



Volume VI Issue #22

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Pesach, 15 Nissan, 5786

April 2, 2026

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Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: Every year I host a Seder and invite the same extended family. Without fail, half of them arrive 45 minutes to an hour late. This year I am thinking of telling everyone that our Seder begins at 8:00 PM when in truth I plan to start at 8:45. Am I permitted to do so?

ANSWER: This is an excellent question with both practical and Halachic dimensions. The short answer is that it is likely permitted, as explained below.

In his Hisorerus Teshuvah (Siman 36), Rav Shimon Sofer ZT"l examines a comparable situation—setting a clock ahead of the actual time without an individual's knowledge to prevent the individual from being late—and determines that such an action is permitted. He references the Gemara in Shabbos (119a), which describes Rava's response upon noticing individuals grinding vegetables late on Friday afternoon. Rava acted out of concern that they could unintentionally continue this activity into Shabbos, thus violating its observance. Rava informed them of a purported letter from Eretz Yisrael prohibiting this practice, despite the fact that no such letter existed. This example illustrates that misleading others for their own benefit may be considered permissible under certain circumstances.

In the case of Passover, similar reasons allow for this exception. The Passover Seder is more than just a social event—it is a Mitzvah min HaTorah (a commandment from the Torah), which includes several duties that must be completed within specific time frames. If guests arrive late and cause the Seder to start late, there is real concern that important Mitzvos of the Seder such as eating the Afikoman before Halachic midnight (according to many Halachic authorities) may not be carried out properly, and that children—who are central to "V'Higadeta L'Vincha" (the obligation to tell the story of the Exodus to your children)—might fall asleep before the narrative even begins.

In addition, the Gemara in Yevamos (65b) establishes that Mutar Leshanos Mipnei haShalom — one may deviate from the truth for the sake of peace. The disruption caused by the lateness of the guests and the tension it creates would also support the conclusion that a lie can be told so the Seder can

start on time, proceed peacefully and without disruption.

It is important to highlight that Rav Yavrov ZT"l, in his Niv Sfasayim, advises that even when permitted, the practice of lying should not become habitual, as this may unfortunately lead one to undermine their own commitment to honesty. While, as outlined above, telling a lie for the purpose of starting the Seder on time is likely permissible, it is preferable to communicate directly with the guests and state: "Given past experiences, we are asking everyone to arrive by 8:00 so that the Seder can begin on time." This statement is entirely truthful and effectively conveys the intended message.

On The Haggadah

Two Questions to Ask at the Seder

Who perhaps, of all people, deserves to be mentioned the most in the Haggadah? Moshe is the obvious answer. Yet, in the entire retelling of Yetziyas Mitzrayim (the story of the exodus from Egypt), there is only one passing reference made to him (within Rabbi Yossei HaGelili's explanation of how many plagues the Egyptians were afflicted with at the splitting of the sea). And that is all!

For the greatest leader in Jewish history that is shocking. How could that be?

And the second question. The song of "Dayenu" where we detail our thanks to Hashem for all of the miracles and kindness that he bestowed upon us throughout the exodus from Egypt until the building of the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple) that we recite during the Passover Seder is quite lengthy – it has 15 stanzas. In addition, right after Dayenu there is another narrative which recaps the Dayenu. Why is such a lengthy narrative (and then a further recap narrative) necessary? Why not just say, "Thank You, Hashem, for everything You did for us?"

These two questions — why is Moshe barely mentioned in the Haggadah, and why Dayenu is so lengthy have a similar answer. And the answer teaches us one of the most important lessons in the entire Torah: the importance of giving credit where credit is due.

Imagine if we were to tell the Yetziyas Mitzrayim story with Moshe as its main character: “Moshe took us out of Egypt. Moshe split the sea. Moshe led us through the desert.” After a generation or two, Hashem may slip into the background — officially acknowledged, technically important, but not really the focal point of the story.

This is exactly the concern raised by the Vilna Gaon in his commentary on the Haggadah. The most famous answer to why references to Moshe are scant is that including him would pull attention away from the true message of Yetziyas Mitzrayim — that Hashem alone saved us, without any human intermediary. In the Haggadah’s own words: “Lo Al Yedei Malach, Lo Al Yedei Saraf, Lo Al Yedei Shaliach — Ani V’Lo Acher” - not through an angel, not through a seraph, not through any agent. Hashem Himself, and no one else.

And the whole point of Yetziyas Mitzrayim is to realize that now that Hashem alone has saved us, we owe it to Him to join His covenant and embrace the mission He has set out for us.

And now, on to our answer to the second question that we posed. When someone does a huge favor for us, it is easy to say, “Thanks so much for everything!” It feels and sounds grateful. But is it really? When we say “everything,” we have not actually identified anything specific that we are thankful for.

And that is why Dayenu is so lengthy and detailed.

The Haggadah breaks down the period of Yetziyas Mitzrayim through the splitting of the sea to the building of the Bais HaMikdash into fifteen separate stanzas and forces us to stop and say thank you at each one. Splitting the sea gets its own stanza of gratitude. Crossing on dry land — that is another separate stanza of gratitude. Reaching Har Sinai is different from actually receiving the Torah and deserves its own separate, “Thank you” – and so on and so forth. The Dayenu does not let us bundle everything together into one, “Thank you for everything, Hashem.”

Putting the two answers to the questions above together, reveals the Hagaddah’s unmistakable message.

References to Moshe do not appear in the Hagaddah to ensure that we give credit to Hashem where it is due. And Dayenu teaches us that when we give credit and say thank you, to do it the right way, we must give credit with precision and specifics to ensure that gratitude is shown for each and every kindness that has been bestowed upon us.

Gebrochts* during Passover, even though this is a practice more commonly associated with Chassidic Jews. In contrast, Litvaks (Lithuanian Jews) such as Reb Yaakov, customarily eat Gebrochts and enjoy dishes with Matzah dipped in water such as Kneidlach, Matzah-Brei, Matzah with jelly and similar foods.

Interestingly, Reb Yaakov permitted his family to follow the common Litvak custom to eat Gebrochts on Passover even though he personally did not. The origin of his practice stems from his time studying at the Slabodka Yeshiva. At that time, Yeshivas did not have dining facilities, so Yeshiva Bochurim (students) were assigned to local hosts through an arrangement known as 'Teg.' Each day or every couple of days, different students would be guests in various community households.

Unlike today, students did not routinely return home for Passover due to financial constraints and logistical challenges; instead, they remained in Yeshiva for extended periods of time, including holidays and breaks. As a result, it was customary for Yeshiva students to be hosted by local families during these times.

One Passover, a young Reb Yaakov was once assigned to dine at a particular household but had reservations regarding the level of Kashrus observed there. To avoid causing offense by questioning their Kashrus standards, he explained that he could not dine with them because he did not eat Gebrochts—a claim that his hosts who ate Gebrochts, readily accepted. This allowed him to decline the invitation respectfully without insulting the host.

However, once Reb Yaakov made this statement, he felt committed to keeping his word for the rest of his life. From that day forward, he never ate Gebrochts on Passover again.

** Gebrochts is a Yiddish word that refers to Matzah that has come in contact with water. It literally means “broken,” and it has come to mean “wet matzah” because Matzah is usually ground or broken up into crumbs before it is mixed with water. Those who refrain from eating Gebrochts on Passover do so for fear that during the baking process there may have been a minute amount of flour that did not get kneaded properly into the dough. Upon contact with water, that flour would become Chametz (leavened bread and prohibited on Passover).*

*“May I back out of a school carpool that
I have already committed to?”
“Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?”*

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