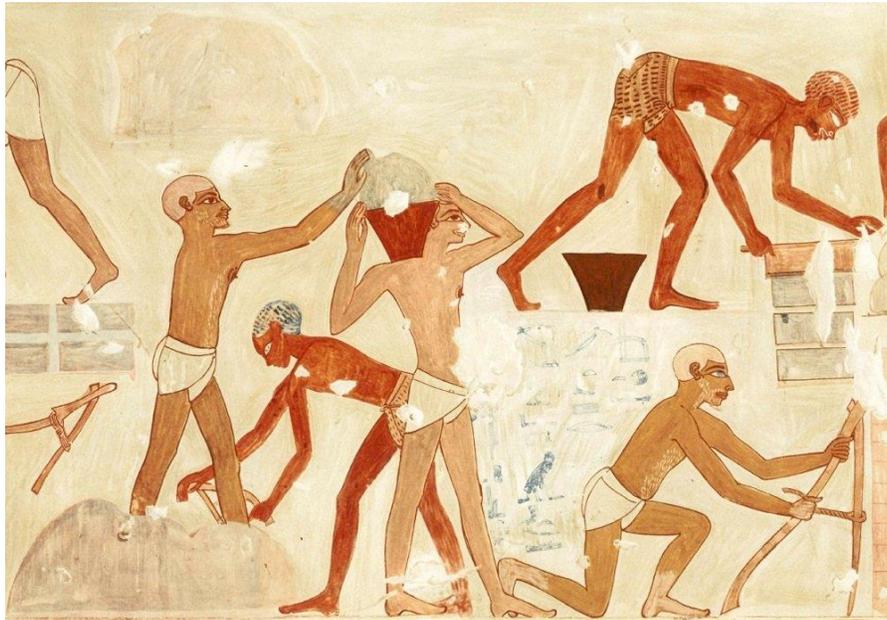




Yeshiva University  
THE RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS–HERENSTEIN  
CENTER FOR VALUES AND LEADERSHIP

**Rabbi Sacks' Haggadah Highlights: Incorporating Israel into Your Seder**  
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### I. Faith as Protest

וְהִיא שְׁעֵמֶדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שְׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, אֲלָא שְׁבָכָל דּוֹר נְדוּר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מֵיָדָם.

And it is this that has stood for our ancestors and for us; since it is not [only] one [person or nation] that has stood [against] us to destroy us, but rather in each generation, they stand [against] us to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hand.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, (p. 3)

Too often in the history of religion, people have killed in the name of the God of life, waged war in the name of the God of peace, hated in the name of the God of love and practised cruelty in the name of the God of compassion... No soul was ever saved by hate. No truth was ever proved by violence. No redemption was ever brought by holy war. No religion won the admiration of the world by its capacity to inflict suffering on its enemies. (p.265)

Early Kibbutz Haggadah (<https://danielgordis.substack.com/p/because-in-each-generation-they-rise>)

How is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights our towns were besieged, and we were surrounded by enemies inciting us. On this night, we sit secure in our home and our towns are flourishing.

How is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights we would celebrate our Festival of Freedom when we were controlled by a foreign ruler.

Now we are free people in our free land the State of Israel.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World* (p. 25-27)

He [God] does not want the people of the covenant to be one that accepts the evils and injustices of the world as the will of God... In Judaism, faith is not acceptance but protest, against the world that is, in the name of the world that is not yet but ought to be... To be a Jewish child is to learn how to question. Four times the Mosaic books refer to children asking questions (the 'four sons' of the Haggadah). The most significant family ritual, the seder service of Passover, begins with the questions asked by a child. Against cultures that see unquestioning obedience as the ideal behaviour of a child, Jewish tradition, in the Haggadah, regards the 'child who has not learned to ask' as the lowest, not the highest, stage of development... Judaism is God's perennial question-mark against the condition of the world. That things are as they are is a fact, not a value. Only one who asks whether the world should be as it is, is capable of changing what it is... I remain in awe at the challenge God has set us: to be different, iconoclasts of the politically correct, to be God's question-mark against the conventional wisdom of the age, to build, to change, to 'mend' the world until it becomes a place worthy of the divine presence.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Israel: Hope of Hope* CD

The day will come, when the story of Israel in modern times will speak not just to Jews, but to all who believe in the power of the human spirit as it reaches out to God, as an everlasting symbol of the victory of life over death, hope over despair. Israel has achieved great things. It has taken a barren land and made it bloom again. It's taken an ancient language, the Hebrew of the Bible, and made it speak again. It's taken the West's oldest faith and made it young again. Israel has taken a tattered, shattered nation and made it live again. Israel is the country whose national anthem, Hatikva, means hope. Israel is the home of hope.

