

The standard seder text begins with the recitation of *הא לחמא עניא*, “This is the bread of *oni* that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt”. The use of “this”, equivalent to the Hebrew *זה*, suggests that one is pointing at a matzah, and the literary issue is that no context has been set. An anthropologist visiting the seder would reasonably conclude that the Jews ate matzah throughout their stay in Egypt, rather than specifically during the Exodus.

In Rambam’s Haggadah, however, the text begins *בבהילו יצאנו ממצרים*. *ב'בהלה'* is a translation of the Biblical *הפזון*, and seems to mean something like “hurry under stress”. This makes the opening a straightforward reference to Devarim 16:3:

לא תאכל עליו חמץ שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצות לחם עני כי בחפזון יצאת מארץ מצרים למען תזכר את יום צאתך מארץ מצרים כל ימי חיידך:

You must not eat chametz over it – for seven days you shall eat over it matzot, bread of *oni*, because it was in *chipazon* that you departed the Land of Egypt, so that you will remember the day of your departure from the Land of Egypt all the days of your life.

It is possible that the absence of this opening is an error in our texts, although if so the error precedes Rambam, as our text is found in the Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon. But (see on this Rav Kasher’s *הגדה שלמה*) the problem here, as in many Biblical texts, is determining the referents of the prepositional phrases. Devarim 16:2 and 3 put together read as follows:

וזבחת פסח ליקוק א-להיך צאן ובקר במקום אשר יבחר יקוק לשכן שמו שם:  
לא תאכל עליו חמץ שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצות לחם עני

כי בחפזון יצאת מארץ מצרים למען תזכר את יום צאתך מארץ מצרים כל ימי חיידך:

You will sacrifice a Pesach to Hashem your G-d, flock and cattle, in the place where Hashem your G-d will choose to have His Presence dwell there.

You must not eat chametz over it –

for seven days you shall eat over it matzot, bread of *oni*, because it was in *chipazon* that you departed the Land of Egypt, so that you will remember the day of your departure from the Land of Egypt all the days of your life”

Grammatically, the term *chipazon* may relate either specifically to the command to eat matzah and not chametz, or else to the Pesach sacrifice. The evidence that it relates to the Pesach sacrifice is Shmot 12:11:

וככה תאכלו אתו מתניכם הגרים נעליכם ברגליכם ומקלכם בידכם ואכלתם אתו בחפזון פסח הוא ליקוק:

Thus you must eat it – your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staffs in your hands. And you must eat it in *chipazon* – it is a Pesach to Hashem.

This seems to indicate that the eating of unleavened bread is certainly not an essential component of *chipazon*, and this might lead someone to object that Rambam’s Haggadah makes an unwarranted connection, and remove the opening.

Why should this matter, though? Isn’t eating unleavened bread in any case part of the recollection of the “stressed haste” with which we left Egypt? Not necessarily – Mishnah Pesachim 9:5 tells us that while the Pesach of Egypt was eaten in *chipazon*, subsequent Pesachs, should not be, perhaps even must not be. The immediate evidence for this halakhic position, as brought in Mekhilta, is “you must eat it in *chipazon*” – it, but not others”. This seems to indicate that while the entire Pesach ritual *recalls* the *chipazon* with which we left Egypt, it is not intended to *recreate* that *chipazon*. If matzah were in fact a recreation of *chipazon*, then, it would be inappropriate to eat them with the Pesach. That we eat matzah at the Seder is therefore evidence that matzah is not associated with *chipazon*, and therefore Rambam’s text is problematic.

Why should the Torah not wish the *chipazon* to be recreated? One possibility is the controversy as to who, exactly, was in a “stressed hurry” to have the Jews leave Egypt. Various midrashim suggest that it was the Jews, the Egyptians, and/or Hashem! If we take the last approach, which is many ways the most interesting, *chipazon* may be a reference to the idea that redemption from Egypt was urgently necessary, and came prematurely, because the Jews would otherwise have descended into “the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of tum’ah” and become permanently unworthy of redemption. Perhaps this is not an aspect of the Exodus that we wish to recall at the Seder, at least not at its outset, despite the principle that “we begin with shame”.

