

THE ANONYMOUS HAGGADAH

A SYNTHESIS OF THE PASSOVER RITUAL AND LITURGY
WITH THE TWELVE STEPS OF RECOVERY

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Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others



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INTRODUCTION

Why is this Haggadah different?

More than any Jewish book of prayer or study written since the close of the Bible 2500 years ago, the Haggadah has resisted attempts to change its format or content.

The reasons are immediate and apparent to anyone who has enjoyed a Seder conducted by someone who knew what they were doing. The impression that remains is indelible and enriching beyond compare.

Seder night is a journey into another time and place. It is a swift glance at the darkest night of the human soul and a lingering dance with liberty and freedom. It is a long play with family and food and a short sharp reminder of the depths to which we may plummet when the framework and fabric of our life decays.

The Journey, more a procession, wends its stately way through fifteen points of interest. There are washing of hands and breaking of bread. There are stories and unfamiliar foods. There are roles for children and playful songs for adults. There is wonder and enchantment, heroes and wicked adversaries, stories of Revelation and Retribution. There is even time to partake of a full Festival meal. There must be time, in my father's house; the Seder took upwards of six hours.

If the Seder is an adventure, the Haggadah is Map, Guide, Directory and Vehicle.

What is it?

Well, the main event of Pesach (Passover) and Seder night is the Exodus from Egypt, the miraculous birth and redemption of the Jewish People. One cannot be long in Recovery without becoming increasingly aware how close are the ideas of Exodus and Recovery. My understanding of the steps and process of Recovery has deepened my appreciation of the Seder. Now my Seder blossoms in the light of Recovery.

The Seder is not simply a description of the Exodus. It is an opportunity to scrutinize the real issue: Our slavery. We were slaves and now we are free.

So what then is freedom? Does it mean we may now do whatever we want?

If we try that route we will soon find ourselves back on the road into Egypt. Freedom is not license. It is the absence of constraint and an awesome life-long struggle. We have learned this lesson, painfully, again and again. For when we became habituated to any self-destructive behavior we were no longer free. Furthermore, of all the destructive patterns of behavior to seduce a person, a "bad habit" is the most difficult to kick. Whether the habit is heroin, gambling or fixing people's lives. Whether it is self-denial, fasting, smoking or looking through people's windows.

This then is what the Haggadah is about. Long before the 12 Steps were formalized, enlightened people knew a Way. The Haggadah describes the Recovery process of an entire people, hundreds of thousands, adults and children. The distilled essence of their experience boils down to this:

- They were powerless, they admitted it.
- They came to believe in a Higher Power.
- They turned their lives and will over to it.

EXODUS FROM SLAVERY





THE MEANING OF CHOMETZ

It is a very ancient custom (dating back to around 1300 B.C.E.) to begin preparing for Pesach 30 days in advance.

We do this primarily by learning about Pesach and cleaning our dwelling houses and other properties of all CHOMETZ (leavened foods).

On the evening before Pesach begins, we search by the light of a candle all the nooks and crannies where conceivably Chometz may have been carried and forgotten. We remove all cooking pots, crockery and cutlery that have been used throughout the year and prepare food for Pesach using Pesach foodstuffs and utensils.

The climax of all this frenetic activity is the Seder Night when we join with our families and enjoy the ritual and tradition of the festival itself.

For those of us familiar with the Twelve Steps and terminology of Recovery, the essence of our preparations for Pesach are a thorough First Step. Wherein we examine in great detail all the manifestations of the disease and all the forms which it may be taking control of our lives.

What is Chometz (leavening)? Technically, it is the action of particular enzymes in the flour which are activated only by the presence of water. It is what transforms a lump of pasta into the fluffy aerated palatable staple we know as dough which bakes into bread and cakes.

No one in their right mind would sit down to a meal of raw yeast. It may indeed be the secret, the essence of the goodness of bread. The fact that yeast makes the dough rise and taste good, is not a reason to make a meal of it. Gorging on yeast or sour dough would make anyone very ill. This has been our experience who have gorged ourselves on "yeast". We have been used to abuse something or someone in our lives. A relationship that might have been nourishing in the right circumstances or proportions has turned toxic because we are extreme. We have lost the balance of sufficiency and health. We are incapable of controlling the manner or frequency of our obsession or the nature of our compulsion.

The First Step is an admission of powerlessness and recognition of the unmanageability of our lives. Strangely though, the longer we work at recovery the trickier and subtler grow the craziness's. Here is an example: Once there was a man who vowed to himself

that he would have the perfectly Pesach-cleaned house. Towards the end of the winter he began in the attic, and working his way downwards, took the house apart stick by stick. Three weeks before Pesach there was no bread or Chometz in the house. People entering had to examine their clothing and pockets for crumbs, wiping their shoes on a special mat. He was satisfied that the house was completely free of Chometz, he had so to speak achieved a spiritual Asepsis. He sat down to enjoy his Seder with a clear mind.

Now a bird flew over the house with a biscuit in its mouth. The biscuit fell down the chimney into the soup cooking over the fire and appeared in the man's plate as he was about to eat. He was horrified and aghast. He looked for a reason to explain this obvious act-of-G-D.

We in the Program do not have to look far for an explanation. The man was obviously a control freak. His whole Pesach was the antithesis of surrender. The reality is that we are powerless even over such a relatively simple thing as cleaning for Pesach.

Unless we receive the help of a Higher Power we are doomed to struggle in vain. If we find the task of cleaning for Pesach daunting it is because we are supposed to find it so. None of us has achieved a clear picture of the nature of our disease without simultaneously being overwhelmed at the task of Recovery. That is why the Second Step follows the first full recognition: A power greater than ourselves.

In the history of the creation described in the Book of Genesis the unfolding of evolution is depicted over a series of six days beginning with the creation of Light. Each days progress is accompanied with the comment "And the Creator saw that it was good".

Upon completion of the sixth day of creation, it is observed "And behold it was very good". The Talmud asks "What happened on the six day that merited the superlative description Very good?"

The answer says the Talmud is this: There was an addition of a certain ingredient to the stew of creation, meriting that title. A final magic ingredient, the yeast that makes the dough rise. Sometimes we call it the Evil Inclination, sometimes we refer to it as Satan, sometimes we refer to it as the Angel of Death. It makes the world "Very Good".

This concept that the impulse to indulge our desires for comfort, sex and prestige is the source of all that is excellent in the Universe is thematic through Rabbinical literature. The disease model of addiction simply examines the effects of these desires when they have become ruling passions. Another theme that runs through the literature is the reference to the Evil Inclination as the yeast in the dough.

The full realization of how we have turned our lives into problems through the misappropriation, as it were, of funds must be clear to us before we can recover.

In order to keep it simple let us explore those three areas of lives where ancient sages and modern scholars agree we need to look.

Step four in the "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of AA" contains the following quote:

"If men and women didn't exert themselves to be secure in their persons, made no effort to harvest food or construct shelter there would be no survival. If they didn't reproduce, the earth wouldn't be populated. If there were no social instinct, if men cared nothing for the society of one another, there would be no society.

So these desires - for sex relations, for material and emotional security and for companionship - are perfectly necessary and right, and surely G-D-given. Yet these instincts, so necessary for our existence, often far exceed their proper functions. Powerfully, blindly, many times subtly, they drive us, dominate us, and insist upon ruling our lives. Our desires for sex, for material and emotional security, and for an important place in society often tyrannize us. When thus out of joint, man's natural desires cause him great trouble, practically all the trouble there is".

Compare the above with a much older quote, dating back around 150 C.E. Rabbi Eliezer is quoted in the Mishna as saying;

"Envy, greed and pride take a man out of the world".

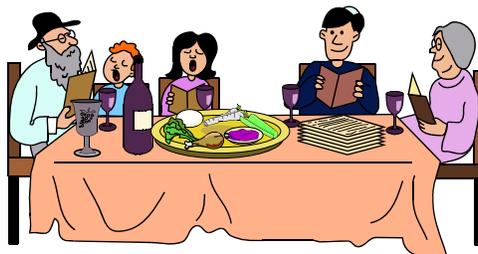
It is clear that the Evil Inclination hasn't managed since the dawn of time to invent even one simple human pleasure. This stands at the crux of our understanding. Good and Evil are not the same as right and wrong.

Now can we apply all this knowledge to the cleaning of the house before Pesach?

Can we see it as the opportunity to survey our possessions and take stock of every single item in our lives. Can we bear to scrutinize them clearly and plainly? Ask ourselves how we are meeting our basic human needs? Are we obtaining our supplies in a spiritual way? Are we now living the excellence?

SPIRITUALITY

We will be in difficulty if we try arriving at a clear consensus of the meaning of Spirituality. Though there are no perfect definitions of the word, certain aspects though are self-explanatory. Spirit means breath, the stuff of life. Whatever is dead cannot be spiritual. The more we celebrate the life we enjoy, the more we live inside our bodies in the here and now the more we are reaching towards a spiritual existence. For many of us, simply dwelling inside our skin has been the most difficult task in Recovery.



THE SEDER

Preparations for the Seder have two distinct parts:

- Cleaning House.
- Creating Order.

I. CLEANING HOUSE

As with all the rituals of Pesach (Passover) and the Seder, every little detail can be examined and worked until it blossoms and sparkles. And so we will see, even the mundane task of ridding the house of Chometz (leavened food) brings us an acute awareness of the following shortcomings.

- A. Our Denial of the prevalence of Chometz.
- B. Our Procrastination over the jobs that need tackling.
- C. Our powerlessness over the final outcome.
- D. Our Perfectionism in setting standards we can't meet.

In order to Clean House properly for Pesach we have in some way to take the following steps.

- A. Break through our denial and become aware.
- B. Confront procrastination and take action.
- C. Admit powerlessness and surrender.
- D. Abandon perfectionism and humbly accept our limits.

II. CREATING ORDER

The Hebrew word "Seder" has only one translation. It means "ORDER". To celebrate the festival properly a good deal of attention must be paid to PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS and a definite framework built around them.

- A. PEOPLE - No one celebrates Seder on their own voluntarily. But the Seder is not an impromptu party. The Seder should be enjoyed with loved ones and shared

with guests. In preparing for the Seder it is important to know who will be joining us.

- B. PLACES - The Seder requires a table, chairs, kitchen, space. In short, we need a place to call home. For many of us, this Seder will be an opportunity to take a fresh look at our environment and its ambiance. Most of us have a comfortable dwelling place, perhaps even luxurious. The Seder, however, doesn't take place in a garden or a bedroom or a study. It is a place for the gathering of family and friends where other standards apply.
- C. THINGS - The Seder is a pageant of music, stories and symbols. There are symbols of all descriptions from white linen and candles to books and pillowcases. The majority of "props" are the items of food eaten at the Seder. All this requires logistics that may take weeks of organizing. The Seder is lavish and rich in detail.

PREFACE AND ABOUT THIS ANONYMOUS HAGGADAH

Because of undeniable and inalienable Rights to a Higher Power of my own understanding.

Because the Right to a Higher Power of my own understanding is total and without any exceptions, I have not used the word "G-D" in this Haggadah. For me it carries baggage, has connotations and brings associations which would deny me the right of free association.

Instead I have used the Hebrew word (translit.) HASHEM which means "The Name". I know of no one who has written explaining its meaning. It is strangely, without millennia of Linguistic and Philosophical impedimenta. No one has written a scholarly treatise on the meaning of the word HASHEM. You may use whatever name you have for your Higher Power. For me the name changes as my knowledge changes, even as my mood changes.

"Hashem" seems the least tyrannical of all choices in the circumstances.

If I have referred to Hashem as "Him" it is only because I find "Her" equally arbitrary, "It" inappropriate, and I am still hopelessly bound by literary convention and too timid to invent something new.

It is interesting to note that the Haggadah does not mention Moshe (Moses) who was central in the dramatic events described in the Exodus from Egypt.

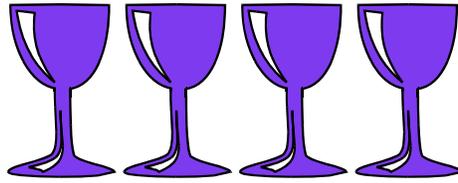
The reason is pointedly an application of the fundamental rule of "principles before personalities". Whilst Moshe may have been the most important person to carry the message to us, we slaves in Egypt were the real cause of events. We mattered in ways that Moshe didn't.

We were the people in trouble, enslaved and in need. The Haggadah reminds us that we did not embark upon the EXODUS brimming with goodwill and fellowship. We were physically, emotionally and spiritually bankrupt. All of us (excepting perhaps a few women), were totally enmeshed in the spiraling insanity of life in Egypt. This then is the story of our Recovery. The principles that become apparent through the story and rituals of Seder Night are germane to our life tonight.

Moshe our teacher is not Author. Who then is the Author of the Haggadah?

There is another anonymous character whose presence pervades the Seder. If you both should chance to meet, consider yourself fortunate. But remember what was said: "You may say YOU were there, but you may not say whom you met there. You may repeat what you heard there without attaching names to it. "

Knowing our selves as well as we do, and our penchant for evading the obvious opportunity to self-examine. It is also fairly certain that any mention of Moshe would have been the launching point for innumerable anecdotes and commentaries about his role. We try and keep the focus on ourselves where it belongs.



THE FOUR CUPS OF WINE

One of the main symbols of the Seder, the four cups of wine, corresponds to the four words for redemption mentioned in the Torah as it is written:

And I brought you out.

And I saved you.

And I redeemed you.

And I took you.

(There is a fifth term hence a fifth cup, but this by tradition refers to the future redemption.)

And I brought you.

There are four characteristics we seem to have in common:

I think I'm bad, defective, worthless.

I'm afraid, should you ever discover who I really am, you must reject me.

No one but I myself can meet my needs.

My greatest need is for escape, ease, comfort, prestige, sex, etc.

To counter these delusions requires time and recovery. We allude to them in the process of drinking the four cups.

1. The first we drink after Kiddush whose message is clear. Hashem wanted us. He still wants us. He chose to bring us out of Egypt. We are not bad or worthless.
2. The second cup we drink after telling the Haggadah which is the description of the worst side of our character and personality. Even knowing that we were idol worshippers, Hashem chose to embrace rather than reject us.
3. The third we drink after eating the holiday meal which symbolizes the satisfaction of our needs, for companionship, food, for a place to belong, etc.
4. The fourth cup we drink after Hallel "Praise" when we sing Hashem's praises and our wonderment at His unconditional love for us. It is this love which is our greatest need.

So the four cups represent the four realities:

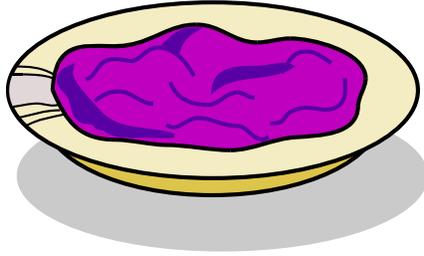
- We are perfect just the way we are, and right where we're supposed to be.
- We can be known intimately, totally and still be accepted.
- We can and will have our needs met by others.
- We are loved unconditionally, and this is our greatest need.

The fifth cup reminds us that we are never completely cured and we are always in the process. Only after the end of time as we know it will we be recovered. So we pour it but do not drink it. This is the cup of ELIYAHU the prophet whose arrival we anticipate.

There is a difference in custom as to when this fifth cup for ELIYAHU is poured. There are those who pour it before the Ma-Nishtana when we pour the second cup. Indicating that we feel secure knowing that no matter what we have done, at the end of time when a final reckoning is made and all about ourselves is revealed, we will still not be rejected by the Almighty.

The other custom is to pour this fifth cup before Hallel when we pour the fourth cup. This reminds us that even when Recovery is achieved our greatest need will still be the need to be loved unconditionally. Even when Moshiach comes it will be to teach us how to open our hearts to those who are close to us and love them in the way that Hashem loves. As it is written:

"Behold I send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of that Great and Awesome day. And he will reconcile the hearts of fathers to sons and the hearts of sons to their fathers".



CHAROSES

Before the Seder begins we prepare a dish of chopped fruit and nuts. (Symbolizing the mortar we used building Pharaoh's cities in Egypt). This is the Charoses into which we dip the bitter herb before eating it. Its main ingredients are Apple, Walnuts, Cinnamon and Wine.

- I. The Apple is our symbol for LOVE the main ingredient in the Charoses. When Egyptians saw Jews multiplying, in spite of Draconian programs aimed at controlling Jewish birth rate. They tried preventing men and women getting together; by so arranging work-shifts and timetables that married couples would never have time alone together. Jewish Women took the initiative. Acting in concert they packed lunches for their husbands and went down to their work places on the building sites. When the men were allowed to stop for a break, their wives led them into nearby fields to enjoy privacy. When Hashem saw their intent, He caused apple orchards to spring up wherever couples went to picnic. And in those orchards the Jewish people was conceived as it is written (Song of Songs): "Beneath the Apple tree I aroused you. There your mother birthed you, where she herself was born".

The playful nature of their lovemaking is also considered important by the Rabbis in an appreciation of that epoch. A romantic interlude described in the Midrash vignettes a scene:

The couples are seated beneath the apple tree, in the privacy afforded by its drooping, blossom-laden branches. He has enjoyed the food she prepared. She takes the cosmetics from her reticule and begins to "make" her face. Looking at herself in the mirror she remarks to her husband: "Which of us is more beautiful, do you think?" He leans closer to peer at his face beside her in the mirror....

(Those very mirrors the women used when applying cosmetics, were given an elevated status in the Temple Building Fund towards which they were later donated. Moses was instructed to take and cast them into the Great Copper Laver from which the priests drew water to prepare their hands and feet before services in the Temple.)

This little story has meanings on many levels of scholarship. In order to fully appreciate its significance, know that the reference to the birth of the mother in the verse from Song of Songs, alluded to a Cabalistic principle known as "The Field of Holy Apples" or the Shechina, the dwelling presence of the Creator. That spot in the

Temple where the Presence of Hashem was seen in fire, crouching like a lion, was known as the Apple.

When Hashem told Avraham our forefather that we his descendants would be slaves in Egypt for 400 years, Hashem promised not to forsake us. Even assuring Avraham that He Hashem would go into exile with us. This then was the Field of Holy Apples where we were conceived, The Shechina.

The apple is bound up with the prime number 5 and the Hebrew letter HEH. The number of seeds in the apple is 5. The number of bumps on the bottom of the apple are 5. So its shape and associations, e.g. the way the seed is suspended in womblike cells where decomposition must precede germination all have added to the layers of meaning evoked by this symbol.

II. The walnut is notorious for its "Klipah", its shells. Before we can get at the kernel we must strip away layer upon layer of defenses. The walnut symbolically is almost an analogy of the world. It has four different layers of Protection:

- (1) Dishonesty and self-deception,
- (2) close-mindedness and blind prejudice,
- (3) unwillingness and inertia,
- (4) the fog and clouds of habit and history.

All of them have to go before we move forward. As we strive to change, the masks and armor fall away and we reach a clear perception of ourselves. The walnut is a paradigm of suppression, representing all the manifold efforts of dishonesty to prevent us seeing ourselves as we really are. The walnut is bound up with the prime number 17 which is also the value of the Hebrew word for SIN. It describes an arrow shot wide of the mark, and represents the natural world severed from all its spiritual connections. The raw material of our bodies, the tools with which we strive to serve the Spirit of Hashem's will for us.

In the description of a soul surveying its body at the end of a lifetime, searching for assets to salvage from the wreckage of the past, it is written (Song of Songs), "I went down to the grove of walnuts to Look and See..." The Kabbalists saw in the shape of the walnut many interesting things. The Kernel is reminiscent of the brain, with its convolutions and striations. But whereas our brains have two lobes the walnut has four lobes. The universe, according to the Kabbalists has four "lobes". The walnut has been used to imitate symbols from the "Celestial Chariot" of Ezekiel, to the concept of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

III. We add cinnamon to the Charoses. In its natural, stick form it resembles straw, which was so necessary to the manufacture of bricks in ancient times. It is bound up with the prime number seven, whose significance is a well known aspect of Judaism.

IV. The final ingredient is wine, the juice of the grape. (The ethyl alcohol manufactured in the process of fermentation is but a tiny aspect of wine's multifaceted symbolism, and its role in Judaism.) The grape has been chosen to represent the powers of the mind, the capability for thought and faith, prayer and meditation. Wine represents the fulfillment of that promise, the conscious contact with Hashem and the knowledge of His will for us. Wine is a symbol for Prophecy which is the ultimate conscious contact where awareness has been reciprocated.

The symbolism was acquired by the grape as a poetic expression of a mundane phenomenon. The mysterious action (of airborne bacteria) which causes the fermentation of the grape into wine, almost an analogy of the process of human thought. The fermentation action with its vigorous bubbling, its transformation into "spirit" and its spontaneous enhancement, simulates the thought process that occurs in our own mind when ideas ferment, solidify and crystallize.

The Union of Man with Hashem was a state of mind, much sought by the prophets and the school of Jewish Meditation. It was always preceded by joy and gratitude which were prerequisites to the prophetic state. So the grape also came to symbolize joy and gratitude. The only state that is elevated beyond the heights of prophetic communion are those moments when we feel Love as it is written (Song of Songs): "But Your Love is better than wine".

The Seder begins with a Benediction Sanctifying the Day. A declaration of a Yom Tov. It has a standard form, Kiddush.



KADDESH

We begin Kiddush by filling a 5 oz. cup with grape juice. It is important that the cup be filled to the extent that the surface tension of the liquid forms a crown over the top of the cup. The force which keeps the liquid together in this way, the surface tension, is an effect of Natural Physical laws which are not our concern here. Nevertheless, without this effect there would be no Life on the planet Earth, since water (whose molecular weight is only 17 Daltons) would be a gas not a liquid. We hold in the palm of our hand a cup of this magical liquid, whose properties we take so for granted, yet which are fantastically providential. Looking at the light reflected off the edges of this crown, it is a good moment to reflect on all the forces at work in our lives which have brought us to this point. We celebrate the four elementary components of the grape: sunlight, wind, rain and earth. We even celebrate the four forces that go to make up the atoms themselves.

Finally we acknowledge Hashem's hand in the creation of what we are about to drink. The grape juice we hold is a pure example of Hashem's energy transubstantiated. $E = mc^2$ means that if you have enough energy you can make matter. Hashem has that energy and we are the matter He has fashioned. This is the meaning of the first Blessing.

"Who creates the fruit of the vine."

The second part of Kiddush refers us to our chosen-ness. Those of us who are in Recovery understand the mystery of being chosen.

Why are we in Recovery? What makes us special that we have been granted the grace of this gift? This blueprint for action this program of life. The Torah, the Steps, the whole concept of our Recovery? The answer, of course, is always a mystery. Hashem simply said "Enough! You've suffered enough!" We are no better or worse, simply lucky. We express our astonishment at the love and joy this festival represents and how different we feel as a consequence.

