

Parsha Ponders

Shevii shel Pesach | Apr 28, 2024 | 21 Nissan 5784

*Songs of praise, or storytelling?*¹

אפילו כולנו חכמים כולנו נבונים כולנו זקנים כולם יודעים את התורה, מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים
Even if we are all Sages, all of us are people of understanding, all of us are elders, all of us know the
Torah, it's a *mitzvah* for us to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt²

On *Seder* night, we are commanded to recount the Pesach story to our children. This is seemingly different than the regular daily *mitzvah* to recall the Exodus from Egypt. Perhaps we can suggest two reasons for the once-a-year *mitzvah* of recounting the story: (1) It's purely expressing and acknowledging to our children all of the miracles that Hashem performed for us. This approach fits simply with the verse: "When your child will ask you on that day....you shall recount to him".³ It sounds like the *mitzvah* is simply a response to the child's curiosity. (2) It's a form of song and praise to Hashem, not simply a retelling of the story⁴.

There's a practical difference between these two approaches. What if everyone present were Torah scholars, who knew all of the intricate details of the Exodus story. There's seemingly no need to recount the story in order to inform everyone, as everyone knows already. However, if the reason is to sing Hashem's praises, that would apply regardless of the attendee's knowledge levels⁵. Is there a way to determine which is the main reason behind the *mitzvah*?

Our Sages tell us⁶ that at the scene of the splitting of the Reed Sea, which collapsed on all of the Egyptians, drowning them, the ministering Angels wanted to sing Hashem's praises. Hashem told them: "My creations are drowning in the sea, and you want to sing My praises?!" We see from here that it's considered inappropriate to sing Hashem's praises when the wicked are suffering. It's also taught⁷ that the reason why we don't say full *Hallel* on the last day of Pesach is because that's when the Egyptians drowned.

It would make sense that on *Seder* night we should try to replicate what our ancestors did on that fateful evening, the night of the plague of the death of the firstborn. The Jews also had a *Seder* that night. Whatever they recounted, was it as a form of a story? Or as a form of a song. If their *Seder* took the form of a song, we would be obligated to do so as well. Or perhaps it was forbidden to sing at that point, as the Egyptians were dying. It would stand to reason then that since we see the Egyptians drowning is a reason to refrain from singing, so too during the plague of the firstborn.

However, unlike the Angels, the Jews themselves sang Hashem's praises after the sea split. Isn't that inconsistent? Don't we learn it's forbidden to sing Hashem's praises at our enemies' downfall? One explanation is that the Angels wanted to sing at that exact moment, but Hashem is all Merciful. He

¹ Based on [Rav Shlomo Kluger's Haggadah's Ma'asei Yadi Yotzer](#) s.v. ג' אמר רבי אליעזר בן עזריה אופן ג'

² [Haggadah shel Pesach](#). As we'll see, [Rav Shlomo Kluger](#) will debate if we all know the Exodus story if there's still an obligation to recount it. I don't understand why he didn't learn from the [Haggadah](#) itself, which seems to tell us that yes, we have to. Perhaps I missed him addressing this, as it's a long piece

³ [Exodus](#) 13:14

⁴ We find precedent for this from our Sages who describe the recounting of the *Megillah* story as a form of *Hallel* ([Megillah](#) 14a). See also [Isaiah](#) 30:29

⁵ Just like with the *Megillah*, even though everyone is very familiar with the story, we recount it anyways

⁶ [Megillah](#) 10b

⁷ See [Beis Yosef](#) to [Tur Orach Chaim](#) § 490

didn't let them. Whereas the Jews waited until the next morning⁸. Since the punishment on the Egyptians had completed, Hashem allowed them to sing.

Another explanation is that it's specifically forbidden for the Angels to sing Hashem's praises at that time, for in their eyes the downfall of the Egyptians wasn't a miracle. They are beyond this world and see the full picture. As such, praises at the time would solely be for the downfall of the wicked. We, on the other hand, don't see everything so clearly. From our perspective, such a salvation was a total miracle. Songs of praise would then be appropriate, as they would be for the miraculous salvation, and not exclusively for the downfall of the wicked.

Accordingly, if we go with the second explanation for why the Jews could sing Hashem's praises, we would be allowed to sing on the original *Seder* night as well. Recounting the *Seder* as a form of song and praise as the Egyptian firstborn died would have been totally permitted. We could then suggest that our own personal recitation of the *Haggadah* is also a form of song. However, according to the first explanation, the Jews were saying over their *Seder* at the time the Egyptians were dying. It would be forbidden for them to then sing Hashem's praises, so their *Seder* must have been a form of recounting and acknowledgement. It would come out then that our *Seder* takes on the same form⁹.

Either way, may we always be cognizant of Hashem's endless Good that He bestows upon us, to the point that we just have to jump up and sing His praises.

Chag Sameach

⁸ In Rav Shlomo Kluger's Derush L'Parshas Beshalach, he surprisingly writes that the Jews sang when the Egyptians were drowning, and it was in fact inappropriate. He says they should have waited

⁹ See further for Rav Shlomo Kluger's attempt to come to a definitive conclusion on this matter