

The Main Features of the Kibbutz Passover Haggadah Collections **Amira Eran**

Description: Amira will talk about the significance of the editing modifications that the kibbutzim that belonged to the Labor Zionist socialist movement made to the traditional version of the Passover Haggadah. She will present special and exceptional items from the kibbutz movement Haggadot collection, which includes various types of handwritten, rare and artistic Haggadot that were designed to be read in a large family-like community and used at the Passover Seder to transmit its local myth to new generations. The modifications in the style and the wording of the kibbutz Haggadah contain new interpretations of the traditional text, additions of well-known Hebrew songs, and illustrations by famous Israeli artists. The content and the design of the kibbutz Haggadot collection convey the vision of a new type of Jew living in the newly-established state. Amira believes that the process of collecting and assessing these archival artifacts sheds light on the construction of new narratives from an ancient text. She will analyze the meaning of these adaptations and discuss the way they challenged the established concept of Jewish identity.

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Sources

Two important books served me in this talk: the first one is a collection of the kibbutzim Haggadot, compiled by Yuval Danieli and Muki Tsur, which includes over 500 kibbutz Haggadot that kept a connection with the traditional text, and were published between 1930 and 1960, entitled *The Kibbutz Haggadah: Israeli Pesach in the Kibbutz*.

The second book is the 650-page *History of the Kibbutz Haggadah*, by Zvi Shua (Faust). This book documents 25 years of research and materials gathered from dozens of collective communities between 1930 and 1950. Shua worked with a small team of editors: Aryeh Ben Gurion, Zecharia Goren and Ezra Rabin, Muki Tzur and Benjamin Yogev. Based on these two books I was able to examine hundreds of kibbutz Haggadot, cross-reference them, and discover the unifying manner in which they were reflect the social vision of their authors.

For my presentation, I have used HaKibbutz HaArtzi Haggadah illustrated by Shmuel Kath, member of Kibbutz Gaa'ton, as a model for my research. Moshe Propes, from Kibbutz Ein Hachosh, illustrated an older version of that Haggada, and I have used his illustrations occasionally.

The main modifications

The chief modifications that I have detected, based on these two above mentioned books are:

1. Expansion of the notion of the *Month of Spring* to a full section dedicated to spring. Spring is regarded a symbol of new birth, end of dark times and revival. It emphasizes the stable relation to the fruit-giving land.
2. Expansion of the concept of *Exodus* as the move from the Diaspora to Eretz Israel, and from social oppression to social freedom.
3. Extension of the flight from the Egypt to the fight for the security of the state of Israel.
4. Depiction of the redemption of the Jewish nation as dependent entirely on the achievement of people, not of divine intervention.

These alternations express the need of a secular community to belong to the former generations, on the one hand, and to express their innovations, on the other.

The main characteristics of the kibbutz that may be mentioned as relevant for this interpretation of the rabbinical texts, are:

- A. Being an idealistic collective organization, rather than a genetic family
- B. Being workers of the land, rather than middle-class Talmud students
- C. Being a secular and active audience, rather than obedient and traditional observers

The authors of the Kibbutz Haggadot changed the word and the wordings of God. They integrated into the traditional text modern poetic passages and combined these with biblical and prayer passages that they freely selected as fitting in with their way of life.

Passover is celebrated as the festival of Spring

The Bible calls Nissan the month of Spring. This name signifies its natural character rather than its historical resonance: "*On the 14th of the spring month, being the month of your deliverance from bondage. And this month shall be unto you a memorial: and ye shall celebrate it as a feast throughout your generations, as a command. Forever shall ye celebrate it, for on this self-same day your hosts left Egypt. Today you become a nation*".(Exodus 12)

The Kibbutz Haggadah opens with this declaration. For the idealistic farmers, Spring symbolizes :

- Renewal & rebirth in nature
- Revival of the Jewish nation on its own land
- Return to manual labor & to growing crops dependent on the seasonal cycle