ורחץ



URCHATZ

The Leader of the Seder only, now washes his/her hands from an ewer into a bowl held by another celebrant, wiping them dry on a hand towel. We have accepted the need for leadership, we wash the leaders's hands. This small, formal act of service is a symbol of our recognition of their leadership. This is an ancient Jewish ritual in and of itself.

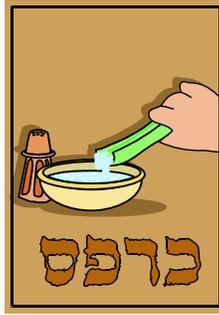
At this point in the Seder, washing the hands has a specific purpose other than to punctuate and elect. It is a statement of purpose, an elevation from the mundane. It symbolizes the wish to be relieved of the bondage of self. Before the Cohen (priest) could perform any of his duties in the Temple, he had to wash his hands and feet from the copper urn in the courtyard. Silently he prayed as we do before we begin the Seder.

"Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Your will. Make me an instrument of Your purpose, take away my difficulties that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Your power, Your love and Your way of life".

The Washing of hands refers back to the Great Copper Urn and further back to the Jewish women and the mirrors they used in Egypt. That was the prime example of an action that served Hashem's purpose. The way water flows between the fingers as it passes over the hands leaving them cleansed, copies the action of lust as it flows through the body. Water always tries to shed its energy and come to rest after doing so. So too do the sensations of lust and longing.

When we eat dry foods, washing the hands is not necessary. But as soon as liquids are involved, as with the ritual of KARPAS we are about to perform when we will dip vegetables into salt water, we must prepare our hands by washing them. It is easily explained in terms of hygiene and cleanliness. But in light of what we just said, it attains a far deeper significance. Whenever hunger, lust or the expression of any of our needs comes over us, we beg Hashem to help us express His will. We ask Him to ensure the lust or the hunger washes over us passing through our fingers. Leaving us cleansed the way washing our hands does.

Washing of hands, (before the advent of theories regarding hygiene) is a singularly Jewish ritual with no counterpart in any contemporary or adjacent cultures and religion. Greeks and Romans had no such symbolical actions in their lives. So its real meaning is closely reflected in the metaphor "I wash my hands of it".



KARPAS

Taking a very small piece of vegetable, less than the size of an olive, we dip it in salt water and eat it.

This whets our appetite physically and intellectually. Even the child in us wakes up asking to be told the meaning. The KARPAS signals our bodies it is time to eat, it is after all an hors d'oeuvre. We snap alert, then tax all our powers of concentration in the Seder that follows. The child has a short attention span and so we use tricks to keep the focus on the real message.

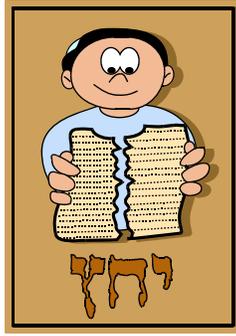
Taking food and dipping it in condiments is itself the essence of wealthy eating habits. Only people with quantities of food and the time to enjoy it indulge in the practice of fiddling with bits of food. Is it not contradictory then to pretend we are poor slaves whilst playing with food? Are we pretending to be slaves tonight? Are we playing?

It is possible to identify with feelings we had when we were slaves. We can contrast our present situation with that we endured as slaves, abusing and being abused ourselves. The Seer is our qualification to be here. We are determined to identify our feelings, we are not about to compare stories.

Let the salt water point to the tears we have shed to earn our seat at the seder table.

Let the salt point to the eternal bond of Hashem's covenant with Abraham and us.

Let it point to the profoundest longing, the clutching sensation in our stomach, that we experience in our longing for fulfillment. It is this which drives us onwards.



YACHATZ

We break the middle Matzo.

Is matzo poor man's bread or the food of free men? Can it be both? If we regard it as the Bread of Affliction why did we carry dough on our backs out of Egypt, to let it bake in the hot sun without leavening and rising? Can one Matzo be both a symbol of wretchedness and deliverance?

Matzo is a paradox.

Not only is it so, but in breaking the middle matzo we also break with symmetry. There is a bigger half and a smaller half. This unpalatable truth is almost a preamble to the Haggadah. The universe is not symmetrical, all is not evenly divided. There is a richer and poorer half. The distribution of assets is not equal. This is one of the mysteries that persists, omnipresent, throughout time. Life the universe and everything is not fair. We cannot balance this sorry scheme of things entire, and so it goes. What was our response as children to the dawning realization that it was not fair? Did we have coping mechanisms? We survived so we must have coped, but we sacrificed our health in order to do so. We split. We broke into pieces. We hid ourself away. And this is how we prepared ourselves for life.

Like the hungriest of paupers eating what we absolutely must, laying aside the greater part for later, when the time is riper. We compromised, accepting this imbalance, bowing to the "Law of Unfairness" which must prevail.

In many ways this acquiescence preceded addiction. We grew satisfied with the expression of a mere fraction of our personalities. We went into "survival mode", subsisting on crumbs of humanness, hiding the greater part of ourselves from ourselves. As we do with the AFIKOMEN.

The focus of our lives grew narrower as our preoccupation with gnawing hunger grew stronger. We had nothing to spare for growth when all we had went to feed our habits. Fewer and fewer opportunities to begin the fixing, as we chased the fix with growing desperation. In the end it became obvious that we had developed a pathological relationship with the "bread of our affliction".

We break the middle matzo because the middle matzo represents the Great Mothering Principle of the Kabbalistical Sphere of BINAH. We lost the ability to take care of our most basic needs, to Mother ourselves.

If the recitation of the Haggadah is our "war-story", our qualification, why are we breaking the matzo now before beginning our war story?

The answer is heartbreaking. The reason this happens before the Haggadah, is because the splitting of the self almost always occurs when we are still in a pre-verbal state. The disorder of our personalities, the shaming and abandonment of ourselves happens when we are still babies, infants. What follows is the story of our lives after the rupture. The inevitable, inexorable descent into the blast-furnace that was our Egypt, and our deliverance. There are no words to describe the event. We simply break the matzo, leaving the smaller section on the Seder plate, We wrap the larger piece in a pillow-case and put it away for afikomen.

Recovery is a lifelong process. We must realize, actualize and integrate the whole of ourselves. We will do this by eating the Afikomen as a symbolic "last-act" of the Seder. When it is all over we will have achieved a reclamation of the "self" we abandoned. We take the Afikomen we have wrapped in a pillowcase, slinging it over the shoulder we explain to our children:

“This is what our parents did when they came out of Egypt;”

As it is written:

“Their dough slung over their shoulders in sheets”

And the sun shone so hot that it was baked, without the opportunity to leaven as dough left alone will do. And so they continued to eat the unleavened bread even when they came out of Egypt".

Why did we continue eating this bread after we had left Egypt? Why is this a point worth mentioning?

In a sense we are reminding ourselves of those times early in Recovery when we found ourselves in very painful situations, eating what seemed identical to the bread of our affliction. We can only see with hindsight that we were eating bread of freedom. In our haste to leave Egypt we were prepared to go to any lengths; even mothers with tiny children walked away from the only homes they had. Walking into the wilderness with nothing to eat but unfinished pastry dough and trust in their Higher Power.

It is customary to hide the Afikomen, allowing children the excitement of the search. Just another way of keeping them awake and alert whilst the Seder continues.



MAGID HA-LACHMA-ANYA

The first Seder in its modern form was conducted on the road into Babylonian exile some 2500 years ago. We had reached the nadir of our resources. Our homes were wrecked, our families torn apart, we had been stripped of all our pride. Nebuchadnezzar was uprooting whole peoples, dispersing an entire Jewish population, dragging us into slavery. Bondage seemed to dog our steps, it was history repeating itself. We felt powerless.

Our leaders however, made us aware in our despair that this was not a repetition of the Egyptian story. In tents open to weary travelers they prepared a seder. Inviting anyone who cared to join, they prepared the Seder we are following now.

The experience, hope and faith we had acquired since leaving Egypt they shared with us then on the road. They showed us, using the symbols on the Seder plate how different were the circumstances of our present from our past. In Egypt we had no plans for a future. Now we had tools to fashion the raw material of our lives into a journey of the spirit. They taught us that we had the right to refuse the mythology of all propaganda. We can give them the lie to their faces. For we are free people, we have the choices to choose and to change, we cannot be enslaved without our consent.

So we begin our recitation with an invitation in the dialect of common man. The Aramaic tongue was for thousands of years the Yiddish language of diaspora Jews. As English is to the reader of this Haggadah, was the Ha-Lachma-Anya of yesteryear. *"This then is bread of poverty that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt....."*

Lest there be those amongst us who feel trapped in the present, enslaved to a substance or destructive behavior. The message is crystal clear: We have been there and this is our story.

There is an interesting play on words, and a hint implicit in the text of the invitation. First and foremost, we have to hunger for the miracle to happen in our life. We have to want it more than anything. Only then, the Haggadah tells us, All who need may come and celebrate Pesach.

You can have it if you want it. Do you want it? Needing it is just not enough.

Are you ready to go to any lengths?



MA NISHTANA - The Four Questions

Of people in recovery, others sometimes inquire. Why can't you just leave your past behind you? Make a clean break, don't dwell in the past: rehashing it again and again. You've stopped your habit, pulled yourself together. You're clean now, sober and respectable. Why go back and sit in a room full of people like yourself, people who may still be doing the crazy things you no longer do. Who are still the sick person you used to be, talking it over and over and over? Is it healthy to live in the horror story? Look to the future. Don't talk about the past as though you had some kind of disease. You glorify the program and call it Recovery, treating it like a Dialysis machine or Iron Lung without which you could not live. Why can't you be like a normal person?

The youngest person sitting at the table is usually the first to ask the "four questions". The youngest is usually the newcomer, and these questions are natural to the newcomer.

1. Why is our disease so all-encompassing, so all-excluding?

Other people have their hobbies, recreations, pleasures, how come we can't enjoy these things like they do? Why did we have only "THE BREAD OF OUR AFFLICTION"? The symbol we use for the object of our obsession is the unleavened bread - Matzo. Our world had shrunk very small.

2. How come there was no pleasure left in what we were doing?

No amount of "acting out" could rid us of our real feelings. Everything we did to relieve the pain merely substituted or increased it. The symbol we use for the bitterness and pain is "MAROR" (bitter herbs).

There are two more questions commonly asked by the newcomer. They refer to the process of recovery.

3. Why do we treat ourselves so well in Recovery? Why don't we just get on with life? Why pay so much attention the way we feel? Whence the slogan EASY DOES IT? Surely a little more discipline, more will-power, a tougher daily regimen, all would work more efficiently than this gentle touch with which we treat ourselves?

The relaxed attitude we adopt is symbolized by the "CONDIMENTS" (dipping food into food.)

4. Why do we take Recovery so slowly? Surely we ought to be rushing to get well? We need fixing now!

The pace at which we expect changes to occur, is symbolized by the "LEANING". Sprawling and reclining as though we were "in our cups". Why does all this take so long?

AVADIM
HAYINU
WE WERE
SLAVES



The Answer is simple and we keep it simple.

1. We weren't just overdoing things a little, we were slaves! And we were powerless. It took the power of the Omnipotent Almighty to extract us from there. Which he did with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. So severely were we addicted to our own slavery and shame that if Hashem had not taken our forbearers out of Egypt then we would still be hopelessly enmeshed in that sickness and slavery. We, ourselves and our children would be without Recovery. And such is the nature of this disease that we must constantly treat it by talking about it. It doesn't matter whether we are clever, intuitive, experienced or whether we know the whole program backwards, whether we can recite the Big Book by heart. We are still commanded to share with others our Recovery. And the more meetings we attend the more praiseworthy we will be.
2. The metaphor of the strong hand and the outstretched arm refers to the substance or activity to which we were addicted. The strong hand as explained later at greater length, is the cessation of using or acting out our addiction. This is the first and most difficult step to take.
3. The outstretched arm refers to the gradual separation and the distance we put between ourselves and the paraphernalia of addiction. The putting away of people, places, and things.

MAASEH - A STORY

The five Rabbis mentioned in this story were all in Recovery.

Rabbi Eliezer was wont to say,

"Live and let live," "Don't be too quick to anger," "Stay sober today before you die" and "Bask in the glow of the wise but beware lest you get too close and burn yourself".

He, of course, had trouble in all these aspects of his personality. He argued with his friends, tried to impress his will upon them, stubbornly refused to accept the majority ruling, rationalized his disrespect of them and ended up excommunicated by them, totally isolated.

Rabbi Yehoshua was wont to say,

"Self-will run riot, the tendency to misanthropy, isolation and depression will kill a person".

He knew whereof he spoke.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria was wont to say,

"One who talks the talk without walking the walk is like a big tree with lots of leaves but no roots. The first strong wind to blow will uproot it and throw it on its face. He who walks the walk more than he talks the talk is like a tree with few leaves but lots of roots. All the ill winds in the universe won't move it from its place. (But it doesn't provide much shade.)"

Rabbi Akiva was a recovering Jew hater. Up to the age of 40 his anger at religious Jews was murderous and fanatical. It was the unconditional love of his friend, later his wife Rachel, which restored him to sanity, and the patience of his gentle teacher Nachum Ish-Gamzu which turned this bellicose, belligerent ignoramus into an intellectual giant. He retained his tendency to militancy all his life, allowed his vision to be clouded by his desires, made political blunders, 24,000 of his disciples died of 'disrespect', and he was arrested, imprisoned and martyred by the Romans.

Rabbi Tarphon was an obsessive compulsive with a tendency to get bogged down in detail and minutiae. Once at night on a dangerous stretch of road frequented by footpads and cutthroats, he lay on the ground in order to recite the Sh'ma according to the ruling of Shammai. Boasting of the danger he had braved, his friends told him he needed help. They warned him that what he was doing was not religious but compulsive and if he died he wouldn't be a martyr, just another O.D. [overdose]. He was wont to say, "You aren't responsible for the results but you must put in the foot work. You don't even have to finish what you're doing, just don't stop".

These then are the Rabbis who sat all night talking about the EXODUS and their own Recovery. Careful examination of the text reveals a superfluous word.

Instead of saying "all that night" it could have read "all night" the Hebrew word for 'that' means Him, each spoke for himself, and so they passed the whole night away until their disciples came and said, "Surely, Rabbis, by now you're all cured? Enough already".

REB ELAZAR BEN AZARIA

Rabbi Elazar said, "I am like seventy years old". Various reasons are proposed to explain the way he looked. He was after all only 16 or 18 years old at the time he is quoted in this Mishna. Rambam (Maimonides) suggests Reb Elazar destroyed his physical health with compulsive study of the Torah. Grueling stretches of non-stop study, indifferent nutrition, appalling conditions, insufficient rest and recreation...all of which accelerated the aging process.

Others claim it was a miracle! When he was appointed to head the Academy at this early age, he was granted instant distinction as all his hair turned white overnight.

Or perhaps it was simply his response to being loaded with heavy responsibilities at such a young age. Whatever the reason, Reb Elazar said, "Even though I look the way I do I couldn't convince the sages that talking about the Recovery from Egypt is mandatory at night as well as during the day. When Ben Zoma introduced his exegesis of the verse, etc."

We of course avoid projecting our legislation onto post-Messianic era. We take one day at a time, one night at a time and so the ruling has been accepted. We say the Sh'ma at night, according to Ben Zoma.

BORUCH HAMAKOM

In this paragraph we bless and thank Hashem, but we refer to Him as "HAMAKOM" i.e. "The PLACE". Hashem is the Lord of People, Places and Things.

First, we bless Him for being there when we need Him and giving us somewhere else to be instead of that place Egypt.

Second, we bless Him for being Hashem and giving us Himself instead of those people and gods of the Egyptians.

Third, we bless Him for giving us what we need to replace all the destructive addictive things in our lives, we thank Him for giving us the Torah, our program to live by on a daily basis. And then again, we thank Him for being Him.

THE FOUR SONS



THE FOUR SONS

There are four kinds of Sons referred to in the Torah regarding THE PRIMARY PURPOSE of carrying the message. These are the four personality types in and out of Recovery to whom we can convey the message.

1. The cleverdik, fiercely intellectual, much too smart for his own good and terminally unique.
2. The one who thinks he's too wicked for it to work for him.
3. The newcomer, barely coherent, totally beaten and ready.
4. The one who's still out there, who can't stop and desperately wants help.



חכם

THE CLEVER ONE SAYS MAH! "WHAT"

He uses the word "What" in the deprecatory was that Moshe used it when he asked: "And what are we that you rebel against us?"

"So what's the big deal?" asks the cleverdik. "What are these testaments, statutes and laws that Hashem has commanded you?"

From his use of the word "you" in the question, we can infer his real needs. He's scared. He is like the arrogant addict who walks into the room, reads the 12 steps and says, "Is that all you have to do?"

His error is twofold. He thinks he's too clever for such a simple program to work in his life, and he thinks he can do it on his own.

The Haggadah tells us,

"You should also say to him".

The word "also" seems superfluous. The Hebrew word for also "Af" has another, emotional, meaning. "Af" means heavy-nasal-breathing-anger. The attitude of the cleverdik will often infuriate, frustrate and invoke anger in us. We have all been in his position.

In response the Haggadah warns us to be gentle. The Hebrew word for "SAY", "EMOR" is the softest, lightest form of address as opposed to "speak" or "tell"....Gently is the only way to carry the message.

And the Message is All the laws of Pesach including what happens after the seder is over. We tell him, "You can't do it on your own". Almost the first law of Pesach is that you require a group. One person can't eat the Paschal lamb; it must be celebrated en masse. Groups of people whose only requirement is a desire to join may come together in the Ritual of Sharing.

"If any of them is missing, let the whole group be concerned." says the Mishna... You cannot bake matzos on your own... You cannot escape from Egypt on your own... So don't say "You"; say "Us".

Finally we tell him, the reason it works is because we take it with us when we leave here. Even when the seder is over we don't eat anything else, that the taste of Recovery we have shared remains with us until we meet again. Therefore we eat no dessert after the Paschal lamb.



THE WICKED ONE SAYS MAH! "WHAT"

He uses the word "what" Mah in the sense that Yaakov (Jacob) used it when he exclaimed, "What an awesome place this is".

"What an awesome program this is you work." says the wicked son.

He thinks everyone in recovery must be adhering to some impossible program of perfection. (From which he is excluded by virtue of his irredeemability) He also, in an inverted grandiosity, no less annoying than the cleverdik, considers himself more unique than anyone else. However bad you think a person might be, he's just worse.

In essence our response is to identify with him. Yes! We too felt that way. In fact we all felt the same way, unsalvageable and despicable. In those days we thought we were G-D, so if we couldn't do it who could?

That's why Hashem brought us out, doing for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. We blunt his argument, we take the bite out of his snarl, we tell him

"Because of this" The seder we're having now. "Hashem did for us". The reason He did for us was that we might carry the message of Recovery to you, not because we were any better than you.

"What does he think?" we ask "For us and not for him?" Does he really believe Hashem would have left him in Egypt? Does he think he's irredeemable? He obviously never met us before.

In the quote which we put to him,

"Because of this, Hashem did for me when I came out of Egypt".

The word "Did" is ambiguous. The Hebrew for "Did" is "ASA" It means a very earthy form of creativity like the making of Man himself (e.g., when the word ASA is used in Nasa Adam, "Let us make man").

It also refers to the final act of creation which is speech. What Hashem "did" for me was to verbalize all the pain which I could not speak for myself. This, we tell the so-called wicked son, is what Hashem did for me. He taught me the words with which to express my feelings.



ת THE SIMPLE ONE SAYS MAH! "WHAT"

The simple one uses "What" in the sense that Yirmuyahu (Jeremiah) used it when he lamented, "Remember, Oh G-D, What happened to us?"

"Just what is this?" asks the simple son. He is openminded and willing to listen, to learn. Why the seder? Why the exodus? Why the slavery?

To him we say: "We were powerless. It was Hashem's strong arm that brought us out of Egypt, out of slavery".

Admitting powerlessness is our first step. If we won't admit it, we can't get help, you have to lose to win.

Tam, the Simple one is ready to hear this message, his name implies it. Tam in Hebrew and all Semitic languages means "The End" an unequivocal finality. He is finished, beaten, willing and ready.

The Tam actually says "What's this?" Mah Zos. The word Zos "THIS" refers to the Recovery known in Hebrew as "Teshuva" more commonly translated as "Repentance". The three elements in the classic description of Teshuva are

Repentance, Prayer and Charity.

These are the building blocks of the 12 steps.

We Confess, Admit, Come to believe.

We become willing, grow humble, make restitution. We Pray and Meditate and we carry the message. Another description of Teshuva uses words of Cabalistic significance and Gematraic equivalence.

1. KOL = VOICE = 136
2. T'ZOM = FASTING = 136
3. MAMON = MONEY = 136
4. ZOS = THIS = 408

ZOS is a name for the "Shechina" It refers to the manifestation of Hashem in the world of man. The dwelling place. The raison d'etre. The Inexplicable meaning of life. Recovery is the reason for the creation of the universe. Why did Hashem allow life to evolve to the point where all the symmetries have broken? All the parities are gone? Even the Universe is no longer evenhanded. Man is the destroyer, so why did Hashem settle upon us?

Look at us in recovery and the answer is self evident. The fixing!

Not the Fix, not the fixation. Repairing, recovering, that's the meaning of life. When the Simpleton asks his simple question, he is being the most profound and complex.

MAH ZOS, "What is ZOS?"



THE ONE WHO CAN'T ASK - SH'EYNO YODAYA LISHOL

You must carry the message to the one who can't ask for help.

That is our primary purpose as it is written: " And you shall tell it to your child on that day, saying: Because of This, Hashem did for me, when I came out of Egypt".

This is exactly what we told the wicked one when he asked his question, the message is identical: "It works! Look at me, I'm not a slave. I am free. You too can be free.

This is why Hashem brought me all this way, so that I could bring this message to you".

In fact we tell him the Haggadah.

YOCHOIL - I MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT

Since it is written, "You shall tell the Haggadah to your child" I might have thought any time in the spring around Pesach time is a good opportunity to talk about the miracle of Recovery. Therefore the Torah states specifically,

"On that day".

So now I know a more specific period. However, I might have thought that day-time, whilst going about the business of preparing for Yom Tov would be a good opportunity to say the Haggadah, to talk about Recovery: Whilst we are cleaning the house for Pesach.

Therefore the Torah states precisely;

"You shall tell the Haggadah to your child, on that day, saying "Because of this Hashem did for me when I came out of Egypt".

