

בצאתי ממצרים

*Building Emunah
Through Telling Our Story*

How to Experience the
Seder as it is Meant to Be

• *Newly Revised Edition* •

Rabbi Levi Lebovits

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How to Experience the
Seder as it is Meant to Be

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The Vaad Project**



A Community Initiative of Yeshiva Toras Chaim, Denver

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Rabbi Yitzchok Wasserman

Rosh Yeshiva

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan

Rosh Yeshiva

כ"ז אדר ב' תשע"ט

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We would like to commend Rabbi Lebovits on his major accomplishment. In this brief pamphlet, he has managed to present many of the important teachings of the Hagaddah in a way that will greatly benefit the English-reading public. Reading this concise explanation of the Hagaddah will enhance the spiritual uplift that one will get from the performance of all the mitzvos of the nights of Pesach.

יצחק ווסרמן

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ישראל מאיר קגן

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Introduction

The Pesach Seder is one of the most memorable experiences in Jewish life. Who doesn't look forward to that once-a-year opportunity to reunite with family and friends and get in touch with the history of our People? The warm glow of togetherness makes the Seder an event not to be missed.

But the Seder is much more than a family reunion or a history lesson. It is a unique opportunity for us to instill deeper levels of emunah (literally, "faith") and closeness to Hashem in ourselves and our children. We leave the Seder different people than we were when we entered.

The Seder comes with a formula for achieving that transformation: telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus from Egypt) and fulfilling the mitzvos of the night, such as eating matzah and marror and drinking the four cups of wine. It's through the Haggadah and the mitzvos of the Seder that we access the soaring levels of emunah within our reach on Seder night.

But how? The story of Yetzias Mitzrayim has grown old on us. The Haggadah itself seems a bit jumbled and disjointed.

And though we all enthusiastically perform the mitzvos of the night, they seem more like obscure rituals than tools to build emunah. How is such a seemingly worn, stale ceremony supposed to arouse us spiritually?

Some try to solve this conundrum by spicing up their Seder with props or personal emunah stories. Others turn the Haggadah into a book of Halachic discussions and complex Torah thoughts. What they don't realize is that doing so puts them in danger of losing the Haggadah's essential message.

The pure, unadulterated narrative of the Haggadah is truly all we need to reach the night's ultimate purpose — sincere singing of Hallel to Hashem. With the right guidelines and context, the Seder experience can be simple, straightforward — and literally life altering! Clarity is the key: if we gain a full appreciation for the structure and progression of the Haggadah's story, we will be able to truly achieve the goal of the Seder — deeper emunah and connection to Hashem.

To better understand our Seder-night objective and why the Haggadah tells the story the way it does, this kuntres (booklet) offers a unique, profound approach to the subject of emunah and the underlying message behind the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The concepts presented here are based primarily on shiurim I heard over the course of nearly twenty years from my rebbi, Rav Reuven Leuchter, shlita, on the topics of emunah, the Haggadah, and Yetzias Mitzrayim. It is my hope that through this kuntres, the reader will access the great levels of emunah, ahavas Hashem, and commitment to Torah and mitzvos available to us on the Seder night.

Levi Lebovits
Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5780

Emunah

Faithfulness to Hashem

The Ramban teaches (Shemos 13:16) that the advent of idolatry corrupted the way people viewed the core principles of emunah. As a result, society severed ties with Hashem and His involvement in their lives. They did their best to deny His existence and reject His supervision of the world.

Yetzias Mitzrayim, with its spectacular display of clearly targeted miracles, forced the world to recognize the truth.

But Hashem does not perform such miracles in every generation. Therefore, explains the Ramban, He wove reminders of His great revelation throughout the Jewish year. We are commanded to recall Yetzias Mitzrayim every morning and evening (Devarim 16:3). We're also charged with the mitzvah of retelling the story to our children each year at the Seder. Other mitzvos, like tefillin, mezuzah, and sukkah, serve as additional reminders of the ultimate demonstration of Hashem's presence and power.

The constant emphasis Judaism places on recalling Yetzias Mitzrayim alerts us to the fact that maintaining our emunah

is a never-ending battle — and that without this barrage of reminders, we would be in danger of falling into the distorted mindset the world held before Yetzias Mitzrayim. This might come as a surprise to those of us who consider ourselves fully-fledged ma'aminin (believers). Are we really at such severe risk of losing our emunah?

