 575:16. There are different customs as to whether *charoset* makes it into this sandwich (see Shulchan Aruch 575:1 and M.B. 575:18-19).

**Laws:** One should eat 15g of matzah (some say 9g). Recline - if you forgot, you need to eat again, reclining. It should be eaten as quickly as possible but in no more than 4 minutes. Regarding the marror there are differently opinions: most opinions require a *kezayis* to be eaten (that’s the same as that which is eaten for the mitzvah of marror), though others hold that any amount of marror suffices.

**Insights:** The passuk cited here refers to the Pesach Sheini. Why not select the passuk in Bo referring to the first Korban Pesach? The Belzer Rebbe explains that this is a form of prayer: that if we are still conducting seder night in our own homes and not the Mikdash we should at least merit to offer the korban Pesach Sheini in the Temple, may it be rebuilt speedily.

#### 10) SHULCHAN ORECH – We eat the meal (customarily beginning with egg dipped in salt water)

**Background:** As with every other Yom Tov (and Shabbos) meal, this meal honors the day and allows us to feel a sense of physical completion to mirror the spiritual completion of the day (Ramchal, Maharal). The custom is to begin the meal with an egg dipped in salt water. It is praiseworthy to recline during this meal but one does not have to. Try to speak about things relevant to Pesach, if possible.

**Insights:** Why the egg? The Mishnah Brurah cites that this either is because *egg* in Aramaic is *beiya*, which means *will*, for it was purely due to Hashem's Will that we were redeemed. Also, the egg is a subtle form of mourning over the absence of the Korban Pesach and Beis Hamikdash. The Maharam would explain that the egg is unique in that the more it is cooked the harder it gets. This alludes to the Jewish People's resilience despite persecution: the more we are victimized the stronger our faith becomes. The Ishbitzer Rebbe would explain that an egg has 'two births': it is formed within a shell inside the mother and then it is pushed out into the world. This represents the two parts of our Exodus: physically leaving Egypt and being spiritually redeemed.

#### 11) TZAFUN – We eat the Afikoman matzah

**Background:** This is a remembrance of the matzah eaten with the Korban Pesach: some say that it is also a remembrance of the Korban Pesach itself. This is why we eat it at the end of the meal – for the Korban Pesach was to be eaten on a (just about) full stomach. Rashi and the Rashbam hold that it is with the Afikoman that one fulfills the Biblical mitzvah to eat matzah (Shulchan Aruch 477 and Sha'ar Tzion 4).

**Laws:** One should eat 30g. Have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah of eating the *afikoman*. Recline! If you forgot to recline, eat another one, this time reclining (unless you have already done *mayim achronim* or started *bentching*). One should try to finish eating the *afikoman* before halachic midnight. One may not eat or drink after the *afikoman*, but water and tea are ok.

#### 12) BARECH- Birkas Hamazon (*bentching*) with the festival (& sometimes Sabbath) additions

**Background:** This is the mitzvah to thank G-d after eating bread. We attest to our faith in G-d and His role throughout our history.

**Laws:** have in mind a) to fulfil the mitzvah of Birkas Hamazon and b) to fulfil the rabbinic obligation to drink the third of the four cups. The cup of wine should be held throughout *bentching*, but if this is too difficult, one can put it down at the start of the *Harachamans* and pick it up again before the *brachah* on the wine. One should recline whilst drinking the wine, but there is no need to re-drink if one forgot.

**Insight:** Note that no Jew can have as much as a sandwich without mentioning Hashem, our history, and the various miracles He has performed for us. We must always be aware of our mission in life: even eating should not provide a deviation from our goals. Eat in order to live, don't live in order to eat.

#### 13) HALLEL – We recite the second part of Hallel

**Background:** This completes the recital of Hallel. There is discussion as to why Hallel is broken up into two parts, and indeed how these two parts differ. Based somewhat on a comment of Rav Hai Ga'on, Rabbi Soloveitchik used to comment that this second part of Hallel is supposed to be a spontaneous outpouring of gratitude and yearning for the final redemption after having lived through the Exodus on seder night. Before Hallel the custom is to recite *shofoch chamascha* and open the door, to remind us that on this night Hashem protects us from demons – in the merit of this display of faith in Divine protection we pray that our enemies be thwarted (Rema 480:1).

**Laws:** One should have in mind to fulfil the mitzvah to recite Hallel. It is ideal to hold the cup of wine throughout Hallel, and raise it at the words '*kos yeshuos essa*'. One does not recline. When drinking the 4th cup, have in mind to fulfil the mitzvah of drinking the last of the four cups. One should drink at least 86ml in order to be able to make an after-brachah. Recline, but if you forgot you do not have to re-drink.