The kibbutz Haggadah stresses its nearness to nature by combining passages from the *Song of Songs*, which are usually considered a secular lyric. The *Song of Songs* presents nature for its own sake: "*Let us go forth into the Fields. Let us lodge in the villages, let us get up early to vineyards: Let us see if the vine have blossomed, whether the pomegranates have budded. The mandrakes are fragrant and at our doors are all manners of precious fruits*". (*Song of Songs* 7)

Other lyrical passages glorify the powers working routinely in nature, like rain and dew, rather than the miraculous intervention of God.

In every Generation and Generation

The theme of the New Seder is to remember the threat that the past generations faced and to celebrate the freedom of the current generation.

And that which hath sustained

Us and our fathers before us

Is the knowledge that we

Have been threatened

Not by enemy alone

But in every generation

We are faced with

Annihilation and we are

Delivered from destruction

The Haggadah transforms the father's command to tell his son what happened to his ancestors to the duty to listen in public to the Holocaust survivor's testimony.

It is united with the command not to forget the crime of Amalek: "*By these eyes that have seen the woe and the grief, their outcries heaving to my hearts' embrace. I have taken this oath: as I breathe and live, to forget not a thing of that which took place, till the tenth generation, forget no jot.....*" (A. Shlonsky: *The Oath*).

The Seder gathering creates an atmosphere that allows one to remember the horrible past in a bearable way. The lesson to be told is that in every generation, every Jew is faced with annihilation. In the secular Kibbutzim, which reject the theme that in every generation God saves his beloved people from their enemies, this command serves as a unifying link between the past generations and the young innovative community that is celebrating a new Seder-order. It serves to show that the present rebellious generation who agreed to form a new type of Jew, feels connected to the former generations and sees them as part of his tradition.

The version of the Haggadah that was composed after the Holocaust emphasizes the impression that the generation that celebrates Passover is the first generation of the final

redemption. This generation, which was born in Israel, will end the history of persecuted Jews, and will start a new period of a creative independent Jews who will fulfill the Zionist vision in a safe state of their own.

Therefore, the Kibbutz Haggadah glorifies the brave struggle of the Partisans against the Nazis on the one hand, and pays tribute to the fight for an independent strong Jewish state, on the other. The Song of the Partisans, who fought against the Nazis ("*Oh never say at all: This is the final way....*", H. Glick) is presented next to the glorification of those who fought for the State of Israel: ("*Then, soon, a girl and boy step forward, and slowly walk... Before the waiting nation... The people stare: who are you, the silent two? And they reply: We are the silver salver upon which the Jewish State was served to you*". (N. Alterman: *The Silver Platter*).

The kibbutz Haggadah transforms the command to tell about the suffering in Egypt to the command to remember the lesson of more recent periods of suffering in the life of nation under oppression. The community sees itself as the last generation of the hunted Jew on the verge of a new birth and overall spring.

*Remember this day on which
You went out of Egypt
Out of the house of bondage.
In every generation each man
Must look upon himself
As though he himself went out of Egypt.
For not only our forefathers,
However, we ourselves were delivered
From bondage.
For in every generation are heard
The cries of Israel and the laments of the
Downtrodden under the
Hands of their oppressors, and in every generation
There blossoms the hope of a new spring and a new life.
The hope of liberation and rebirth*

The Kibbutz Haggadah merges the notion of spring with the notion of freedom and the revival of the nation: Freedom is the Eternal Youth of a Nation.



Exodus as a symbol of every struggle for freedom

Actually, the members of the kibbutz saw the Exodus from Egypt as a necessary stage in their battle of classes against social oppression. The socially-oriented Kibbutzim interpreted the historical events as stages in the historical materialism predicted by Karl Marx. They believed that the self-destruction of capitalism and its replacement by socialism is inevitable. The Haggadah points to the similarity between the slaves' revolution in Egypt and the revolutionary actions carried by the working class to break the chains of capitalism that will lead to a socio-economic emancipation.