Or is it possible that we simply don't understand the extent of emunah's relevance to our lives?

The Talmud describes how, when the Jewish People's adherence to mitzvos began to decline, their leaders saw a need to distill the 613 mitzvos into a few core principles through which Jews could affirm their Judaism. The process started with Dovid HaMelech and ended with Chavakuk HaNavi, who concentrated the entire Torah into one idea: “*Tzaddik be'emunaso yichyeh* — a tzaddik lives through his emunah!”

Chavakuk HaNavi's definition teaches us two basic characteristics of emunah: Firstly, it is something that sustains **life** (“a tzaddik **lives** through...”). Secondly, it is a **personal** endeavor (“**his** emunah,” not just general emunah). Let us explore these two ideas.

Defining emunah as “faith” or “belief” makes it a device of the mind, not of the heart. Chavakuk HaNavi, however, teaches us that emunah is more than just clarity of knowledge — it is sustenance for living. What does this mean?

We make choices based on our perception of reality. As our definition of reality changes, so does the way we act. Take the example of a man before and after marriage. While he's single, his “world” contains no one but himself. He makes choices primarily for his own gratification. Once he gets married, however, his reality changes. His “world” suddenly includes his wife as well. Her needs merge with his, and his decisions now must be based on her best interests as well as his own.

In his commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin, Chapter 10), the Rambam lists 13 ikrei emunah — core principles of faith in Hashem. These ikrim aren't simply ideas to believe in.

Like marriage, they are mindshifts that serve to reshape our reality and change the way we make choices. For an example, let us turn to the 12th principle of emunah — faith in the coming of Moshiach. We can simply believe that Moshiach will eventually come — or we can live day-to-day with this reality. How do we do this? By hearkening to the message behind the coming of Moshiach — that Hashem has a purpose for creation. Doing so motivates us not just to live for the “here and now” but to do our part in preparing the world for its final destiny. Believing in Moshiach reframes our worldview and shapes our priorities and decisions.

Unfortunately, there are many who don't make their choices based on reality. One might be married, but ignore the reality that his world now contains a wife. He is married, but he acts like he's not. The same is true of the ikrei emunah. Though each principle conveys a specific message of growth, connection and responsibility, we can easily choose to ignore these messages and detach ourselves from the true reality of life.

After Krias Yam Suf (the Splitting of the Red Sea), the Torah tells us that “Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people had yirah (reverence) for Hashem and they had emunah in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.” The order of the posuk (verse) is puzzling. If emunah means belief in Hashem's existence, shouldn't that come before reverence, not follow it?

This reversal informs us that emunah is more than just a thought process; it is a relationship. The word emunah stems from the same root as the Hebrew word ne'eman, which means “faithful.” Emunah is the act of ne'emanus, faithfulness, to Hashem and to the messages of the 13 principles of faith. The Jewish People had already witnessed plenty of miracles. They had certainly believed in Hashem's existence before the Splitting of the Sea. What Krias Yam Suf did was deepen their faithfulness — their ne'emanus — to Hashem and to Moshe, His servant.

What does it mean to be ne'eman? In his commentary on

the verse, “In My entire house, he (Moshe) is ne’eman” (Bamidbar 12:7), the Rashbam offers a definition: “steadfast and rooted every moment of the day.”

Being “faithful” means fully anchoring and committing oneself to a particular reality. A faithful husband fully commits himself to his marriage, providing for his wife no matter how much work that entails, and doing his best to restore harmony no matter how difficult things become. In short, he remains a loyal husband “through thick and thin.”

Throughout both the Written and Oral Torah, the Jewish People’s relationship with Hashem is characterized as a marriage. Hoshea HaNavi explains that this “marriage”, this everlasting bond between us and Hashem, is fueled by our emunah (see Hoshea 2:22), our “sticking with Hashem through thick and thin.”

Our relationship with Hashem is constantly under threat. Challenges are looming everywhere — at home, at the workplace, in our relationships. Countless times a day, we find ourselves at a crossroads: do we draw on our emunah and stay the course with Hashem, or do we chart our own course in life? Emunah goes to the core of who we are and our sense of responsibility toward Hashem.

It is easy to believe in abstract truths when they do not challenge our way of life. What is difficult is remaining firm and steadfast in our dedication to Hashem in the face of challenges that force us to reconsider who we are.