I can only say "Because of this" at the formal seder when the symbols of the Seder, Matzo and Maror, the symbols of slavery and freedom are clearly visible. We need to stay in touch with the fundamentals of the program. "We must keep it green". It must not become some abstract journey we talk about. Let's keep it real and tangible to all our senses.



IN THE BEGINNING - MITCHILO

When we were commanded to tell the Haggadah to our children this is what was being referred to. The actual Haggadah begins here. The word Haggadah means "Tough talk". Hard words to swallow: "Words, hard as sinews".

What could be so unpalatable and indigestible about the Haggadah story? More than just the admission of powerlessness it must be our level of depravity that embarrasses us.

This isn't the story of our struggle to get out of Egypt. The Exodus was not a civil rights march. We weren't fighting anyone. This is not our struggle for the right to equality or freedom of religion. This is a story of events as they really occurred. Our contribution to the whole saga is not a noble one.

To understand anything about our history, put it in the context of daily commerce in a civilization of Bronze-age Mesopotamians and Egyptians 1800-1300 B.C.E. Let us examine for a moment one aspect of life in that epoch. What did they invent for "Kicks"?

The overwhelming mood and mind-altering experience of ancient times was idol worship in all its multifarious forms. But most modern people would be disgusted by the worship of idols of yesteryear.

People had pathological relationships with it. They persisted in practicing its worship in the face of all evidence that it was harmful to their physical, mental and spiritual health.

High on the list of contemptible people are the panders and purveyors to death-dealing habits. Be they crack dealers, tobacco houses, sugar barons, propagandists, polluters or televangelists.

Well, the bad news is that we were up there on the list of exploiters. Our family business was the making and distribution of idols and fetishes. We had the local franchise dealership in Ur of the Chaldees.

The good news is that now Hashem has attached us to His worship as it is written.

Joshua said to all the people, "These are the words of Adonai the G-D of Israel: "Over the river lived your ancestors from time immemorial. Terach father of Abraham and Nachor. And they worshipped other gods. I acquired your father, taking Abraham from the other

side of the river and walking him through all the Land of Canaan. I increased his seed and I gave him Issac. To Issac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Mount Seir to Esau as an inheritance, Jacob and his sons went down into Egypt".

BLESSED IS THE KEEPER OF PROMISES

(a) Blessed is the keeper of promises to Israel!

Is there a suggestion here that Hashem doesn't always keep His promises?

(b) Because the Holy Blessed One calculated the end, to do...

What is the connection between this and the previous statement? What promise to Israel is being referred to here in the text? In the recorded history of Israel before the Exodus, no where do we find such a promise made to them. To who, was the promise made? and what is the meaning of the phrase; "calculated the end, to do"? To do what?

The Haggadah is referring to mysteries spoken about by the Kabbalists. "The last action in the first thought" -- the last action was the evolution of Israel.

In classical antiquity Israel was a very late development. By tradition, we were, in fact, the last to evolve. The End, as it were, of the evolutionary process of creation, of nationhood, of language and culture.

"The promise to Israel" is the promise Hashem made to Himself to create Israel. The first word of the Torah, "B'RAISHIS" "In the Beginning" refers to Israel who are called "Raishis". Because "T'shuvah" Recovery, which is reason for the creation, is also called "Raishis".

The final act Hashem did was the evolution of Israel, but it was His primary purpose For T'shuvah is the primary purpose. For Israel carries the message which is the enormous wealth referred to at the end of the paragraph. We were given this wealth during the Exodus in two parts.

"And the Children of Israel came through the sea on dry land" (Exodus 14:22).

Were they in the sea or were they on dry land? asks the Midrash, continuing: "From here we learn that each individual had to throw himself into the sea before it parted".

Nachshon Ben Aminadav, prince of the tribe of Judah was first to jump into the sea. It reached his nostrils before splitting for him. Did Nachshon know what would happen or was he committing suicide? Did all those who followed, the six hundred thousand, did they know the sea would split or did they expect to drown? Were they expecting some sort of miracle to occur?

Another question that begs to be asked, concerns the "Great Wealth" promised to our Father Abraham, which was brought out of Egypt.

It is well known that when the Jewish people left Egypt, they emptied it of treasure, leaving it like an ocean without fish. There was nothing left for them to borrow or take. Yet we are told that seven days later Moshe had to drive them away from the scene of the Splitting of the Red Sea, that they were so busy plundering the booty, stripping the corpses of the Egyptian dead that they would not move on. Furthermore we are told: the value of the spoil picked at the seashore was hundreds of times greater than the loot hauled out of Egypt. The Midrash makes a ratio comparison as that of dots of silver to lines of gold. How empty could Egypt have been, if there yet remained the vast treasure carried by the pursuing army which later drowned in the sea?

The answer is of course that there is treasure and then there is treasure!

What so precious was it we brought out of Egypt with us on the first night of Pesach? What could possibly have been worth those hundreds of tormented years, the slavery, the pain or the degradation?

First of all we realized that we could not manage our own lives. Intelligent and well meaning though we were, children of the Holy Patriarchs and Matriarchs, twelve tribes of G-D, alone we were not enough. Nothing we ourselves were capable of was going to stop our descent to the lowest depths of defilement.

This may seem at first glance like a very unpretentious truth. Until you realize that many a civilization has gone from evolution to extinction with no inkling of its implication.

Secondly, we in Egypt came to believe that a only a power infinitely greater than ourselves was capable of managing, maintaining a sane balance and governing our life's affairs. Throughout the year that revealed the Ten Plagues, we became imbued with the profound awareness that the G-D of our Fathers is the Creator of the World, and no one else. That we had failed in all our attempts to control our Egyptianization. That while it is true we had not intermarried, we'd maintained our identity as the Children of Israel, we spoke Hebrew and dressed as Jews.

It was not enough. If there are 50 gates of disgust we had passed through 49 of them. We could not and cannot do it on our own, we are powerless. In order to be delivered out of Egypt we would need the Almighty to act as midwife. To have our Jewish gold separated from the dross that was Egypt we would need an omnipotent, caring and loving G-D. What priceless knowledge this is.

Now to return to the question we asked at the outset, what happened at the sea?

Knowing intellectually that something is true, is only the first step. Being able to act on that knowledge is a much more difficult matter. What happens when our fears meet our

challenges? There we were at the Red Sea, the Egyptian cavalry and army bearing down on us, there was nowhere to run.

Moshe said "Hashem has said "Be quiet" He will do the fighting for you. Why are you crying at me? Tell the children of Israel to begin moving".

This was the first real moment in history when our fears met a challenge. It was a triumphant moment because we made the decision to turn our will and life over to the care of Hashem. To answer the question; did Nachshon know the sea was going to split for him? He didn't stop to ask. Turning life over to the care of G-D, precludes such meaningless speculation.

When I know I'm being taken care of, what does it matter whether I'm being told to walk or stand still? To jump into the sea or into the flames? When it was all over, when we began realizing what had happened to us, the jump we had made, the quantum leap, the purest act of faith, we couldn't get over it. We sat together on the seashore going over it, again and again.

This was wealth beyond anything we had dreamed. That we could give up managing our own lives and turn it over to the care of a kind, caring, loving G-D? It was totally unprecedented. It was revolutionary. It was even greater wealth than we had brought out of Egypt with us. Moshe had to get us moving, urging us away from there. He knew it was not the end of our spiritual journey, there was more to come.

It is said that the riches we brought out of Egypt was given us in the merit of the women, while the riches we acquired at the Sea was in the merit of the men. The hidden meaning is this. The realization we were out of control, that only Hashem could straighten us out, was achieved passively. We did no more than watch the plagues befall the Egyptians. It took no participation on our part.

Passivity is often symbolized in Jewish stories by 'woman'. The realization we could make leaps of faith required action on our part. We ourselves had to do the jumping, intellectualizing about faith in G-D wouldn't save us. Action is denoted in this story by the symbol 'man'.

I. One is known as the Plunder of Egypt which refers to our realization of the first two steps.

First, we realized how powerless we were, then we realized that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

II. The second installment of riches is referred to as the Plunder of the Red Sea.

We were faced with the Egyptian army, whose only thought was our annihilation. Behind us was the sea. We felt trapped and desperate. We cried to Moshe; he cried to Hashem. He told Moshe to tell us not to worry,

"Just let go, let G-D. All you have to do is start walking".

Instead of crying out again, "where shall we walk to"? We turned our will and lives over to the care of Hashem and started walking into the sea. We walked until the water came up to our nostrils without looking back. And the waters parted.

This knowledge that we could turn our will and life over was the greatest wealth we could ever have been given, and we are told that the Plunder of the Sea was more valuable even than the Plunder of Egypt.

The first installment of riches is known as the "Women's" meaning that it is passively acquired.

1. We admitted we were powerless...
2. We came to believe.....

The second part is known as the "men's" since it requires action.

3. We made a decision....

The textual ambiguities in this paragraph are too numerous to elucidate individually and their translation into English would require further explanations and commentaries. So much is left for those who want to learn of the mysteries of the Kabala and more will be revealed.

The word "Kaitz" "end" has a numerical value of 190 which was the number of years spent developing the latent personalities of the slaves we later became. We were in Egypt only for 210 years.

The 190 years previous to that is calculated from the birth of Yitzchak and goes to make up the 400 years of exile, promised to Abraham. In fact our problems all began with the birth of Yitzchak.

"And they will be slaves to them and they will oppress them four hundred years".

It is not clear who will oppress whom and who will suffer the most.

"And also the nation they serve I will judge".

Hashem promised to be judgmental also to the Egyptians. He was most judgmental about us. In fact the vast majority of us never made it into Recovery and four-fifths of us died in the days of darkness during the Plague of Darkness. The percentages haven't changed much over the millennia.

"Hashem calculated the end to do".

4. In the world of the Kabbala, words have meanings within meanings. "ASA" "to do" appears a number of times in the story of the Exodus. It refers to the fourth and final stage of development in the creation. ASIYA, DOING, is the ultimate purpose and meaning of the creation. T'shuva, fixing, recovery, is likewise the ultimate meaning. We Israel are the Ultimate meaning, we are ASIYA. Now in the order of the Kabbala, the order of creation is formalized thus; corresponding to the four stages of thought into speech:

- 1) Unconscious thought, inspirational.
- 2) Conscious creative thought.
- 3) Rational, reflective, selective thought, and
- 4) Speech.

Corresponding to the four words ATZILUTH, B'RIYAH, YETZIRA, and finally ASIYA, each is a form of creativity but ASIYA is the most tangible, as speech is the most tangible thought.

Corresponding to this are four stages of Recovery:

- 1) We were relieved of the obsession,
- 2) We made decisions to change our lives and take steps,
- 3) We took those steps, one at a time and finally;
- 4) We carried the message.

"When Hashem did for me" intimates at these processes.

THIS IS WHAT STOOD BY OUR FATHERS - V'HEE SH'OMDO

(We lift the cup and hold it in the palm of our hand as we recite this chapter.)

The promise to Israel which the "Keeper of Promises" made is what has stood as a beacon for us, a guarantee of continuity.

We lift the cup to remind us of the second term "V'hitzalty", "And I saved you". The Holy-One-Blessed-is-He saves us again and again. In this context, Hatzala refers to the intimacy we enjoy with our savior. We need keep no secrets. We may feel ashamed at the thought that again and again we dream of "using". It wasn't only in Egypt that we were slaves, we relapsed again and again. Each time our enemies rejoiced in our slavery and each time they saw us recover.

Every time it happens, they think to hold us in the palm of their hands. But before they can squeeze and crush us we are gone, for Hashem holds us in the palm of His hand.

The word used in the text is "AMAD" "Stood".

Perils arise and stand over us, threatening to destroy us. Not just in Pharaoh's Egypt but in every generation new substances, and new habits each with life-threatening consequences seems about to engulf us. And the Holy One save us again, His promise looms every bit as large and powerful as any threat.

GO OUT AND LEARN - TZAY U'LMAD

Go out and learn what Lavan the Arami plotted to do to Yaakov our father. He was worse than Pharaoh who only wanted to kill the males. Lavan tried to uproot us completely. Pharaoh hated us as a people, Lavan hated us as an idea. To glimpse how profound such hatred can be it is necessary to project ourselves beyond the present moment and imagine as it were the world without all possibility of redemption. Lavans' world.

Lavan was the brother of Rivka (Rebecca) wife of Yitzchak. When Eliezer, Avraham's servant, went to Mesopotamia to betroth Rivka as a bride for Yitzchak, Lavan tried to poison him so that no Jewish nation could be born.

Later Yaakov (Lavan's nephew) came to Lavan looking for a wife for himself. He fell in love with Rachel, Lavan's daughter, but was tricked into marrying Leah. Lavan was desperate to prevent the marriage of Yaakov and Rachel, for they would give birth to Joseph and the hope of redemption from Egypt. To Benjamin and the hope for ultimate redemption. Lavan tried 100 ways to cheat Yaakov out of every possible joy and profit, but he never succeeded because Yaakov was such a straightforward man and because Hashem took charge of his affairs and caused them to prosper.

Lavan hated Yaakov and everything he stood for; as it is written, "the Aramaian loathed my father". It was only the promise that Hashem has made to Himself, regarding Israel that stood us in good stead.

The rest of this verse quoted in the text segues neatly into the Haggadah and the story of the Exile into Egypt, as it continues:

"And he went down into Egypt, and he sojourned there, small in number, And became there a great nation, powerful and numerous".

What follows is a note on how we came to be in Egypt. Don't think we went willingly. Oh No! We were forced down by the word of the Almighty. Don't think we went down into Egypt intending to stay there. No! We went down merely to sojourn as it is written...etc.

Did all this hesitation and reticence prevent us becoming enmeshed in the experience of Egypt and the subsequent slavery? The answer to that is history.

Many of us began using a medication at the express prescription of a medical practitioner, many of us began eating simply to assuage a ravening hunger. Many of us were genuinely angry at something in our lives which needed charge. The end result was always the same. The medication became a habit, the meal became a binge, the anger became abusive rage, friendship became obsession, the rules changed as we were playing and we never noticed.

SMALL IN NUMBER

As it is written:

"Seventy souls your fathers went down into Egypt".

Seventy seems to be a pivotal number in the Jewish story. Seventy is the minimum number of people who can represent Israel, there were seventy elders of the people. There are seventy interpretations to the Torah.

70 languages.

70 nations.

70 letters in the ineffable name of Hashem.

70 sparks of Holiness scattered in the shattering of vessels, which describes the fall of Adam and Chava (Eve), and the expulsion from the garden of Eden.

Significantly, Yocheved, mother of Miriam Aharon and Moshe, was born in between the walls of the city as they arrived. Yocheved was the last of the 70. I think that there are probably 70 addictions.

BECAME A NATION

We didn't quite fit into the Egyptian lifestyle. Try as we might we could never quite get comfortable, always feeling outside the mainstream. The story that follows depicts the beginning of our slavery. We may have tried to assimilate, we began doing things contrary to our nature simply to be more like the Egyptians. We experimented with their ideas, trying to absorb and be absorbed by their culture. All we got was the poisonous propaganda and none of the benefits. They denied us citizenship and gave birth to us instead of melting us down. As a grain of irritating sand in the stomach of the oyster, we became a pearl. We stuck out. Egypt became our womb, the crucible of our shape.

AND I PASSED OVER YOU

"I saw you wallowing in your blood. And I said to you, "By your blood shall ye live". And I said to you "By your blood shall ye live."

This is an important rule in Recovery. Are we prepared to go to any lengths?

Will we chase serenity as we chased our Anodyne of choice? Are we prepared to carry the message to others the way it was carried to us?

"The message is clear" Says Hashem. "Either you invest your blood in this mission I give you, or else you'll live by your blood".

AND THE EGYPTIANS PLOTTED EVIL AGAINST US

As it is written:

"Let us be crafty, lest they multiply. And it will happen if the opportunity arises, a war will break out and they will join our enemies and fight us and leave the land".

This is the description of the onset of the disease. The behavior or habit takes on a guile and cunning as though it were part of a master plan. Powerful and baffling!

So it was with the Egyptians. They did whatever they had to, making sure not to spook us into refusing. Once we were hooked, they led us gently by the nose down the path to the point where we no longer had a choice but to do as we were told. They gave us important tasks to perform, granaries and treasuries to build, told us how well we were doing, how much they needed us. They told us that what we were paying them in labor was just taxes. As it is written:

"And they appointed tax collectors over them".

"They gave us hard work".

"And the Egyptians worked the Children of Israel harshly".

The midrash tells us that at first all Egyptians gathered to make bricks. Pharaoh himself rolled up his sleeves and played in the mud with us making bricks. We thought we were doing no more than our patriotic duty.

The actual Hebrew word for harshly is PARECH which is made up of two separate words, PEH-RACH meaning "gentle mouth". This is how addiction always begins. It feels good. Softly we were seduced into a life that became increasingly harsh and oppressive. Which of us doesn't remember how hard we worked to stay out there?



AND WE CRIED OUT

And we cried to Hashem G-D of our Fathers. We did not cry to our own personal G-D. We had no G-D. We were devoid of any conscious contact with Hashem. We had no interior vision and faith in a Higher Power. The spiritual path of prayer and meditation was not yet open to us.

The closest we could get was to cry to the G-D of our Fathers.

We knew that Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov had a very personal relationship with Hashem. They tried to pass that information on to us, but we had to go the long way around and make our own journey.

Most of us are familiar with "foxhole prayers". Promising all manner of things to Hashem if only He will save us this one more time.

"And Hashem heard our voices". It does not say "He heard our prayers" since they were hardly that. We were incoherent, in great pain. We did the most we could do, reaching out and asking for help. No newcomer can do more.

HE SAW OUR PAIN

This is the loss of intimacy as it is written:

"And Hashem saw the Children of Israel and Hashem knew".

The word 'know' has sexual connotations, as it is written:

"And Adam knew his wife and she conceived and bore him a son".

Addiction leads to the place where ultimately nothing remains of the joys and pleasures we take for granted. Intimacy and addiction are mutually exclusive, for it is accompanied by high levels of core shame. Intimacy sets the stage for risking exposure and nakedness. Intimacy uncovers the core self which the addict can never risk for fear of rejection.

The next thing we lost were our children. We mirrored no one and no one mirrored us.

Kabbalistically, 'Son' symbolizes kindness. What remained was unbalanced fear symbolized by 'Daughter'. All the drugs and behaviors we abused have vicious side-effects. More so because they are distorted balances of emotions and sensations. Drugs famous for inducing euphoria left us severely depressed, whilst those famous for making us reckless left us shrill with paranoia. Killing the males and leaving the females is another example of imbalance. The pain was intense.

Hashem also saw the pressure we were under. No one but an addict in search of a fix, feeding a habit, desperately searching for validation, comfort or relief, knows the meaning of pressure. What incredible lengths we went to just to avoid the inevitable. We willingly trod the treadmill of unreality to avoid facing ourselves. Our hunger was a ravenous beast we desperately tried to keep sedated. The sheer energy expenditure involved in remaining "out there" far exceeds the most arduous lifestyle we work at in Recovery.

HASHEM TOOK US OUT OF EGYPT

It wasn't a medical doctor or psychiatrist. It wasn't a judge or probation officers. Hashem didn't send any of the counselors, advisors or representatives He has it at His command.

In His Glory and Solitary Majesty He brought us out of Egypt. As it is written: "And I passed through the Land of Egypt this night".

This night refers to the addiction which is the true exile in darkness.

1. Egypt, the seduction of abandonment to the world of slavery is the Place which we now had the power to resist. "And I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt".
2. Firstborn refers to the glittering pantheon of illusory hyped-up irresistible People whom we now had the power to resist. "And all the idols of Egypt I judged and executed".
3. Idols refers to all the ephemeral objects of our obsession, Things to which we imagined ourselves eternally enslaved. "I am Hashem". I can restore you to sanity. " No one else".

Hashem brought us out of Egypt with:

- 1) A mighty hand.
- 2) An outstretched arm.
- 3) Fearsome greatness.
- 4) Signs.
- 5) Wonders.

WITH A MIGHTY HAND

This is the Pestilence. Pestilence was real in Egypt, for us now let it be a metaphor.

The five descriptions of Hashem's power correspond to the five stages of Recovery from any form of addiction, obsession or compulsion that the disease may take.

The first steps we took,

led to the cessation of our acting out behavior. We had to stop using before we could recover, but we lived to use as much as we used to live. Sobriety, abstinence, solvency or whatever recovery we sought required first the Mighty hand of Hashem. This is the mighty hand referred to in the Haggadah. Just saying NO! is a very difficult action to take.

A symbol of just how difficult is the Pestilence, the sudden death of all our props and crutches. Everything we relied upon died or was jerked out from beneath us. In an age where everything from running water to agriculture to transportation and clothing depended on beasts of burden and domestic animals, the instantaneous death of cattle, livestock, horses, asses, camels, sheep and goats, was catastrophic. This is what it was like to stop using.

The second stage of recovery

is the Outstretched arm, symbolized by the cutting sword. We begin to cut ourselves off from the people, places and things associated with our addiction. If we don't make this break, odds are we will relapse. Pushing away from ourselves all the accouterments and paraphernalia of using. We begin by holding them at arm's length. We are still fascinated and obsessed by them.

With the third stage of recovery

comes great fear, symbolized by the "Shechina", the Divine Presence, awareness. As we go beyond earliest recovery, distancing ourselves a little from the whole experience, we encounter fear of returning and relapsing. The fear of our vulnerability. Fears of many varieties surface. We discover that the whole fabric of our lives has been shot through with fear. We feel defenseless and naked. Stripped of our armor, we are gripped by terror for our lives. We know that without help from somewhere, we must surely go back to a life of using. This fear is a natural, healthy and defensive response to the reality of weakness when we consider the life-threatening nature of our disease. Fear for the loss of sobriety can be a valuable tool in staying "clean".

The fourth stage is

The Sign, the image of the external power which keeps us from hurting ourselves. The almost tangible, visible, physical guarantee of safety. The object of our desperate white-knuckled "hanging on" through the turbulence of Recovery. The symbol is a staff.

The Hebrew word for staff is; MATEH which besides meaning staff, also means TRIBE. The words "staff" and "tribe" are interchangeable since the staff is actually a symbol of

identification in tribal societies. Each of the twelve tribes was represented by an elder or PRINCE. His symbol of authority and vested power was the staff he carried. For many of us our tribe is the fellowship we belong to and the meetings we attend. It is the staff of our life, when meetings are our bread and butter.

The fifth stage of Recovery

is the Miracle, the Wonder, the change we have wrought in ourselves through the new course of our action. We have turned our life around and now have a new purpose. This is symbolized by BLOOD. Earlier we referred to Hashem's condition upon our Recovery.

