



Source Sheet for Pesach Guided Meditations

The Psychodrama of the Seder Night

This source sheet is intended to provide the context for the Pesach Guided Meditations available on the AJS website, but it also stands alone as a resource on the experiential nature of the Seder itself.

While reading the sources below, consider the specific obligation to tell the story of the Exodus at the Seder and the inner work involved therein. Does the obligation to tell the story of the Exodus seem to be a matter of intellectual knowledge, or something else? How would you describe it?

Haggadah, Avadim Hayinu

Even if we were all wise, all people of understanding, all elders, all knowledgeable of the Torah, it would be incumbent upon us to speak of Yitziat Mitzrayim (going out from Egypt). And anyone who increases their telling of Yitziat Mitzrayim is praiseworthy.

הגדה של פסח - עבדים היינו

ואפילו כלנו חכמים
כלנו נבונים
כלנו זקנים
כלנו יודעים את התורה
מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים
וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משבח

Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 116a

Our Rabbis taught:
If the child is intelligent, they ask [their parents].
If not, the wife asks the husband.
If not, the husband asks himself.
Even two scholars who know the laws of Pesach ask one another.

תלמוד בבלי - פסחים קטזא

תנו רבנן
חכם בנו - שואלו
ואם אינו חכם - אשתו שואלתו
ואם לאו - הוא שואל לעצמו
ואפילו שני תלמידי חכמים
שיודעין בהלכות הפסח - שואלין זה לזה

What does this excerpt from David Brooks' article suggest about the power of storytelling? Does it resonate with your own experience of the Seder ritual?

David Brooks, 'On Conquering Fear', *New York Times*, 3rd April 2015

Once people start speaking to each other and telling stories to each other, they generate alternate worlds. A story isn't an argument or a collection of data. It contains multiple meanings that can be discussed, questioned and reinterpreted.

Storytelling becomes central to conquering fear. It's a way of naming and making sense of fear and imagining different routes out. Storytellers expand the consciousness, waken the sleeping self and give their hearers the words and motifs to use for themselves. Jews tell the story of the Exodus each generation to understand the fears they feel at that moment. Stories create new ways of seeing, which lead to new ways of feeling and thinking.

Beyond merely telling the story, what does this passage from the Haggadah suggest we also do on Seder Night?

Haggadah, Rabban Gamliel

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as if they left Mitzrayim, as it is stated; “And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'For the sake of this, did the Eternal do [this] for me in my going out of Mitzrayim.’” (Exodus 13:8)

Not only did the Holy One, blessed be He, redeem our ancestors, but He also redeemed us along with them, as it is stated; “And He took us out from there, in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He swore to our ancestors.” (Deut. 6:23)

הגדה של פסח - רבן גמליאל

בְּכֹל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לְרַאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ
כְּאִלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם
שְׁנֵאמַר
וְהִגִּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר
בְּעֵבֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי
בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם

לֹא אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּלֶכֶד גָּאֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
אֶלָּא אַף אוֹתָנוּ גָּאֵל עִמָּהֶם
שְׁנֵאמַר
וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם לְמַעַן הָבִיא אוֹתָנוּ
לְתֵת לָנוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתֵּינוּ

The first half of the above quote from Rabban Gamliel is from the Mishnah (Pesachim 10:5). The towering legal authority and philosopher, R' Moses Maimonides (1135 – 1204), in his comprehensive code of Jewish law, the Mishnah Torah, does something subtle but powerful with it. He adds just one letter, changing the meaning of one word, and uses a different proof-text. What is he trying to tell us?

Laws of Chametz and Matzah 7:6

In each and every generation, a person must present oneself as if one, oneself, has just now left the slavery of Mitzrayim, as the Torah states: “[the Divine] took us out from there...” (Deut. 6:23).

הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:

בְּכֹל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ
כְּאִילוֹ הוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ יֵצֵא עִתָּהּ מִשְׁעֶבֶד מִצְרַיִם
שְׁנֵאמַר
וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם וְגוֹמַר

Maimonides mandates that we, personally, adopt a story that is not in fact our own. What does this mean in terms of our psychology, our thoughts and emotions? Before seeing the following sources which address this question, what is your own answer?