This is why we need constant reminders of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Internalizing the message of Yetzias Mitzrayim gives a person the resolve to remain loyal to Hashem and His Torah. Our goal on Seder night is to condition ourselves and our children to become the tzaddik referred to by Chavakuk HaNavi — firmly rooted in a life **with** Hashem.

With this goal in mind, let us explore the Haggadah’s narrative of Yetzias Mitzrayim and how it provides an entryway into the “world” of emunah.

Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim

The Power of a Story

The Seder night is known as the night of *mesiras haTorah m'dor l'dor* — transmission of the Torah from one generation to the next. On this night, we provide our children with the tools to fulfill the ultimate purpose of the Torah — remaining faithful to Hashem “through thick and thin.” How do we accomplish this? By telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim — by following the Torah’s commandment to “tell your child on that day, saying, ‘It is on account of this that Hashem did so for me when I left Egypt’” (Shemos 13:8).

Why does the Torah instruct us to impart this message through storytelling? Normally we think of stories as entertainment, not education. Would it not be more sensible to lay out the basic fundamentals of Judaism through a class or lecture?

Actually, we could ask the same question about the entire Torah, filled as it is with stories about our ancestors. Why does the Torah choose to educate through stories instead of instructions?

In his Introduction to Bereishis, the Ramban explains that the stories of Bereishis are included in the word “Torah” (as stated in Shemos 24:12) “...because they *guide* people along the path in matters of emunah.” What is this “path of emunah” that the Ramban mentions?

We live with a constant struggle — should we stay loyal to Hashem, or cave in to our human nature and ignore Him? This process is a never-ending journey that requires constant alertness and introspection. How do we stay strong on this journey? By studying the stories of the Torah. It is those sto-

ries, not analytical proofs or anything else, that provide the greatest support for emunah.

So what is it about stories in general, and specifically these stories, that help us deepen our emunah in Hashem?

A story isn't simply a collection of facts; it's also the plot around the facts and the message behind them. Facts are distant and abstract; a story is close and personal. A story does more than entertain. It has the unique ability to create **identification**; we feel as if we are the characters themselves. A captivating storyteller makes his listeners feel as though they are experiencing the story, not just hearing it.

Knowledge alone won't prompt us to overcome our human nature and pursue a meaningful relationship with Hashem. A relationship is built through identification, not just truth. A story can help us see ourselves from a new angle, creating the motivation to remain ne'eman, steadfast, in our commitment to Hashem whatever life might send our way.

The Torah's narratives, from Avraham Avinu to Moshe Rabbeinu and beyond, teach us who we really are. Our ancestors accomplished incredible things. Their great attributes, like the ability to recognize a higher purpose for Creation and to respond to challenges in kind, are embedded in the make-up of our personalities. As we read the stories of the Torah, we identify with our ancestors — and reconnect with our true selves.

Just as the Torah imparts truths through storytelling, we fill that role for our children on Seder night. We don't just teach facts; we help them access the wealth of emunah embedded in the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim.

A good storyteller lives the story he is telling and draws his audience in to experience it with him. It is our task to become that master storyteller. How? The same posuk that instructs us to retell the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim also commands us to regard ourselves as if **we** left Egypt on that night. If we want to draw our children into the “world” of emunah

we must first experience it ourselves. Preparing for the Seder properly doesn't mean spending hours rooting around for novel insights to share. It means personifying a living emunah. This will enable our children to discover who they truly are, what they are part of, and what that means for their lives.

Through the Eyes of the Haggadah

The Torah's command to retell the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim doesn't come with instructions. So we turn to the Oral Torah, the commentary that we received at Sinai to help us understand the written text. We look to our Sages for guidance as to how we should retell the story. What should we emphasize? Which details are most important?

The Sages answer us with the Haggadah — our guide in telling the story of emunah the way the Torah wants it to be told. There are innumerable meanings and messages contained in the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Fortunately for us, we're not expected to touch on every last message. Our Sages instruct us to focus on one specific angle of Yetzias Mitzrayim when teaching the story to our children. That angle may not encompass everything, but it allows us to achieve the Seder's purpose.