## II. Yesterday's Slaves to Today's Hostages

Exodus 1:11-13

וַיִּשְׂמוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עַנּוֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לַפַּרְעֹה אֶת-רַעַמְסֵס:

So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses.

וּכְאֲשֶׁר יֵעָנוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּלָּצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites.

וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרָעָה:

The Egyptians ruthlessly imposed upon the Israelites

## Exodus 2:23-25

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הַעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעֻקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הַעֲבֹדָה:

A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God.

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב:

God heard their moaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּדַע אֱלֹהִים:

God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

## Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno on Exodus 2:23

**ויזעקו.** זעקו מכאב לב על עבודתם, כענין הלילי שער, זעקי עיר:

They cried out of frustration about their miserable fate and their enslavement. A similar expression for venting such feelings of frustration occurs in Isaiah (14:31) הֲלִילִי שַׁעַר זַעֲקֵי הָעִיר, “Howl, o gate! Cry out, o city!”

**ותעל.** שועתם אל האלהים מן העבודה. לא בשביל תשובתם ותפלתם, אבל כמקנא על אכזריות המעבידים, כאמרו וגם ראיתי את הלחץ:

God’s response was not due to their repenting and praying, but He simply was angry over the excessive cruelty with which the Egyptians treated the Jewish people. This is why He added גם וראיתי את הלחץ אשר מצרים לוחצים אותם, “and I have also seen the pressure that the Egyptians keep imposing on them.

## Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada* (Maggid), p. 57

The sages defined ‘heavy labor’ as ‘work that has no time limit,’ such as ordering someone to “dig until I return.” There are two aspects of slavery, physical and psychological, and Jewish law recognized that the psychological effects can sometimes be worse than the physical exhaustion of backbreaking labor. “Heavy labor” is work designed to crush the spirit of slaves by depriving them of the freedom to make decisions and subjecting them to someone else’s will.

## The Cry of Hostage Families and Rescued Hostages

“They stormed into our homes. They beat people. They kidnapped others, the old and the young without distinction.” Yocheved Lifshitz (85 – 17 days in captivity)

“I was chained for three weeks in Gaza. I was kept in a really dark room without being able to move.”...”The feeling like they’re taking me, like I’m some kind of object... I couldn’t stand it. My instinct was just to fight, to do what I can.” Amit Soussana (40 - 55 days in captivity)

"From the very first day, it's been a slow-motion terror. You know sometimes you get a fright when you come around a corner and you didn't know someone was there and you have that moment where you jump back and you're like, oh my gosh, and your heart is pumping in your chest. I didn't know it was sustainable. But it has been endless." On day 69, she described what she was going through: "Someone tore my heart out and took it away. I'm walking through this life in this very artificial way. Just trying to do the best that I can so that I can function enough to be able to be productive in trying to save my son's life." Rachel Goldberg-Polin (Hersh still in captivity – Day #181)

Prayer for the Return of the Hostages To be recited at the Seder before the recital of *Vehi Sheamda* Composed by The Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi David Lau

### **PRAYER FOR THE RETURN OF THE HOSTAGES**

TO BE RECITED AT THE SEDER BEFORE THE RECITAL OF *VEHI SHEAMDA*  
COMPOSED BY THE CHIEF RABBI OF ISRAEL, RABBI DAVID LAU

*May it be the will of our Father in Heaven who took his nation Israel out of the yoke of Egypt, He should bless and save our brothers and sisters the hostages who are held in iron chains.*

*Strengthen their souls and faith, protect them from all harm and sickness, have mercy on his sons and daughters who look for his salvation, annul all cruel decrees. With His great kindness, He shall send their redemption and speedily take them from darkness to light and from the abyss of captivity to eternal freedom, and return them safely to their families and homes.*

*Please, plant brotherhood, peace, and friendship in everyone's hearts. Remove jealousy and baseless hatred, and spread over us the shelter of Your peace, so that we should soon merit to sing before You a new song.*

### **סדר התפילה להשבת החטופים**

לאמרה בעת אמירת הגדה של פסח, לפני אמירת והיא שעמדה  
תיקן הרב הראשי לישראל הגר"ד לאו

יהי רצון מלפני אבינו שבשמים אשר הוציא את עמו  
ישראל מתחת סבלות מצרים, הוא יברך ויגזר את אחינו  
ואחיותינו החטופים האסורים בכבלי ברזל.