R' Abraham Isaac Kook (1865 – 1935) was the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel and a giant of both mysticism and Jewish law. In this passage, Rav Kook points out that Emunah, whose root letters mean “art” or “craft,” is not simply “faith” or “belief” as usually understood, in the sense of something passively received. What does Emunah in fact mean in this context? This prepares us for what follows over the page – the Sefat Emet's approach to our above question on Maimonides.

Midot HaRa'ayah, Emunah 1:1

Simple education begins when a child reaches some understanding.
Intellectual education begins when they go out into the atmosphere of the world.
And Emunah – with the beginning of creativity.
“Make yourselves holy – then be holy!” (Lev. 11:44)

מידות ראייה אמונה א:

הַחִינוּךְ הַפְּשוּט מֵתְחִיל
מִשְׁבֵּא הַיֶּלֶד לְכֻלּוֹ אִיזוֹ הַכֹּרֵה
וְהַחִינוּךְ הַמְּדַעִי מֵתְחִיל
מִשִּׁיצָא לְאווִיר הָעוֹלָם
וְהָאֱמוּנָה מֵהַתְּחִלָּה הַיִּצִּירִית
וְהַתְּקַדְשָׁתִים
וְהַיִּיטֵם קִדְשִׁים

Having seen that Emunah can imply an active creativity, we can now appreciate the Sefat Emet teaching below, which is a key piece of the inspiration behind the AJS Pesach Guided Meditations.

R' Yehudah Leib Alter of Gur (1847 – 1905) is known by the title of his primary work, Sefat Emet (Language of Truth), a widely esteemed and beloved Chasidic Torah commentary. The Gerrer Chasidim remain a large and influential community to this day.

What does this teaching say to you about the meaning of your Pesach this year?

What is your personal Meitzer (place of constriction) that you seek liberation from?

Sefat Emet on the Haggadah

The Haggadah says, “In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves [as if they left Mitzrayim]...” and then it continues, “[The Divine] took us out...” (Dt. 6:23) It appears from this that through Emunah, that there is a Yitziat Mitzrayim for every generation revealed in this [practice of Seder Night]...

And it appears to me also that through Emunah a person enters into the collective, and certainly life is drawn to every Israelite from the collective experience of Yitziat Mitzrayim for Israelite consciousness. Only through Emunah can a person come to this!

And once a person sees themselves as if they left, they know and believe that even the enlightenment that they have, would not exist without Yitziat Mitzrayim.

Through this it is revealed to them to see how to really leave!

And so is the explanation for the teaching in the Haggadah, “Even if we were all wise people...” for even a wise person who is cleaving to the Living Divine must know that everything they are experiencing is through Yitziat Mitzrayim.

That is the truth, but it must be clarified through Emunah, which is the recital of the story, in clarifying, open and explicit language, that in every generation there is a Yitziat Mitzrayim according to the concerns of that generation, and all of this occurs at the time of [the original] Yitziat Mitzrayim.

And according to a person's Emunah that they themselves are like one who went out, this aspect is revealed to them, and they feel the current Yitziat Mitzrayim, and so every person can leave their own personal Meitzer (place of constriction).

שפת אמת על ההגדה של פסח

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם
לראות את עצמו וכולי
ואח"כ אמר
ואותנו הוציא
ונראה כי על ידי אמונה
שיש יציאת מצרים לכל דור ודור נתגלה זה
...

ויש לומר גם כן כנראה לי שעל ידי אמונה
נכנס לתוך הכלל
ובודאי בכלל היה יצ"מ
לנקודה הישראלית
שמשם נמשך חיים לכל איש ישראל
רק על ידי אמונה באין לזה
ואחר שרואה עצמו כאלו יצא
וידע ומאמין
כי גם ההארה שיש לו
לא היה לולי יצ"מ
על ידי זה נתגלה לו
שרואה איך יוצא באמת

וכן הפירוש בסיפור יציאת מצרים
אפילו כולנו חכמים וכולי
כי אף שהוא חכם
דבוק בה' חיים
יש לו לידע כי כל זה על ידי יצ"מ
שהאמת כן
רק שצריך לברר זה על ידי אמונה
והוא הסיפור לשון בירור וגילוי מפורשת
כי בכל דור
יש יציאת מצרים לפי ענין הדור
וכל זה היה בשעת יציאת מצרים

וכפי אמונת האדם כאילו יצא
נתגלה בחינה זו
ומרגיש מיצ"מ של עתה
ויוכל לצאת כל אחד
ממיצר שלו