"Either by your blood ye shall live or else by your blood shall ye live".

This is the full circle, the last stage of our Recovery when we internalize the steps, becoming staffs of life.



THE TEN PLAGUES

It is customary when announcing the ten plagues to shed ten drops of wine from the cup, to indicate the absence of joy in the punishment of our enemies. It is never the right time to gloat at the downfall of others and this ritual reminds us of that.

The Kabbalists imbue the action with a deeper significance. The wine, as we mentioned earlier, represents the powers of thought, more specifically the "understanding" or deduction we associate with intuition. This is known as BINA and is attributed to the feminine or receptive aspect of life. Prophecy with its receptive role vis-a-vis Hashem is feminine and grounded in "BINA", intuition, until the prophecy is passed onwards by the prophet. Then it becomes positive, masculine and specifically "CHOCHMA", wisdom.

Prophecy requires SIMCHA, joy and gratitude which are associated with wine. They too are feminine aspects of the psyche. Here, however, we acknowledge another aspect of our feminine, negative self. Its roots are in the future, for there are many possible futures. The future like Woman, may give birth to many possibilities. The past is Masculine, there is only one past. It is in the past that our resentments have their source. Resentments more than anything in life, cut us off from the source of Simcha and prophecy. We simply have to let go.

Part of the problem with our feelings is the overwhelmingly, primal nature of their capacity. At first when we regain our feelings and sensations they feel huge. A small hurt, like a drop of wine on the end of our fingertip is associated with the entire cup of wine. We have not learned to differentiate, it feels as though there is a swimming-pool full of pain in the basement which overflows if we add so much as another single drop to it. Instead of feeling appropriate sensation, we experience as it were a lifetime of stored hurts we never felt before.

Fears and hatreds have similar dynamics.

At this point in the seder when we announce the anguish suffered vicariously as it were on our behalf by the Egyptians in the Haggadah, we let go our resentment and rage. We spill it over the edge recognizing for a moment the primal nature of our rage and how it resembles a cup filled to the brim. What remains afterwards is thus our cup of joy and gratitude.

These are the ten plagues that the Holy-one-blessed-be-He brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt.

Each of us has suffered the plagues in all their variety of forms and richness of diversity. The order of manifestation as they occurred to the Egyptians in Egypt was particular to them. Rather than compare our own stories, let us identify.

THE FANTASY OF OMNIPOTENCE



1. BLOOD:

To understand the significance of the first plague we must first understand what importance was attached to the River Nile in Ancient Egypt. A great deal has been written on the subject and this is not the place for a detailed review. Suffice it to say that for Hashem to strike all the water of the Nile into blood was to strike directly at the heart of political, cultural, religious and economic life. Much more than merely a classic military tactic. Cut off their water!

The Nile irrigates the whole of Egypt by inundation. It is swollen by rains in the mountains at its source. Heavy with organic sediment, it overflows its banks, irrigating as it fertilizes. It is the source of life, wealth and art. It is a god. Ceremonies associated with the inundation, rituals and sacrifices comprised a large part of Egyptian daily life. The priesthood, centering upon the King and Queen of Egypt, the Pharaoh, was dedicated to the perpetuation of the links between the royal family and the Nile. As Pharaoh walked down to the water, it would rise to meet him. Pharaoh by association became a god. The Nile was not a symbol; it was a reality.

Some of us have had a similar relationships with a substance, mood-altering ritual or obsession.

Suddenly after Millennia of being their most trustworthy, reliable friend, the river turned into a putrid filthy morass of blood, an enemy. We too have gone through this state of change when our "best friend" showed its true ugly face, the other side of dependence where all is ill health and slavery. No more than we were the Egyptians able to forsake the Nile. Just because it had turned to blood didn't mean that their habits changed suddenly. They continued in their denial through all the stages of substitution and rationalization. As it is written:

"And all the Egyptians continued to dig beside the river looking for water to drink, because they could not drink the river water"



2. FROGS:

This plague reduced Pharaoh from the proud vain tyrant to a ridiculous figure, butt of a divine joke. When Hashem warned that He would mock Pharaoh and his institutions, that He would playfully dismember the instruments of government, this plague of frogs surely fulfilled all that promise.

A frog appeared in Pharaoh's palace, in his bed chamber, in his bed. When it was crushed, two live frogs appeared in place of the dead one. They multiplied like insects and croaking, hopped out of Pharaoh's bedroom and made their way through the palace. They invaded the ministry buildings surrounding the royal palace. From the government departments they split, multiplied and spread like tendrils of the bureaucracy itself into every corner of Egypt, into people's kitchens, their kneading troughs, even into their ovens. (The Hebrew for frog, "TSFARDEA" also translates into BIRDWITTED - "Nonsense!") Like the croaking reptile which simply announces itself and tries to be louder than the next croaking frog, so are politicians. All this could not fail to be interpreted by the Egyptian civilian as a humorous humiliation of their monarchy and its vested interests by a Higher Power.

We too have seen all our efforts at control come to nought. We have been humiliated disastrously in direct consequence of our actions and decisions, we have seen them bear witness to our stupidity, to our delusions. As we tried to get the cosmos to dance to our tune, and all its creatures to act the parts we assigned to them, we appeared no less ridiculous than frogs.

DENIAL



3. LICE:

This plague was an attack on the disease's most powerful weapon, "Denial". Denial is a mechanism whereby the most outrageous manifestations of the addiction can be explained without admitting the necessity of change. An example would be someone with lung cancer blaming automobile emissions for the illness whilst smoking three packets of cigarettes every day. The Egyptians had a similar attitude. When the plagues began to strike, The College of Magicians produced practitioners who could simulate these effects with their thaumaturgical arts. The result of their success was to enable Egypt to prolong its agony, it was "business as usual". This is the function of denial. The mere fact that they could product similar results with magic meant somehow that their lives were not as

unmanageable as Moses was attempting to point out. Pharaoh didn't feel quite powerless over events as long as someone close to him was murmuring into his ear, "It's only a strong manipulation of natural forces, your majesty". But as with all illusion there is a natural upper limit to the intricacy of the web.

When first we lie or deny the truth, to ourselves or others, we have to compensate. The ripples spread outward from the event of the denial, each untruth has ripple-like effects, ramifications, each having to be explained. If I deny the effect of the cigarettes on my lungs I have to redefine the meaning of the term carcinogenic. If I maintain that denial, I have to redefine the definitions of phenomena such as melanoma, asbestosis, oncogeny and other things. If I wish to continue in my denial, I have to explain in some new way enzyme activity and amino acids and a thousand other facts.

There reaches a point where lies and evasion can no longer explain events fast enough to avoid the momentum of the truth. Magic and illusion have their own "event horizon". In Egyptian magic the illusion could not be sustained if it required the denial of something smaller than a grain of barley. There are simply too many details to take care of to maintain the illusion. This was the wonder of the plague of lice. They are smaller than a grain of barley. It was at this stage of events that the Magicians of Egypt began to lose face and ultimately their power. They tried to duplicate the lice but were unable to. At which point, they broke through their first level of denial and admitted a Higher Power. As it is written:

"And the Magicians said to Pharaoh, "It is a finger of G-D".



4. WILD BEASTS:

Maintaining His attack on Pharaoh's denial, Hashem instructed Moshe to confront Pharaoh in the morning when Pharaoh went down to the water. Pharaoh relieved himself every morning privately by the water in order to maintain the illusion that he was a god and so did not need the toilet. Moses warned Pharaoh but he would not budge.

Suddenly like some monstrous, collective delirium tremens, Egypt was filled with marauding animals, snakes and scorpions. But the land of Goshen where the Children of Israel lived was free and peaceful. At this point Pharaoh's denial began to crumble and he proceeded to the next stage of his defeat. He tried to negotiate.

We have all at one time or another tried negotiating with our disease. If I switch brands, add water, change partners, only on weekends, anything from geographic relocations to surgery, just let me carry on as I was. And all to maintain the fantasy of omnipotence, Pharaoh called Moshe and Aharon and told them to start public worship of their G-D in the land of Goshen, hoping thereby to placate Moshe and maintain control. Moshe

demanded the right to travel three days into the wilderness, Pharaoh agreed on condition they went no further. The plague was lifted, Pharaoh changed his mind and once again refused to let them go.

DEFIANCE



5. PESTILENCE:

The plague referred to earlier in the Haggadah as "Mighty Hand" was the sudden death of all the livestock in the fields. We too have seen the disappearance of all our valuable possessions, jobs, businesses, houses, and automobiles. We know what it means to be smitten with the pestilence. To look around and survey the desolation of all one's wealth disintegrating. To ask; "Why is this happening to me"? (as though this wasn't somehow a logical progression considering the direction in which we were headed).

The "beast" in Egypt was food, clothing, transportation, status symbol, object of worship and means of waging war. It was commerce and agriculture. It struck the Egyptian suddenly and forcibly that life could not go on as it had been doing. Pharaoh's reaction was not so incomprehensible to those of us who have been in his position. He became defiant. As it is written: "And Pharaoh sent inspectors, and behold not a single one of the animals belonging to Israel had died in the plague. And Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to send out the People".



6. BOILS:

At the point where their very bodies rebelled and broke into many suppurating boils, the illusion and denial broke down completely. As it is written:

"And the Magicians could not stand before Moshe because of the boils. The boils afflicted the Magicians and the Egyptians".

The Magicians lost all their credibility and in fact are never heard or referred to again in the Torah.

Because the Egyptians felt the way they did about themselves, because their self esteem like ours, was based so much on their external physiognomy - because they were so proud of their physical culture, smug and self-satisfied, safe in the knowledge that whatever hardships would have to be borne as a result of their obstinacy and defiance could always be deflected upon the slaves and lower orders of society. They were

themselves smitten. Their bodies became disgusting, repulsive and painful. The small domestic and household pets of which the Egyptians were worshipfully reverent, the dog and cat, were equally subject to the plague of boils though they had been immune to the pestilence. The message was clear to them as it has been to us. When we use and abuse, we jeopardize our selves and all those around us.

Don't look to place blame for misfortune that befalls those we love, somewhere else. While we were busy chasing our "high", too busy to take care of those who really needed it, they suffered. If children fell ill because their environment was unsafe - because we couldn't afford to provide them with the nutrition, hygiene and care they needed or because our affairs were in such chaos - it's typical for us to go in search of a blame victim. Anywhere.

These plagues, their sequence, their targets and all the details of their execution were purposeful. Our experiences, however painful and humiliating can always benefit others, and that's a promise!

AMBIVALENCE



7. HAIL:

Before this plague occurred, Hashem via Moshe warned Pharaoh very specifically about what was to come adding:

"And this time I will send all my plagues to your heart".

In the description of the hail that fell we are told that it was accompanied by very loud thunder. However damaging the hail was, its impact was not as great as the thunder. The hail was not the frozen raindrops with which we are familiar. It more closely resembled molten lava spewing from an erupting volcano in droplets. Yet the thunder which accompanied it was far more frightening. Because very loud noise is disorienting, and in order to hang on to illusions we must be able to fixate on them. When in a disorienting situation our world collapses. When Pharaoh appealed to Moshe to beg Hashem to lift the plague, he referred to "the God-thunder and the hail". Moshe answered

"I will pray, the plague will be lifted but you are not ready to let the people go".