**Insight:** The passuk from Hallel *odecha ki anisani ve'tehi li li'yeshua* expresses a central theme in the Haggadah. We praise Hashem for having enslaved us, for the slavery itself propelled us to reach the heights of redemption. Tragedy and redemption are two parts of one process.

#### 14) NIRTZAH – We end with various themed songs and rhymes

**Background:** *Nirtzah* marks the culmination of seder night, and the songs have deep messages and themes (famous is the Vilna Ga'on's explanation of *Chad Gadya* telling the story of all the exiles in our national history).

**Laws:** there is a mitzvah to stay up after seder night as late as possible to learn about Pesach-related laws and discuss the Exodus (Shulchan Aruch 481:2), but if one is too tired one may go to sleep. Note that some of Krias Shema al Hamittah is omitted on Seder Night, for it is a *leil shimurim* time of Divine protection from *sheidim*, the protection of which was why the Krias Shema al Hamittah was instituted.

**Insight:** *Echad Mi Yodeya* ('who knows one?'): a fun song for the kids (and older kids). But why do we make seemingly silly songs and number games at the end of the most spiritually uplifting night of the year? One idea is that this is a way of expressing our joy in having performed the mitzvos of the night. A deeper angle is that by the end of seder night one should be so enveloped with spirituality and gratitude to Hashem that any material object should immediately make one think of Hashem. Therefore, in *echad mi yodeya* we play word and number association games, whereby even the mere mention of the numbers is supposed to make us think of Hashem and His Torah.

### **Chag Kasher Ve'Samayach Daniel, Janine, Dovid, Miriam, Sarah and Esther**

**Key:** The halachos were checked over by Rav Gershon Meltzer of Mir Yeshiva. They are based on the Mishnah Brurah, and bits from the book 'Guidelines' for Pesach. The guide for the *shmurim* (quantities/volumes) broadly speaking is that for Torah-mandated volumes we use the Chazon Ish size for a ke'zayis (25g approx.), whilst for Rabbinic obligations Rav Chaim Noeh's view is used (15g). These weights/volumes can vary according to the thickness of the food eaten, so it's always advisable to calculate yourselves. None of these halachos are intended to substitute or replace your Rabbi – please refer all questions to him.

[i] *Kiddush* on Shabbos is a positive mitzvah *min hatorah*, whilst there is a discussion as to whether *kiddush* on Yom Tov is a mitzvah *min haTorah* **or** *mi'derabbanan* (see Chassam Sofer, Psachim 106a)

[ii] Again, as far as I remember, there is discussion as to whether this Hallel is *min Hatorah* **or** *Mi'derabbanan*

[iii] Depends on the *machlokes* between Rambam and Ramban regarding the *geder* of *kiddush*: the Ramban writes that it is to infuse the day with kedusha, whilst the Rambam writes that it is simply to mark the day's entrance

[iv] See Tosafos start of Arvei Pesachim, Griz al HaRambam, Tosafos Sukkah 38a *mi*, the Steipler, Rashi and Tosafos 108b, etc.

[v] Ashkenazim make four brachos on the four cups, whilst Sefardim only make a bracha on the first and third cups. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 474 and Mishnah Brurah there. It all stems from a *machlokes* between the Ba'al Ha'maor and the Rif and Ran as to how to learn a gemarra in Chullin, and how to learn the gemarra Arvei Psachim 109b-110a

[vi] For there is a minority view that one only washes for foods dipped in liquid in the times of the Mikdash. Though not accepted fully, these opinions are weighty enough to cause a doubt as to whether a bracha is recited, and the rule is *safek bracha le'hakel*, which means no bracha is recited

[vii] Haggadas Hegyonci Halacha p17

[viii] It is a much-discussed question why women are obligated in the mitzvah of talking about the Exodus: after all, it is a positive time-bound mitzvah which women are normally exempt from? The traditional answer given is via the principle that *they were also involved in the miracle* (which the gemarra uses to explain why women are obligated in the four cups of wine). The problem is that this would probably only obligate them on a Rabbinic level, and even then according to Tosafos in Pesachim 108b, our *af kein* principle does not apply at all to Torah mitzvos (and the Mishna Brura essentially writes in hilchos Purim that we go with this understanding of *af kein*). Other suggestions are that since women are obligated in the four cups then they are obligated on that which we recite the four cups on. **Or**, women being obligated in the mitzvah of matzah obligates them in Haggadah too. There are questions to be asked on both of these approaches, and we do not have enough time to discuss this here.

[ix] See Mishna Brurah 572:16 which, if read closely, implies this explanation of the Gra too.