יחזק נפשם ואמונתם ישמרם מכל נגע ומחלה יחמול  
על בניו ובנותיו המצפים לישועתו יבטל מעליהם כל  
גזרות אכזריות. בחסדו הגדול יחיש פדותם ויגאוו מהרה  
מאפלה לאורה ומבור השבי לחרות עולם וישובו לשלום  
אל משפחותיהם ואל בתיהם.

אנא, נטע אחוה שלום ורעות בלב כלם הסר קנאה  
ושנאת חנם ופרס עלינו סתת שלומך ונזכה בקרוב לומר  
לפניך שירה חדשה.

### **III. Divine Justice**

שפך חמתך אל־הגוים אשר לא ידעוך ועל־ממלכות אשר בשמך לא קראו. כי אכל את־יִעֲקֹב ואת־נְהוֹי השמו. שפך־  
עליהם זעמך וחרון אפך ושיגם. תרדף באף ותשמידם מתחת שמי ה'.

Pour your wrath upon the nations that did not know You and upon the kingdoms that did not call upon Your Name! Since they have consumed Ya'akov and laid waste his habitation (Psalms 79:6-7). Pour out Your fury upon them and the fierceness of Your anger shall reach them

(Psalms 69:25)! You shall pursue them with anger and eradicate them from under the skies of the Lord (Lamentations 3:66).

Commentary on “Pour out Your Wrath on the Nations,” *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Haggadah*, p.68

For centuries, Jews suffered a series of devastating blows - massacres, pogroms, forced conversions, inquisitions, confinement to ghettos, punitive taxation and expulsions, culminating, in the very heart of ‘enlightened’ Europe in the Holocaust. Yet these verses, two from Psalms, one from the Book of Lamentations, are almost the only trace left by this experience on the Haggadah, the night when we recall our past... Judaism is a religion of justice. It is also a religion of love, compassion, forgiveness, generosity and peace. But from the beginning it has wrestled with the question of how to bring the Divine presence down to earth, in the structures and institutions of society. The necessary precondition is justice. Once that exists, there is room for the many other virtues that humanise our world. But without justice, something fundamental is missing. ‘Pour out Your wrath’ is not a call for vengeance. It is not a call to human action at all. It is, rather, a prayer for Divine justice.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “The Cup of Hope,” *Covenant and Conversation* 5769

The drama of the fifth cup [cup of Elijah] now becomes apparent. Pesach represents the start of the great journey of Jewish history, from slavery to freedom, Egypt to the promised land. What then became of it after the destruction of the Second Temple, the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion, the Hadrianic persecutions and the long, tragic series of events that led to the greatest exile of Jewish history? Could Jews celebrate freedom under such circumstances? ...The very festival that spoke of liberty gained became –for almost 2,000 years –a poignant reminder of what the Jewish people had lost: freedom, a land, a home. A new phrase was born: next year. ‘This year we are slaves; next year we will be free. This year we are here; next year in Israel.’ The past became the future. Memory was transfigured into hope. It is not too much to call the Jewish people ‘the people of hope’. What had happened once would happen again. As the prophets of exile – Jeremiah and Ezekiel – said: there would be a second exodus. The loss was only temporary. The Divine promise was forever. It was in this context that the debate over the fifth cup arose. Jews could speak about the four preliminary stages of redemption – but could they celebrate the fifth: ‘I will bring you to the land’? That is the debate between Rashi, Rambam and Ravad. Rashi says one should not drink a fifth cup; Rambam says one may; Ravad says one should. Hence the extra cup at the seder table. Out of respect for Rambam and Ravad, we pour it. Out of respect for Rashi, we do not drink it. According to the Sages, unresolved halachic disputes will one day be resolved by Elijah (the word Teyku – ‘Let it stand [undecided],’ refers to Elijah: ‘The Tishbite [Elijah] will come and answer questions and problems’). Hence the fifth cup became known as ‘the Cup of Elijah’.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “The Missing Fifth,” *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Haggada*, (p. 104)

In the half-century since the Holocaust the Jewish people has emerged from darkness to light. The State of Israel has come into being. The Hebrew language has been reborn. Jews have been brought to safety from the countries where they faced persecution. In the liberal democracies of the West Jews have gained freedom, and even prominence and affluence. But Israel is not yet at peace. In the Diaspora assimilation continues apace. Many Jews are estranged from their people and their faith. Something is missing from our celebration- the fifth cup... That is a measure of

what still needs to be achieved. We have not yet reached our destination. The missing fifths remind us of work still to be done, a journey not yet complete.

