

## The Significance of the Ritual in the Passover Family Liturgy in Light of the Book of Blessings (“Sefer Habrachot”)

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Without a doubt, the collection of Psalms, many of which were sung during ceremonies in the Temple, is the oldest continuously used prayer book in the world. The Babylonian exile led to the establishment of the institution of the synagogue, where congregations of adherents of Judaism gather to pray together.<sup>1</sup> After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, synagogal prayers completely replaced ritual offerings, while the rituals that had been previously practiced by small groups called *chavurah* were present in the everyday lives of Jewish families.<sup>2</sup> The appearance of new sects and their dispersal around the world led to the necessity of establishing the rules that all adherents of Judaism are obliged to follow. The earliest canonized texts of prayers come from the period of the *gaons* (seventh-ninth centuries AD) and the oldest text that has survived to the present day is the *Seder Rav Amram*<sup>3</sup>, which was compiled around 860 AD. Also among the oldest is the *Haggadah*, which was arranged by rabbi Saadia Gaon around 940 AD as part of a larger collection of prayers.<sup>4</sup> According to one dictionary, the *Pesach Haggadah* is “a text read at home during the Seder meal, which initiates the holiday of Passover.”<sup>5</sup> This text contains fragments from the Bible (primarily from the Book of Exodus

- 1 Although synagogues existed in the time before the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, during the exile the synagogue gained independence, which ensured the continuity of worship (P. Ginsbury, R. Cutler, *The Phases of Jewish History*, Devora Publishing Company, Jerusalem 2005, p. 72).
- 2 L. A. Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book: Shabbat at home*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock 2004, p. 3–4.
- 3 S. P. Gelbard, *Rite and Reason: 1050 Jewish Customs and Their Sources*, Mifal Rashi Publishing, Petach Tikvah 1998, p. 11.
- 4 P. S. Alexander, *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984, p. 9.
- 5 A. Cała, H. Węgrzynek, G. Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich. Słownik*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 2000, p. 109.

and the Psalms), proverbs, fragments of rabbinical literature (including the *Mishnah* and *Midrash*), prayers and blessings, as well as religious and folk songs.

The subject of the following study is the order of the Paschal home liturgy and the significance of its rituals to the family that celebrates. For my analysis, I have used the book *Sefer Habrachot*, which is intended for the celebration of family liturgical ceremonies on Shabbos and the holidays.<sup>6</sup> In it, the chapter *Pesach* begins on p. 73. As a starting point, the following fragment from the Book of Exodus is quoted: “Moses said to the people, ‘Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of a house of slavery. For it was with a strong hand that the Lord brought you out from there. Nothing made with leaven may be eaten. This day on which you are going out is in the month of Abib’” (Exodus 13:3–4). On page 75, there is a short explanation in the form of answers to the following questions: What do we celebrate during Passover? What is the purpose of the matzos (unleavened bread)? What is the significance of the sixth day of the Passover?

The publishers referred to the historical event that was the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, giving details according to the Jewish tradition, strictly tied to Biblical texts. Leaving their homes in haste, the Israelites did not have time to add yeast to the dough; hence, they ate unleavened bread, which in Hebrew is called *matzo*. This bread has become a basic symbol of Passover, which in the Pentateuch has the alternative name of the Feast of Unleavened Bread: *Hag hamacot* (for example, in Exodus 23:15). This name also appears in New Testament texts, such as: “Now the feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was drawing near” (Luke 22:1).

According to the *Haggadah* and the order of the celebration of the Passover holiday introduces of individual persons and the entire family community to historical reality. However, the *Seder* was not thought up as the recreation of symbolic gestures in order to travel back to a mythical era, to a time of revelation.<sup>7</sup> The *Haggadah* does not attempt at updating the Exodus from Egypt through, for example, processes imitating the march of the Israelites from the home of slavery. According to Monford, this would be a de-historicizing process that strips the celebration of its historical dimension. Meanwhile, the

6 The full title of the book is: *Sefer habrachot leshabatot vechagim bemishpacha* (*The Book of Blessings for Sabbath and Holidays in the Family*), wyd. Matan Amnujot, Tel-Awiw 2006. The contents of this publication have been described in detail in the article: M. Rucki, *Księga „Sefer habrachot” do żydowskiej liturgii domowej*, „Liturgia Sacra” 51 (2018) no. 1, p. 93–104.

7 M. Eliade, *Cosmos and history. The myth of the eternal return*, Harper & Row, New York 1959, p. 35.

*Seder* references ancient events in which those who celebrate become participants by including people into the permanent consequences of the Exodus.<sup>8</sup>

## 1. The Ritual of Clearing Leaven

De Vries notes that the Passover holiday itself is a symbol: "The Exodus from Egypt is the *aleph* and the *taw*, the first and last letters, in the history of Judaism. [...] That event gave rise to the wonder-filled history of Israel."<sup>9</sup>

The proper celebration of Passover began with "clearing the house of leaven," pursuant to the Biblical commandment: "From the very first day you will have your houses clear of all leaven. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day to the seventh will be cut off from Israel" (Exodus 12:15). Thus, the first subchapter beginning the blessings and prayers for the feast of Passover is the *bedikat chametz* (the clearing of leaven). The publishers of the book *Sefer Habrachot* did not describe the procedure of searching for leaven and removing it from the home in detail; however, detailed rabbinical guidelines have been published on this topic.

Pecaric emphasizes that "[t]he Torah prohibits the possession of any quantity of *chametz* during the feast of Passover. A punishment for possessing or using *chametz* is the *karet*: literally, cutting off, a premature death sentence levied from the Heavens."<sup>10</sup> The Biblical concept of *karet* is often incorrectly translated into Polish as exclusion; however, various contexts reveal that it refers to the death penalty. During the first case of the celebration of Passover (Exodus 12:15), there is talk of "cut[ting] off" (*karet*) a person who violates the laws related to the Passover by eating the forbidden leavened bread. The general context is related to the angel of death passing through Egypt and killing all the first-born sons wherever Moses' orders were ignored. Thus, "cutting off" is something more than merely removing a person from the group of people who celebrate Passover.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> M. Harris, *The Passover Seder: On Entering the Order of History*, „Judaism” 25 (1976) no. 2, p. 167–174.

<sup>9</sup> S. P. De Vries Mzn., *Obrzędy i symbole Żydów*, przekł. z niderl. i oprac. A. Borowski, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2001, p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatonowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, red. S. Pecaric, tł. E. Gordon, consultations related to the Polish language with L. Kośka, Stowarzyszenie Pardes, Kraków 2002, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> A detailed discussion of the meaning of the Hebrew concept of *karet* in Biblical and extra-Biblical texts can be found in: M. Rucki, *Czy wytracenie oznacza wykluczenie?*, „Colloquia Theologica

The notion of yeast (*chametz*) encompasses products from five kinds of grain that were subject or could be prone to fermentation as a result of contact with water. According to rabbinical conclusions, flour from wheat, rye, oats, barley, and spelt that had been in contact with water for eighteen minutes or longer is considered *chametz*.<sup>12</sup> Pecaric mentions the two following positive commandments related to yeast during Passover:

- the imperative to get rid of *chametz*,
- the imperative to eat *matzos* on the first night of Passover.

