

## HISTORY OF THE PASSOVER HAGADAH

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The Hagadah was first written 1300 years ago (~700CE), but the events leading up to it started much earlier, about 3500 years ago.

The first event occurred 3500 years ago (~1500 BCE). At that time, the Jews were enslaved in Egypt. In the story of the Exodus, Gd sent Moses to smite the Egyptians with 10 plagues and free the Jews, so that Gd could give them the Torah and settle them in Israel.

Just before the 10<sup>th</sup> and last plague, the Jews were informed that they would soon be leaving Egypt and going to the promised land. They were commanded that after they settle in the promised land, each year on this date (in the month that falls at the beginning of spring, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month) they should sacrifice a paschal lamb during the day, and at night eat it with matzah and maror (bitter herbs) while telling over the Exodus story to their children. The command to tell the Exodus story to the children was told to the Jews 4 times in the Torah. Each time with a different content, to indicate that the content and wording is up to the individual, for the individual to use content and wording that is most appropriate for his own family.

So, after settling the Israel, each year on the 14th day of Nissan, the Jews would perform the Passover ceremony, sacrificing a lamb during the day and eating it at night with matzah and maror while telling over the Exodus story. The Jews would include many other steps in the ceremony that weren't explicitly commanded in the Torah, such as drinking 4 cups of wine, asking the 4 questions, eating a celery dipped in salt water and saying psalms. The instructions of this ceremony were passed down orally from generation to generation. This continued for 1700 years. Over the years, people started forgetting some of the steps of the Seder.

So, about the year 200, the rabbis wrote the Mishnah, which is a cursory compilation of laws on all Jewish subjects. It is comprised of about 60 volumes (misechtas), each volume covering a different Jewish subject. One of the volumes deals with the laws of Passover. And chapter 10 of this volume lists the steps one performs in the Passover ceremony. So, for the first time in 1700 years, Jews had a written authoritative list of the steps of the Passover Seder. But there was still a problem, because although the steps were listed in the Mishnah, details of each step were left to be handed down orally. Over time, those details gradually became forgotten and subject to debate.

So, 300 years later (about the year 500), the rabbis wrote the Gemarah (Talmud), in which they followed the format of the Mishnah, but filled in the details that the Mishnah had left out. So, in the volume of the Talmud dealing

with Passover, in chapter 10, the rabbis recorded, in about 40 pages, everything they knew about the Seder, including rules they were uncertain about, philosophy and stories and complex Talmudic sequences of logic.

But there were still problems. 1) Most people couldn't afford to buy the Talmud, because it was a massive work that had to be written by hand (before the days of the printing press). 2) It required great intelligence and effort to interpret and understand it. And even if you could do all that, 3) While the Talmud told you the basic gist of each thing you had to say, it left much of the content and phraseology to the individual, so that during the Seder, Jews would have to formulate their own wording to fulfill the obligations described in the Talmud.

So, 200 years later (about the year 700), the rabbis composed a simple handbook, in which they wrote down, for the common man, word per word, each sentence you can say in the Seder to fulfill his Passover obligation. And they called this handbook a Hagadah. There were several varying versions of the Hagadah, because, as mentioned above, although the gist of each thing you must say is a matter of law, the content and wording is up to the individual.

Of course, before the invention of the printing press, all Hagadahs were hand-written. In fact, one Hagadah that was handwritten 1000 years ago still exists today. (It wasn't a stand-alone handbook but a chapter of a Siddur.)

The first printing-press version of the Hagadah was printed in 1482 (50 years after Guttenburg's invention). It had only 12 pages. Since then, over 3000 versions of the Hagadah have been printed.

Although ancient versions of the Hagadah differed from each other, the different editions of the Hagadah have become more mutually consistent over the years. The Hagadah has changed very little over the past 1000 years. In fact, essentially the only part of the Hagadah that HAS changed significantly is the last section of poems and songs, and even THEY are ancient. For example, the AZ ROV NISSIM poem was written 1500 years ago. The ADDIR HU poem was written in the Middle Ages, and its tune, which is basically the same in all Jewish homes, is at least 360 years old. The poem EHAD MI YODE'A is at least 500 years old (and is missing in Sfardi Hagadahs).

# **POSTER FOR SPEECH**

**1500BCE Exodus**

**200 Mishnah**

**500 Gemarah**

**700 Hagadah**

**1492 by printing press**

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## STEPS OF THE HAGADAH

Kiddush.

Wash hands

Eat celery dipped in salt water

Break the middle matzah and hide it

Declare that this matzah is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in Egypt.

Declare that the needy are invited to join us in our Seder.

4 questions (Mah Nishtannah ) asking why is this supper different from all other suppers

Father explains: because we were slaves in Egypt and Gd freed us, etc, etc

Explain that tonight we are commanded to tell over the story of freedom from slavery even if we already know it.

How long? The longer you spend on it the better.

Cite 4 paragraphs in Torah commanding us to recount the story of freedom from Egypt (Deut. 6:20; Ex.12:26; 13:8; 13:14)

Explain how we know, from Torah's phraseology, that the command to tell this story is tonight, the 15th day of Nisan

Explain that in every generation, even before the Exodus, Gd saved us from murderers who tried to destroy us

Several pages of word play, to arrive at a lot of interesting deductions.

List the 10 plagues

Dai Dai'ainu: poem listing all the good things Gd did for us from, from saving us from Egypt to settling us in Israel

The significance of the Passover sacrifice, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs.

First two chapters of Hallel (which is part of Psalms)

Bracha thanking Gd for freeing us from slavery

Wash our hands again

Eat matzah

Eat bitter herbs

Eat a sandwich of matzah and bitter herbs

Eat the meal

Eat a final piece of matzah.

Bench

Remainder of Hallel, along with some other psalms of praise that we recite every Sabbath morning

Recite poems and songs