#### IV. What War Does to Faith

##### Birkat ha-mazon

##### **Rabbi Sacks, Haggadah, p. 119**

*Once I was young, and now I am old, yet I have never watched a righteous man forsaken or his children begging for bread:* This line, from Psalms 37:25, has often raised questions. Surely throughout history there were times when the righteous were forsaken? Indeed this is one of those questions that, according to the Talmud, Moses asked God: “Why do the righteous suffer?” (BT *Brakhot* 7a)...I once heard a beautiful explanation from Rabbi Moses Feuerstein of Boston. The key phrase of the verse is *lo ra’iti*, standardly translated as “I have not seen.” The verb *Ra’iti*, though, occurs twice in the Book of Esther with a quite different meaning. “How can I bear to watch the disaster that will befall my people? And how can I bear to watch the destruction of my family? (Est. 8:6). The verb here does not mean “see.” It means “stand by and watch, be a passive witness, a disengaged spectator. *Ra’iti* in this sense means seeing and doing nothing to help. That, for Esther as for the Psalmist, is a moral impossibility.

Rabbi Shai Held, *Judaism is about Love* (FGS), p. 70-71

In our own time, many of us are more confident of God’s solidarity than we are of God’s salvation; in other words, we believe that God is with us even if we don’t think that God will dramatically intervene to save us. That may indeed represent a vast gap, or even a chasm, between us and our biblical forebears. And yet they have bequeathed us something precious and potentially transformational: the insistence that we need not lie about our suffering, the awareness that honesty is never a sacrilege, the courage to cry out, and the confidence that injustice is to be resisted rather than accepted.

##### **Genesis Rabba 39:1**

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵל אַבְרָם לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ צָרָף וּגְוֵ' (בראשית יב, א), רַבִּי יִצְחָק פָּתַח (תהלים מה, יא): שְׁמָעִי בַת וַיִּרְאֵי וְהִטִּי אָזְנִי וְשִׁכְחִי עֲמִיד וּבֵית אָבִיךָ, אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק מִשָּׁל לְאַחַד שְׁהֵינָה עוֹבֵר מִמְקוֹם לְמִקוֹם, וְנִרְאָה בִּירְה אַחַת דּוֹלְקָת, אָמַר תֹּאמַר שְׁהֵיבִירָה הַזֶּה בְּלֹא מְנַהִיג, הַצִּיץ עָלָיו בְּעַל הַבִּירָה, אָמַר לוֹ אֲנִי הוּא בְּעַל הַבִּירָה. כִּךָ לְפִי שְׁהֵינָה אָבִינוּ אַבְרָהָם אוֹמֵר תֹּאמַר שְׁהֵעוֹלָם הַזֶּה בְּלֹא מְנַהִיג, הַצִּיץ עָלָיו הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמַר לוֹ אֲנִי הוּא בְּעַל הָעוֹלָם.

“The Lord said to Abram: Go you, from your land, and from your birthplace, and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). “The Lord said to Abram: Go you, from your land...” – Rabbi Yitzhak began: “Listen, daughter, see, and incline your ear. Forget your people and your father’s house” (Psalms 45:11). Rabbi Yitzhak said: This is analogous to one who was passing from place to place and saw a building with a flame burning in it. He said: ‘Is it possible that this building has no one in charge of it?’ The owner of the

building looked out at him and said: 'I am the owner of the building.' So, because Abraham our patriarch was saying: 'Is it possible that this world is without someone in charge?' The Holy One blessed be He looked at him and said to him: 'I am the owner of the world.'

**Rabbi Shai Held, *Judaism is about Love* (FGS), p. 54**

Abraham refuses to look away. Confronted with the abyss of meaninglessness, he will not avert his eyes. But not only does Abraham refuse to turn away, he cares: "Is it possible that this world has no one who looks after it?"...That possibility shakes Abraham to the very core of his being...the founding father of the Jewish people is someone who will not hide from the reality of human suffering.

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The God Who Acts in History" (*Va'era*, Covenant & Conversation)**

"In the darkest night, Israel was about to have its greatest encounter with God. Hope was to be born at the very edge of the abyss of despair. There was nothing natural about this, nothing inevitable. No logic can give rise to hope; no law of history charts a path from slavery to redemption. The entire sequence of events was a prelude to the single most formative moment in the history of Israel: the intervention of God in history – the supreme Power intervening on behalf of the supremely powerless, not (as in every other culture) to endorse the status quo, but to overturn it."