Additionally, there are four negative commandments:

- eating *chametz* during the Passover (eight days) is forbidden;
- eating anything that is mixed with *chametz* is forbidden;
- *chametz* cannot be seen at any property belonging to a Jew;
- *chametz* cannot be found at any property belonging to a Jew.<sup>13</sup>

The book *Sefer Habrachot* only notes that on the thirteenth day of the Jewish month Nisan (or the twelfth if the fourteenth day of Nisan coincides with Shabbos) one should perform the *bedikas chametz* rite after reading the *arvit* prayer by candlelight. Pecaric has qualified that this only concerns prayers that are said socially (in the presence of ten Jewish adults); in the case of individual prayers, *bedikas chametz* must take place first.<sup>14</sup> Although Zalcmán's *Haggadah* requires the use of candle wax,<sup>15</sup> Pecaric writes that paraffin wax is permissible; however, candles are to be used even when the ritual is performed during the day.<sup>16</sup>

Before "removing the yeast," the entire home, yard, and all the facilities owned by a Jewish family are tidied up. There is consensus among rabbis that this is not a matter of "spring cleaning," but the removal of the remains of the *chametz*:

We always care for tidiness! However, however, we above all have to get rid of what is leavened, wherever it comes from, even the smallest scrap. From all the nooks and all the pores of the skin. It's as if life were to start anew. Clean and new. [...] The smallest crumbs are swept away; all in

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Ottomania" 2 (2017), p. 179–195.

12 *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 28.

13 *Ibidem*.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 30.

15 *Hagada. Opowiadania o wyjściu Izraelitów z Egiptu na dwa pierwsze wieczory święta Pesach*, Wydawnictwo Księgarni M. Zalcmana, Wiedeń 1927, p. 3.

16 *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 32.

the household contribute to the last chores and to washing so that in the coming hour [...] all that remains of the *chametz*, which could be left, is burnt.<sup>17</sup>

The symbolism of unleavened bread and yeast is frequently used by the authors of the New Testament. Typically, yeast (*chametz*) symbolizes sin and impurity, while unleavened bread (*matza*) signifies cleanliness and holiness.<sup>18</sup> *A Haggadah* published by a community of messianic Jews<sup>19</sup> cites the following text by St. Paul before a description of the *bedikas chametz* ritual:

Your boasting is not appropriate. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough? Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6–8).

Getting rid of the yeast in the Jewish rituals has the following dimensions: *bitul chametz* (revocation of the possession of yeast), *biur chametz* (the destruction of the remaining bits of yeast through burning), and *mechirat chametz* (selling yeast to non-Jews if destroying it incurs excessively large losses). The book *Sefer Habrachot* also contains a formula said before burning the yeast (Aramaic: *srefat chametz*)<sup>20</sup>: "I am ready to fulfill the positive and negative commandments concerning the burning of the *chametz*."

## 2. Setting the Table

Apart from the *chametz*, the second most important symbol typical of Passover is the setting of the table in a particular way. The Seder plate, on which

17 S. P. De Vries Mzn., *Obrzędy i symbole Żydów*, op. cit., p. 174.

18 "He spoke to them another parable. 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened'" (Matthew 13:33; see also: Luke 13:21).

19 *Messianic Passover Hagada*, Keren Ahvah Meshichit, Jerusalem 2006, p. 7.

20 The sub-heading *Srefat Chametz* in reality is a combination of the Aramaic word *saraf*, which means "to burn" (see: M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, Luzac & Co., London 1903, p. 1632) and the Hebrew *chametz* ("yeast"). In the Aramaic text of this blessing, the word *chametz* does not appear; only its Aramaic equivalents: *chamira* and *chami'a* (ibidem, p. 477).

products used for liturgical (symbolic) functions are placed, has the most important place on the table. De Vries writes:

In a narrower sense, [*Seder* means] the plate that is situated in the middle of the table along with the components placed there, which are to serve as signs visually illustrating the narrative known as the *Haggadah* that would soon be referenced from the book.<sup>21</sup>

Decorated tables on which places for all the appropriate products are marked or signed are produced and sold among Jewish communities. Pecaric notes that there are two variants of arranging the products: according to rabbi Rema and according to ARIZaL.<sup>22</sup> Each of these two arrangements has its own rationale and symbolism.

The book *Sefer Habrachot* limits itself to just one sentence of commentary on the preparation of the Paschal table; thus, I will reference a typical description of a holiday table and its symbolism from Zalzman's *Haggadah*:

Three matzos are on a big plate on the platter: 1 Kohen, 2 Levi, 3 Israel, depicting the three states of the Israelite people,<sup>23</sup> separating them by a napkin, while dishes that serve the ceremony are placed at the surface in the following order:

A roasted egg<sup>24</sup> and roasted meat on the bone represent to us sacrifices offered up during the Passover.

Bitter herbs are supposed to recall the depressing and difficult times of our forefathers in Egypt.

21 S. P. De Vries Mzn., *Obrzędy i symbole Żydów*, op. cit., p. 177–178.

22 *Zemiroi Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 51. Rema: the shortened name of the Polish rabbi Mojżesz ben Izrael Isserles (1520–1572), the founder of a rabbinical higher school in Krakow who was also a judge in Krakow's rabbinical court and the author of numerous works dealing with Judaism (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8340-isslerles-moses-ben-israel-rem> [10.06.2018]). ARIZaL: the shortened name of Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (1534–1572), the creator of modern kabbalistic studies. He looked for mystical meaning in each of God's commandments; according to him, the fulfillment of them influences a person's spiritual state. He introduced numerous mystical elements into the liturgy (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10192-luria> [10.06.2018]).

23 The word כֹּהֵן *kohen* refers to priests, descendants of Aaron, while לֵוִי *Levi* (the Levites) is one of the generations of Israel that have been distinguished to serve in the Temple (Numbers 8: 14–22).

24 As a food of mourning, the egg was introduced into the components of the Paschal supper in order to commemorate the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. For more on this topic, see: M. Rucki, M. Abdalla, A. Benyamin, *Jajka wielkanocne w początkach chrześcijaństwa*, „Teologia i człowiek” 29 (2015) no. 1, p. 295–312, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/TiCz.2015.013>.