Notice, for instance, how the Haggadah chooses to present the Ten Makkos. The Plagues served to educate the world about Hashem's existence, His control over the universe, and the concept of reward and punishment (see Shemos 8:6, 8:18, 9:14, 9:29). Many people assume that the chief goal of sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim is to reinforce those fundamentals of Judaism. The Haggadah, however, mentions the Ten Makkos only as part of a larger story. While these concepts are undoubtedly important, our Sages did not consider them the central focus of Seder night.

It is crucial that we remain faithful to the Sages' narrative. We must stay on the page and work to understand the Sages' messages without getting carried away with props or peripheral ideas. Staying focused on the Haggadah itself will gain us and our children entry into a realm of emunah that we can happily revisit year after year.

Yetzias Mitzrayim

Our Story

As we begin our journey into the heart of the Haggadah, it is important to remember: the Haggadah tells **our** story just as much as it tells that of our ancestors. If we read through the plain text, without adding embellishments or outside knowledge, we'll notice that the Haggadah speaks just as much about **us** as it does about **them**.

Take the Haggada's choice of pronouns; *we*, *us*, and *our* appear far more often than *they*, *them*, and *their*. For example, "**We** were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Hashem our God took us out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm." Or, "Originally **our** ancestors were idol worshippers, but now the Omnipresent has brought **us** near to His service." The passage titled *Tzei U'lmad* ("Go and learn"), quotes the four pesukim (verses) that the Torah instructs a farmer to declare when bringing his first fruits to Yerushalayim. While the farmer might have lived hundreds of years after the Exodus, he describes the different stages of Yetzias Mitzrayim as if he himself lived through them. Likewise, the entire lyrical composition of the *Dayeinu* ("It would have sufficed **us**") is in first person plural.

An even more striking proof of our inclusion in the Hagg-

dah's story appears at the end of Maggid, the narrative portion of the Seder. The Sages tell us clearly: "It was not only our fathers whom the Holy One, Blessed is He, redeemed from slavery; **we**, too, were redeemed **with them**."

The Maharal (Gevuros Hashem, chapter 52) shares an insight into this idea. He explains that when Hashem took the Jewish People out of Egypt, He didn't only redeem the individuals alive at the time. Rather, every Jew, from our Patriarch Avraham until the end of history, was included in that exodus.

What does this mean? The Jewish People is not simply a nation like all the rest. We are a collective spiritual entity that includes the souls of every Jew ever to exist. The spiritual composition of the Jewish People is not bound by time or space and is beyond the observable laws of nature. We are like a tree: Each individual Jew is a fruit that bears the spiritual-genetic material of the roots, trunk, and bark, i.e., our ancestors' attributes and experiences. We are all part of one.

Yetzias Mitzrayim is the story of the birth of the spiritual entity called Yisrael. The Jewish Nation came into existence like a baby, delivered from within the constriction and bondage of Egypt. In that way, the Haggadah is **our** personal story, connected to each of us in every generation. **We** ourselves were actually in Egypt because the Jewish People were in Egypt, and we are part of the Jewish People. **We** were delivered because our ancestors were delivered and, in their emergence, took on the enduring form and characteristics that we possess. Yetzias Mitzrayim is not just an account of what happened to our ancestors. It is the story of our collective beginning.

We are to hear — and tell — the story as if it were **our** story. The most important condition for success in transmitting the Seder's story is our obligation to regard ourselves as if **we** left Egypt on that night.

Yetzias Mitzrayim

The Message

The first of the Aseres Hadibros serves as the source for our obligation to believe in Hashem. Considering this, the wording of the commandment seems rather strange. Instead of stating, “I am Hashem, your G-d, who created the world,” it states, “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who *took you out of the land of Egypt.*”

We gather from this surprising turn of phrase that our emunah is not based on Creation, but on Yetzias Mitzrayim. Why is that? Why is faith in the One who took us out of Egypt more relevant than faith in the One who created the world?

To answer this question, we must gain a better understanding of what our Sages truly wanted us to draw from the Seder’s narrative. What story does the Haggadah tell? What message does it seek to impart?

The simple reading of the Haggadah tells the following story:

- Hashem draws Avraham Avinu toward His service and establishes a covenant with him and his descendants that He will eventually fulfill by taking the Jewish People out of Egypt.
- Hashem miraculously gives Avraham and Sarah a child, Yitzchak, and then, again miraculously, gives Yitzchak two children, Yaakov and Esav.
- Yaakov’s father-in-law, Lavan, attempts to destroy Yaakov and his family but does not succeed.
- Yaakov and his family (seventy souls) are forced to descend to Egypt, eventually multiplying and becoming a unique people.

