

Pesah 1 5782 Sermon
Redemption in the Bread and in the *Matzah*

The main theme of the *Seder* is Redemption – both the redeeming, the saving of our people 3,500 years ago, and the redemption which is yet to come.



Like our *Siddur*, our prayer book, the *Seder* bounces seamlessly from past redemption – the Exodus narrative to the future redemption, which I would like to understand as a time better than the one we are in now.

Now, you are probably familiar with the former – the telling of the story of our redemption from Egypt: that's of course the main object of the *Seder* and the *Haggadah*, which means telling.

Tell it well, tell it creatively, tell it in a way that's engaging and that all ages can understand and appreciate and remember.

That's what it's about – noticing how the narrative is woven into the rituals, questions, and discussions. A great Jewish dinner party modeled on the Greek Symposium.



But there is another element that is less obvious: the future redemption.

This was understood to be the days or time of the Messiah, a future time of peace. While a literal Messiah, as a person, does not resonate with me, the idea of a more peaceful era does. And how badly do we need that right now!

The theme of a future redemption is more subtly woven into the *Haggadah*. At first glance, we might not see the strands, but they are there.

At the beginning of the *Seder*, the Sages declare that the biblical injunction to tell the story of the Exodus all the days of your life means the days of the Messiah – a future time of redemption.

Before we drink the second cup of wine, we recite a unique paragraph, the Blessing of Redemption, where we state our hope to celebrate future holidays in God's rebuilt city, Jerusalem – a classic feature of Messianic peace.

There are other references embedded in the *Haggadah*, but I want to move to the *Seder*'s final moment: "*Lashanah Haba'ah Birushalayim* – next year in Jerusalem. Now, this can be understood literally: we hope next year to be in Israel and [yes, we are planning a shul trip for next February \(third time's a charm!!\)](#), but the compilers of the *Haggadah* were not intending it simply to be the physical land of Israel – which they, unlike us, could not simply visit by getting on a plane. They meant a different kind of Israel, a different type of Jerusalem. A Jerusalem in time. A future redemption.

When we sing *L'Shanah Haba Biirushalayim* – we are dancing with hope. A future hope – a time of peace and blessing.

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But there is another place in the *Seder* where we find this idea. It's when we take the first bite of *matzah*; at this moment in the *Seder*, there are two blessings.

One blessing is specific to the *matzah* – Praised are You *Adonai*, Sovereign of time and space Who has sanctified us with Your *Mitzvot* and commanded us to eat *matzah* – eating *matzah* at the *Seder* is a unique *mitzvah* that requires its own blessing.



But it is accompanied by the *Hamotzi*, the regular blessing for all bread.

Sometimes we forget that *matzah* is a type of bread – the only kind we eat this week, but bread nonetheless.

What's the blessing over bread, over any kind of bread?

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh HaOlam Hamotzi Lehem min ha-aretz.

How do we translate it?

Praised are You *Adonai* our God, Sovereign of time and space who brings forth bread from the earth.

What does it mean?

That we are thanking God for the bread. Don't forget we are not "blessing" the bread as is commonly said. We are thanking God for the bread.

So, what's strange about this blessing?

It's not true!

God does not bring forth bread from the earth! We take wheat from the earth and make it into bread or when things are rushed, into *matzah*.

If God is involved, it's in the wheat; if we see God in this process, then God is at the beginning of the journey, in the wheat/earth/nature/Creation part, not in the complexity of transforming it into bread. This is



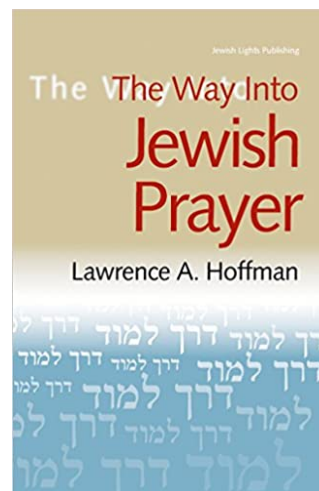
what we find in other food blessings – thank you for the fruit of the vine – *borei pri hagafen*, a green vegetable like the *karpas*: *borei pri ha-adamah* – thank you for the fruit of the earth, but the blessing over bread does not go back to its original source.

So, what's the deeper message of this blessing?

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Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman in the book: The Way into Jewish Prayer points us to the *Midrash* of Genesis, a fifth Century rabbinic commentary.

The Torah states that while Adam and Eve cannot eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was in the middle of the Garden of Eden, the Torah does not indicate what the other trees were.



Rabbi Zeira exclaims that there were bread trees as big as the cedars of Lebanon (Bereisheet Rabbah 15:7). And he has a

prooftext: since after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Torah states that you shall eat bread “by the sweat of your brow” (Genesis 3:19). After the Garden of Eden, there are no more bread trees – that explains why we have never seen one!

But there is more – the rabbis then debate about what is the blessing referring to: is it the bread or the *matzah* that is right in front of us?

No, they look at it in a larger context, in a broader view of human history.

Is it the bread that Rabbi Zeira imagined from the bread trees in the Garden, in the past? An ancient bread?

No, the rabbis claim that it is a future bread.

A bread that will grow in a future redemptive time. Not the past Edenic time of perfection, of redemption, not the current moment with its complexities.

But our bread points to the future – a future of hope and redemption, a future where all people will have bread to eat. It directs us to a time when we all will be sustained by food.

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All that brings us right back to the *Seder*.

What’s the first part of *Maggid*, the telling portion of the *Haggadah*?

As the *matzot* are uncovered, we recite *ha lahma anya* – this is the bread of affliction, and then we invite in anyone who is hungry.

This *matzah* is a call to action.

To feed others.

And it concludes *hashata hakha* – this year we are here, but we are not redeemed. But *l'shanah haba'ah* – next year *b'ar'a D'Yisrael* – next year in the Land of Israel.

When we feed others, when we look at the *matzah* at the *Seder*, or any bread at any time, we recite the *Motzi*, we are reminded of our duties to feed others, to care for others, and when we do that, we bring the world closer to redemption.

So as you enjoy your *matzah*, let us hope that next year we will be in Israel – whether physically or spiritually or both, in a world of peace and redemption.