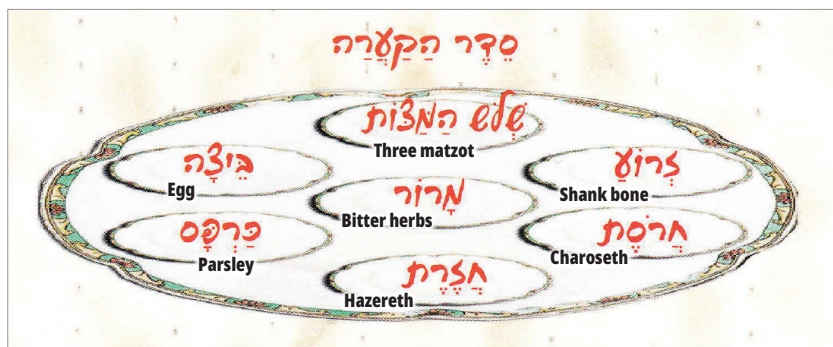


Fig. 1. The pattern of a traditional placing of symbolic products on a Seder table (*Messianic Passover Hagada*, Keren Ahvah Meshichit, Jerusalem 2006, p. 4).

Charoset, made of crushed nuts, ginger, and wine, are a symbol of the clay in which our forefathers had to make bricks.

The head of the family sits on the left side,<sup>25</sup> because sitting in this way is a sign of freedom and liberty.<sup>26</sup>

Another, equally concise description of the Paschal table can be found in the Messianic *Haggadah*:<sup>27</sup>

סמלים הסמלים

קערת הסדר **The Passover Platter**: The platter contains symbols of the Paschal Sacrifice, the sufferings of our forefathers in Egypt, and liberation as well as new life.

זרוע וביצה **Shank bone and egg**: a symbol of sacrifices (the roasted egg is a sign of mourning related to the destruction of the Temple).

מרור **Bitter herbs**: a recollection of the bitterness of slavery.

25 Sitting and especially lying in this position corresponds to ancient notions of how a person gifted with freedom behaves at the table. According to the mishnah (*Pesachim*, 99b), not even the poorest Israelite should eat the Passover meal in a different way than by lying on his or her side (שייב). The later Gemara (*Pesachim*, 108a) contains explanations that such a position means freedom and thus references discussions on whether one should always support oneself on one's side or only when drinking the first two glasses of wine. It is said that one cannot lie on one's back or support him or herself on his or her right side.

26 *Hagada. Opowiadania o wyjściu Izraelitów z Egiptu na dwa pierwsze wieczory święta Pesach*, op. cit., p. 4-5.

27 *Messianic Passover Hagada*, op. cit., p. 4.

חרסת **Charoseth**: Symbolizes the clay from which our forefathers had to make bricks. Its sweetness somewhat tempers the bitterness of the herbs.

שלש המצות **Three matzot**:

העליונה **The upper matzot** symbolizes the priesthood<sup>28</sup>.

האמצעית **The middle matzot** symbolizes all of Israel.

התחתונה **The lower matzot** symbolizes all of Israel.

ארבע הכוסות **Four glasses**: the four glasses of salvation refer to four aspects of salvation: “I will free you (from the burdens of the Egyptians);” “I will deliver you;” “I will redeem you;” and “I will take you (as my own people)” (Exodus 6:6–7).

1. The spiritual liberation of the Hebrews by Abraham’s forefathers, who were destroyed by idolatry.

2. Liberation from Egypt, from national slavery.

3. The Jewish nation’s life in freedom in the Land of Israel as well as the building of the Temple as a center of spiritual life.

4. A sign of the coming of the Messiah.<sup>29</sup>

There are various interpretations of each of these symbols, which are more or less familiar in Judaism. Generally, these which are mentioned are broadly known, as they are repeated in various editions of the *Haggadah*.

### 3. The Order of the Liturgy

Pecaric suggests that during the beginning of the Seder all recite its individual parts aloud. The book *Sefer Habrachot* contains a list of part of the Seder with a short description under the heading *Seder Pesach*:

קדש **Kadesh** (sanctification). Blessing over the wine.

ורחץ **Urchatz** (washing). Washing hands before eating the *karpas*.

כרפס **Karpas** (parsley). The vegetable is dipped in salty water and eaten.

יהץ **Yachatz** (breaking). The middle matzo is broken in half.

מגיד **Maggid** (sermon). Telling the *Haggadah*.

רחצו **Rachtzah** (cleaning). Washing hands before the meal.

<sup>28</sup> Naturally, this in reference to the hereditary Jewish priesthood, which is reserved only for Aaron’s descendants.

<sup>29</sup> De Vries emphasizes that the symbolism of four glasses can be understood in different ways; he also mentions a fifth glass prepared “for the prophet Elijah” from which no one drinks.



מצה מוציא מצה **Motzi matzah** (a blessing you “lead out” over the matzo). The blessing over unleavened bread.<sup>30</sup>

מרור **Maror** (bitter herbs). Part of the bitter herbs is eaten.

כורך **Korech** (“sandwich”)<sup>31</sup>. A piece of matzo is eaten along with the bitter herbs.

שולחן ערוך **Shulchan orech** (setting the table). The holiday meal is eaten.

צפון **Tzafun** (“hidden”). It is eaten with the *Afikoman*,<sup>32</sup> which had been hidden.

ברך **Barech** (blessing). A blessing is said over the meal.

הלל **Hallel** (praise). The *Hallel* prayer is recited.<sup>33</sup>

נרצה **Nirtzah** (conclusion). Concluding prayers.

Such a brief description is sufficient to understand the symbolism of the Passover Meal. However, I would like to supplement it by an important detail related to the Paschal lamb. De Vries writes:

That night, there won't be a Paschal lamb on the table, although it is the Passover. Due to the laws on sacrificial offerings, it cannot be slaughtered or prepared outside the Temple. Thus, the Paschal lamb was known only in the Temple and in Jerusalem. However, a symbol helping us to visualize it must be there; hence, the *roasted bone*.<sup>34</sup>

The topic of the permissibility offering a Paschal sacrifice outside Jerusalem was already considered before the destruction of the Temple. Such a discussion was also noted in the Talmud (*Pesachim*, 53a–b). A certain Thaddeus, the rabbi of Rome, introduced the custom of roasting a goat kid for Passover according to a recipe reserved only for offering sacrifices in the Temple. Jerusalem rabbis would send him letters accusing him of the sin of eating sanctified meat outside the Temple. However, because of the authority of this rabbi Thaddeus it was ultimately decided that “where there is a custom of eating roasted meat on the Passover night, it is permitted, but it is forbidden in places where no

30 Some communities consider the blessing said over any bread and a blessing concerning the commandment to eat the matzo to be distinct (ex.: *Messianic Passover Hagada*, op. cit., p. 10).

31 According to tradition, Hillel the Elder ate bitter herbs that were placed on the matzo; hence the name “the Hillel sandwich.”

32 The word *Afikoman*, whose origin is uncertain, refers to a piece of matzo that is hidden at the beginning of the Passover meal and eaten at the end as the last dish.

33 This refers to the Psalms, especially 115–118, which begin with the word “Hallelujah” and in the Jewish tradition are called the “Egyptian Hallel” and Psalm 136, which is called the “Great Hallel” (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7109-hallel> [7.05.2018]).

34 S. P. De Vries Mzn., *Obrzędy i symbole Żydów*, op. cit., p. 177–178.

such custom exists.” Meanwhile, rabbi Aha bar Jacob believed that merely eating unleavened bread at a time when the Temple is destroyed is only a rabbinical imperative, not a Biblical one (*Pesachim*, 116b).

### 3.1. *Kadesh, Yachatz, and Maggid*

Next, the book *Sefer Habrachot* (p. 78–79) contains blessings said over a glass of wine (*Kadesh*). An addendum concerning cases when the Paschal meal coincides with Friday evening, or with the greeting of Shabbos, as well as on Saturday evening, when the ceremony of bidding farewell to the Shabbos, has also been added. At the very beginning, the head of the family or another person who leads the ceremony says the word: “I am ready to fulfill the commandment concerning the first glass.” De Vries emphasizes that during the celebration of the Passover every person has his or her own glass filled to the brim, while the *kiddush* is simultaneously said by all who are present.<sup>35</sup> Pecaric notes that one should not pour wine into one’s own glass and that instead the person sitting next to him or her should do this so that “everyone feels like a king served by servants.”<sup>36</sup>

Next, as part of the rituals and blessings that are said, the book *Sefer Habrachot* (p. 80) contains information related to *Yachatz* (breaking): “The middle matzo should be broken in half. The bigger piece should be hidden as *afikomen*, while the smaller piece should remain on the table between the two remaining matzos.”

From that moment, the part called the *Maggid*, or the telling of the story, which is of great import to the whole family, begins. As a historical narrative concerning common ancestors and words and gestures passed on from generation to generation, this part engages not only the storyteller, but the other members of the family, including the children, as well. The blessing at the beginning is said in Aramaic, which began to be used during the period of the Babylonian exile, which in itself makes it an element referring to the centuries-old and often-contradictory history of the Jewish people.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 181.

<sup>36</sup> *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogostawieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 70.

### 3.2. Asking Questions and the Narrative

After these words, a child asks prearranged questions, which I will discuss in the next subchapter. Like many other publications, the *Sefer Habrachot* suggests that the youngest child in the family asks these questions. Asking questions on the Passover night is mentioned three times in the Mosaic Pentateuch (Exodus 12:26–27; 13, 14 and Deuteronomy 6, 20); answers granted by the father also come from these texts.

This narrative contains several anecdotes from the life of Talmudic rabbis and their reflections of the topic of the celebration of the Passover, after which there appear uniquely judgmental questions asked by a child (p. 83):

חכם **Wise** son, what does he say? „What are these testimonies, laws, and rules that our LORD God implored you to fulfill?” Thus, explain to him the rules of celebrating the Passover including that after eating the Paschal lamb (*afikoman*) you can no longer eat anything.

רשע **Bad** son, what does he say? “What celebrations do you have here? Speaking the LACHEM, he does not identify with the feast, at the same time excluding himself from his nation and religion. Hence, you will respond to him: “This happens because of what the LORD did to me during the exodus from Egypt.” Saying “me” rather than “you” emphasizes that with such an attitude he would not experience redemption, being with the forefathers in Egypt.

תם **Noble** son, what does he say? “What is this?” Respond to him: “The LORD has taken us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery, with a strong hand.”

ידוע לשאל ושאינו **And to the one, who does not know how to ask**, you yourself must say how it is written: “And on that day you will explain to your son, This is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:8).

Next, the historical narrative takes on a religious color, becoming reminiscent of a testimony to a meeting of the ancestors with God. An especially important aspect of this testimony is the fact that the meeting with God changed the ancestors’ fate and also impacts the present generation that takes place in the Passover celebration, or the celebrating family:

מתחלה **Once** our forefathers were idolaters, but now the Omnipresent One has made us serve Him, as is written: “[...] I brought your father Abraham from the region beyond the River and led him through the entire land of Canaan. I made his descendants numerous and gave him Isaac. To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau” (Joshua 24:3–4). [...]

ברוך **Blessed** be the One who keeps the promise given to Israel, blessed is He. The Holy and Blessed One decided on the end of slavery, as He foretold our father Abraham by entering into a covenant with him [...].

The matzo is covered, and the glass is raised, while the following words are said:

This is the same promise that was given to our ancestors and to us. In each time, there are enemies who arise to destroy us, but the Holiest One, blessed be He, always liberates us from their hand.

The narrative about the exodus from Egypt spreads, projecting on the next 3,500 years of the history of the Jewish people, the ancestors gathered at the family table, and at the family itself. “We” attests to the participation of all who are present in this incredible encounter with God and in experiencing His redeeming power.

Those at the table do not drink or eat after these words; instead, they set aside the glass and uncover the matzo. These ritual gestures are not explained; I could not find any descriptions of their symbolism in the available literature.

Next, the narrative reaches the culminating point, when God acts in a supernatural way and saves the people of Israel from their plight (pp. 85–88):

צא **Look** and find out what the Aramean Laban wanted to do to Jacob, our forefather. Pharaoh gave a command to kill only boys, but Laban wanted to destroy everyone, as is written: “My father was a refugee Aramean<sup>37</sup> who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as a resident alien. But there he became a nation great, strong and numerous” (Deuteronomy 26:5).

וירד “**And went** to Egypt,” as commanded by God. “He stayed there” means that Jacob, our forefather, was not to stay there forever, but to be there for a brief time. It is written: “‘We have come,’ they continued, ‘in order to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants’ flocks, because the famine has been severe in the land of Canaan. So now please let your servants settle in the region of Goshen” (Genesis 47:4).

במתי “**With a small group**,” as is written: “Seventy strong your ancestors went down to Egypt, and now the Lord, your God, has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven” (Deuteronomy 10:22). “Became a nation there”: this means that in Egypt the Israelites had already become

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37 In English translations, the expression אבי אבד ארמי *arami owvd avi* is rendered as “My father was a refugee Aramean” (Deuteronomy 26:5).

a separate nation. "Great and strong," as is written: "But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific. They multiplied and became so very numerous that the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7).

ורב **"And numerous,"** as is written: "I made you as numerous as the flowers in the field and you became great and numerous and beautiful. Your breasts developed and your hair grew, but you were nude and barefoot." "Then I passed by and saw you struggling in your blood, and I said to you in your blood, Live!" (Ezekiel 16:6–7).

וירעו **We were wronged** by the Egyptians, who oppressed us and made us perform harsh labor (Deuteronomy 26:6). And the Egyptians wronged us, as is written: "Come, let us deal shrewdly with them to stop their increase; otherwise, in time of war they too may join our enemies to fight against us, and so leave the land" (Exodus 1:10). And they oppressed us, as is written: "Accordingly, they set supervisors over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor. Thus, they had to build for Pharaoh the garrison cities of Pithom and Raamses" (Exodus 1:11). And they persecuted us, as is written: "So the Egyptians reduced the Israelites to cruel slavery," (Exodus 1:13).

ונצעק **We cried** to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression" (Deuteronomy 26:7). And we called to the Lord, the God of our forefathers, as is written: "A long time passed, during which the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their bondage and cried out, and from their bondage their cry for help went up to God" (Exodus 2:23). And the Lord heard our voice, as is written: "God heard their moaning and God was mindful of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24).