Building Emunah Through Telling Our Story

- The Egyptians afflict us and impose harsh labor upon us, causing us to cry out to Hashem for help.
- Hashem, hearing our cries and remembering the covenant He made with the Avos, brings the makkos upon Egypt.
- Hashem Himself takes us out of Egypt through the final blow of the Plague of the Firstborn.
- Hashem brings scores of makkos upon the Egyptians at the Red Sea.
- Hashem splits the Red Sea, takes care of us in the wilderness, provides us with the manna, gives us the Torah, brings us into Eretz Yisrael, and builds us the Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple) so that we can atone for our sins.

Reading this story compels us to wonder: If the mitzvah of sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim is to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt, shouldn't we expect the Haggadah to focus on the exodus itself and the joy of freedom from Egyptian bondage? Why, then, does the Haggadah include events such as Hashem drawing Avraham close to His service, Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah), Krias Yam Suf (the Splitting of the Red Sea), and the gift of Eretz Yisrael?

The answer to this question lies in two words: hashgacha pratis — or Hashem's individualized supervision of our lives. Our belief in hashgacha pratis, writes Rav Yitzchak Isaac Chaver in his introduction to the Haggadah, is the foundation of our Judaism.

Many understand hashgacha pratis as the simple belief that everything that happens comes from Hashem. We thank Him for the good things and resign ourselves to accepting the difficulties He sends. When things don't go our way, we comfort ourselves with the thought that we'll one day see Hashem's wisdom in hindsight and things won't seem so unfair.

Viewed this way, belief in hashgacha pratis seems more

like a response than something that motivates our behavior. And while this view is technically accurate, it is only the outer shell. Taking this approach makes us focus on what Hashem does **for** us, not what He wants **from** us.

The Ramchal in Derech Hashem (2:3) reveals a different angle of hashgacha pratis, taking it from a reactive attitude to a proactive one. Each one of us, he explains, has a unique purpose in Hashem's kingdom that only he or she can fulfill. Every aspect of our lives is designed specifically by Hashem to enable us to carry out that mission. The challenges we encounter are custom-tailored to activate the unique greatness within us. For example, writes the Ramchal, Hashem might make someone poor in order to help him develop a sense of satisfaction with the little Hashem has given him. Other times, Hashem might make someone wealthy, offering him the chance to become a giver and have mercy on those with less.

Hashem is interested in each one of us and how we can contribute to His master-plan. He oversees each of us individually, orchestrating every aspect of our lives to give us the best chance for success in our mission. Hashgacha pratis isn't simply an attitude that lets us tip our hats in times of good and fall back on our belief when things are difficult. Instead, hashgacha pratis leads us to live life from the vantage point of our mission in this world.

Why is Hashem so deeply interested in us? Why does He involve Himself so thoroughly in our lives?

When Hashem gives Moshe the mission of redeeming the Jewish People, the Torah says, "When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship G-d on this mountain." (Shemos 3:12) Rashi explains, "And that which you asked, 'What merit do the Jewish People possess that they should depart from Egypt?' I [Hashem] have much invested in this departure, for they are destined to receive the Torah on this mountain (Mount Sinai) three months after they leave Egypt."

Hashem enters our lives in order to actualize the purpose of our creation — receiving and living by the Torah. As Rav Yitzchok Isaac Chaver explains, the foundation of Judaism — and the message of Yetzias Mitzrayim — is Hashem’s desire to see us achieve our specific mission in His world. The Seder narrative is the story of Hashem’s unwavering involvement in building, supporting, and furthering the Jewish People’s mission. That is why the Haggadah’s story begins with Avraham Avinu and goes as far as the building of the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim.