In this context, even the *Bread of affliction* is not necessarily the *Matzah*, which is the Passover bread, but food offered to those who are ready to eat the fruits of our hands. Those who are still longing for *manna* will be still wandering in the desert: "*Up, wanderers in the wild... Enough of roving now in the desert races! there lies a great, wide road before your faces.... No more light bread, the bread of toil, fruit of hands instead*" (H. N. Bialik)

Turning the traditional tools into secular tools

The four questions

The traditional custom where the youngest child asks his father how this night is different from all other nights, was replaced by existential questions referring to the gathering of an entire community, rather than a lone nuclear family: "*How is this night different of all nights? Why do we use weapons? When will be a universal peace? When will all Jews regathered in Israel?*"

Indeed, at first children did not attend the Seder, because not everyone had children, and the group did not want to split up into families for the event. In later years when the community grew bigger, children participated in the cultural program.

The four sons

The Kibbutz community - known for its universal communal education, which does not discriminate between smart and not-so-smart kids - did not accept the traditional model of four types of sons. No wonder that the artist Shraga Weil from Kibbutz Ha'ogen depicted the four sons as a harmonic orchestra. (Although he did paint the wise son as a religious person, blowing the shofar, most likely in the synagogue, while he illustrated the wicked son as a shepherd, playing the flute.)



The four cups

In the traditional Seder, the four cups signify the four languages of redemption used by the Lord to save the Jewish people from slavery and to bring them to the Promised Land. In the kibbutz version of the Haggadah, each cup honors the State of Israel, its well-being and the fight for its secure existence. As the Seder is addressing a non-religious community, the blessings over the cups replace passive adherence to the word of God with active praise for the stability of the state of Israel. The First Cup is dedicated to *salvation*. The second cup is dedicated to the *wellbeing* of the State of Israel. The third cup is dedicated to overall *peace*, and the fourth cup is dedicated to the *welfare of the community* and its pioneering effort to work the land.

In sum, the main alternations the authors of the Kibbutz Haggadah made in the traditional text are:

1. Adding a new section dedicated to Spring, based on the command to celebrate Passover in the month of spring. Spring symbolizes the rebirth of the nation and emphasizes the dependence of the farmer on the fruits of the lands.
2. Merging between the historical move from Egypt to Israel and the social move from financial enslavement in the diaspora, to a free farming life in Israel
3. Turning the command to tell the Sons the Story of oppression in Egypt to the command not to forget the Holocaust and its reverberations.
4. Turning the flight from Egypt to the fight for a secure homeland
5. Turning the four cups and the four questions into secular tools pointing to global stages in the social revolution of the working class.

Conclusions

The kibbutz members deliberately rejected the customs, festivals and prayers that belonged to the old world. They changed the traditional rituals and the old texts to suit the gathering of an entire community and public observance of the holiday.

The founders of the Kibbutz saw in the Exodus story a symbol for their communal vision of liberation from economic slavery and adopted it as a metaphorical call for a worldwide social revolution of the working class.

The kibbutz Haggadah conveys the vision of a new type of Jew living in the newly established state. It highlights the tension between sanctity and profanity and stresses the active point of view of people who connect their pioneering ideology and the classical Judaism, by emphasizing the responsibility of every person for his or her own fate.

In this lecture, I have strived to show that the Kibbutz Haggadah made dramatic textual and decorative changes in the traditional Haggadah in order to present:

The exodus from Egypt as a social phase in the struggle of the working class towards its emancipation.

The rise of a Jewish homeland, the settlements on the land of Israel and the fight for its safe existence as the final stage of redemption.

The current non-religious generation as the chosen and last generation in the history of generations of persecuted Jews on the verge of annihilation.

Salvation and redemption as the fruit of human activity and not the result of a divine interference.