וירא **And He saw** our plight, or the separation of spouses, as has been said: "God saw the Israelites, and God knew..." (Exodus 2:25). Our oppression concerns the killing of our sons, as is written: "Throw into the Nile every boy that is born, but you may let all the girls live" (Exodus 1:22). And our yoke, our oppression, as is written: "Now indeed the outcry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them" (Exodus 3:9).

וירוציאנו **Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt** with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonder (Deuteronomy 26:8). **The Lord brought us** out of Egypt not through the aid of an angel or a seraph or messenger, but the Holy, blessed God Himself did this in His glory, as is written: "For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every firstborn in the land, human being and beast alike, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the Lord!" (Deuteronomy 12:12). "I will go through the Egyptian land" –

אי מלאך ולא אני **I, and not the angel.** "I will strike down every firstborn in the land" – I, not a seraph. "And I will execute judgment on all the gods of Egypt" – I, the Lord; I not a messenger. I, the Lord, I and no one else!

The selection of fragments from Sacred Scripture connected with a first-person plural narrative creates a feeling of a common experience both in the past and in the present. Participants identify with their ancestors, who

experienced both misfortune and God's miraculous intercession. God directly and personally enters into people's lives, which is emphasized several times, and the effects of this are salvific for some and tragic for others.

After this, there are reflections on the topic of signs and miracles, which on page 90 lead us to the list of the ten plagues that afflicted Egypt. A short commentary instructs us that during the mention of each plague one should take several drops of wine from the full glass. The following words are said:

אלו עשר מכות **These are the ten plagues** that the Holy, Blessed One sent upon the Egyptians in Egypt.

דם	<i>dam</i>	blood
צפרדע	<i>Tzefardeyah</i>	frogs
כנים	<i>kinim</i>	lice <sup>38</sup>
עחב	<i>arov</i>	wild animals <sup>39</sup>
דבר	<i>dever</i>	pestilence
שחין	<i>sh'chin</i>	boils
ברד	<i>barad</i>	hail
ארבה	<i>arbeh</i>	locusts
חושך	<i>Choshech</i>	darkness
מכת בכורות	<i>Makkat Bechorot</i>	killing of the firstborn

Wine is once again taken out of the glass while abbreviations referring to the plagues proposed by rabbi Yehuda are said: *DeTZakh*, *ADaSH*, *BeACHaV*, but this ritual is not mentioned in the book *Sefer Habrachot*.

Next, the reflections of Talmudic rabbis concerning the number of plagues are mentioned on pages 90–91. This is a very interesting example of rabbinical exegesis that is out of the scope of interest of this study.

38 Polish translations of the Bible tend to speak of “mosquitoes” instead. A Polish-Hebrew dictionary gives the following definitions: “louse, insect, mosquito” (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. J. Stamm, *Wielki słownik hebrajsko-polski i aramejsko-polski Starego Testamentu*, vol. 1–2, Vocatio, Warszawa 2008, p. 456).

39 “Flies” tend to appear in Polish translations instead (Millennium Bible): *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu w przekładzie z języków oryginalnych*, oprac. zespół biblistów polskich z inicjatywy Benedyktynów Tynieckich, wyd. 4, Pallottinum, Poznań 1991) or “vermin” (Paulist Bible: *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu. Najnowszy przekład z języków oryginalnych z komentarzem*, Święty Paweł, Częstochowa 2008).

### 3.3. Incantations

Next, the song *Dayenu* (“it would have been enough”) is included on p. 92 and preceded by the subheading:

**What wonderful blessings has the Omnipotent One sent upon us!**

If He would have brought us out of Egypt and not judged them – *dayenu* (it would have been enough).

If He would have judged them, but not their gods – *dayenu*.

If He would have slaughtered their gods, but not slaughtered their firstborns – *dayenu*.

If He would have slaughtered their firstborns but not given us their riches – *dayenu*.

If He would have given us their riches but not split the sea for us – *dayenu*.

If He would have split the sea for us but not led us through its middle on dry land – *dayenu*.

If He would have led us across the bottom as if it were dry land but not drowned our persecutors – *dayenu*.

If He would have drowned our persecutors but not satiated our needs in the desert for forty years – *dayenu*.

If He would have satiated our needs for forty years but not fed us manna – *dayenu*.

If He would have fed us manna but not given us Shabbos – *dayenu*.

If He would have given us Shabbos but not led us to Mount Sinai – *dayenu*.

If He would have led us to Mount Sinai but not given us the Torah – *dayenu*.

If He would have given us the Torah but not led us to the Land of Israel – *dayenu*.

If He would have led us to the Land of Israel but not built the Temple for us – *dayenu*.

The text on p. 93 would have been a kind of conclusion of the song:

Thus, we should be grateful to the Omnipresent One for not one, but many blessings. It was He who brought us out of Egypt, judged them, judged their gods, slaughtered their firstborns, gave us their riches, split the sea for us, led us through the middle of the sea and kept us dry, threw our persecutors into the sea, met our needs in the desert for forty years, fed us manna, gave us Shabbos, brought us to Mount Sinai, gave us the Torah, led us to the Land of Israel, and built us a temple so that we could redeem our sins.

All of God’s actions ultimately lead to an overriding aim: the redemption of the sins of all people who participate in the Paschal supper and who identify with their ancestors, their nation, and its uninterrupted history that is continued here and now.

After the conclusion of the *Dayenu* song, p. 93 of the *Sefer Habrachot* contains a subheading with the name of the famous rabbi Gamaliel:<sup>40</sup>

רבן גמליאל רבן **Raban**<sup>41</sup> **Gamaliel** has said: everyone who does not explain these three Paschal things does not fulfill his duties. Here they are:

[All say]:

פסח מצה ומרור *pesach, matzah umaror* (Paschal lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs).

The book *Sefer Habrachot* contains no information that all should respond; however, such a suggestion does appear in later editions of the *Haggadah*. Such a response of the community to the summons of the elder is, on the one hand, the fulfillment of a duty that Raban Gamaliel mentioned, and, on the other, an example of a dialogic liturgical act similar to a responsory. The Catholic liturgy of the hours also makes use of this procedure while it openly admits that it has been borrowed from the Jewish liturgy: “Preserving a very old and wise rule that has already been recognized in the Jewish literature, the Liturgy of the Hours makes it possible for the believer and the community to respond to the Word of God by singing the responsory.”<sup>42</sup>

At this point, the *Messianic Haggadah* emphasizes the connection between the figure of Gamaliel and the New Testament: rabbi Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel the Elder and the teacher of Saul of Tarsus, who would later become the Apostle to the Nations under the name Paul.<sup>43</sup> It references several verses from the Acts of the Apostles that refer to Raban Gamaliel: 22:2–3 as well as 5:34–39.

