

## Notes on Passover Talk 3: How Do We Get From There to Here?

1. What we've seen so far is the assembly of verses/sections of the Bible which explain the Passover holiday and how we should celebrate it. It was quite obvious that if we accept the requirement of Deuteronomy, that is, the Torah, that the Passover lamb can only be sacrificed in the Temple of Jerusalem, that something had to change. The Mishnah provided the earliest indications of just how radically things needed to change, replacing the Temple sacrifice requiring a speedy meal with staff in hand, loins girded, ready to flee from Egypt. Instead, we found clear, unmistakable references to the symposia of Greece and Rome, with their fabulous meals, ample wine, and eating while reclining on divans. That took us from the days of the Temple which ended in 70 CE about two centuries later, to about 250 CE.
2. The Gemara, the Talmud, contains discussions which took place over the next three centuries but which added very little to our knowledge of what we should do to observe the Passover holiday. The Gemara is primarily concerned with attempting to understand the Mishnah. Even the matter of what is meant by "afiqoman" receives little in the way of clarification there.
3. The Talmudic era ended about 550 CE, and we hear almost nothing about Passover observance until the year 1000 CE when suddenly! we have a full-fledged Haggadah, a book of liturgy composed for recitation at the Seder written by one of the most famous of the medieval Jewish scholars, Sa'adia Ga'on.
4. From that point on, versions of the Haggadah appeared, seemingly multiplying over the centuries, until today there are literally hundreds to choose from. Of course, for Jews of my own era, there was only possible choice: the Maxwell House coffee Haggadah because the company provided a free copy with each purchase of coffee.
5. The Haggadah is somewhat flexible liturgy. There are fixed requirements. Mention is made of many of the biblical verses we saw in our first lecture. A valiant attempt is made to comply with the various requirements stipulated in the Mishnah and Tosefta which we read in our second lecture. As we contemplated the meaning of the word "afiqoman" we realized that it's pretty hard to comply with requirements when no one knows what the word means. And that also includes *hazeret* and *baroset* which we can all consume with relish (ha!) even though we don't have the faintest idea what the words really mean.
6. The "Four Questions" are recited almost verbatim from the Mishnah--just a small change occasioned by different eating customs in Babylonia from the Land of Israel. But the tale of the "Four Children" was added from other sources. We have at least three sources for that story, and the most interesting thing about it is that each of the three sources attaches explanations in different order from our Haggadah--in one, for example, the wise son might say what in another version is said by the wicked son. Apparently the story is just a pretext for talking about four visions of our religion!
7. The meal is situated in the middle of reciting one of the oldest liturgies known to Judaism, the set of Psalms we call "Hallel." We saw that in the Mishnah, there was a dispute between Hillel and Shammai about whether to start the meal after Psalm 113 or 114, and in the Haggadah, we witness Hillel's great victory!
8. After the meal, there are a few required elements. Grace must be recited, but there are various versions of it to choose from. This is the occasion for the 3rd cup of wine. European (Ashkenazi) Jews abandoned the custom of reciting Grace over wine, but Middle Eastern (Sephardi) Jews retained that custom, and it is followed for the Passover in the Haggadah.
9. In deference to a requirement of the Mishnah/Tosefta era, the Haggadah then asks us to recite the "Birkat HaShir" which we interpret to mean the liturgy of the morning service (Shaharit). This almost certainly reflects a tradition of continuing the Seder until dawn. While few Jews still do this, the custom has been relocated to the third of the Jewish pilgrimage festivals, that of "Weeks" or Shavu'ot.

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10. The last part of the Seder is almost entirely optional--a selection of songs, mentions of the Holocaust, our newly found freedom in a revitalized State of Israel, whatever the Seder company might be interested in doing until it's time to leave.
11. Before that departure, one rabbinic requirement is the recitation of a brief closing statement, preceded by the 4th cup of wine:

Our Seder is now complete according to custom and practice.  
Our faith demonstrated,  
We pray that we will merit  
Continued freedom,  
Joyfully living in the land of Zion.

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם