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CONTENTS:

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SEEING DOUBLE: THEMES IN JUDGES, CHAPTER 3

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Full of unconventional heroes and uncharacteristic attention to descriptive details, with vivid battle scenes and stunning victories, the Book of *Judges* engages the student of Tanakh from beginning to end. The well-known cycle (or "dance", as R. Benny Lau calls it) of sinning/oppression/crying out to God/deliverance by the judge/period of quiet, which forms a backdrop to the narratives, serves to link the otherwise unconnected accounts of the different judges.

Another, more subtle connection between the chapters dealing with what are often referred to as the "Major Judges," is God's personal relationship with each judge. In all but one of these stories, the judge is either someone with whom God communicates directly, such as Devorah, the only actual prophet amongst the judges, or is a charismatic individual who becomes temporarily "enveloped" by the spirit of God, such as is described with Gideon, (Jud. 6:34), Yiftach (Jud. 11:29), and Samson (Jud. 14:6).

In each of these accounts, God converses and interacts with the judge to varying degrees. For example, Gideon speaks freely with God, sometimes initiating the conversation, sometimes responding. Feeling a lack of confidence, he turns to God and requests a show of miracles for reassurance. God replies by granting all of the signs he asks for and then offers him another one for good measure. Samson, after one particularly harrowing massacre, cries out to God that he will die of thirst. God answers him by opening up a crater flowing with water for him to drink. While there is no direct dialogue between Yiftach and God in the verses, when, after some negotiation, Yiftach consents to assume the role of leader of his people, he immediately goes to Mitzpeh to "say all of his words before the Lord" (Jud. 11: 11), implying a relationship.

Moreover, in these narratives God plays an active role in the unfolding of the events. In the Gideon story, we find a demonstrative show of participation, with God whittling away the Israelite army to a mere 300 men in order to confirm that it is He who brought about the victory, rather than allowing the people to think, for even one minute, that it was "my hand which saved me."

With Devorah, a single, cryptic phrase, "And God confounded [the enemy]," serves to demonstrate God's prominent role. When fleshed out by the poetic images from her victory song, the succinct phrase is understood to convey how God enlisted all of nature – in a dramatic display of rain, thunder, and lightening – to vanquish the enemy.[1]

God's involvement with Samson is evident from the very start, beginning with his miraculous birth and his consecration as a Nazir "from the womb." In several other places, the text makes sure to indicate that it is God orchestrating even the most personal decisions from behind the scenes, often unbeknownst to Samson himself. We are told, for example, that Samson's insistence on taking a Philistine woman for a wife, much to his parents' dismay, is "the Lord's doing. He was seeking a pretext against the Philistines" (Jud. 14:4).

God's part in the Yiftach narrative is somewhat less blatant but, still, the terms of the vow Yiftach makes to God in Jud. 11: 30-31, "if Thou deliver… into my hands", are immediately met by God, in the very next verse, which uses the exact same wording: "and the Lord delivered them into his hands." This "pointed echo," to borrow Robert Alter's phrase, implies a direct correlation between the two verses: a request by an individual, and its fulfillment by God. This correlation indicates a personal, mutual relationship.

In only one of the major judge narratives are all the above elements conspicuously missing. The very first of the series tells of a judge who does not communicate with God at all and, though the story begins with the common introductory remark "and the Lord raised them up a deliverer," and the judge himself invokes God's Name once to the king and once to rally the people to his side, a plain reading of the text is surprising in its total absence of God as a protagonist in the entire account. The judge is the left-handed Benjaminite, Ehud Ben Gera.

It has already been shown[2] that the section which comprises the Ehud narrative (Jud. 3,12-30) is written as a concise chiastic structure. The story begins with the Moabites and their cohorts Amon and Amalek (a triumvirate of Israel's arch enemies in the bible) smiting the children of Israel ("*Vayakh et Yisrael*"), and concludes with the Israelites smiting the Moabites ("*Vayakhu et Moav*"). The children of Israel send a tribute to the foreign king in Ehud's hand ("*be-yado*") and, in the end, the enemy is subdued by the hand ("*tachat yad*") of Israel. Before he kills Eglon, the text relates that Ehud returned from a place called Pesilim, and after he escapes we are told that he passed Pesilim.

[1] Judy Taubes Sterman, "Themes in the Deborah Narrative," *The Jewish Bible Quarterly 153* (2011): 15-24

[2] See, for example, Yonatan Grossman's lecture, http://www.hatanakh.com/lessons/אהוד-ועגלון-חרב-קטנה-ובטן-גדולה-0.

These and many other linguistic parallels gradually converge, pointing us towards the central element of the narrative, the gruesome murder of King Eglon. Regarding this whole chapter, the careful literary structure seems to be more than just convention; it may be a subtle hint to a broader theme which runs throughout the narrative and unlocks a deeper meaning to the entire story. Throughout the short section there is a pronounced sense of repetition, pairing and parallelism. Many of the events and particulars of the story are presented in twos, or with matching counterparts, and the peculiar elements interspersed throughout the text often occur in double form.

Though the theme of doubleness is most apparent in the main part of the narrative, it can already be detected in the very first sentence. Here the narrator isn't satisfied with the standard introduction to the familiar cycle, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord," but sees fit to duplicate the phrase almost word for word, relating that God sent an enemy to oppress them, "…because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord."

Predictably, the people cry out to God, and the hero is chosen. He is introduced in a flurry of repetition. The cadence of verse 15, with its word pairs tripping from one to the next, *"Be*n" ("*…Ben Gera, Ben ha-Yemini"), 'Yemin' ("Ben ha-Yemini...yad yemin"),* and *"Yad" ("yad yemin…be-yado"),* produces a sort of reverberating, echoing effect. Note the play on words: "*Ben Yemini, ish iter yad yemino,"* designates Ehud as a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin, but translated literally it reads, "son of the right (hand), a man whose right hand is blocked." It is uncommon enough for the biblical text to offer us physical descriptions of characters in general, but this particular trait, left-handedness, is mentioned only two other times in all of Tanakh (Judges 20:16 and 1 Chronicles 12:2), both with reference to the tribe of Benjamin and both specifically regarding their military prowess.

Chronicles I, 12:2 indicates that these Benjaminite heroes used their left hand equally as well as their right, a definite advantage in a fight, and this reading is reflected in the Septuagint's translation of the word "*iter*" in our verse as *amphoterodoxios,* a neologism comprised of two Greek words and taken to mean someone who uses the left hand as well as the right. Whether the tribe had a genetic predisposition to left-handedness, or deliberately bound or inhibited their right hands in some way,—that is, whether it was nature or nurture (or, as has been suggested, a bit of each)[3]—this physical feature reinforces our theme: Ehud's left hand functions as his right; he is ambidextrous.

In Ehud's hand, the text continues, the children of Israel send an offering, presumably some sort of tax, to the king of Moab. Ehud sees this as an opportunity to make his move. That the generally laconic biblical text next offers us precise details about both the exact size and shape of the weapon Ehud prepares for himself will need explanation, but the sensitive reader may not be surprised at this point by one aspect of the description: this is not a typical weapon, as this sword has not one, but two edges.

The attention to unusual particulars now increases as we are told that Ehud straps this small dagger ("a *gomed* in length") under his clothes, specifically to his right thigh, and that Eglon, the king is "a very stout man" (v.17, literally," very healthy") who is sitting in his own personal "cool upper chamber." In a gesture that can be seen as another corresponding act, just as Ehud dismisses all the people who accompanied him (v.18), Eglon, too, shoos away all his attendants (v.19).

As we approach the gory climax, the text begins to slow down the action, giving us each vivid detail piece by piece. First, Ehud says a brief sentence telling Eglon he has a secret message for him, at which point the king clears the room. This secret can also be understood on two different levels: Presumably, Ehud is pretending to have some important information for the king—perhaps news about a potential rebellion by the Israelites. This is a reasonable conclusion for the king to draw when he sees that Ehud has sent all of his men away and then returns alone. But, in fact, Ehud really does have a "secret message" for the king—a hidden dagger meant to be delivered directly to the king!

Next, Ehud says a second sentence to him, closely parallel in structure to the first, declaring that he has a message from God for him, and we are told that Eglon stands up from the chair. Our interest is piqued as we wonder why the text bothers with these "stage directions" about Eglon's position. Ehud then "puts forth his left hand," and the reader is eager with anticipation. He takes the dagger from his right thigh, and the tension grows. Only then does the text finally tell us he plunges the dagger into Eglon's (large) belly. The image conjured of a fatted calf (the name Eglon is reminiscent of the word "*eigel"*, calf) being slaughtered is perhaps a not so subtle way to mock the enemy king. Like Chekhov's gun, the moment the little sword is introduced the reader knows what it will be used for, but the slow-motion effect here builds up the suspense in much the same way as any good horror movie, making the culmination all the more horrifying.

The next few facts could certainly be filed under "Too Much Information," as we are told the hilt of the sword followed the blade into Eglon's belly, his fat closed around it, Ehud did not remove the sword from the belly, and the "waste came out." This enigmatic verse, with its profusion of graphic descriptions, is closely mirrored in the next verse in another example of the double theme.

In this verse, Ehud escapes into the vestibule and locks the door of the cooling room behind him. The last line of verse 23, the singular phrase, "*va-yetzeh haparshedona*," and the waste came out, is directly parallel and even rhymes with the first line of the next verse, "*ve-yetzeh hamizdarona*," and he went out to the vestibule. Ehud closes the door, "*va- yisgor,"* just as in the previous verse the fat closes, "*va-yisgor,"* around the blade. The dagger is locked inside Eglon's stomach, forever, just as Eglon himself is now locked inside his room, lifeless. Even the lock on the door itself, it becomes apparent, is a double lock.

After the deed is done, Ehud locks the door with a key from the outside and makes his escape. Eglon's servants see that the door is locked and assume that their master is relieving himself in his private chamber. They surmise that the door was locked not by an outsider trying to escape unnoticed, but from the inside by the king himself, wanting some privacy. There is a bit of scatalogical humor as we imagine the scene: Eglon's servants draw the very wrong conclusion and wait patiently, and, after a while, perhaps a little awkwardly for him to come out of the bathroom. Meanwhile, Ehud has murdered him in cold blood, has long escaped, and has even managed to muster a rebel army. Again, the description is meant to poke fun at the foolish enemy.

[3] Boyd Seevers and Joanna Klein, "Biblical Views: Left-Handed Sons of Right-Handers", *Biblical Archaeology Review (*2013).

With a few more instances of the dual theme, the story concludes. The term used for the thrusting of the dagger into Eglon is "*va-yitkaeha."*[4] This word is echoed in verse 27, when Ehud blows the shofar, "*va-yitka,"* to rally the people. The 10,000 Moabites who were slain by Ehud and his army were all "robust men." The uncommon Hebrew word used is "*shamen,"* literally fat, reminding us of Eglon, and they are "subdued under the hand of Israel" (v.30), much as their king is literally subdued by Ehud's hand. Their utter destruction is emphasized by the phrase, "not one of them escaped" (in Hebrew, "*nimlat*"), just as the full expression of Ehud's success is described as him escaping ("*nimlat*"), while the servants were busy deliberating. Finally, in both the episode before this story (where the judge is Othniel), and the one after (with Devorah), the land is quiet for a period of 40 years. In our story "the land was tranquil for 80 years" (v.30), exactly double the amount of time.

If interpreted correctly, this undercurrent of doublings which runs throughout the narrative helps explain the peculiar attention to seemingly insignificant details which cannot but be puzzling to the reader. The story is full of doubles because the mission Ehud went on was of a double nature – there were two ways it could have been completed. The original plan might have gone successfully, as it indeed does, but if any one particular of the myriad of details had been even slightly otherwise, the mission might have turned out to be very different – perhaps even a suicide mission. Thus, it is necessary for the text to give us details that emphasize to us that, surprisingly, all did go according to plan.

We are told, for example, that Ehud uses his left hand and therefore conceals the sword on his right thigh, because this is the less common placement. Were he to be searched by the guards, they would be less likely to look on that side. When he reaches his left hand towards his right thigh in front of the King, Eglon likely doesn't suspect a thing, because this is not the side that most men carry their swords on. The sword is doubled edged because Ehud, aware of the king's physique, plans to use that to his advantage. One thrust of a dagger, sharp on both sides, into the king's belly, can do maximum internal, fatal damage.

The fact the Eglon stands up when Ehud says his second sentence to him means that with the two men standing close to each other, Eglon's girth may have prevented him from seeing what Ehud was doing, as with only the slightest gesture of his hand Ehud is able to unsheathe the short dagger and with a just flip of the wrist, plunge in into Eglon's protruding stomach. It is quite possible that Eglon never even knew what hit him!

As to the detail of the fat closing around the dagger, this meant that there was no bloody weapon for Ehud to conceal on his way out. Moreover, there was no blood spatter – not on the floor, not on Eglon's clothes, and no telltale signs on Ehud himself, which made it possible for Ehud to stroll out of the room, past any guard that may have been there, without arousing any suspicion whatsoever.

The unpleasant detail about the waste is, in fact, extremely relevant. The smell is presumably what caused the servants to draw the conclusion they did, allowing Ehud plenty of time to reach safety and gather his army. When the servants finally open the door to the room, "There their master was lying dead on the floor" (v.25). With no weapon and no blood stains, they may very well have thought their corpulent king died of natural causes and never realized that he had been assassinated right under their noses!

Here, then, is yet another instance of parallelism —Eglon is dead, but both the King and all his men are portrayed as being caught so completely off guard that they never even grasp what actually happened to bring about their pathetic situation. But, of course, had Ehud been a righty, had Eglon not cleared the room of all his men, been so fat, or stood up just when he did, had the sword not been small or swallowed up in Eglon's belly, had the door not locked from both sides, and so on, Ehud would surely have been caught and killed, and the story would have turned out quite differently for both him and the Israelites. The double theme highlights the ambiguity inherent in such an endeavor.

The dual nature of the story, then, can be understood on a deeper level as well: a double meaning to this double theme. Unlike many of the other judges, Ehud does not receive a single sign from God that he will be successful, not a prophecy nor a visit by an angel; he is never cloaked in the spirit of God, and he makes no bargain with God to ensure his success. He seems ready to embark on his mission alone, regardless of the personal outcome. In one sense, then, this chapter can be seen as a story of a brave hero working on his own, willing to sacrifice his life to save his nation.

But when Ehud tells the king the second time that he has "a message from God," that statement, too, is a double entendre. On the one hand, he has no real message from God, as God has not spoken to Ehud at all or, for that matter, even made an appearance in this whole story. Ehud is just using these words as a ruse to get Eglon's attention, and it works even better than he had hoped, as Eglon stands up in anticipation, playing right into Ehud's (left) hand.

At the same time, he is speaking the absolute truth. Ehud is not a lone freedom fighter acting on his own. In fact, everything he does in this story is "a message from God." It is God who "strengthens" Eglon in the first place, allowing him to prevail over Israel (v.12), and it is He who "raises up a savior" (v.15) for them in Ehud. The series of fortunate events which fall so perfectly into place is none other than an indication that God is, in fact, playing a central role in the story, choreographing every step from backstage.

Ehud understand this, and in the only sentence he speaks to his people, he gives credit where it is due. It is neither Ehud's left hand nor his right, but "the Lord," he tells them, Who has "delivered your enemies... into your hands." The theme of doubleness thus reflects the two parallel planes on which the story plays out: the human dimension—where characters operate of their own volition, actions are risky, and outcomes are uncertain—and the higher dimension—which emphasizes that the unfolding of events is part of a Divine plan, and that "All is in the hands of heaven."

The story of Ehud drives home the message that, although concealed and covered, God is indeed intimately involved at every twist and turn, guiding events, even if from the human perspective the uncertain outcome sometimes seems finely balanced on a knife-edge.

[4] This very term will be used again in the next story in Judges, where Yael kills Sisera, in another example of the slow-motion technique used to build suspense.

An Obligation of Sight: Depictions of Suffering in the Haggadah

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"In each and every generation, a person is obligated to *see* himself as if he left Egypt." - *Passover Haggadah* and *Mishnah Pesahim* 10:5.