After saying the words “Pesach, matzah umaror,” there is an explanation of what they mean (pp. 93–94):

40 The commentary in the Jewish prayer book explains that Raban Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel the Elder, was the head of the Sanhedrin, the *Nasi*, in the last decade before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (*Sidur szabchej geulim*, Geulim, Jeruzalem 1995, p. 346). The *Jewish Encyclopedia* informs that this information is uncertain and questioned, but it emphasizes the broad recognition and role of this individual in the history of Judaism (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6494-gamaliel-i> [27.05.2018]). The New Testament uses the form Γαμαλιήλ; hence, in Polish the version “Gamaliel” has been accepted instead of “Gamliel” גמליאל.

41 The title *raban* means “our teacher” and is a sign of universal recognition.

42 *Liturgia uświęcenia czasu*, pod red. W. Świerzawskiego, Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, Kraków 1984, p. 119.

43 *Messianic Passover Hagada*, op. cit., p. 46.



פסח **The Paschal lamb**, which our fathers ate when the Temple still stood; what does it mean? It recalls that the Holy, Blessed One passed over [Hebrew פָּסַח *pasach*] the houses of our fathers in Egypt, as is written: “[Y]ou will reply: ‘It is the Passover sacrifice for the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. when he struck down the Egyptians, he delivered our houses.’ Then the people knelt and bowed down” (Exodus 12:27).

**We raise the matzo and say:**

Why do we eat the מצה **matza**? Because the dough that our fathers had kneaded had not been able to rise when the King of Kings revealed Himself, the Blessed One, and liberated them, as is written: “The dough they had brought out of Egypt they baked into unleavened loaves. It was not leavened, because they had been driven out of Egypt and could not wait. They did not even prepare food for the journey” (Exodus 12:39).

**We raise the bitter herbs and say:**

מרור **These bitter herbs**, why do we eat them? Because the Egyptians made the life of our fathers in Egypt bitter, as is written: “So the Egyptians reduced the Israelites to cruel slavery, making life bitter for them with hard labor, at mortar and brick and all kinds of field work—cruelly oppressed in all their labor” (Exodus 1:13–14).

בכל **In every** generation, the person (Jew) should consider himself to be among those who had been brought out of Egypt.

It should be noted that all those gathered give a response (the word “we say” is in the plural form), identifying with the symbolism and appropriate events. Verbal explanations are connected to raising up the matzo and bitter herbs, which significantly bolsters the perception of all who are present. Time-transcending bonds between the participants of the Seder and their ancestors who experienced God’s activity approximately 3,500 years ago are forged.<sup>44</sup> All feel as if they were among those being brought out of Egypt.

After reading these words, God is praised. The book *Sefer Habrachot* recalls another liturgical activity: the matzo is covered, and the glass is raised into the hands. Next, all say:

לפניך Thus, our duty is to thank, praise, glorify, sing the glories of, proclaim, bless, exalt, and adore the One who performed miracles to our fathers and to us; led us from slavery to freedom, from

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<sup>44</sup> The current consensus among Biblical scholars concerning the date of the Exodus is about 1250 BC, although there have been academic publications that question the methods of dating based on the currently accepted rules and demonstrating that the event of the Exodus took place in the middle of the fifteenth century BC, which corresponds to Biblical tradition to a greater extent (see: D. Rohl, *Pharaohs and kings. A biblical quest*, Crown Publishers, New York 1995).

sadness to joy, from mourning to celebration, from darkness to great light, from subjugation to redemption. Let us sing Him a new song: HALLELU-JA!

After these words, the glass is set aside and the matzo is uncovered, after which Psalms 113 and 114 are sung; in them, the word “Hallelujah,” which is an encouragement, is sung: “Praise the name of the Lord.”

### 3.4. The Concluding Part of the Liturgy and the Holiday Meal

After singing the Psalms, the matzo is covered and the glass is raised, while the blessing emphasizing the dependence of the family on God, who has allowed it to live to this joyful and ceremonious moment, is said (p. 96):

ברוך **Blessed** are You, LORD, our God, King of the Universe, who has rescued us and rescued our forefathers from Egypt and thanks to you we have survived to the present day and this night we can participate in eating *matzah* and *maror*. Similarly, Lord, our God, God of our forefathers, lead us to the feast days and the pilgrim feasts that will come in peace and joy because of the rebuilding of Your city and those who rejoice serving You. There, we will eat the regular and Paschal sacrifices, whose blood will stain the wall of Your altar according to Your will. And we will praise You with a new song for rescuing and redeeming us. Bless are You, Lord, redeemer of Israel.

After the blessing, the following formula is said: “I am ready to drink a second glass,” meaning the fulfillment of imperatives related to the celebration of the Passover, after which a typical blessing is said over the wine. The book *Sefer Habrachot* emphasizes that the second glass is drunk while lying on one’s left side.

Next, pages 97–98 contain the blessings *Rachtzah*, *Motzi*, *matzah*, *Maror*, and *Korech* along with brief instructions on performing functions:

רחצה Rachtzah (washing)

**We wash our hands and say:**

Blessed are You, God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with the commandment of washing our hands.

מוציא Motzi (“who brings out”)

**The matzo is taken, and a blessing is said:**

הנני **I am ready...**

ברוך **Blessed** are you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who leads the bread out of the land.

מצה Matzo (bread made of unleavened dough)

**A piece of matzo kezayit (the size of an olive) from the upper, middle, and lower matzo, after which the following blessing is said, and it is eaten:**

ברוך **Blessed** are you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and ordered us to eat unleavened bread.

מרור Maror (bitter herbs)

**A bit of bitter herbs is taken (kezayit – the size of an olive) and is dipped charoset and one says:**

הנני **I am ready...**

ברוך **Blessed** are you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and ordered us to eat bitter herbs.

כורוך Korech (“sandwich”)

**The matzo underneath is broken. A piece of kezayit with a bit (kezayit) of bitter herbs is taken, after which the following blessing is said:**

זכור **To remember** the Jerusalem Temple, as Hillel the Elder did. In the times when the Temple still stood, Hillel took the meat of the Paschal offering and the unleavened bread with bitter herbs and ate them together in order to fulfill what is written: “From the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month until the evening of the twenty-first day of this month you will eat unleavened bread” (Numbers 9:11; Exodus 12:8).

**Everything (the matzo and herbs) is eaten.**

These are the last liturgical functions before the eating of the holiday meal. Next, there is a feast during which there is no tension resulting from the performing of liturgical functions and there are casual conversations, jokes, etc. Usually, the family prepares the tastiest dishes and delicacies that bring the most pleasure. Polish Jews traditionally prepared eggs, liver, fish, meatballs, kugel, tzimmes, sweets, and fruit for the Passover meal.<sup>45</sup> This shared feast unites the family that had just been separated and eaten matzo, which symbolizes the body of the Paschal lamb offered up for the sins of the people and their salvation. All present come to participate in the feeling of community as well as the experience of God’s experience and regained freedom.

The last symbol of the Paschal liturgy directly named in the *Sefer Habrachot* is the *afikoman*, or a piece of matzo that had been hidden at the beginning of the meal in order to be found at the end and eaten together. This part of the Paschal liturgy is called the *cafun* (“hidden”). A blessing is not said; instead,

45 A. Cała, H. Węgrzynek, G. Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich. Słownik*, op. cit., p. 252.

this incantation is said: “I am ready to fulfill all the orders related to the consumption of the *afikoman*” (p. 98).

All present receive a piece the size of an olive. In some communities two olive-sized pieces are eaten; one of them symbolizes the *Korban Pesach* (the lamb offered up as a Passover sacrifice), while the second matzo is eaten along with this meat.<sup>46</sup> This leads to immediate associations with Holy Communion, which is eaten by all the participants of the Mass as the true Body of Christ, the Paschal lamb. After the description of the consumption of the *afikoman*, the *Messianic Haggadah* contains a fragment of 1 Corinthians 23–26, which describes the Eucharist.<sup>47</sup> Messianic rabbis have found typological symbolism here, noting that the fact that the *afikoman* is a broken piece of matzo that is covered and hidden represents Jesus’ death and burial.<sup>48</sup>

The very name *afikoman* is something of a mystery. Some believe it originates in the Greek language, in which the words ἐπί Κομός mean something that is to happen later, or dessert.<sup>49</sup> Pecaric suggests a similar meaning, but he takes it from the Hebrew words *afiku mene temika*, which means “bringing all kinds of sweetness.”<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, in one edition of the *Haggadah* that comes from Yemen the Hebrew words *afik min* are understood as a reminder that it is not permitted to try either fruits or other foods after eating this matzo.<sup>51</sup> In the Talmudic treatise *Pesachim* 119b, there is an explanation that the word *afikoman* consists of the first letters of words referring to all kinds of dishes, which emphasizes that one cannot eat them after eating a piece of the *afikoman* at the conclusion of the Passover meal. Pecaric notes that nothing else can be eaten or drunk after the *afikoman*; the last two glasses of wine are the only exception.<sup>52</sup>

In light of the lack of certainty about the existence of the custom of separating the *afikoman* between all the participants in Jesus’ time, we cannot say with certainty if this element of the Seder is now the Eucharist, the center of the Church’s life. Some authors emphasize that during the time of the Temple the matzo did not have to symbolize lamb meat, which was eaten during the

46 *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 58.

47 *Messianic Passover Hagada*, op. cit., p. 63.

48 A. Moorhead, G. Kaplan, F. Marcy, *Messianic Haggadah*, Aion Multimedia, Glendale 2016.

49 D. Nessim, *Passover and the Afikoman*, [in:] *Messiah in the Passover*, eds. D. L. Bock, M. Glaser, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids 2017, p. 169–182.

50 *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 58.

51 W. H. Greenburg, *The Haggadah According to the Rite of Yemen*, David Nutt, London 1896, p. 14.

52 *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 170.

Passover meal, and that the oldest known edition of the *Haggadah* does not contain information about the *afikoman*, although the relationship between the *afikoman* and the hidden Messiah is evident.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.5. The Concluding Blessing

*Barech* (p. 98) is the final blessing after the meal. The book *Sefer Habrachot* refers to page 144 or 150, where one can find the texts of typical blessings said after the consumption of meals. It notes that the following formula should be said first: "I am ready to fulfill the commandment concerning the blessing after eating, as is written." The text of the blessing over the wine during which the third glass is drunk follows.

There is a brief instruction concerning filling the fourth glass of wine for the prophet Elijah and opening the door on page 99. Pecaric explains that the opening of the doors demonstrates that on that night God gives special protection to His people.<sup>54</sup> De Vries writes:

In today's time, this is on our part only a gesture that does not require any courage of us. However, in the Middle Ages there were numerous accounts that speak of robberies and assaults, about plundering and murders during the Seder meal. There were countless such incidents.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, attacks against Jews celebrating Passover occur today as well. The largest such crime was the massacre of guests celebrating the Exodus from Egypt in the Park Hotel in Netanya on March 27, 200. As a result of this suicide attack, thirty among 250 guests were killed and 140 were wounded.<sup>56</sup> Thus, we can understand why the liturgy contains a summons to God referencing the Psalms of vilification (79:6–7 and 69:25) asking for vengeance at this point.

Pour out your wrath on nations that do not recognize you, on kingdoms that do not call on your name. Pour out your wrath upon them; let the fury of your anger overtake them.

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<sup>53</sup> D. Nessim, *Passover and the Afikoman*, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> *Zemirot Pardes Lauder. Pieśni szabatowe i błogosławieństwo po jedzeniu*, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>55</sup> S. P. De Vries Mzn., *Obrzędy i symbole Żydów*, op. cit., p. 187–188.

<sup>56</sup> <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA-Archive/2002/Pages/Passover%20suicide%20bombing%20at%20Park%20Hotel%20in%20Netanya.aspx> (27.05.2018).

Next, the door is closed and the recitations of Psalms 115–118, which is part of the so-called Hallel, begins (pp. 99–104). The texts of prayers praising God begin on p. 105, during which (p. 107) the readiness to fulfill the commandment to drink the fourth glass is announced and a blessing is said over the wine. All concludes with the *bracha acharona* (the final blessing), after which the part of the Paschal liturgy known as the *Nirtzah* (conclusion) takes place.

Thus, we have fulfilled the order of the celebration according to customs and laws. Just as we have deserved to fulfill it, may we also deserve [to do so in the future]. Purest One, who reigns in the heavens, raise up the congregation that cannot be counted. Bring sprouts out of the trunk You have planted. [Lead] the redeemed to Zion with song!

The entirety concludes with the following wish: “[May we celebrate the Passover] next year in a rebuilt Jerusalem!”

Table 1 compares the most important rituals present in the domestic Paschal liturgy along with their context, both that included in the book under study here and that absent from it. The impact of individual elements on the family community that celebrates Passover is also briefly described.

Table 1. The impact of Passover rituals

Ritual	Text (placed in the book)	Context (not included in the book)	Impact
Searching for and destroying the yeast	Blessings concerning the yeast	Functions leading to the great event, the participation of all family members	Fun, the educational aspect, the desire to completely fulfill God's commandments
Kadesh (sanctification)	Blessing over the wine	Drinking four glasses of wine is an obligatory element of celebration increasing happiness and bringing joy; additionally, it contains a Biblical and spiritual message	Common experiencing of the sacred, gratitude to God, dependence on God, fulfilling the Commandments
Urchatz (washing)	Washing hands before eating the <i>karpas</i>	Washing hands as preparation for holy rituals, washing as receiving ritual purity, entry into the sacred sphere	Emphasizing the importance of the celebration and the events that have led to it
Karpas (parsley)	The vegetable is dipped in salty water and eaten	Rich symbolism of the Seder table, which provokes questions and discussions on historical and religious topics	Ritual manifestation of the experience of the ancestors (the tears of slavery)