With this understanding, let us take a fresh look at the Haggadah’s story:

- At a time when the world has severed ties with Hashem, He initiates a relationship with Avraham by drawing him toward His service (see the section *Mit’chila ovdei avodah zarah hayuh avoseinu* — “Originally our ancestors were idol worshipers and now the Omnipresent has brought us close to His service,” which refers to the bond that began with Avraham and extends to the entire Jewish People).
- Hashem enters further into Avraham’s world to give Avraham and Sarah a child they could not have naturally, and then enters his son Yitzchak’s world, also to give him children he and Rivka could not naturally have. Each time, Hashem enters the picture, taking the necessary steps to advance the creation of a Jewish nation.
- Throughout the process, there are antagonists who try to prevent the creation of the nation. First, Lavan tries to uproot Yaakov’s family before it can become a people (see *Arami oved avi* — “An Aramean attempted to destroy my father”). Then, Pharaoh enslaves us in order to make us forget our true identity (implied with the words “*Va’yarei’u osanu HaMitzrim*” — “The Egyptians did evil to us and afflicted us”).
- Each time, Hashem intervenes to ensure the Jewish

People's existence and mission in this world, as He does throughout all the generations (as the Haggadah states in the section, *V'hee she'amda l'avoseinu v'lanu* — "It is this that stood by our fathers and us").

- Hashem "in His glory and Himself," not an angel or an emissary, takes us out of Egypt. This demonstrates the fact that Hashem is directly involved in our lives, without intermediaries (as explained in the section, *Vayotzi'einu Hashem miMitzrayim* — "Hashem took us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm").
- Hashem then gives us the Torah, granting us the key to fulfilling our purpose in His world (The Haggadah presents this in the section, *Baruch HaMakom baruch Hu* — "Blessed is the Omnipresent; blessed is He.")
- After giving us the Torah, Hashem continues to accompany us devotedly. Through the manna, He provides a supernatural existence for us in the wilderness, then brings us into the supernatural land of Eretz Yisrael. He builds us the Beis Hamikdash to cleanse us of our sins, helping us restore our relationship with Him on a constant basis (as the Haggadah recounts in the *Dayeinu* section).

Clearly, this narrative isn't just the story of freedom from Egyptian bondage. The Haggadah is telling the story of Hashem's faithfulness to us. He built us up "from the heaps of garbage," as Dovid Hamelech says, "to seat us with nobles." The Haggadah's story is the story of the process through which Hashem established us as a nation like no other — as a nation that exists under His personal supervision and care. As a nation who lives for a higher calling.

The Haggadah's story is much more than history. It is the template for our relationship with Hashem forever. He is constantly entering our worlds as well, challenging us to push beyond our comfort zone and fulfill our life-mission.

When we reflect on Yetzias Mitzrayim and see our lives

refracted through that lens, we realize that everything a Jew experiences in this world has a purpose. No Jew's life begins at birth; we are living a continuation of the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Each time we recite the Birchas Hamazon (Grace after Meals), we thank Hashem not only for our meal, but for Yetzias Mitzrayim as well. We recognize that Hashem provides for our needs in order to further our purpose in this world.

The Haggadah describes Hashem knocking on our door, waiting for us to let Him into our lives. Emunah is our response — opening the door for Him. The custom-made purpose Hashem assigns each of us may not be the purpose we have in mind for ourselves. We may, for example, be more interested in the troubles of wealth than the suffering of poverty. Our impulse to satisfy the self stands in the way of our accepting the journey Hashem has chosen for us. We'd rather live life the way we want than stay on board with Hashem's plan. If we internalize the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, we will be able to open our doors to Hashem — to accept His plan and live our lives the way He wants us to live them.

The Talmud teaches (Sanhedrin 110b-111a) that the word “amen” is an expression of emunah. It also explains that “amen” is an acronym for “*E-l Melech Ne'eman*” — “G-d, faithful King.” Those two facts together raise a question: Why do we use a phrase about Hashem's faithfulness to *us* to express *our* emunah in *Him*?

The answer: In order to be “steadfast and firmly rooted” in our relationship with Hashem, we first have to recognize how steadfast *He* is in His faithfulness to us. His unwavering commitment to the Jewish People shows His tremendous interest in us and our mission. That makes us value our own potential, and motivates us to “stay in the game” with Hashem. We trust that whatever we face in life has been sent by our Creator to help us grow into who we're meant to be.

Our emunah in Hashem, therefore, is a direct result of His

“emunah” in us. When reciting the Shema alone, we preface our declaration of faith — “*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*” — with “*E-l Melech Ne’eman.*” Reminding ourselves of Hashem’s faithfulness to us enables us to truly accept the yoke of Heaven.