To Moshe, it was clear that Pharaoh had no intention of letting go, he was ready to die and bring the entire world down with him. Pharaoh was not a coward, he was not weak but he was not smart. He was challenging the Almighty. Hashem said, "In order that All the world might see that I am The Higher Power and that ultimately there is hope, that prayer and faith are necessary and worthwhile, I will let you live". Pharaoh bore the lice

and the boils without demur. He was not afraid of pain. Yet when the noise of the thunder filled his head, cutting him off from his defense mechanism he was just as frightened as any other human would be. Very loud noise by itself is a form of torture against which the body is not equipped to defend itself. Are we different? Are we ready to let go? Are we tired of all the noise in our heads?



8. LOCUSTS:

The locust was also preceded by negotiation. Pharaoh, urged by his people who were losing heart, tried to bargain with Moshe. But when he was told that Moshe intended leaving with young and old, men and women, he balked. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the destruction wrought by the voracious locusts who devoured everything edible, scared Pharaoh. He panicked, calling Moshe and Aharon, confessing to having sinned against their G-D and them, begging them to forgive him again and to beg Hashem to remove "this death".

But the truth is that as much as he wanted to let them go, he wanted to hold on to them.

CAPITULATION



9. DARKNESS:

The significance of this plague was the isolation it imposed upon the Egyptians. As it is written:

"No one could see his brother and no one could get up for three days".

The darkness, we are told, was palpable. But the greatest darkness is when we cannot hear what our brothers are saying. Seeing is analogous of all communication between friends. All meetings of the mind are called seeing. If we continue determinedly down the path of self-obsession we must eventually reach that point of palpable darkness where all communication breaks down. If insanity is defined as making the same mistakes but expecting different results, then Pharaoh King of Egypt must by this time have been insane. Again he tried negotiating and saving face. He could not admit his powerlessness. He tried to salvage something from the situation. Eventually he took refuge in rage and forbade Moshe from setting foot in his palace again. Moshe agreed saying, "Yes, let it be just as you have spoken. I will not see your face again".

During the three days of darkness, four-fifths of the Children of Israel died of an overdose and were quietly buried by relatives and friends. Even with all they had seen, most slaves didn't believe in salvation.



10. SLAYING THE FIRSTBORN:

We tend to blame providence and bad luck for the losses we suffer as a consequence of using and abusing. The price is the same whether we learn our lesson or not. There is no way to use safely, and death is always the price. Pharaoh and all his people, every Egyptian regardless of race, caste or rank - all lost a loved one, child or sibling. The anguish was great. The capitulation was total: no more deals or negotiations, no more stipulation or clauses, no more conditions or half measures. They suddenly became aware of their own mortality. Sometimes it requires the death of someone close to us to make us ready to change. It is impossible to scare an addict since all the denial mechanisms forbid it. Sometimes though, a moment spent thinking about the state of life as it is now, especially when a major tragedy has occurred, is sufficient for the seed of doubt to take root and grow. Bringing the edifice of denial and delusion crashing down. For each of us in Recovery, "the slaying of the firstborn" has occurred (at least once).

RABBI YEHUDA GAVE ABBREVIATIONS

As though he had written - BFL WPB HLDF. It has been suggested that Rabbi Yehuda had a problem and would not waste ten drops of wine when three would do. Of course many more significant reasons are given to explain his abbreviation of the plagues.

1. The first three plagues were brought about by Moshe's brother Aharon. Moshe had no part in smiting the Nile or the earth and dust of Egypt. When he was a baby and placed in a basket and left to drift in the Nile amongst the reeds and bulrushes, the Nile protected him. It would have been an act of ingratitude for him to have turned it into blood. When Moshe killed an Egyptian whom he saw beating a slave, he hid the corpse in the earth and dust of Egypt. To have turned the dust into lice would also have been an ingratitude. This the Torah teaches us, is a measure of the responsibility on one who owes gratitude. The second three were performed by Moshe and Aharon together. The last plagues were brought on by Moshe himself.
2. The first three plagues were all at the lowest possible level (i.e., sea level and ground level). The second three were above ground level. The final plagues came from successively higher levels.

RABBI YOSI HAGLILI SAID:

What possible difference can it make to know that the Egyptians suffered three times as much at the crossing of the Red Sea?

It is written (Ex. 15.26):

And he said, "If you listen well to the voice of Hashem you G-D and you do what is right in His eyes, if you hearken to His commandments and guard His statues, all the illness which I brought upon Egypt I will never bring upon you, for I am Hashem your Healer".

This is perhaps the clearest indication of the nature of things in Egypt. The verse does not refer to plagues brought upon Egyptians. Rather it speaks of disease and illness upon Egypt. Finally it introduces the concept of a Healing Higher Power. During the plague of lice the Magicians referred to the "Finger of G-D". We explained there that this was a breakthrough in their denial. It was a crack in the apparently seamless wall of rationalization they had built to explain events that pointed at the need for a change in their lifestyle. What was their life-style?

Egyptians, we are told, had passed through the fiftieth gate of "Tumah". There is no specific translation into any language of the word Tumah. In this context it appears to mean self-centeredness, self-deception, self-abuse, self-destruction, self-obsession. It amounts to Soul Murder. Life in Egypt was soul destroying. Israel, we are told had reached the portals of the Fiftieth Gate. They had already passed through forty-nine. Another moment would have been too late. Hashem rushed them out of Egypt just in time to prevent them stepping through that final Gate. Each Gateway is another lie I tell myself, another excuse I make for another selfish act I rationalize. The experience in Egypt was a journey into sickness and addiction. We went all the way. There was very little difference between our disease and that of our slave drivers. What happened to the Egyptians was meant for us. Hashem could have destroyed them instantaneously. The slaughter of the firstborn could have been extended to everyone.

We Children of Israel had to learn a lesson. We had to see before our eyes fifty kinds of denial stripped away. We had to come out of fifty kinds of excuse. Our attention had to be skewered and riveted for a lasting impression to be made. So the whole panoply of the Exodus unfolded. And Rabbi Yosi Haglili tells us that in fact the Children of Israel saw the "Hand of Hashem" And they Came to Believe in Hashem and His Servant Moshe.

Yet their enthusiasm lasted no more than three days as it is written:

"And they went three days into the wilderness and found no water and complained to Moshe....".

Reb Yosi Haglili is telling us of all the misery which we need not suffer. If we keep walking the steps, learn to listen, do the right thing, etc. Hashem promised us that all the misery He brought upon Egypt will not befall us, because He is our Healer. We came to

believe in Him at the Red Sea. If it worked for them it can work for us. So the two ideas intertwine.

Rabbi Eliezer said:

"Each plague was in fact four plagues".

Rabbi Akiva said:

"Each plague was in fact five plagues".

They argue over the nature of anger itself. Rabbi Eliezer believes that "Wrathful breathing" is not an acting out of anger, unlike the other four expressions which imply action. Rabbi Akiva disagrees, saying it is a "plague". Perhaps their argument has to do with their own natures and their perception of the role that healthy anger plays in the life of a normal person.

Or perhaps their argument refers to Hashem and the description of anger when applied to Him. Is there such a thing as divine anger which is not manifest in a physical "plague"?

Rabbi Eliezer maintains that Hashem may be angry in the descriptive sense of "Being".

Reb Akiva says No! Hashem angry is a condition that affects all the Universe and is never just a state of being.

DAYAINU

Dayainu does not mean it would have been enough. Rather, it would have been more than we deserved.

If we count our blessings here we find:

FIFTEEN REASONS FOR BEING GRATEFUL

1. He brought us out of Egypt.

Obviously our first gratitude is for the fact that we are no longer trapped, enslaved to substances and habits. There could be no growth so long as we were in Egypt.

2. It does not say He judged them, rather, He did judgments among them.

The word "did", ASA refers to the most tangible form of creativity the ultimate unfolding of Hashem's plans. Hashem is not judgmental simply for its own sake. His judgments are very creative. He did it for us, in order to show us the nature of our addiction and the power of the lie in which we lived. Hashem exposed both the Egyptians and their gods.

3. He "Did" their gods.

The creativity we refer to is undoubtedly the humor and playfulness in the humiliation of the Egyptian gods.

4. He killed their firstborn.

This is the culmination of the first lesson. Slavery means death. Addiction means death. The worship of ungod means death. Let this be clear and unequivocal.

5. He gave us their money.

It does not say gave us their wealth, rather their money. A medium of exchange, the dollar is a piece of green paper of little value. But it represents agreement amongst people to maintain a monetary system and all the cultural ramifications carries. For the system to be successful, a stable balance of forces must exist in the marketplace.

The whole structure of economics that worked so well for the Egyptians now came to work for us. It was a sane, peaceful, rewarding system. The word chosen here to describe money MAMON, is unusual in this context. One might have expected the word KESEPH, silver to be used. Mamon does not appear in the story of the Exodus, whereas Keseph, silver is mentioned often. We did not have to go through the hardship of developing our own through scarcity and hardship and want. We didn't need any more upheavals in our lives concerning mundane things. Poverty makes Recovery difficult. We

had enough on our hands without skyrocketing inflation and a forced return to the barter system.

6. He split the Sea for us.

We might have had to fight a pitched battle with them the way we did weeks later with the Amalekites. The Egyptians might have found themselves drawn away to fight elsewhere against marauders, or any number of other possibilities. Instead we were taught to surrender and turn our will over to Hashem. That was good for us.

7. He passed through it on dry land.

We are not merely remarking that Hashem took care of details. When the Red Sea split and we passed through it, we did not walk through mud and swamp. Everything was as dry as a bone and the walk was comfortable. We are really pointing out that Hashem is loving and caring. The ungodly we served in Egypt were many things, none of them loving and caring or anticipating of our needs.

8. He drowned our oppressors in it.

Apparently it was very important to us to see the Egyptians destroyed. Perhaps we were afraid that so long as they could chase us they were incapable of letting go and we would have to battle endlessly with them. Perhaps we ourselves could never let go until we saw them utterly defeated. Whatever the reason, Hashem did drown them all in the Sea.

9. He took care of our needs.

Forty years in the wilderness. Protected us from sun and wind, snow and rain, snakes and scorpions. We were surrounded by "Clouds of Glory" and never really lacked material things. We had our needs met.

10. He fed us manna.

This was not just food. This was an entirely new creation. A whole new species of long molecule, this was not some growth or desert cacti. The Manna gave a whole new meaning to the phrase "Living by the word of Hashem".

11. He gave us the Shabbos.

Shabbos is priceless; it is not a "Sabbath", or day or rest. Only those who live it know what it feels like. To describe it is fruitless. A marble statue has as much resemblance to a real person as the common notion has to the true meaning of Shabbos. It is the pearl of Hashem's treasury.

12. He brought us close to Mount Sinai.

This in itself was an enormous step for us. We became willing to have all our defects of character removed. We were willing to go to any lengths to do Hashem's will. We were entirely ready. What higher spiritual peaks could we possibly have aimed for? We weren't just present at Mount Sinai, we were close.

13. He gave us the Torah.

Not merely a jewel out of His treasury, Hashem gave us the whole treasury.

14. He entered us into the Land of Israel.

15. Built us the "Chosen House" (Temple) to atone for our sins.

Who mentioned sins? Sin is implicit in the way we are. We aren't angels. We aren't expected to get it right the first time or even the second time. We are going to keep failing. What matters is progress, not perfection.

The Hebrew words chosen here to mean Temple are BAIS HABECHIRA, literally translated as "House of Choice". An allusion to the end product of the Exodus. We are no longer slaves because we have a choice. The real distinction between the using addict and the recovering addict is the power of choice. And so our gratitude list ends with thanks for the gift of what is more commonly referred to as Free Will, freedom to choose.