Yachatz (breaking)	The middle matzo is broken in half	The symbolism refers to the experiences of ancestors	The participation of the family in centuries-old events
Maggid (sermon)	Telling the <i>Haggadah</i>	The separation of roles in the narrative (children ask questions while adults explain); elements that arouse children's interest and their engagement are introduced; the children feel important; common songs bolstering the feeling of belonging	Narrative, a sense of the continuity of generations, building identity and a feeling of belonging in relation to God's direct activity in history
Rachtzah (washing)	Washing hands before the meal	Preparation for holy functions	Reference to service in the Temple (relationship with God)
Motzi matzah (blessing over the matzo)	The blessing over unleavened bread	Symbolism referring to the experiences of ancestors during the Exodus from Egypt	Manifestation and experience of events from the past
Maror (bitter herbs)	Part of the bitter herbs is eaten	Rich symbolism of the Seder table, which provokes questions and discussions on historical and religious topics	Manifestation of the taste of the bitterness of slavery
Korech (“sandwich”)	A piece of matzo is eaten along with the bitter herbs	Rich symbolism of the Seder table, which provokes questions and discussions on historical and religious topics	The repetition of ritual functions from before 2,000 years
Shulchan orech (setting the table)	The holiday meal is eaten	A common holiday meal, an atmosphere of joy and freedom, the tastiest dishes, jokes and family anecdotes	Strengthening of the entire family community by eating the meal together, talks, singing, etc.
Tzafun (“hidden”)	It is eaten with the <i>afikoman</i> , which had been hidden	The participation of children; the father “humbles himself” with respect to the youngest child finding the <i>afikoman</i> ; rewarding the child and placing him or her at the center of attention	Mystical participation in the sacrifice, which has rescued the life of the community; waiting for the Messiah, a game with a strong educational message
Barech (blessing)	A blessing is said after the meal	The Biblical context refers to the settling of the liberated Israel in the Promised Land and to the consumption of the fruits of that land	Gratitude to God for received graces, awareness of the community's full dependence on God,
Hallel (praise)	The Psalm <i>Hallel</i> is recited	Praising God for all graces that the Jews have experienced in the past and present	Common singing, knowledge of Biblical texts, gratitude to God
Nirtzah (conclusion)	Concluding prayers		Building a common experience of fulfilling the Covenant, communal experience of joyous moments of liberation

#### 4. Counting of the Omer

Immediately after these words in the *Sefer Habrachot* (p. 108) there is the header *The Order of the Counting of the Omer*. The prayer book *Sharey Tefilo* contains the following explanation of this custom:

The Torah requires that we count beginning with the second day of the Passover for seven weeks and on the fiftieth day of the establishment of the feast of Shavuot (fifty days after Passover). On the second day of Passover, a sacrifice in the form of a sheaf (Hebrew: *omer*) of barley from the new harvest is offered. The Torah notes that the counting of days must begin after the feast of Passover, “Beginning with the day after the sabbath, the day on which you bring the sheaf (Hebrew: *omer*) for elevation, you shall count seven full weeks” (Leviticus 23:15); hence, this counting of days is called *sfrat ha-omer*, or literally “counting from the *omer*.”

According to the Torah, every Jew should by him or herself count the days from the *omer* (as opposed to other measurements that are necessary for establishing the calendar, which leads to the *Bet Din* court in the name of the entire people). In connection to this, commentators have noted that “counting of the *Omer*” is not an ordinary counting of days of the calendar, but a period of transition from the Passover (the day when we have received physical freedom after the Exodus from Egypt) to the Shavuot (the day we received spiritual freedom after having received the Torah).<sup>57</sup>

Because all holidays are celebrated twice in the Diaspora, the book *Sefer Habrachot* notes: “Outside Israel, we begin to count the Omer on the second night of Passover.” Next, there is a formula of counting that is repeated everyday throughout the entire time up until the fiftieth day, along with the prayer for the rebuilding of the Temple:

Blessed are You, God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and ordered us to count the *Omer*.

Today is the first day of the *Omer*.

May it be Your will, God, our God and God of your fathers, that the Temple will be rebuilt soon, in our time, and let us participate in Your Torah.

This comment follows: “Outside Israel, we talk on the first night of Passover,” after which the following texts of songs are placed:

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57 *Sidur szaarej tfilo (nusach aszkenaz)*, ed. P. Polonski, Machanaim, Jeruzalem 5767 (2008), p. 435.



- *Wayehi bachatzi halaila* (It happened at midnight),
- *Ki lo nae* (This is appropriate for Him),
- *Veamartam zevach Pesach*“ (And you will say: Passover sacrifice),”
- *Adir Hu* (Mighty is He),
- *Echad mi yodea* (What is one?),
- *Chad gadya* (one goat).

The last section of the *Pesach* (p. 115) contains the title: *Kiddush Shacharit* and contains blessings and prayers said during the day of the feast. They are:

- Psalm 23 (The Lord is my shepherd...);
- a fragment of Isaiah 58:13–14 (If you refrain from trampling the sabbath...);
- a fragment of Exodus 31:16–17 (So shall the Israelites observe the sabbath...);
- one of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20:8–11 (in the Ashkenazi tradition, either the entirety or the last sentence of verse 20:11 is read).

After these words, this annotation follows: “On ordinary days we begin here” and verses of Leviticus 23:4, 44: “These are the festivals of the Lord, holy days which you shall declare at their proper time. Thus, did Moses announce to the Israelites the festivals of the Lord.” A summons to a blessing over the wine and the blessing itself (*kiddush*) is the same as during Shabbos.

## 5. Conclusion

An analysis of the Paschal family liturgy in light of the book *Sefer Habrachot* allows us to distinguish several factors that are important for the building of family ties as well as a sense of identity, dignity, and one’s own worth. In particular, the following elements are important:

- a historical narrative that turns into a family narrative and encompasses all present at a holiday meeting;
- rituals that give rise to a feeling of persistence, stability, and belonging; especially important is the ritual of separating the last piece of matzo, which symbolizes the hidden Messiah and Paschal Lamb in whose sacrifice all present participate;
- common songs;
- the reading of the texts of prayers in ancient languages (the continuity of generations and traditions);

- constant references to God's activity, which became Israel's experience at the moment of the Exodus from Egypt and many times in history.

In this way, the spiritual reality ceases to be abstract and distant for the participants of the Passover meal and becomes an element of the everyday lives of those gathered at the family holiday table.

## Abstract

### The Significance of the Ritual in the Passover Family Liturgy in Light of the Book of Blessings ("Sefer Habrachot")

This article contains an analysis of texts of the Passover liturgy that are typical with regards to the significance of their rituals to those who participate in the celebration. It discusses individual activities and words that are said in the order in which they begin, beginning with the search for and destruction of the leaven on the day before Passover and concluding with the measurement of an omer after its conclusion. All the blessings and narratives said on the context of these activities contain factors that are conducive to the strengthening of family ties. The celebrated liturgy brings to the fore ancient events and emphasizes the communal experience of God over the generations as well as the dependence of the family and the entire Jewish people on God.

**Keywords:** Judaism, Passover, family, ritual

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