On the night of Passover we are famously commanded to tell over the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the miraculous redemption of the Israelite slaves, our ancestors, by our God. But we are not only commanded to tell the story; we are supposed to imagine ourselves as those very ancestors, to put ourselves in their shoes. Notably, the *Haggadah* uses the language of sight to express this command. We not only listen to the words of the *Haggadah* being read aloud or sung, we not only taste the bitter herbs; we are supposed to *see* ourselves as those ancient Israelites. And so comes the richly illustrated Haggadah to help us envision the slavery in Egypt, God's miracles, and the playing out of Passover traditions throughout the generations.

This command to visually experience our liberation was made literal in the work of contemporary Israeli artist David Moss. In his spectacular *Haggadah*, Moss uses an image of a collection of miniature portraits of Jews of all different time periods, races, and cultures lying next to tiny Mylar mirrors to illustrate the verse from *Mishnah Pesahim*. The mirrors and the portraits allow us to see both ourselves and this varied collection of past and present Jews, all participating in the Passover Seder. Our physical image, along with those of the Jews depicted on the page before us, are here, now, in the mirror, experiencing the Exodus.

It is likely that Jews would have made illustrated *Haggadot* even without the Mishnah's particular language of sight in mind, but the Mishnah's words encouraged the creation of visually stunning *Haggadot*, eventually leading the text to become one of the richest spaces for visual creativity within traditional Judaism. We have had illuminated and illustrated *Haggadot* for about as long as we have had the text,[5] and the proliferation of versions in modernity only points to the popularity of the text and visual accompaniments for it. I cannot think of another Jewish text that many American Jewish families have multiple copies of, including copies purchased solely for their aesthetic beauty - the *Haggadah* is unique in this way.

The *Haggadah*, however, is also a distinctive space for the depiction of suffering and evil. Obviously the story ends well for the Israelites; they are freed, redeemed, watch their tormentors drown, and become God's chosen people. But throughout that narrative they suffer significantly, and the Egyptians suffer even more. *Haggadah* illustrators, particularly the Medieval illuminators who made such exquisite and imaginative manuscripts as the *Rylands Haggadah* and the *Golden Haggadah*, did not shy away from depicting the Egyptians' horrific punishments. But what does it mean for us to spend time looking at images of Egyptians covered in boils, drowning in the splitting of the sea, or mourning the deaths of their first borns? Should humanity even be allowed to make images of these and similar horrors?

Probing the ethics of imagemaking, particularly when it comes to violence and suffering, is often approached as a modern problem. Photography and video have given humanity access to direct visualizations that "witness" destruction in the moment. The theorist Susan Sontag, for example, implicated photography in particular as changing the modern condition when it came to images of war: a photograph, unlike a painting, is a "record, from very near, of a real person's unspeakably awful mutilation; that and nothing else."[6] But the iconography of suffering, as Sontag also points out, "has a long pedigree."[7] And for the original viewers of Medieval *Haggadot*, although the images may not appear realistic, they were about as close as one could get to visually experiencing the suffering that took place during the Exodus.

And so, some of the famous Medieval *Haggadot* give ample visual space to the plagues and the drowning of the Egyptians in the sea. In the *Golden Haggadah*, one of the most famous and beautifully decorated of Medieval *Haggadot*, likely written and illustrated in Barcelona in the early 14th century, one can see a despondent Pharaoh scratching at his lice, Egyptians dropping dead animals off a tower during the plague of *dever*, and a bereaved Egyptian woman cradling her dead first-born in a pose reminiscent of the Christian *pieta* figure.[8] Significantly, both Egyptians and Israelites in the manuscript are dressed in contemporary fashion, and these scenes served as a space to play out the "drama of the relationship" between Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain.[9] To that end, both Jews and Egyptians appear as upper class aristocrats, and the Egyptians are not made to appear as inhuman monsters. As Professor Marc Epstein points out, it is in the gestures of the Egyptians that their pain and suffering is expressed, rather than in extreme violence or gore.[10] A sense of Jewish triumphalism is kept at bay, and the suffering of the Egyptians, particularly the loss of children, something shared by both Israelites and Egyptians in this *Haggadah*'s illustrations, is depicted with great sensitivity and empathy.

By contrast, the Medieval *Haggadah* known as the *Rylands Haggadah*, created in Catalonia between 1330-1340, took the opportunity to revel in the punishments of the Egyptians and depict the full triumph of the Israelites over their oppressors. In the various images of the plagues descending on the Egyptians, including *Makat Bekhorot*, Israelites can be seen pointing to and mocking the sufferers.[11] Looking at the images of the plagues in the *Rylands Haggadah*, a Jewish viewer would immediately associate herself with

[5] Marc Epstein, "Illustrating History and Illuminating Identity in the Art of the Passover Haggadah" in *Judaism in Practice*, ed. Lawrence Fine (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 298.

[6] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, (New York: Picador, 2003), 42. The video live-streaming of the recent horrific attacks on the mosques in New Zealand tragically brings these questions of witnessing and image-making again to the fore.

[7] Ibid., 40.

[8] Marc Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah*, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2011), 197.

[9] Ibid., 171.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 229.

the triumphant Israelites, watching and mocking the Egyptians' torture, and thus becoming a voyeur twice over.

The *Haggadah* also gave Jewish patrons an opportunity to artistically depict, through the medium of Jewish text and *midrash*, their own contemporary suffering. Medieval *Haggadot* are famous for incorporating midrashic interpretations of the Exodus story into their illustrations. One more gruesome *midrash* that made its way into the illuminations of *Haggadot* in *Ashkenaz* is that of Pharaoh being afflicted with leprosy and bathing in the blood of Jewish babies in order to cure the disease. Exodus 2:23 states that after "A long time after that, Pharaoh died," prompting Rashi to note: "He was stricken with leprosy and would slaughter Israelite babies and bathe in their blood."[12] David Malkiel explains that the depiction of Pharaoh's illness and gory cure was popular in fifteenth-century Germany, where Jews were being accused of the traditional blood libel. In at least one record, one of the accused Jews under torture answered that he had murdered a Christian child in order to treat leprosy.[13] The earliest depiction of the leprous Pharaoh appeared in the *Hileq and Bileq Haggadah*, usually dated to around 1450, and appeared in several later Germanic *Haggadot* and prayer books. The scene eventually made it into early printed *Haggadot* including the 1526 *Prague Haggadah* and the 1609 *Venice Haggadah*.[14] The renderings of the midrashic interpretation thus provided a popular outlet for Jews to reflect on their own contemporary, deeply felt persecution, and cast it back into Biblical history.

And so, what of our *Haggadot* today? Although it would be impossible to survey the illustrations in all contemporary *Haggadot* - there are simply too many of them - I think there is a general trend to move away from exploring the more gruesome suffering of the Israelites and Egyptians. When I think of my own family Seders and the telling over of the plagues, I hear the wonderful children's song about how frogs were truly everywhere, and see the proliferation of plague masks and finger puppets. Some modern *Haggadot* still beautifully and tragically depict the plagues and the drowning of the Egyptians; the *Szyk Haggadah*, made by Arthur Szyk in Poland between 1934 and 1936, comes to mind, although it too was made in an era of oppression, during the rise of Hitler. Arthur Szyk includes a full plate devoted to the drowning of the Egyptians in which the viewer sees the Egyptians arms and spears flailing as they are covered by turbulent waves. But overall the trend I believe is to treat the suffering of the Egyptians stylistically, comically, or as entertainment for children.[15]

Interestingly, this tendency to overlook the experience of suffering in the Exodus story is not the case ritually. In the seder itself we pause and take stock of the suffering of our own people and of the Egyptians through ritual and sensory actions like eating *maror* and *haroset,* which represent the bitterness of slavery and the slaves' building materials respectively. We take ten drops of wine out of our cups for the suffering of the Egyptians during the plagues, and we do not recite full *Hallel* during the last six days of Passover because of the death of the Egyptians at the splitting of the sea. I remember being taught in high school the exquisite *midrash* from *Megillah* 10b about how the angels were admonished for wanting to celebrate the drowning of the Egyptians at *Yam Suf* since, as God said, "The work of My hands, the Egyptians, are drowning at sea, and you wish to say songs?" Through these acts and texts we continue to ritually remember the Egyptians' suffering and even suffer a little ourselves, while perhaps ignoring the tortures of the Egyptians (and our own ancestors) in our visual encounter with the Exodus story.

