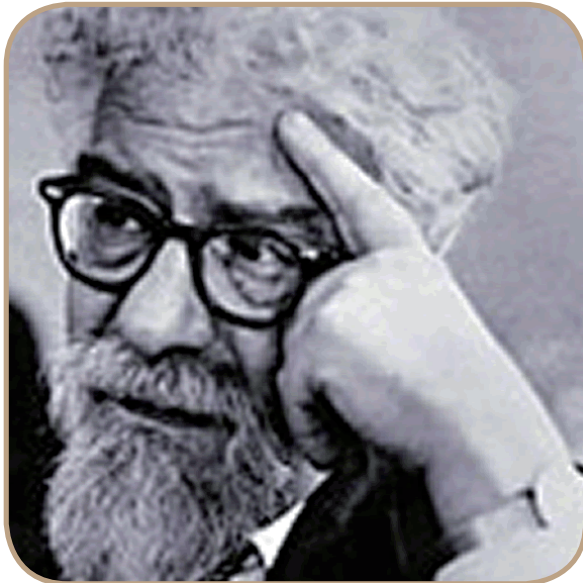




מרכז השל לקיימות

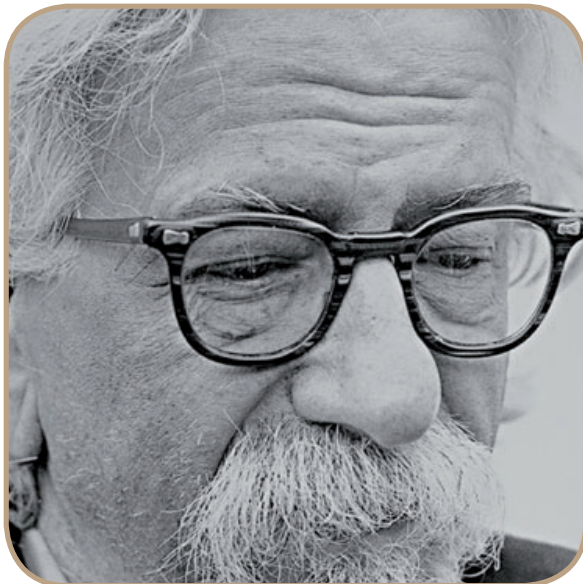
Heschel Sustainability Center

مركز هيشل للاستدامة



A Jew is asked to take
a leap of action, rather
than a leap of thought

— Rabbi Abraham
Joshua Heschel



The Heschel Center for Sustainability is proud to present the:

HESCHEL-INSPIRED PESACH HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT



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INTRODUCTION



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was a leading teacher, activist, social critic, theologian, poet, philosopher, and scholar. Born in Poland in 1907, Heschel received a traditional yeshiva education and obtained traditional semicha, rabbinical ordination, at the age of 16. He then studied at the University of Berlin, where he obtained his doctorate, and at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, where he earned a second liberal rabbinic ordination. As a young man, Heschel studied with some of the best German-Jewish scholars, and even took over for Martin Buber as the head of the Lehrhaus Institute in Frankfurt. Escaping from the Nazis, Heschel found his way to the United States where, after a brief period at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, he landed at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) in 1945. Here, he served as Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism until his death in 1972. During his tenure at JTS, Heschel explored many facets of Jewish thought and spirituality, authoring pioneering studies in modern theology, medieval Jewish philosophy, and Biblical and Talmudic literature.

In his works, Heschel's perspective revealed a combination of spiritual values together with social criticism and political activism. Through this lens, he saw the teachings of Hebrew prophets as a direct call for social action, and dedicated himself to taking direct action in the civil rights movement and protests against the Vietnam War. The ideas elicited in Heschel's pursuit of social justice and his analysis of Jewish views of humanity are applicable in so many situations, both modern and historical. Words written in relation to the civil rights movement resonate with the same pursuit of justice and freedom that we recount at the Seder table. It is for this reason that we have created this haggadah supplement, to enhance the traditional tale of Jewish enslavement and freedom laid out in the Pesach story with the wise words of a Jewish theologian who lived through a contemporary version of the battle for freedom.

The Heschel Center for Sustainability was named in memory of this great teacher. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel is an inspiration to us in that his life and ideas embody a rare synthesis of values: study and action, theology and ethics, a craving for wisdom and spiritual transcendence alongside a similar desire for peace and justice for all, spiritual depth and radical political activism, scholarship and social action, wonder and «radical amazement» at the natural world together with speaking truth to power in the political arena. Thus, the Heschel Center is guided by his vision – combining politics, social criticism, and spirituality - and his words. As a think-and-do tank, the Heschel Center goes beyond taking a leap of thought and takes the leap of action to create a sustainable world committed to the health of human beings and ecosystems, justice, and the preservation of the commonweal.

We would like to offer a very big thank you to those who contributed to this unique haggadah supplement, volunteering their time and passion to this collaborative project. All of the contributors to this collective work are members of the Siach Network, a platform for environmental and social justice activists to converse, connect, and cooperate.

Finally, we would like to wish you a *chag sameach*. May your *charoset* be sweet, your *maror* be pungent, and your *matzot* nourish body and soul!

Dr. Orli Ronen and the Heschel Center Team

ENDS AND MEANS: SLAVERY, IDOLATRY AND FREEDOM, Dr. Jeremy Benstein

I am an end as well as a means, and so is the world: an end as well as a means. My view of the world and my understanding of the self determine each other. The complete manipulation of the world results in the complete instrumentalization of the self...

(From Who Is Man?, Stanford University Press, 1965, p. 81)

How proud we are of our victories in the war with nature, proud of the multitude of instruments we have succeeded in inventing, of the abundance of commodities we have been able to produce. Yet our victories have come to resemble defeats. ... Selling himself into slavery to things, man becomes a utensil that is broken at the fountain... [The Sabbath exists] to set apart one day a week for freedom... a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money... on which man avows his independence of that which is the world's chief idol...

(From The Sabbath, Farrar Straus and Young, 1951, p. 3, 27-29)

The Haggadah text and the seder ceremony, according to the rabbis who framed them, should מתחיל בגנות, begin with the initial degraded condition of the Jewish people, and מסיים בשנה conclude with our final redeemed status. That much is agreed upon. But from there ensues an argument as to what the relevant narrative is: what is “true” degradation, and what constitutes redemption? One position is of course that the most important story is that “once we were slaves, and now we are free”—the tale of the great social and political transition from slavery to freedom.

But another view has it that the original wretched status of the Jews was that our ancestors were idolaters, and they were raised up into a position of faith in the Eternal. Two concepts of «lowly» origins are essentially two framings of Jewish history: one emphasizing the political/historical dimension, the other the religious/spiritual side.

Despite the surface differences, idolatry and slavery are conceptually related, even linked, and moreover, though they seem distant from us today – how many slaveholders, slaves or idol-worshippers do you know? – are also closely connected to contemporary society.

What is slavery, deep down? Simply put, slaves exist to fulfill the needs and commands of others, with no possibility for choice or expression of their own. Their owners do not acknowledge that slaves have their own dreams and desires, and when they internalize a slave mentality, slaves begin to see themselves in this way. **Slavery involves taking a person, who is an end unto him or herself, and making that person a means to another's ends.** In that respect, slavery is not a historical curiosity: even without whips or chains, today, from the traffic in women, to migrant labor, to all kinds of oppressive social relations—sadly, the idea of slavery, even if not called that, is still very much with us.

And idolatry? What does it mean to worship a mortal person, a force of nature, or money, or power, or our own ego or needs, instead of an eternal transcendent God? Idolatry takes aspects of physical, temporal reality and ascribes to them ultimate value. **Idolatry means taking something which is a means to other ends (money), or a part of a greater whole (nature, ourselves)—and mistaking it for an end, or for the whole.** And in ascribing it divine status, it becomes something worthy of being served, sacrificed for, or “worshipped” in a variety of ways.

Both slavery and idolatry are contemporary threats precisely because of the degradation of the human spirit and the servility they entail. Heschel above connects the two: idolatrous enslavement to elements of the physical world, including the works of our own hands, and slavish idol-worship of things of the spirit.

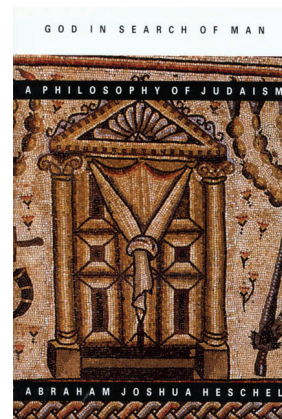
When we take the need to consume, which is a means for the sake of achieving higher ends, and make it an end in itself, a force that shapes our lives, a goal that we serve and not the other way around—we pay a high price, both materially and spiritually.

And to the extent that there seem to be forces in our society beyond our control, such as economic forces in the worlds of finance and globalization, forces that serve narrow vested interests instead of the greater public good—how can we say we are truly free?