This is the Haggadah’s essential message — Hashem’s long standing emunah and deep investment in us. The story brings to life our steadfast relationship with Hashem, through thick and thin, which we would never abandon no matter how much our human drives try to pull us away. The story of Yetzias Mitzrayim helps us rise above our negative inclinations so that we can stay in the natural realm of a Jew.

We can now understand why Hashem identifies Himself in the Aseres HaDibros as the G-d of Yetzias Mitzrayim, not as the G-d of Creation. Our emunah is more than just belief in a Creator. It is the deeply rooted, never-ending relationship with Hashem that stems from the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Hearing the simple, unadulterated story of the Haggadah allows us to recognize the depth of Hashem’s relationship with us, the position He’s assigned to us, and His limitless interest in us. It is that recognition that will bring us to sing Hallel at the culmination of the Seder.

Summary

While the Pesach Seder is a night with great potential, much can get lost in the shuffle. Having heard and told the same story year after year, we pour our creative and intellectual energies into glossing over or trying to polish the Haggadah’s seemingly disjointed account of Yetzias Mitzrayim. We add insights and props, rather than trusting that our Sages had a careful plan in the way they wrote the narrative. To gain a better appreciation of the Haggadah, and to achieve its

purpose, we must revisit the topic of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the backbone of the Seder.

The Ramban explains that the Torah gives us constant reminders of Yetzias Mitzrayim because it is the cornerstone of our emunah. Why the need for so many reminders, when we already consider ourselves believers?

Chavakuk HaNavi teaches us that emunah is more than just belief. It is the lens through which each of us relates to Hashem. Emunah means following Hashem's lead. It means leaving aside our own ideas about how our lives should look and instead internalizing the messages Hashem sends our way.

Our faith tends to be reactive when it should be proactive. We accept what Hashem gives us, when actually there is more that we can do. Hashem's individual involvement in our lives is not only about what He wants **for** us, but what He wants **from** us. Each one of us plays a specific role in Hashem's plan for the world. Hashem enters our personal lives in different ways to push us toward success in our mission. We humans must constantly push ourselves to yield to Hashem's design instead of insisting on our own plans. Constant reminders of Yetzias Mitzrayim serve as our weapons in that struggle.

There may be other ways to teach our children, and ourselves, the message of emunah. But none is as effective as good storytelling. Information makes us smarter, but a story changes our lives. We identify with the characters and see ourselves as reliving the events. In our battle against human nature, this **identification** wins us far more ground than any knowledge or insight. By relating to the traits of our ancestors, we can recognize our true selves and rise above our flawed desires.

Yetzias Mitzrayim is not just any story, it's **our** story — the story of the Jewish People. The Jewish People were enslaved in Egypt, and the Jewish People were freed. Because we are all parts of the collective Jewish People, **we** were also

enslaved — and **we** were also redeemed.

The Haggadah is our Sages' guide for telling the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Though we might have chosen to focus the Haggadah around the miracles of the Ten Makkos, our Sages had a different priority. They centered their narrative around Hashem's ongoing involvement in the Jewish People's existence. The Haggadah's story begins long before our enslavement in Egypt, and continues far beyond the Exodus. It spans the entire period from Hashem's drawing Avraham Avinu close until the building of the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. Our Sages focus on events throughout that timespan which show Hashem actively participating in our development. Krias Yam Suf, Matan Torah, providing for us in the wilderness the miraculous manna, and the gift of Eretz Yisrael are some examples. The message is that Hashem acts with emunah toward us. He has a mission for us and continuously intervenes on our behalf to bring His vision to reality.

In this way, the Haggadah's narrative describes the prototype for our ongoing relationship with Hashem. The story of Yetzias Mitzrayim is the foundation for all Jewish life. Although it is human to resist being faithful to Hashem, we can change our own nature by experiencing the deep interest Hashem has in the Jewish People, how invested He is in our success, and how He never gives up on us.

The story helps us view ourselves as **His**. He made us, He raised us up, and He bound us to Him with an everlasting bond. This deep level of identification, which we reach by telling the Haggadah's story, holds more power than any of the temptations born of human nature.

Hashem's emunah in us, which enables us to recognize our true essence, leads to our emunah in Him. As a result, we commit ourselves to Hashem's plan for us and to letting Him into our lives. This is the message we impart to our children, and ourselves, on the Seder night.