Although we continue to enact these representations of the Israelites' and Egyptians' physical suffering, visually today we appear to be more interested in a different type of evil: the domestic disquiet represented by the four sons. No contemporary *Haggadah* is complete without a richly illustrated depiction of these four famous Seder participants. The different personalities and choices represented by each son gives artists a chance to visually explore our values. What do we think of as good? Those qualities will be depicted accompanying the wise son. Conversely, what are we afraid of for our children? What is the worst they can turn into? The wicked son is a chance to visually imagine these fears. And unsurprisingly these fears are culturally contingent.

In some of the early printed *Haggadot* the wicked son is a soldier, and earlier in Medieval *Haggadot* he was similarly depicted as a warrior or knight. An 1847 *Haggadah* from Amsterdam depicts the wicked son as a caveman. In early twentieth century American *Haggadot* he is a sportsman or boxer.[16] The *Szyk Haggadah* has him as an assimilated leisure hunter. The *"Let My People Go" Haggadah*, created during the height of the Soviet Jewry movement, has the wicked son depicted as a fat Soviet Commissar, smoking a cigar lighted from a *hanukiah*. My favorite childhood *Haggadah*, the claymation *Animated Haggadah*, has him as a rebellious teenager, with a safety pin in his ear and a recalcitrant expression. In a recent depiction of the "four daughters," the wise daughter wears a kippah, pantsuit, and studies Talmud, while the rebellious daughter is a hippie protesting for abortion rights and against animal testing.

When we look at the four sons, we envision our hopes and fears for our families, and ask what does wisdom look like? What does rebelliousness look like? Although the wicked son's questioning does not operate on the same scale as the suffering that appears in regards to the plagues, *Yam Suf,* or the Israelites' slavery, depictions of the rebellious child reflect a small scale domestic tragedy. It is the suffering that is close to us, the child turned away, who does not appreciate our rituals, culture, and tradition and has instead chosen a path that is perhaps close by, but foreign to us and our values.

Illustrated *Haggadot* are a tool that allow us to "see" ourselves, reflected in the faces and the bodies on the page in front of us who left Egypt, thousands of years ago. Famously, Rambam, in the *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Hamtez u-Matzah* 7:6, wrote that we are required *liharot* - to show ourselves leaving Egypt - rather than simply *lirot* - to see ourselves as having left - inspiring many Seder night theatrical performances. Although people usually take the language of *liharot* as a call to dramatically act out the Exodus, the making of *Haggadah* illustrations, particularly ones of Jews in contemporary

[12] Rashi's commentary is based on *Shemot Rabbah* 1:34.

[13] David J. Malkiel, "Infanticide in Passover Iconography," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 85.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Again, there are contemporary *Haggadot* that do include this imagery of suffering, including *The Katz Passover Haggadah* and the recently released *Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel*.

[16] J.D. Eisenstein, *Hagaddah for Passover*, 1928, quoted in David Geffen, *The American Heritage Haggadah* (Jerusalem, New York: Gefen Books, 1997), 19

dress like in the Medieval manuscripts, can be understood as fulfilling the need to "show ourselves" as participants in this legendary drama. But like all good art and artmaking, *Haggadah* illustrations are also a commentary on our sensibilities, culture, and values. Depictions of Egyptian suffering can be triumphant and voyeuristic, or sensitive and empathetic. Illustrations of Israelite suffering can be a place to express the real and always present pain of persecution and antisemitism. The *Haggadah* text offers space for imagining tragedy on a grand cosmic scale, and on the intimate level of the family, whose sons and daughters are all headed in very different directions. So when we read our *Haggadot* this Seder night, do not think the pictures are just for fun or for kids. They are a rich reflection of our values and fears, raise questions about what we should depict and what we should see, and are a powerful tool for fulfilling the central *mitzvah* of the Seder night. The illustrations allow us to visualize the Exodus like we were there, to truly see ourselves as those slaves, experiencing the miracle of freedom.

This Week's *Lehrhaus Over Shabbos* is sponsored in loving memory of
Evelyn G. Butler Morris (Pittsburgh, PA)
by her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.