Mistaking mere means for ends in themselves, or true ends for means to other goals, or a small piece of reality for the whole of existence, are categorical «sins» that prevent us from fulfilling our social and spiritual human potential. The holiday of Pesach, with its many questions, is designed to get us to think about that potential, about not only achieving freedom, but using it for the good of all, and for the world of which we are but a part.

■ Contributed by Dr. Jeremy Benstein, Co-Founder and Deputy Director of the Heschel Center and Director of the Environmental Fellows program. He holds a PhD in cultural anthropology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The task of Jewish philosophy today is not only to describe the essence, but also to set forth the universal relevance of Judaism, the bearing of its demands upon the chance to remain human... We were not born by mere chance as by-product of migration of nations or in the obscurity of a primitive past. God's vision of Israel came first and only then did we come into the world... Judaism is an attempt to prove that in order to be a man, you have to be more than a man, that in order to be a people, we have to be more than a people (God in Search of Man, p. 421-422).



On Passover, we celebrate the birth of our people. What is the meaning of this celebration? Are we celebrating the birth of our national or religious particularism? What can be the moral or environmental meaning of such a private party?

Heschel teaches us that the source of our identity as a people is not a national or a religious particularism, but an intimate relationship with the Universal Living God, with the Creator of all men in His likeness, of all His creation.

Heschel introduces us to a God who trusts in man, who calls upon us to act for social justice and to open our eyes to see the environment of man as the creation of God. Instead of god as a concept that belongs to the Jewish religion or nation, Heschel surprises us with the Universal Living God who calls upon Israel to be a people in His image.

If a human being is but a human being, an individualist who cares first and foremost for himself and only then thinks about the other and the environment, than he may become less than human. God trusts man that he can transcend himself toward the other, that he can be reborn as more than a human being. And a human being who responds to this trust, who acts in the likeness of God, indeed becomes God's partner in the redemption of the world.

The phenomenal and innovative claim of Passover is that this very surprising view can also relate to a people, that Israel is called to be a people more than a people. Namely, as a Jew you simply can't be as in the paradox of the racist or oppressive Jew, who destroys, for racism is the very opposite of the basis of his national identity and therefore ceases to be a "Jew".

After the holocaust, Heschel called the Jewish people to bring this "universal relevance of Judaism" to all the people. We all have to understand that the moral and environmental actions are not a supplement to our identity but the very essence of our human, national and religious identity. The exodus will free all the people.

■ Contributed by Dror Bondi, a Chasid of Abraham Joshua Heschel and devoted to bring his thought to Israel. He wrote a book and a dissertation on Heschel's thought and translated the first Hebrew collection of Heschel's articles. Dror lives with his family in the Urban-Kibbutz Beit-Yisrael in Jerusalem and teaches Jewish thought at the Ein-Prat Academy.

WE MUST LEARN TO BE SURPRISED, Dyonna Ginsburg

"An individual dies when they cease to be surprised. I am surprised every morning when I see the sunshine again. When I see an act of evil I don't accommodate, I don't accommodate myself to the violence that goes on everywhere. I am still so surprised! That is why I am against it. We must learn to be surprised."

By most standards, Moses had proven himself a leader well before God chose to speak to him for the very first time. Raised in the house of Pharaoh, Moses left the lap of luxury to see the suffering of the Hebrew slaves, his brethren, first-hand. He stepped up to the plate when no one else did, intervening on behalf of the oppressed, Hebrew and Midianite alike. He took on the challenge of mediating disputes between people of similar social standing, insisting that wrongdoing must be addressed even in cases without clear-cut persecutors and victims. He risked his stature and his life to pursue justice.

But, it wasn't until Moses stopped to look at the burning bush that God chose him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt – "When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said: Moses, Moses (Exodus 3:3-4)." Explaining why Moses was worthy of a divine encounter, the midrashic compilation Tanhuma states, "The Holy One blessed be He said to him [Moses]: You took pains to see. [I swear] on your life that you are worthy of having me reveal myself to you."

Early in his life, Moses actively went out and "saw pain" (Exodus 2:11). But, it is only later, when he "took pains to see," that God initiates contact. What was so special about Moses' latter behavior?

First, Moses did not let his vision get in the way of his ability to see. Conventional wisdom dictates that leaders are those with single-minded attention. They don't get distracted. They keep their eye on the prize. But, such intense focus often results in tunnel vision, limiting an ability to see and experience new things and perspectives. In contrast, by stopping to look at the burning bush, Moses looked beyond himself and his concerns – no matter how lofty – and saw the world panoramically.

Second, Moses was not jaded. A prolonged exposure to suffering can leave leaders, in general, and social change activists, in particular, hardened. While remaining deeply committed to the larger cause, they lose the ability to see individuals and their suffering. Moses, however, deemed one bush worthy of his attention; God, therefore, deemed Moses worthy of His.

Third, Moses understood that oppression is insidious. When subjugation is embedded in a social and economic system, it is easy to write it off as being part of the natural order. It's tempting to claim: This is just the way things are. When Moses looked at the burning bush, he first saw the *what* – "and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Like most people, he accepted the burning bush at face value without asking questions. What made Moses special is that he didn't stop there. He turned around and proceeded to ask *why* – "And Moses said: I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." Like a bush, Pharaoh's reign appeared to be unscathed by the fire of tyranny raging from within. It took a Moses to understand that such insidious tyranny can be extinguished only by doing a double-take and asking systemic questions.

Presumably, when God sees Moses stop to see, God sees and appreciates all these things in Moses. But, perhaps, most of all, God sees and appreciates Moses unknowingly emulating God. Indeed, a mere few verses before Moses stops to see, it is God who does so. "And it came to pass in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried... And God saw the children of Israel, and God took cognizance of them (Exodus 2:23, 25)." By "learning to be surprised," Moses walks in God's footsteps.

■ Contributed by Dyonna Ginsberg, Director of Jewish Service Learning at The Jewish Agency for Israel and one of the co-founders of the Siach Network.

*"Indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible."
(From Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement, 1972)*

It seems like tales connected to the Jewish holidays are filled with easily identifiable villains in positions of power who make it their mission to destroy or to exploit the Jewish people. Think of Antiochus who tried to suppress the Jewish law and infiltrate the Temple with Greek influence, or Haman, the nasty advisor to King Ahasuerus who set out to exterminate all of the Jews. These stories all highlight the actions of one man, yet in telling them, we often fail to acknowledge the compliance of a whole kingdom of people who silently supported the rule of a tyrant. The story of Pesach is no different. While we sit around the table and tell the tale of Pharaoh in Egypt, his strong hold over the Jewish slaves, and his repeated refusal to "let our people go", I encourage you to consider Heschel's notion of indifference as it relates to this familiar story. Of course, Pharaoh and his close advisors were the ones making real decisions which kept the Jews in slavery. Yet all the people of Egypt, by accepting this behavior as the status quo and reveling in the benefits and freedoms that having slaves enabled them, were responsible for this atrocity.

In the terms of Heschel, it may have been Pharaoh who was guilty, but all of the Egyptians were responsible for the wrongdoings against the Jewish slaves by doing nothing at all to change the situation. It seems like God must have agreed, when he afflicted the ten plagues upon all the people of Egypt. If Pharaoh, as the king and ruler, was the only one responsible for the slavery of the Jews, why not skip all the plagues and just go straight to killing the Pharaoh's firstborn (sparing, along the way, the firstborn of all the rest of the kingdom)? Yet God rained down on all the people of Egypt with frogs and lice and cattle disease, all of which had far greater impact on the citizens of the land than the Pharaoh himself, who was hiding safe in his palace. Although some versions of the Pesach story reveal that after certain plagues, the citizens of Egypt begged the Pharaoh to let the Jews go free, as the familiar story reveals, those who complied in the face of evil suffered the consequences of their inaction.

A similar story is unfolding in the world today, as we sit back and watch our environment collapse around us. We place blame on oil tycoons and big businesses for acting on their personal interests above the interests of society. We agonize as world leaders fail to come to any substantial agreement on regulating pollution and mitigating the impacts of climate change. We point to those in power as the evil forces which put us in this terrible situation. We talk about efficiency as a way of causing the least amount of harm while still allowing ourselves to live the privileged life which we have become used to. While some of us take active roles in speaking and acting out against climate change, the majority of us are not yet ready to talk about changing our consumption habits or taking any significant steps to improve our situation. As in the story of Egypt, it will be all of us who drown in the sea chasing after our modern illusion of comfort.

In the name of Heschel, I urge you this year to consider the following notion; how far removed are we from the people of Egypt who, satisfied with the status quo and their comfortable lifestyle, remained indifferent in the face of evil? How many plagues of our own (increasing frequency and strength of hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and droughts) will it take until we, too, cry for mercy to our leaders? We are a free society, and we are all responsible for our indifference in the face of evil. As a people who has stood strong and risen above the forces of evil time and time again, it is our duty to take responsibility and stand up against the indifference of modern society to today's evil forces.

■ Contributed by Tess Lehigh, Resource Development Coordinator at the Heschel Center. She holds a Master's degree in environmental studies from the Porter School at Tel Aviv University.

"At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses. The outcome of that summit meeting has not come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The Exodus began, but is far from having been completed." – AJH

These were the words with which Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) opened his address at the 1963 National Conference on Race and Religion, in Chicago ("The Insecurity of Freedom," p. 85).

It was at that same conference that Rabbi Heschel first met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the keynote speaker at this national gathering. The two became friends and allies working together for equality and justice, until King was cut down by an assassin's bullet in the spring of 1968.

While these men came from very different backgrounds – Heschel from a Hasidic community in Poland, and King from an African American Baptist community in Atlanta – they shared several qualities that brought them together during a tumultuous and transformative time in American public life.

Both men came from prominent religious families and were groomed to take up the mantle of leadership of their forebears. Both were passionate believers in a God of compassion and righteousness, who called on humankind to serve as co-creators of a world suffused with these values. Each turned to their sacred Scriptures for inspiration and guidance, allowing text and life to interpenetrate dynamically. And both were masterful at using their exegetical and linguistic skills, as well as their charisma, to awaken people's consciousness and stir them to action.

As one might expect, the Exodus narrative plays an important role in the speeches and writings of these great religious leaders. In the quotation from Heschel cited above, he reminds us that the universal struggle for freedom is ongoing and that the figures of Pharaoh and Moses remain important models in a world where far too many people still yearn for liberation. In fact, in the very next sentence in his address Heschel further concretizes his message with the provocative statement that "it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea" than it was for many African Americans to "cross certain university campuses."

One powerful instance in which King made use of the Exodus narrative was in his final public address in Memphis, popularly known as the "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech. In this now historic sermon, he describes with great passion the gratitude he feels for all that he has witnessed in the development of the civil-rights movement over the previous decade.

As he winds down his speech, he compares himself to Moses standing on top of Mount Nebo on the edge of Canaan, looking out over the Promised Land, knowing that he will not enter it with his people (Deuteronomy 34:1-4). With a new set of death threats in the air, King speaks openly about his mortality. "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will," King said. "I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!"

Tragically, King was murdered the very next day.

In reflecting on the lives of King and Heschel, one of the many things I respect about these courageous men was their deep dedication to their respective Christian and Jewish communities and their ability to learn from and work with people from other religious and secular traditions for equality and justice. In fact, both understood their engagement in multifaith and cross-cultural campaigns as necessary expressions of their particular religious commitments.

When Heschel returned from the Selma-Montgomery march, he wrote in his diary that walking with King and the other civil-rights leaders evoked in him the same sense of the sacred he experienced as a child walking through the streets of Warsaw with the great Hasidic masters in his family. And King, of course, spoke of the profound influence Mahatma Gandhi had upon him as a Christian nonviolent activist.

As we gather around our seder tables, reliving the pains and triumphs of our ancient ancestors in their march to freedom, let us also pause briefly to reflect on the legacies of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Luther King Jr., two great modern advocates of compassion and justice. May their memories continue to inspire and agitate, awakening us to the challenges and possibilities of freedom today.

**This reflection is adapted from an earlier blog post from ON Scripture: The Torah*

■ Contributed by Rabbi Or Rose, founding Director of The Center for Global Judaism at Hebrew College (Newton, MA).

Not so unlike Egypt of old, Abraham Joshua Heschel was born into a slavery of sorts, the moral nightmare of what became Nazi Germany, and had his own exodus in 1938 from Fascist Europe, to London and eventually the United States. But the Jewish people had no savior, no hand that led them out of Egypt. Heschel's mother was murdered by the Nazis; two of his sisters died in concentration camps – three of the six million.

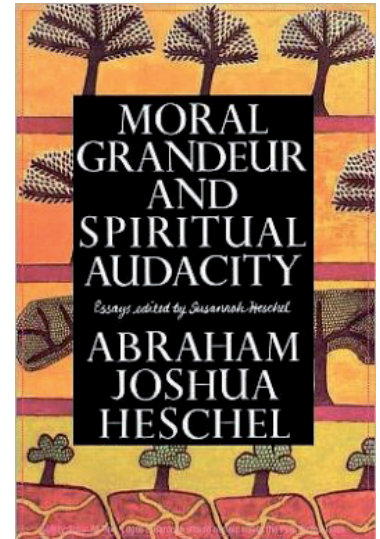
As the nightmare's scope began to be revealed, Heschel wrote an extraordinary essay titled "The Meaning of This War", published in February 1944, before D-Day, before liberation was ensured.

Let Fascism not serve as an alibi for our conscience. We have failed to fight for right, for justice, for goodness; as a result we must fight against wrong, against injustice, against evil. We have failed to offer sacrifices on the altar of peace; now we must offer sacrifices on the altar of war.

Evil has a context, Heschel tells us. And that context inevitably leads back to us. Good and evil were perhaps never so clear as at that moment. There was nothing simpler than to see Hitler as a monster. But Heschel, who experienced the nightmare in the most personal of ways at that very moment, refuses to surrender to convenient narratives, and urges us to understand that evil emerges from somewhere. Where right, justice and goodness have been eclipsed, where poverty and despair and indignity have flourished, evil will appear. Heschel leaves it to us to imagine what our culpability is for the horrors of Europe. Few are guilty, Heschel teaches us, but all are responsible.

Too easily we turn the complexity of our world into neat dichotomies of good and evil, truth and power. We see wrong in other's actions and deeds, not in our own sins of omission and commission. But Egypt, we are taught, is neither a one-time historical reality, nor simply the triumph of good over evil. Egypt is everywhere, always. There is evil, which, when emerging, must be combated. But there is the breeding ground for evil, all around us; the great and subtle inequities and insults, which fester and threaten to break loose, in so many directions. Heschel's courage, his moral audacity, was to remind us, at the darkest of moments, how we are all connected, and how we can be, must be, agents for change.

■ Contributed by Dr. Eilon Schwartz, founder of the Heschel Center along with Dr. Jeremy Benstein in 1994 and Executive Director until 2012. He is currently the head of Shaharit: Creating Common Cause, a think-tank he established with the aim of generating a new vision for Israeli society.



"To pray is to dream in league with God, to envision His holy visions"

It's easy to attend a synagogue service, but far harder to pray with passion. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel who grew up with the intense prayers of a Hassidic court was withering in his criticism of the synagogues of his day which he described as, "the graveyards where prayer is buried", he was equally damning about the rabbis whom he described as "page-boys" because instead of inspiring their communities with deep scholarship and fervor, all they did was call out page numbers to communities who had no idea how to follow a service, let alone pray meaningfully.

Turning prayer into a profound experience can be hard, but in describing how we should conduct ourselves at the Seder, the Mishna offers us some important ideas. It begins by explaining that as we tell the story of the exodus, we should begin with a dismal and disgraceful story of the Israelites servitude and idolatry, building to a crescendo of joy telling how God brought us to freedom and enlightenment. This story should take on a personal note as each of us identifies with the narrative of the Seder:

In every generation, a person should regard himself as if he himself came out of Egypt, for it is written, "It is because of that the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt"

This pattern is underlined in the passage Arami oved avi – (My father was a wandering Aramean) in which we tell the story of the exodus first hand through the eyes of a Jewish farmer living in Israel and bringing his first fruits to the Temple.

Immediately after this, we sing of praise to God which the Mishna tells us should emerge from a genuine sense of personal of redemption from the brutal slavery of Egypt and thanksgiving that we can participate in the journey to the ultimate redemption.

Therefore, (because of this powerful experience we have described) we are bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt to extol and to bless he who made all these miracles for our fathers and for us. He brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, from mourning to a festival day and from darkness to great light and from servitude to redemption, so let us say before him Halleluiah.

Finally praise is interrupted by the meal and the powerful moment when, we open the door for Elijah who will usher in the Messianic age – the time when there is no more suffering and injustice and a new era of justice and loving kindness begins.

The seder, its story and its prayers invite us to remember past suffering, to experience the sense of redemption. It calls on us to imagine and build a world of spirituality and justice. In this magical vision, prayer can no longer be a dry ritual. Prayer becomes a genuine outpouring of emotion; of gratitude and hope for the future. "To pray is to dream in league with God, to envision His holy visions".

■ Contributed by Rabbi Gideon Sylvester, the British United Synagogue's Rabbi in Israel and director of the education program for the Jerusalem branch of the Rene Cassin Fellowship in Judaism and Human Rights. He was formerly Director of the Beit Midrash for Human Rights at the Hillel House of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



Much of what the Bible
demands can be
comprised in one
imperative: Remember!

— Rabbi Abraham
Joshua Heschel



מרכז השל לקיימות

Heschel Sustainability Center

مركز هيشل للاستدامة

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