Another reason to not recreate *chipazon* may be the description of Ultimate Redemption in Yeshayahu 52:12:

כי לא בחפזון תצאו ובמוסה לא תלכו כי הלך לפניכם יקוק ומאספכם א-להי ישראל:

For you will not depart in *chipazon*, and you will not go in the manner of fleeing, because Hashem goes before you, and one One who gathers you is the G-d of Israel.

This verse, as noted by many midrashim (but not Radak), seems to see the *chipazon* with which we left Egypt as a flaw in that redemption. Perhaps the Pesach is supposed to look both forward and back, and we do not recreate those aspects of the Pesach that did not foreshadow ultimate redemption

These two rationales are intriguingly combined in a fascinating Midrash Sekhel Tov on the Song of the Sea (attached but not translated). Exodus 15:12-19 is written in a grammatical form that obscures present and past, but there seems to be a perhaps anachronistic mention of the Temple as an ultimate goal, and the verses can be read as suggesting that the inhabitants of Canaan have already been struck dumb by the passage of the Children of Israel among them. The verse Sekhel Tov focuses on is 15:13, “You have guided with Your *chessed* this nation which You have redeemed; You have directed them with Your strength to Your holy dwelling-place”. “Your *chessed*” suggests that this was undeserved – but when had Hashem redeemed the Jews, let alone taken them to His holy dwelling-place? Sekhel Tov posits that Hashem took the Jews to the Temple Mount (on the wings of eagles: see Shmot 19:4) on the night of Passover, where they brought and ate the Pesach sacrifice, and then returned them to Egypt in time for the Plague of the FirstBorn. While Hashem was in *chipazon* lest they *return* too late, in His *chessed* He did not hurry them.

In this reading, we did not leave Egypt with *chipazon* at all, although we did eat the Pesach while G-d waited, patiently, but kebyakhol stressed. And so it would certainly be inappropriate to begin the Seder by saying that we *left* Egypt in *chipazon*, and that the matzah recalls that.

In a Chassidic mode, we might suggest that the underlying message of this reading of the poetry of Exodus is that redemption can only happen to those who have already experienced it – the Jews could not leave Egypt unless they had a true understanding not only of what they were leaving, but where they were going. Thus in the narrative of Exodus it is clear that true redemption cannot occur until Sinai, and perhaps not even then, until the message of Torah has been fully understood as well as heard. This is a useful cautionary note with regard to contemporary dreams of redemption, but may we merit that complete understanding speedily and in our days, and strive toward it regardless.

Shabbat shalom

"נחית בחסדך" –

דומה לו "וינחם אל מחוז חפצם" (תהלים קז ל), "וינחם בענן יומם" (שם עח יד) ולשון נחיל' היא כאדם המפרש בים וקם סער עליו, או כיוצא בשיירה ותעה ורדפוהו ליסטין, ונודמן לו אוהבו והוליכו והנחהו בשלום למחוז חפצו, לכך נאמר "נחית בחסדך" – שלא היו בידינו מעשים טובים ומצוות, אלא חסד עשית עמנו ונחיתנו:

"עם זו" –

כלומר עם זה, ולשון זכר היא, ודומה לו "עם זו יצרתי לי" (ישעי' מג כא):

"עם זו גאלת" –

במה גאלתם, בכופר שנתתה מצרים בתמורתם:

"נהלת" –

אין נהילה אלא נהיגה בלט, ודומה לדבר "אתנהלה לאטי" (בראשית לג יד), "אין מנהל לה" (ישעי' נא יח), "וינהלם בלחם" (בראשית מז יז), וכל דומיהן:

"בעזך" –

בתוקף שלך, שאע"פ שאתה עזוז וגבור, לא היתה מדביקתו ללכת במרוצה, אלא כמחזיק ביד בנו ומכה לו לאט, ולא עוד, אלא שנהילתך היתה עריבה ביותר, שנשאתנו בעוזך על כנפי נשרים בשעה קלה והבאתנו במצרים בלילי הפסח:

"אל נוה קדשך" –

למקום בית המקדש, דכתיב ביה "נוה שאנן אהל בל יצען" (ישעי' לג כ), ואכלנו שם הפסח,

והחזרת לנו למצרים מיד,

ואע"פ ששכינתך היתה נחפזת לך, דכתיב "ואכלתם אותו בחפזון" (שמות יב יא), לנו לא החפזתה בכך: