

A comprehensive guide to the *Maggid*, the principles and process of its composition, and how to use it at the *Seder*.

וְכָל הַמְאָרִיךְ בְּדִבְרֵי שְׂאֵרְעוּ וְשִׁהוּ הָרִי זֶה מְשַׁבַּח

(משנה תורה הלכות חמץ ומצה ז:א)

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The starting point for understanding the *Maggid* is the fourth *halacha* in the last chapter of Mishnah *Pesahim*:

מזגו לו כוס שני וכן הבן שואל. אם אין דעת בבן אביו מלמדו מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות שבכל הלילות אנו מטבילים פעם אחת הלילה הזה שתי פעמים. שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלים חמץ ומצה הלילה הזה כולו מצה. שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלים בשר צלי שלוק ומבושל הלילה הזה כולו צלי. לפי דעתו שלבן אביו מלמדו. מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח ודורשים מארמי אובד אבי עד שהוא שגומר כל הפרשה.¹

They pour for him the first cup and here the son asks. If the son lacks intelligence his father teaches him: 'How different is this night from all other nights? For on all other nights we dip once, on this night twice. On all other nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread, on this night all of it is unleavened. On all other nights we eat meat roasted, stewed or boiled, on this night all of it is roasted. According to the intelligence of the son his father teaches him. He begins with disgrace and ends with praise and they expound 'my father was a wandering Aramean' until he completes the whole passage.

Following *qiddush* and an appetizer course consisting of lettuce and other foods with dips,² the son asks the father questions. If the son is not developed enough to ask

¹ Many readers will notice that the text of this *halacha* is substantially different from the one they are familiar with from standard editions of the Mishnah. In fact, the entire chapter as it appears in standard editions is one of the most corrupt in the entire Mishnah. While most of the time the standard editions are not inaccurate to this degree, this should serve as a wakeup call as to the necessity of providing accurate editions of all the basic texts of *Torah she b'al peh*, so as to ensure that time spent studying Torah is in fact spent studying Torah and not scribal errors or the anxieties of the papal censor.

² Later authorities, based on the practice of Rav Aha the son of Rava recorded in the *Talmud Bavli* (*Pesahim* 115a), rule that one should only use lettuce if no other vegetables are available, so as to avoid the question of whether to say the *b'racha* over *maror* at this stage or only later when it is again brought out for the main meal. While the *Tosefta* rules that a *b'racha* must be said over every *mitzvah* (*B'rachot* 6:9), the Mishnah almost never refers to them and it seems quite possible that the principle only became generally accepted in the early Amoraic period when *b'rachot* on *mitzvot* were the occasion of many disputes (see *B Succah* 45b-46a, *Pesahim* 7a-b). It may well be that the Mishnah does not envision any *b'racha* being said on the maror other than *borei p'ri hadamah*. In any case, the Mishnah is quite explicit that lettuce should be eaten during the appetizer as well as during the main course. This is the basis for the *mah nishtanah* statement about dipping twice, which refers not to two dipping courses (which would not have been uncommon), but two dipping courses consisting of lettuce. From early medieval *haggadot* used in the land of Israel it is clear that there were many components of the appetizer course, including fruit, rice, and pastries [!]. The *Tosefta* (*Pesahim* 10:5) refers to a course consisting of offal meats. The practice of eating less than an olive-sized portion of a vegetable arose as a way of avoiding uncertainty over whether to say a *b'racha aharonah* on this course

pertinent questions then the father prompts him by pointing out the various ways this meal is different from other evening meals during the year.³ While the general practice at festive meals was to have one course including the dipping of lettuce, on this night there were two.⁴ On other nights, both leavened and unleavened bread were eaten, but on this night only unleavened. On other nights, meat cooked in a variety of ways would be served, but on this night, it was all roasted.⁵ The father then teaches ‘according to the intelligence of the son’, beginning with disgrace and ending with praise⁶ and expounds the passage beginning with ‘My father was a wandering Aramean’.

The passage in question is the liturgy that owners of land are required by the Torah to say on presenting the first fruits of each year’s crop at the Temple. It is found in *Devarim* 26:5-8 (I shall hereafter refer to it as *parshat habikkurim*):

אָרְמִי אֶבֶד אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְר שָׁם בְּמִתֵּי מֵעַט וַיְהִי־שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
עָצוּם וָרֹב: וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: וַנִּצְעַק
אֶל־ד' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע ד' אֶת־קִלְנוּ וַיִּרְא אֶת־עַנְיָנוּ וְאֶת־עֲמָלָנוּ וְאֶת־
לִחְצָנוּ: וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ד' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה וּבְמָרָא גָּדֹל וּבְאֹתוֹת
וּבְמִפְתָּיִם:⁷

or to wait to fulfil one’s obligation at *birkat hamazon* (since one does not, in any case, have to say a *b’racha aharonah* on an amount smaller than an olive). From early-medieval Land of Israel *Haggadot* it is clear that the original practice was to say a *b’racha aharonah* after each section of the appetizer course. Rav Sa’adya Gaon, who knew of only one course consisting of a single vegetable, also ruled that a *b’racha aharonah* should be recited as does *Rambam* in one of his responsa.

³ This is plainly the meaning of the Mishnah and is interpreted as such by *Rambam (Hilchot Hametz uMatzah 8:2)*, though he rules that they should be said as a matter of course regardless of the intelligence of the son. However, the practice of having the son (and in some households, all the sons and even daughters) read a modified version as questions has become universal, despite the grammatical impossibility of construing them this way and the rather obvious fact that nowhere in the entire *Haggadah* is there anything resembling an answer.

⁴ This practice was specific, apparently, to Mediterranean civilization and so the *Talmud Bavli* amends the text to the one used today.

⁵ Generally, this is taken to refer to the time of the Temple when the *Pesah* sacrifice was eaten. However, the previous *halacha (Pesahim 10:3)* has already made clear that the chapter is referring, unless it specifies otherwise, to practice after the destruction of the Temple. As an earlier *halacha (Pesahim 4:4)* indicates, many Jewish communities had the practice of eating roast meat on *Seder* night as a commemoration of the *Pesah*. One notes that, according to the correct text of the Mishnah, there are three statements referring to *maror*, *matzah*, and *Pesah* respectively, the three things which Raban Gamliel specified must be discussed.

⁶ This clause is the subject of a dispute in the *Talmud Bavli Pesahim 116b*. As recorded there, Rav holds that the ‘disgrace’ is that our forefathers were idolaters and Rava (according to accurate texts) holds that it refers to our later forefathers being slaves. Both of these views are included in the text of our *Haggadah*. I agree with the view of Mitchell First (First, 2012) that this clause is meant to be read with the next one, so that ‘disgrace’ is ‘My father was a wandering Aramean’ and I believe that the *Mahloqet* in the *Bavli* is to be interpreted in this light. I explain my views on this subject at length in the essay ‘What is disgrace? A new interpretation of *Pesahim 116:a*’.

⁷ It should be observed that this is not, in fact, the end of the passage, which continues ‘And He brought us to this place and gave to us this good land...’. Some claim, based on the Mishnah, that the

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and he dwelt there, few of number, and became there a great nation, mighty and numerous. And the Egyptians did bad to us, and they afflicted us, and they placed upon us hard work. And we cried out to HASHEM the God of our fathers, and HASHEM heard our voice, and he saw our affliction and our travail. And HASHEM brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and great terror and signs and wonders.

This passage is a brief synopsis of *yetziat mitzrayim*, delivered in poetic language and covering all the major points from the entry to Egypt until the final exodus. The job of the father at this stage of the *Seder* is to expound (*doresh*) the verses so as to fulfil his obligation to recount the foundational event of the Jewish people.⁸

It is necessary at this stage to clarify why such a method of expounding the exodus story was chosen. Alternative options would have ranged from simply allowing the father to tell the story in any manner he chose to providing a fixed liturgy containing sections from the Torah and other books of the *Tanach* as well as midrashic explanations and embellishments. Part of the answer is that this was *Hazal's* default format for liturgy. Many Jews today believe that when saying the *Shemone Esrei*, for example, they are obligated to use a specific order of words every day, three times a day. However, in reality, *Hazal* specified only the subject matter of the *b'rachot*, leaving the precise wording to the choice of each individual or community. The closest we get to a set liturgy is the mandatory inclusion of certain phrases and formulas to be inserted on special occasions. Only short *b'rachot* were given a fixed text. Variety on a set theme was not an exception for *Hazal*, it was closer to being a rule.

There is a further reason, however, why this format was so particularly appropriate for the *Seder* night. The Mishnah states that the father must tell the story 'according to the intelligence of the son'; it is not enough to tell a story, the story has to be understood, and it has to engage. Given the potential differences in intelligence – from the slow 5-year old to the 12-year old prodigy – among children present at a *Seder*, let alone the adult participants, even the most perfectly composed text could not fulfil this criterion. A

Maggid should continue until the end of the next verse and therefore include the entrance to the land of Israel as the conclusion of the story, but that this was dropped to reflect the needs of Jews living in exile who could not say 'and He brought us to this place'. This is plausible enough, but there is no evidence of this in extant *haggadot* including those from the land of Israel. That still leaves a gap of around 600 years in which the change could have taken place, but we can say with reasonable certainty that our *Maggid*, composed in Bavel in the 8th or 9th century, never included the extra verse.

⁸ The exact status of this obligation is a matter of dispute. *Rambam*, *Sefer haHinuch*, *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*, and *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, all include this obligation as one of the 613 *mitzvot* and this was accepted by subsequent authorities. However, the lists of the *Ba'al Halachot Gedolot* and Rav Sa'adya Gaon do not include such a mitzvah and it is also absent from a poem on the theme by Ibn Gabirol. Presumably, however, they would agree that the father is supposed to tell his son about the exodus on this night, since the Torah explicitly says so. The question is whether talking about the exodus is a mitzvah in itself or merely the intended result of other mitzvot of the evening, as it is, for example, at a *pidyon hamor*. The dispute is about the nature of the Torah's legal system rather than what one should be doing on the eve of the 15th of Nissan.

perfectly pitched account of the exodus story for one child would be far too complicated for another and tedious for a third. In order for the ends of the *Seder* to be achieved, it is necessary that the father be allowed substantial latitude to tell the story in the most appropriate way for his audience.

The question then becomes why any framework was provided at all: why not allow each father complete freedom to tell the story in any way he sees fit? The question might seem odd to the modern Jew who has got used to following a set text even for the most private and personal petitions, but it is worth asking anyway. If *Hazal* saw fit to specify, up to a point, how the story should be told then there must be a reason. It is not, though, a hard question to answer. The greater the latitude allowed to each father, the greater the chance that, not to put too fine a point on it, he will make a hash of it. The use of a short synopsis of the exodus story places a limit on the discretion of the father, ensuring he covers the main themes of the exodus and gives them their due weight.⁹

So much, then, for the *Seder* service as described in the Mishnah. There is nothing in the *Gemara* that alters this format, however, the *Seder* service that we use, and that which has been in use for a millennium, looks rather different. The father no longer expounds the verses of *parshat habikkurim*, instead he reads an exposition that is found in the same form in all of the thousands of different editions of the *Haggadah* used around the world. This is not to say that the act of *darshanut* (expounding) is absent, at least in the more learned household, but the object of explanation has shifted from *parshat habikkurim* itself to the commentary upon it. What apparently has happened is that a standardized way of expounding *parshat habikkurim* was introduced and accepted, replacing the former latitude to expound the verses with a fixed commentary, known – along with some preliminary material – as the *Maggid*.¹⁰

⁹ There is a secondary question of why the passage *Devarim* 25:6-9 passage in particular was chosen. There are two other passages that could serve the same purpose: *Bemidbar*: 20:15-16 and *Devarim* 6:21-24. First, when answering such a question, it is necessary to remember that *one* of the options had to be chosen; even if the choice was random *parshat habikkurim* would still have a 1/3 chance of winning. Secondly, one can observe that *parshat habikkurim* has features that the other two passages do not. *Bemidbar* 20:15-6 includes nothing about God's punishment of the Egyptians and *Devarim* 6:21-24 picks up the story in the middle after the children of Israel are already enslaved. A further reason is that *parshat habikkurim* was the most well-known of the passages since it was used by those presenting their first fruits in the Temple. It is true that the *Seder* ritual as described in the Mishnah is probably of Post-Temple origin, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that the passage retained a certain prestige thereafter, especially as it one of only two examples of a liturgical text found in the Torah, the other being *viduy hama'asrot* which appears just afterwards. Finally, it can be seen simply by comparing the three passages that *parshat habikkurim* is the most elegant, with a sonorous repetition of near-synonyms that makes for easy memorization.

¹⁰ The most explicit statement to the effect that one must read the entire *Maggid* as written is found in *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*: 'and he reads the whole *Haggadah* as it is written' (*Mitzvah* 144), but a similar, if less emphatic, statement is found in the *Tur* and *Shulhan Aruch* (OH 473:[7]). The Artscroll *Mahzor* makes the rather astounding claim that *all* of the participants at the *Seder* are required to recite the *Maggid*!

That is, at least, our guiding assumption, but a little reflection shows it is quite untenable. There is no getting around the conclusion that the introduction of a fixed text – *any* fixed text – eradicates the possibility of expounding *parshat habikkurim* according to the intelligence of the son. The standardization of the *Shemoneh Esrei* can be said to have the benefits of ensuring that each individual can pray elegantly and in conformity with halachic requirements, even admitting the inevitable cost in terms of *kavanah* and engagement. The standardization of the *Maggid* unavoidably undermines the whole enterprise because the goal is communication, not with God, but with another human being.

That would be the case if the *Maggid* were in every respect perfectly lucid and added up to a riveting account – for those of a given level of intelligence – of the exodus story. The actual text we have in front of us, however, meets neither condition. Look at the following section of the *Maggid*:

With a strong hand This is the plague, since it says, ‘Behold the hand of *HASHEM* is on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the cattle and on the flock, a very heavy plague.’

And with an outstretched arm This is the sword, like that which says, ‘And his sword drawn in his hand outstretched over Jerusalem.’

And with great terror This is *Giluy Shechina*, like that which says, ‘Or has God assayed to come to take for Himself a nation from the midst of a nation with trials, with signs, and with wonders, and with war, and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm and with great terrors, according to all which *HASHEM* your God has done for you in Egypt before your eyes.’

And with signs This is the staff, like that which says, ‘And this staff take in your hand, with which you shall do the wonders.’

And with wonders This is the blood, like that which says, ‘And I shall place wonders in the heavens and the earth: blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke’.

בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִבְרַח אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת יְדֵי הַיָּדוֹן הַזֶּה
בְּמִקְנֵי אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה, בַּסּוּסִים, בַּחֲמֹרִים, בַּגְּמְלִים,
בַּבְּקָר וּבַצֹּאן, דָּבָר כָּבֵד מְאֹד.

וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה זוֹ הַחֶרֶב, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְחָרְבוּ
שְׁלוֹפָה בְּיָדוֹ, נְטוּיָה עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

וּבְמִוְרָא גָדֹל זוֹ גְלוּי שְׂכִינָה. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר, אוֹ
הַנְּסֶה אֱלֹקִים לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לוֹ גּוֹי מִקֶּרֶב גּוֹי בְּמִסְתַּ
בְּאֵתָת וּבְמִוְפְתִים וּבְמִלְזָמָה וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע
נְטוּיָה וּבְמִוְרָאִים גְּדוֹלִים כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְכֶם ד' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם
בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵיכֶם.

וּבְאֵתוֹת זֶה הַמַּטֵּה, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְאֵת הַמַּטֵּה הַזֶּה
תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה־בּוֹ אֵת הָאֵתוֹת.

וּבְמִוְפְתִים זֶה הַדָּם, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְנָתַתִּי מוֹפְתִים
בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ.

If we leave out the prooftexts and list the ‘explanations’ in order we get the following:

Plague → Sword → *Giluy Shechina* → Staff → Blood

Who would dare to claim that this, on the face of it, is a reasonable way of telling the exodus story? And yet, this is, quite literally, what the *Maggid* has to say on the verse beginning **וַיֹּצֵאנוּ** (‘And He brought us out’). Questions abound about what looks disconcertingly like a randomly thrown together list. Why is the fourth plague singled out at the beginning and the first plague mentioned at the end? What is the point of mentioning the staff? What *Giluy Shechina* (revelation of the divine presence) is being

referred to? Most obviously of all, where does ‘the sword’ make any appearance in the story of *yetziat mitzrayim*.¹¹

In my experience, most observant Jews are vaguely aware of the problem, but will only acknowledge it when pushed and then respond in one of two ways. The first is to claim that the *Maggid* is an esoteric text full of mysteries. This claim is not falsifiable by any but supernatural means, but one can simply point out that, if it is true, the use of *Maggid* by ordinary Jews not privy to its secrets should be discontinued post-haste. The second is some variant on the claim that ‘midrash isn’t supposed to make sense’. Without wanting to comment gratuitously on the religious mindset of those who engage in this sort of ‘apologetic’, we can say that even if this were true in general, it cannot be true of the *Seder* night. The requirement to expound the exodus story using *parshat habikkurim* as a base and in a way that the child in front of you can understand, is a halachic obligation and that obligation cannot be fulfilled by repeating parrot-like what one acknowledges to be a string of opaque comments arranged higgledy-piggledy.

But if the *Maggid* as generally viewed appears to be an attempt to do the impossible executed badly, that is not the end of the story. The first chink of light emerges when, it is recognized that while many parts of the *Maggid* are bafflingly obscure, there are some that are so clear that they practically interpret themselves:

And the Egyptians did bad to us Like that which says, ‘Come let us outsmart him, lest he multiply and when war shall happen he too will be added to our enemies and he will fight against us and go up from the land.’ (*Shemot* 1:10)

וַיִּרְעוּ אֲתָנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: הֲבֵה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה, וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֵף גַּם הוּא עַל שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ, וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ.

And afflicted us Like that which says, ‘And they placed upon it [the people] taskmasters in order to afflict it, and it built storage cities for Pharaoh: Pitom and Rameses’ (*Shemot* 1:11)

וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם. וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה. אֶת-פִּתּוֹם וְאֶת-רַעַמְסֵס.

And placed upon us hard work Like that which says, ‘And the Egyptians worked the children of Israel with harshness.’ (*Shemot* 1:13)

וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה. כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָפָר.

Unfortunately, by this stage, many *Seder* participants are so bewildered by the talk of a lady with fully grown breasts rolling around in blood that they have given up trying to understand what is going on. Millions, though, when they reach this section, must have wondered why the entire *Maggid* couldn’t be so admirably clear. Here, each element of the verse in *parshat habikkurim* is linked to a verse in the primary account of *yetziat mitzrayim* in *Shemot* and they are done so **in order**. There is no demand here for strained interpretations, everything just makes perfect sense. For one brief part of the exodus story, that of the initial enslavement and oppression of the children of Israel, the tale is told in a way that is easy to understand and communicate. It is not, then, that the author of the *Maggid* was incapable of expounding the *Maggid* in a clear and ordered fashion it’s

¹¹ In part 1 of my essay ‘Occam’s Sword: A different way of reading the *Maggid*’, I discuss the various attempts made to identify ‘the sword’ within the traditional explanatory framework.

just that, most of the time, he thought it better to strew around random, indecipherable allusions.¹²

Except, of course, he didn't. If a text (if anything for that matter) looks mis-executed to this sort of degree, it is worth considering whether you have been looking at it from the wrong angle. In the case of the *Maggid*, the solution is quite simple: the method of commenting on the verse beginning וירעו by the author of the *Maggid* is, in essential matters, and despite appearance to the contrary, exactly the same one he uses throughout the work.

What I mean by that is as follows. The purpose of our *Maggid* is to tell the exodus story in its proper order by linking each successive element in *parshat habikkurim* to a section of the primary account in *Shemot*. By turning the verses beginning with 'A wandering Aramean' into a map of the Torah's full account of *yetziat mitzrayim*, it provides you with a tool for telling the story without missing anything out, but with the flexibility to lengthen or shorten, emphasize or pass over, in accord with the needs of your audience. Once one realizes this, the perplexing list above suddenly becomes entirely clear:

Plague and Sword	Moshe tells Pharaoh that the Hebrews must be allowed to travel into the wilderness lest God 'strike us with the plague or with the sword. ' Pharaoh responds by intensifying their burden (<i>Shemot</i> 5:3)
<i>Giluy Shechina</i>	In response to Moshe's complaint, God tells Moshe that he has not yet been known by 'my name <i>HASHEM</i> ' and that this name will now be revealed (<i>Shemot</i> 6:2)
Staff	Aharon throws down his staff at Pharaoh's court and turns it into a crocodile. (<i>Shemot</i> 7: 10)
Blood	Moshe and Aharon meet Pharaoh at the river and turn it into blood. (<i>Shemot</i> 7:20)

To put matters extremely simply, the author divided up *parshat habikkurim* into 23 parts, divided up the story in *Shemot* into 23 parts and provided a way of linking the two together, directly where possible, indirectly where necessary.

In the absence of a clear understanding of how the *Maggid* is supposed to work, readers were forced to make a virtue of necessity and explain the many apparently opaque and confusing features of the text as positive qualities. For example, the *Maggid* when read off the page famously makes no mention of Moshe whatsoever. This has variously been explained as teaching a theological message about the role of human action in history, as an attempt to prevent the quasi deification of Moshe, or as a way of combatting

¹² For clarity's sake, we should say that this is not exactly the view of contemporary academic scholarship, which sees our *Maggid* as the result of a process of many different writers injecting their own additions without any overall plan. That is to say, the *Maggid* we have is not the result of a bad author, it's the result of there being no author.

hypothetical Qaraite services in which Moshe is presumed to have been central. The truth is, however, that there is no good reason when telling the exodus story to omit entirely its most important human character. When we read the *Maggid* in the correct fashion, however, the problem, like so many others, simply doesn't arise. The *Maggid* takes you through the exodus story step by step, dividing up the story into consecutive parts and directing you to relate each part in turn. When using the *Maggid* to relate the exodus story on *Seder* night, Moshe is expected to play the exact same role in the story as he does in the Torah itself.

The composition of the *Maggid*

We are now ready to look in detail at how the *Maggid* was put together to create a comprehensive map between the synopsis of the exodus contained in *parshat habikkurim* and the full account contained in the book of *Shemot*. At this stage, though, it is necessary to sound a sort of warning. The whole purpose of understanding the *Maggid* correctly is so that it should *not* be the focus of attention on *Seder* night. Looking in detail at how the *Maggid* is put together is useful as a technical exercise and for developing an appreciation of the intellectual powers of its author. Some understanding of how it works is necessary simply to use it properly and to dispel misconceptions about how it is supposed to be used. That done, however, on *Pesah*, the *Maggid* should get back behind the scenes, so to speak, and go back to serving its purpose as a tool to help us think and talk about *yetziat mitzrayim*. If users of this *Haggadah* spend their *Seder* night talking about the *Maggid*, then it cannot have been said to be a success.

With that said, we can move on with our task. As above, the structure of the *Maggid* is very simple. It divides up the verses in *parshat habikkurim* into tiny chunks, then maps them on to a section of the exodus story as told in *Shemot*. When you put all these chunks in order, you have a complete map of *yetziat mitzrayim* from beginning to end, that can then be used as a base to expand and contract the story as appropriate on each individual *Seder* night. The 'interesting' part of the *Maggid*, and that which has generated such a disastrous level of confusion, is the method by which the author linked the tiny chunks of text A to the much larger ones of text B. These links fall into three categories:

- (1) Where there exists an obvious thematic and/or linguistic link between the element of *parshat habikkurim* and the section of *Shemot*, the *Maggid* simply links them using the phrase *כמה שנאמר*, a hard to translate formula found only very rarely in *Hazalic* literature, amounting to something along the lines of 'like what as it is said'.¹³
- (2) Where no such natural link exists, the *Maggid* will generate one using midrashic exegesis, often cut and pasted from an earlier source. Read on

¹³ The *haggadot* of Rav Amram Gaon, an anonymous Geonic manuscript sometimes attributed to Rav Natronai Gaon, and *Rambam* use *כמו שנאמר* which is easier to construe. The version of Rav Sa'adya Gaon simply uses *שנאמר*. Whatever the correct term, the function is the same, and I shall use *כמה שנאמר* since that is what most readers will be familiar with and one can make a reasonable case that it the correct version.

their own, these comments can be quite baffling. Once one realizes that they are not intended to explain or allude to anything, but simply to create a connection to a section of *Shemot*, then interpretative problems that have survived for a millennium dissolve away.

It should be noted at this point that some of the comments in the *Maggid* fall somewhere in between the above two camps.

(3) Some of the comments are part of a very basic framework the author of the *Maggid* inherited from earlier *haggadot*, taking on a new meaning as part of his system.

It is those in the third category which require the greatest deal of explanation and which, to be frank, do most to destabilize the quite remarkable intellectual project of the *Maggid's* author. It is, therefore, to these that we shall turn first, which requires us to look a little at our *Maggid's* prehistory.

Let's start by looking at the equivalent section from an earlier Babylonian *haggadah*:¹⁴

ולבן בקש לעקר את הכל שנ' ארמי אבד אבי.
 וירד מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול ועצום.
 וירא את ענינו כמה שנ' וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים.
 ויוציאנו ד' ממצרים לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף לא על ידי
 שליח אלא הקב"ה.
 ביד חזקה שתים בזרוע נטויה שתים [במורא גדול שתים] באותות
 שתים ובמפתים שנים אילו עשר מכות שהביא המקום ב"ה על
 המצרים במצרים ואלו הן דם צפדעה כנים ערוב דבר שחין ברד ארבה
 חושך מכת בכורות.
 רבי יהודה היה נותן בהם סימנים דצ"ך עד"ש באה"ב.

The most obvious feature of this *Maggid*, from our vantage point, is how short it is. The more impatient *Seder* participant may perhaps find himself pondering whether to use this text as the basis for next year's service, but this thought would be misplaced for more than just reasons of traditional piety. It is quite inconceivable that this text was ever supposed to be simply read out as it is written.¹⁵ Apart from the sparseness of the

¹⁴ The manuscript from which it is copied was written around the beginning of the 11th century CE, long after the *Maggid* we use today had become standard. The actual text must be much earlier, but how much so is difficult to say.

¹⁵ The assumption that this and similar *maggids* were intended to be read off the page, despite the absence of any positive evidence and its inherent implausibility, is, as far as I know, shared by all *Haggadah* scholars. Its origin is a disconcertingly blistering attack made by Rav Natronai Gaon towards the end of the 9th century C.E. on a *haggadah* with a similarly scanty commentary from the Land of Israel, subsequently quoted in the enormously influential *Seder of Rav Amram Gaon* at the beginning of his section on the *Pesah* liturgy. Rav Natronai attacked the *haggadah* as being the work of Qaraites determined to violate *halacha* and read the Torah unmediated by authoritative hermeneutic techniques or the guidance of *Hazal*. For centuries, his attack was taken at face value until the *haggadah* he was commenting on, or one very similar, was discovered in the Cairo Genizah. Since

commentary, the careful reader will have noticed that this *Maggid* only quotes a little more than half of the words of the *parshat habikkurim* passage itself!

Instead, it seems obvious that this text was used by those following the original practice of orally expounding *parshat habikkurim*, the text of which they must have been presumed to know off by heart. The question then becomes why are *any* comments included at all? The answer, presumably, is that they contain certain themes or claims that the author of the *haggadah* in question believed were sufficiently important that they should be included at every *Seder*, regardless of the intelligence of the son or the breadth of knowledge of the father.

A number of these early *haggadot* have been recovered, in whole or in part, since the discovery of the Cairo Genizah and researchers have been able to group them into identifiable traditions. They all provide the same sparse level of commentary and must all have been used by readers in the same, original, way. There is quite a deal of variety in the midrashic comments included in the different *haggadot*, but there are three elements that were, as far as we know, universal:

- (1) An introductory comment based on ארמי אבד אבי referring to Lavan trying to destroy ‘the whole’.
- (2) A comment on ויוציאנו ד' ממצרים to the effect that God did not make use of any intermediary during the exodus.
- (3) A simple arithmetic explanation of the words ביד חזקה onwards, explaining that they refer to the ten plagues.

While the exact wording differs from one *Haggadah* to another, the basic phraseology is remarkably consistent, indicating a relatively high level of antiquity for these texts. All three elements, along with others that appear in different *haggadot*, were adopted centuries later by the author of our *Maggid* and fitted into his system of mapping *parshat habikkurim* to the account of the exodus in *Shemot*. When analyzing these three comments in particular, it is important to keep two separate questions in mind. The first is what those who originally included these comments in older *haggadot* had in mind when doing so. The second is what role they play in the *Maggid* we use. The second question, we will deal with when we look at each individual element of the *Maggid* in order. The first question, we shall deal with briefly here.

The comment on ויוציאנו is easily explicable in the light of two facts. The first is that during the early Rabbinic period and beforehand there was a widespread belief among parts of the Jewish people in the critical importance of various intermediaries between man and God, and even that some of these intermediaries partook in some way or another of divinity.¹⁶ A major focus of the Rabbis during this period was polemicizing

(with the greatest possible respect) we now know that every other assumption he made about this *haggadah* was wrong, it is high time we retired this one.

¹⁶ The version of this *d'rasha* in many early *haggadot* includes an extra exclusion, לא על ידי דיבר, which would appear to be a reference to the belief in the *logos* ('The Word') a common belief among Jews

against such beliefs.¹⁷ The second is that many biblical passages can be read as suggesting that God *did* make use of intermediaries during the exodus. The most striking among these is the references to **הַמְשַׁחֵת** (the destroyer) who was not allowed by God to go into the houses of Jews who had smeared blood on the lintel and doorposts of their house.¹⁸ It is for this reason that the original source for this *d'rasha*, found in *Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael* (*Pisha* 13) includes a proof-text derived specifically from the plague of the firstborn. This proof-text is included in some early *haggadot* and also incorporated by the author of our *Maggid*.

The *d'rasha* which uses some simple arithmetic to derive the number 10 from the words beginning from **בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה**, is included for an equally obvious though rather different reason. If we imagine a father explaining the verse of *parshat habikkurim*, we can assume that, whatever his level of knowledge or rhetorical skill, he would have no trouble elucidating the basic meaning of phrases like 'And he went down to Egypt', 'And they placed upon us hard work', or 'And *HASHEM* heard our voice'. However, when he came to the last line he would have had much more difficulty. One can say in general what 'a strong hand' or 'great terror' means and relate this to the various miraculous acts performed by God prior to the exodus. However, to say anything more specific, to precisely differentiate one from the other, presents a much more difficult proposition. The nature of language such as this is that it evokes more than it can ever be made precisely to say. The purpose of including a simple *d'rasha* explaining – one might say explaining away – this list of near-synonyms as referring to the ten plagues in their entirety resolves this very practical problem. When the father reaches this point in

under the influence of Hellenic concepts during the late Second-Temple period, Philo being only the most famous example. Many of those who held such conceptions found their way into the Christian community and their beliefs eventually crystallized into the doctrine that (*Halilah*) God is composed of three elements, each of which pre-existed the universe and one of which ('the Word') was incarnated as a human. Within the Jewish community, these views were effectively suppressed and strict monotheism became synonymous with Jewish identity. Works such as the Books of Jubilees or the Book of Enoch, which are full of mystical angelology, and had been regarded by many Jews as having the authority of scripture, were so successfully suppressed that Jews forgot what they said and we would have no idea were it not for some being rediscovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls and others being preserved by fringe branches of the Christian Church. Subsequently, a rather different challenge to Rabbinic orthodoxy arose in the form of Qaraism, which denied the legitimacy of *halacha* based on oral tradition and Rabbinic legal exegesis. Medieval commentators caught up in the battle against Qaraism conceptualized earlier sectarian groups, such as the Tzadokites, as being proto-Qaraites. For this reason, the meaning of early Rabbinic polemic against mystical and insufficiently monotheistic groups was substantially forgotten.

¹⁷ Some of the more striking examples include: (i) Mishnah *B'rachot* 5:3 and *Megillah* 4:9 require that a *Shlich Tzibur* who says *Modim* twice must be silenced; (ii) Mishnah *Megillah* 4:10 forbids the use of the *Mercava* section of *Yehezqel* from being used as a haftarah (iii) The Talmud *Bavli Shabbat* 13b reports that the Rabbis considered suppressing *Yehezqel* in its entirety.

¹⁸ See *Shemot* 12:23. Other examples include *Bemidbar* 20: 16 ('And he heard our voice and he sent a *malach*'; *Shemot* 23:20-22 ('Behold I am sending an *malach* before you...beware of him and listen to his voice...'); *Tehillim* 78:48 ('He would send against them... bad *malachim*').

expounding *parshat habikkurim*, he knows exactly what he has to talk about, namely the ten plagues.

If the original insertion of these two *d'rasbot* into the *haggadah* liturgy is reasonably easy to explain, the third one, which forms the first part of the framework built upon by the author of our *Maggid*, requires greater discussion and represents a suitable jumping off point for looking in detail at each element of the *Maggid* we use today.

צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו. שפרעה לא גזר אלא על הזכרים ולבן בקש לעקור את הכל.

שנאמר ארמי אבד אבי

There is near-universal agreement among biblical scholars that the correct understanding of this phrase is 'My father was a wandering Aramean', though whether it refers to Avraham, Ya'aqov, or to an archetype of the patriarchs in general, is a question regarding which reasonable people will continue to disagree.¹⁹ It is, however, commonly believed that the interpretation 'according to Hazal' is 'An Aramean was trying to destroy my father', the *Haggadah* being the proof. Some go so far as to condemn those who side with *Ibn Ezra*, *Rashbam* and others as demonstrating impiety. It is easy enough to show that this is not the case. This is the commentary on the verse found in *Sifrei*:²⁰

¹⁹ A minority view is 'my father was a perishing (or starving!) Aramean. See (Gerald Janzen, 1994). What all these views have in common is that 'ארמי' is considered to be the same person as 'אבי' and the subject of the verb 'אבד'. Mitchell First makes a strong case that the author/compiler of the Mishnah also understood the verse this way (First, 2012), which I think is correct

²⁰ At this point, it is perhaps necessary to briefly describe the *Midrash Halacha*, since a rough working knowledge is essential to understanding the rest of this introduction and there are many Jews, even those who have mastered hundreds of pages of *Gemara* who have not much more than vague awareness of its existence.

The term *Midrash Halacha* refers to the earliest written collections of Rabbinic exegesis which date from roughly the same era as the compilation of the Mishnah, that is around 200 CE. They are called halachic midrash because their primary purpose is legal exegesis, in contradistinction to later collections which are primarily homiletic, or perhaps even literary, in nature. This is a retrospective term created by academic scholars and does *not* mean that all the material they contain is halachic; rather exegesis of different types is liberally mixed together. However, it does mean that they completely ignore sections of the Torah with little or no halachic significance. For that reason, there is no collection on *Bereishit* and the only book which is covered in its entirety is *Vayiqra*. The four collections that survived are: on *Shemot* – *Mechilta d'Rabi Yishmael*; on *Vayiqra* – *Sifra*; on *Bemidbar* – *Sifrei*; on *Devarim* – *Sifrei*. However, these were not the only compilations that once existed. Some, such as *Mechilta d'Rabi Shimon Ben Yohai* and *Sifra Zuta* have been recovered, whole or in part, by researchers over the past century. It is not easy, and in some cases impossible, to buy a printed edition of these works, though one can find much of them in *Midrash haGadol*, a rediscovered 14th century anthology, which is more widely available.

The basic purpose of *Midrash Halacha* is to demonstrate how legal rulings found in the Mishnah, Tosefta and elsewhere are derived from the biblical text. It is now generally believed that they were compiled after the Mishnah, perhaps by even more than a century, but the underlying oral process of exegesis and legal systemization to which both the Mishnah and *midrashim* testify would have occurred concurrently over many centuries

מלמד שלא ירד אבינו יעקב לארם אלא על מנת לאבד ומעלה על לבן הארמי כילו

איבדו

This teaches that our father Ya'aqov did not go down to Aram except to wander/perish and it considers Lavan the Aramean as if he destroyed him.

We clearly see here two distinct understandings of the verse. According to the first, the subject of the phrase is Ya'aqov²¹ and according to the second it is Lavan. Given the order in which these *d'rashot* are placed and the use of the phrase 'it considers',²² it is reasonable to assume that we are to understand that the first comment follows the basic, literal meaning of the verse²³ and that the second is an allusion or hint contained within it. To use an anachronistic classification: the first is *p'sbat* and the second is *d'rash*.²⁴

²¹ What exactly it is trying to convey is a slightly different matter. It would seem odd to say that Ya'aqov went to Aram in order to be destroyed (or to destroy?), though that is how the verb is used in the second part of the comment. It is possible that parts of the *d'rasha* were compiled from separate sources, in which case it may be that the verb [א ב ד] in the second part is being used in a different sense to mean wander, that is, to stay temporarily.

²² The phrase is elsewhere used to connote a message derived from a verse that is not in any respect its literal meaning. See *Pirkei Avot* 3:8.

רבי דוסתאי ברבי ינאי משום רבי מאיר אומר, כל השוכה דבר אחד ממשנתו, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו מתחייב בנפשו, שנאמר (דברים ד) רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך.

²³ It is a dogma among *Haggadah* scholars that the intended understanding here is not 'My father was a wandering Aramean', but a third understanding according to which ארמי denotes a geographical location, rendering the phrase something like 'My father went down to Aram'. This seems initially plausible when you compare the language of the *Sifrei* to Greek and Aramaic translations of the verse, but it falls apart on closer inspection. The י suffix is used countless times in biblical Hebrew to denote an individual's membership of a tribe or ethnic group, his place of origin or residence, or to mark him out as having a particular characteristic. It can also be used in a genitive sense, particularly in archaic Hebrew and in names (גבריאל = mighty man of God). There are no examples of it being used in the sense of travelling to a place. Conversely, the ה suffix is used liberally throughout the Torah in exactly this sense, including two words later in the same verse. To claim that *Hazal* read the word ארמי as 'to Aram' is to claim that they struggled with basic Hebrew grammar. It is one thing to claim this of the contemporary common man, or even later *Amoraim*, for whom Hebrew had already become a liturgical language mediated through the prism of Aramaic translation (See *Bavli B'rachot* 38:1 and *Succah* 39:1), it is quite another in relation to the *Tanaim* for whom Hebrew was the language of study and instruction and who have bequeathed to us thousands of pages of text in cogent, lucid Hebrew. The correct explanation is as follows. If we identify the subject of the verse as Ya'aqov, then the question becomes how can he be described as an 'Aramean'. One obvious answer is that he was an 'Aramean' in a borrowed sense because he lived there for two decades, analogous to the way we might describe a Jew as being 'American' or 'French'. The ancient translations of the phrase as 'My father went down to Aram' are to be understood as part of the genre of explanatory translations, and the comment in *Sifrei* is based on this understanding, which is actually identical to that of *Ibn Ezra*, *Sforno*, and *Hizquni*. *Rashbam*, who understands the subject of the phrase to be Avraham, interprets the term in an ethnic sense (*Ramban* on *Bereishit* 12:1 provides justification for describing the *avot* as Arameans).

²⁴ In *Hazal's* terminology, דרש was used to refer to any form of exegesis, from that which followed closely the plain meaning of a verse all the way to that which was quite fanciful. The formal division between פשוט and דרש was made by later commentators and systematizers trying to make sense of the vast array of exegesis *Hazal* had left at their disposal.

Three questions present themselves. The first is why the *d'rasha* was made in the first place, the second is why it was included in all early medieval *haggadot* and the third is what new use, if any, it was put to by the author of our *Maggid*.

Regarding the first question it is necessary to bear in mind two contexts. One is the tendency among Hazal's exegetes to depict characters that the Torah portrays as complex and ambiguous as being either wholly good or wholly wicked. Anyone familiar with the commentary of *Rashi* – whose comments are almost all culled from earlier sources – will be aware of this phenomenon, which can be seen in the treatment of Esau and Bil'am as well as Lavan. The goal seems to have been to draw exemplary moral and immoral archetypes for use in instruction, so Lavan became the archetypal *ramai* ('cheat') used to illustrate a certain form of bad behaviour to generations of Jewish students. The second context is that the term 'Aramean' was sometimes used as a casual and broadly derogatory term for non-Jews, similar to the way *goy* (in essence a neutral description) is used in Yiddish.²⁵ This perhaps reflects tensions with Syrians that would have become quite acute after the Bar Kokhba revolt, when the land of Israel became a junior part of a large Roman Province with Syria as its political and economic centre. Lavan may have played a similar role to Esau, who was famously used in the midrashic tradition as a target upon which to vent frustrations with the Roman empire and later Christian powers.²⁶

The second question is easy to answer when we look to the passage that is found, with some variation in wording, immediately preceding it in every extant *haggadah*:

וְהִיא שְׁעֵמֶדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שְׁלֹא אָחָד בְּלֶכֶד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, אֱלֹא שְׁבָכָל
דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם.

And it is that [promise – the covenant between the parts] which has stood for our fathers and for us. For not only one stood up against us to destroy us, but in every generation, they stand against us to destroy us but the Holy One Blessed Be He saves us from their hand.

Kulp (2009, p. 222) characterizes this as teaching that 'the story of the Exodus is timeless'. Others of a less sympathetic disposition may find here a more than usually reductive rendition of the 'lachrymose conception of Jewish history'. In any case, the first function of the phrase *arami oved avi* in the *Haggadah* is to act as a proof text for this idea: it was not only from Pharaoh that a previous generation was saved, but also from Lavan.

²⁵ See Mishnah *Megilla* 4:9; B *B'rachot* 8b; B *Pesahim* 112b.

²⁶ Levi Finkelstein famously ascribed the comment on *arami oved avi* to the pro-Ptolemaic, anti-Seleucid politics of a pre-Hasmonean author. Every author of an academic *Haggadah* likes to take a shot at this famous, but quite impossible theory. However, in denying any political motivation behind this midrash, at least in its original context, I am inclined to think they have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

The use of the rare phrase **צא ולמד** ('go and learn') as an introduction serves to indicate that the *d'rasha* about Lavan is a proof for what has come before.²⁷

In this manner, *parshat habikkurim* is introduced in the *Haggadah* as a comment, not as a thing commented on. The section beginning **צא ולמד** therefore serves a dual purpose: it provides support for the theological statement beforehand and introduces the exposition of *parshat habikkurim*. In other words, it is there to link the preliminary remarks with the central part of the evening. Its function is liturgical, so to speak, ensuring that *parshat habikkurim* does not enter the evening awkwardly unannounced, but as part of an unfolding order of service.

This is the role that it played in the various different *haggadot* we have, both from Bavel and the land of Israel. It plays the exact same role in our *Maggid*. The question is whether it does anything more. As we have said, and as we shall see in unfolding detail, the method of the author of the *Maggid* was to divide *parshat habikkurim* and the narrative from *Shemot* into corresponding sections and link them. Does the comment on **ארמי אבד אבי** fit into this scheme? If it does, then it is instructing the father to pick up the story with Ya'aqov's return from Aram. This is not in itself far-fetched; if Ya'aqov's status as an Aramean is taken as a reference to his two-decade stay in Aram, then any kind of explanation of *parshat habikkurim* would have to mention this, if only briefly.²⁸ There are difficulties, however. In between Ya'aqov's return and going to Egypt there is lot of narrative material in the Torah that one would have to skip, including his reconciliation with Esau and the unseemly events surrounding Dinah, none of which are relevant to the evening's theme.

It is important at this stage to bear in mind two things. The first is that, as we saw above, this section is part of a basic framework the author inherited from earlier *haggadot*. It may be disappointing to find that it fits somewhat awkwardly into his system, but that should not be discounted as a possibility. The second is that this section is fundamentally different from every other part of the *Maggid*. The format throughout is to quote a fragment from *parshat habikkurim* then to make some of comment, usually citing a verse and introducing it with **כמה שנאמר**. This section does the opposite. This may be an indication that what was an introductory passage in earlier *haggadot* is intended to remain as such in our *Maggid*, nothing more. More than that we cannot say, except to remark that this section has undoubtedly functioned as a piece of misdirection at the opening of the *Maggid*, bearing much of the responsibility for sending its readers up interpretative blind alleys.

²⁷ The version that made its way into the *haggadah* tradition also contains an additional claim not found in any other extant source, namely that Lavan was worse than Pharaoh since he sought to wipe out both the males and females. It is not clear what the basis for this claim and it may simply have been borrowed from a source talking about something else (Kulp, pp. 222-3). The fact that our only sources for this idea are found in *haggadot* does not necessarily mean it was invented specifically for that purpose.

²⁸ See footnote 22.

וירד מצרימה אנוס על פי הדב[ו]ר

The *Maggid's* comment, 'forced, according to the utterance', is found in all known *haggadot* from the Land of Israel (though with **דיבר** or even **דבר** instead of **דבור**).²⁹ It was originally inserted into the exposition of *parshat habikkurim*, presumably, to emphasize that leaving the Land of Israel is not an option a Jew can simply choose to take, but something that may be done only under specified and pressing circumstances. This message, unfortunately, is one that needs to be emphasized in every generation, but was particularly important for the early medieval community in the Land of Israel, struggling for its very existence in the face of Byzantine oppression.

The comment was adopted by the author of our *Maggid* because it fits in perfectly with his system. Even without citing a verse, it is clear that we are being directed to Ya'aqov's revelation from God before entering Egypt:

ויסע ישׂראל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיָּבֹא בְּאֶרֶץ שֹׁבַע וַיִּזְבַּח זְבָחִים לְאֱלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַרְאֵת הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי הִקַּל אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֶל־תִּירָא מִרְדֵּה מִצְרַיִם כִּי־לִגְוֵי גְדוֹל אֲשִׁמְךָ שָׁם:

And Yisrael journeyed, and all that he had, and he came to Be'er Sheva, and he slaughtered sacrifices to the God of his father Yitzḥaq. And God said to Yisrael in visions of the night and He said, 'Ya'aqov, Ya'aqov,' and he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'I am the God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for a great nation I shall make of you there.' (Bereishit 46:1-3).

There are two issues left to resolve. The first is why the author breaks from his normal style and dispenses with the formula of **כמה שנאמר** followed by a citation. I believe that the answer is that in using his sources and stitching them together in a new way, he adopted the principle of changing the original wording as little as possible and. We will see many further examples of this practice. The second issue is whether it is really plausible to claim that Ya'aqov was forced to go down to Egypt by God's command, since he was already on the way when he received the revelation. The answer to this, I believe, is that the phrase can be read with an implied comma. Ya'aqov was forced to go down to Egypt by the famine conditions *and* did so in accordance with direct revelation.

We can also make a brief historical remark at this stage. As mentioned, in its original context in *haggadot* from the Land of Israel, this comment has an obvious polemic edge. It may, however, have a second one too. In some early *haggadot*, the comment on **וַיִּצְיָאֵנוּ ד' ממצרים** excluding the intervention of any divine or quasi divine entities other than God Himself, has an extra clause **לא על ידי דיבר** meaning 'not by means of the *logos* ('word')'. Belief in the *logos* as an active and separate element within God was a common belief among Hellenized Jews, the most famous of whom was Philo of Alexandria, and

²⁹ It is my belief that these should be vocalized the same.

eventually became central to Christian theology. I do not believe that the insertion of על לא על ידי דיבר a few lines before פי הדיבר was coincidental.

In *logos* theology, the ‘word of God’ (or *memra* in Aramaic) was conceived of as an active and creative force, both separate and yet also part of God, which, while inferior to God Himself, is, from the perspective of human beings, perhaps, ultimately more relevant.³⁰ The opening words of the gospel of John express what was at one stage, unfortunately, a widespread view within the Jewish people before finally being suppressed by the Rabbis of Mishnaic and early Talmudic period:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The *logos* was considered to have played an especially important role in the supreme revelation of divine power, the exodus from Egypt, and it is precisely the intervention of any such entity that is denied in the comment לא על ידי דיבר. The juxtaposition of the comment stating that Ya’aqov went down to Egypt על פי הדבור seems to me a deliberate attempt to de-personify and de-mythologize the *logos*, to turn it back from ‘The Word of God’ into the ‘word of God’. In the exodus story, *logos* did not *do* anything (לא על ידי דיבר), it did not even say something, it was merely said (על פי הדבור).

ויגר שם

מלמד שלא ירד [יעקב אבינו] להשתקע [במצרים] אלא לגור שם שנאמר: ויאמרו אל פרעה לגור בארץ באנו כי אין מרעה לצאן אשר לעבדיך כי כבוד הרעב בארץ כנען. ועתה ישבו נא עבדיך בארץ גשן

The formula מלמד שלא ירד להשתקע אלא לגור שם has relatively recently been found in a *haggadah* from the Cairo Genizah, which contains both Babylonian and Land of Israel elements in a way that makes it hard to categorize and which is hard to date exactly (see Appendix iii – *haggadah* iv). This *haggadah* also has an additional gloss on the side adding *Bereishit* 47:4, the same one we find quoted in our *Maggid*. In *Sifrei* we also find the following comment.

מלמד שלא ירד להשתקע אלא לגור שם *שמא תאמר שירד ליטול כתר מלכות
תלמוד לומר לגור שם

*This teaches that he did not go down to settle permanently, but [merely] to dwell there. *Lest you say he went down to take a royal crown, therefore it says ‘to dwell there’.*

³⁰ The best place to look for more information is chapter 5 of (Boyarin, 2004), though I am wary about recommending it since the author is a rather nasty kind of heretic and writes with the goal of advocating the Neo-Frankist synthesis of Satmar politics and Foucauldian theology [sic!] that he dubs ‘diasporic Judaism’. To give him his due credit, however, he is admirably frank about what he was doing and the discerning reader can separate the very important material he presents from the counter-intuitive spin he puts on it.

The exact chain of transmission is hard to pin down. It may be that the comment originated in *Sifrei*, was adapted and incorporated into some *haggadot* and from there adopted by the author of our *Maggid*. The manuscript evidence, however, indicates a slightly more complicated story. Looking at this extract from *Sifrei*, we see that it seems to repeat itself, first in simple language and then in a slightly more flowery form. It appears that the second comment (beginning at the asterisk) is original to *Sifrei* and the first part – which is absent from some manuscripts – was added by later scribes, probably familiar with it from the *Haggadah*. The author of our *Maggid* may have got the idea of including the verse *Bereishit* 47:4 from an existing tradition or, as seems to me more likely, it was his innovation, in which case the gloss on the *haggadah* from the Cario Genizah reflects the growing influence of our *Maggid* after its publication in authoritative Geonic texts.

What we can say with certainty is this. The comment in its original form, either in *Sifrei* or earlier *haggadot*, is undoubtedly similar in its message to the one we just looked at, emphasizing as it does the importance of living in the land of Israel. Some trace of this message no doubt remains in our *Maggid* for those receptive to it, but the main function of the comment is not polemical. Instead, the goal is to direct the father to tell the next part of the story. After narrating how Ya'aqov and his sons went down to Egypt, his next task is to relate how they settled in the land of Goshen as an appropriate place to rear livestock.

במתי מעט

כמה שנאמר בשבעים נפש ירדו אבתיך מצרימה ועתה שמך ד' אלקיך ככוכבי השמים לרב

At the opening of the book of *Shemot*, Ya'aqov and his seventy descendants are counted. The odd part of this comment is that we are not directed there, but to *Devarim*, where the same figure is given by Moshe retrospectively. The reason for this is that the author of our *Maggid*, as we have already seen, was not working from a blank slate. Once again, his comment is found both in some earlier *haggadot*, as well as *Sifrei*, where we read the following.

יכול באוכלוסים הרבה תלמוד לומר במתי מעט כענין שנאמר בשבעים נפש ירדו
אבותיך מצרימה

One might have thought [he went down] with a great multitude, therefore it says 'A few men', as it says 'with seventy souls your father went down to Egypt'

This comment had already been modified by an earlier *haggadah* author (see Appendix iii – *haggadah* iv) who removed the opening hypothetical as well as the extra linking word (כענין שנאמר in place of שנאמר). Except for adding the word כמה, the author of our *Maggid* absorbed this comment unchanged despite the proof text pointing to *Devarim* 10:22 rather than opening part of *Shemot* in which Ya'aqov's tribe is counted, since these texts are equivalent in meaning. Once again, we see his concern to leave the original wording of his sources in place where there is only limited room for confusion.

There has been a small debate about whether it is correct to include the end of the verse, ‘and now *HASHEM* your God has placed you like the stars of the heavens for multitude’, since this is not relevant to the fragment **במהי מעט**. In *Sifrei*, it is true, the end of the verse is not cited, and it is also omitted from a minority of Geonic and medieval versions. However, in the earlier *haggadah* that was probably the author’s intermediate source it is included. Further, it seems to me that if we understand the method of our *Maggid*, the question isn’t really relevant. The verse quoted itself is not supposed to be the focus of attention, what is important is the section of the story the *Maggid* points you to. In this case, as elsewhere, the author’s desire to retain the wording of earlier sources led to a potential for confusion, but it is a potential that can only be realized when one is not aware of what the *Maggid* is trying to do.

ויהי שם לגוי מלמד שהיו ישראל מצוינים שם

The comment on this fragment is taken word for word from *Sifrei*. It is hard to see how it fits into the author’s system, since there is nothing in the story in between the previous comment (directing us to *Shemot* 1:1-5) and the next one (directing us to *Shemot* 1:7), and no verse is quoted to help us. In my opinion, the most likely explanation is that shortly after the *Maggid* was compiled, someone observed that the previous two comments were taken from *Sifrei* and set out to fix the text by copying this one over too, in this case completely unaltered. There should only be a comment on the fragment **ויהי שם לגוי גדול עצום**. This is consistent with the reality that the proper way of understanding the *Maggid* was lost early in the process of its popularization.

גדול עצום

כמה שנאמר: ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו במאד במאד ותמלא הארץ אתם

This is the first comment that is entirely original to our *Maggid’s* author and a perfect example of the type (i) comment as we defined it above.³¹ The fragment is linked to a verse in *Shemot* through the phrase **כמה שנאמר** and the connection is easy to understand on both the semantic and linguistic level. Just as the fragment talks about Yisrael’s descendants becoming numerous, so does the verse it points to, and a further link is established by the presence of the root [עצמ] in both the fragment and the verse. The father is thereby directed to discuss the remarkable growth of the children of Israel after Ya’aqov’s death.

³¹ Safrai and Safrai (p. 133) point out that the same comment is found in *Midrash haGadol* and suggest it may be from a Tannaitic midrash. However, this gets things completely the wrong way round. *Midrash haGadol* (a remarkable 14th century compilation of numerous sources, many of which are now lost) uses our *Maggid* as source-text and ‘improves’ it in various ways. There is no evidence for any prior source for this comment and no reason to think one exists, since in its style and structure it exemplifies the unique style of our *Maggid* which is entirely atypical of *midrash*.

ורב

כמה שנאמר: רבבה כצמח השדה נתתיך ותרכי ותגדלי ותבאי בעדי עדיים שדים נכנו ושערך צמח ואת ערם ועריה

It is probably the case that no part of the *Maggid* has done as much as this one to make it appear strange and bewildering in the eyes of its readers. The first step to remedying this issue is to establish the proper text.

In modern *Haggadot*, we find quoted two verses from *Yehezqel* chapter 16. Despite being consecutive, they are quoted in the wrong order, so that the description of a female baby writhing in its placental blood appears *after* its description of her as a young woman with comely hair and full breasts. I do not believe that I am the only one who, as a teenager, glanced over at the translation and felt rather embarrassed contemplating this apparently obscene material being solemnly recited at the head of the table. In fact, the second verse cited, verse six, simply should not be there at all. It is a late addition, probably made by the *qabbalist*, Yitzhaq Luria, or one of his disciples, in order to tilt the text to a particular interpretation, one that we shall see is not totally off the mark.

While the comment is, like the one that precedes it, original to the author, it is much more complex in nature and draws on (at least) two midrashic sources, both of them found in *Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael*. The first of them is as follows:

והמושים עלו בני ישראל אחד מחמש ויש אומרים אחד מחמישים ויש אומרים
אחד מחמש מאות עלו. רבי נהוראי אומר העבודה ולא אחד מחמש מאות עלו
שנאמר רבבה כצמח נתתיך וכתיב ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו שהיתה אשה אחת
יולדת ששה בנים בכרס אחת ואתה אומר אחד מאות עלו ואימתי מתו בשלושה
ימי אפלה...

'And the children of Israel went up hamushim'. One fifth. And some say one fiftieth. And some say one five-hundredth. Rabi Nehorai says: By gum, not even one five-hundredth went up, as it says 'I made you increase like the plants of the field' (Yehezqel 16:7). And it is written: 'And the children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed', one woman would give birth to six sons in one womb. You say that one five-hundredth went up, when did the rest die? During the three days of thick darkness.

This is the source for a famous aggadic trope according to which only a small fraction of the children of Israel were sufficiently meritorious to leave Egypt and the rest died during the ninth plague. From this source the author of our *Maggid* drew the idea of linking the fragment רב in *parshat habik'urim* to the verse in *Yehezqel* starting רבבה. This verse is part of a passage allegorically describing the early period of Israel's history in terms of God raising an orphan girl. However, this source only describes in exaggerated terms the speedy growth of the children of Israel which is what was already referred to in the comment on the previous fragment גדול עצום. To understand what the author is getting at, we need to turn to our second source:

מפני מה הקדים לקיחתו של פסח לשחיטו ד' ימים היה רבי מתיה בן חרש אומר
 ואעבור עליך ואראך ועתך עת דודים הגיע שבועתו שנשבע הקב"ה לאברהם
 שיגאל את בניו ולא היה בידם מצות שיעסקו בהם כדי שיגאלו שנאמר שדים
 נכונו ושערך צמח ואת ערום ועריה וגומר ערום מכל מצות נתן להם הקב"ה שתי
 מצות דם פסח ודם מילה שיתעסקו בהם כדי שיגאלו שנאמר ואעבור עליך ואראך
 מתבוססת בדמך

Why did the Pesah offering have to be taken four days before it was slaughtered? Rabi Mathya son of Harash would say: 'And I passed over you and I saw you and behold you had grown breasts' (Yehezqel 16:8). The time had come for the oath which the Holy One Blessed be He had sworn to Avraham that he would redeem his sons, and they did not have in their hands any mitzvot to occupy themselves with in order that they should [merit to be] redeemed. As it says 'your breasts were formed and your hair grown, but you were still naked and bare etc.' (Yehezqel 16:7). 'Naked' of mitzvot. The Holy One Blessed be He gave to them two mitzvot, the blood of the Pesah and the blood of circumcision to occupy themselves with in order that they could be redeemed, as it says: 'I passed over you and I saw you wallowing in your blood.' (Yehezqel 16:6)

The broader purpose of this passage is to explain the purpose of the first *Pesah* offering. It can't have been commemorative since the event *Pesah* commemorates had not yet happened and if it were merely about making a sign on the house of every Hebrew, then there were presumably other ways of doing it. The answer given is that the purpose of the *Pesah* was to accumulate merit by fulfilling a divine command, which is why certain aspects had to be brought forward.

Many commentators correctly worked out that the *Maggid's* comment was based on this passage and it was to make this allusion clearer that the extra verse from *Yehezqel* was added in the 16th century. However, they missed the point. This is absolutely not the right stage in the *Maggid* to start talking about the *Pesah* offering, which only happens at the end of the story. Instead, we should look not at the conclusion of the *midrash*, but at its supporting premise. In the earliest version of the *Maggid*, that found in the *Seder* of Rav Amram Gaon, only the first three or four words of each verse introduced by **כמה שנאמר** are quoted, but in the comment on **ורב** we also find the last two words, 'naked and bare'. This strongly suggests that it is these two words, which in the *midrash* are taken to refer to the Israel's lack of merit, to which we must pay attention.

The midrashic tradition affirms that the children of Israel in Egypt fell to a low spiritual and moral state, a claim which, though absent from *Shemot*, is found in chapter 20 of *Yehezqel*. This belief also has a strong, almost indisputable theological basis. True though it is that the period of slavery and oppression in Egypt was foreordained as part of a masterplan, it cannot be that generations of Jews had to endure this suffering unless they did something to deserve it. One could argue that telling the story of the exodus without including the apostasy of the children of Israel in Egypt would be to make an implied complaint against God's justice in overseeing human affairs. This, at any rate, seems to have been the view of our author who permitted himself his first of two departures from

mapping *parshat habikkurim* strictly to the story as it is told in *Shemot* and instead directs us to include, at the end of the first part of the story, a reference to our forefather's moral decline.

וירעו אתנו המצרים

כמה שנאמר: הבה נתחכמה לו, פן ירבה והיה כי תקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם הוא על שנאינו ונלחם בנו ועלה מן הארץ.

The *Maggid's* treatment of the first verse of *parshat habikkurim* is the one that requires by far and away the most discussion. As we move into the main body of the story in *Shemot*, however, things become much clearer. The comment here is original to the author and follows his general formula throughout. The reference given is to the next part of the story, namely the enslavement of the children of Israel at Pharaoh's order.

All that needs to be explained here is the link between the fragment and the verse cited since the root [רע] is not present in the verse and it does not describe the Egyptians actually doing anything bad to the children of Israel. The answer is that the phrase **וירעו אתנו**, translated as 'they did bad to us', strictly speaking (at least when taken out of context) means 'and they caused us to be bad' because of the absence of the ל prefix. The *Maggid* seizes upon this reading, but renders it as 'and they considered us to be bad' or perhaps, 'and they caused us to be bad *in their eyes*'. This is the basis of the semantic link with the verse in which the new Pharaoh expresses his distrust of the children Israel on the grounds that they might be 'be added on to our enemies'.

ויענונו

כמה שנאמר: וישימו עליו שרי מסים למען ענתו בסבלתם ויבן ערי מסכנות לפרעה את פתם ואת רעמסס

This section is even easier to understand. The link is established by both the content and the shared root [ענה] 'to oppress'.

ויתנו עלינו עבדה קשה

כמה שנאמר: ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך

Here the link is only semantic, with **קשה** being linked to a synonym from an unrelated root **בפרך**. The author of the *Maggid* is taking us sequentially through the story, from initial enslavement to the imposition of oppressive labour and then to the imposition of even harder work as a response to the failure to stem the Hebrew birth-rate.

ונצאק אל ד' אלקינו

כמה שנאמר: ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבדה ויזעקו ותעל שועתם אל האלקים מן העבדה.

Like the previous five comments this one is original to the author and characteristic of his style.³² The link between the fragment and the verse being pointed to is established by the shared content, namely the children of Israel crying out to God. It is further strengthened by the connection between the root [צ ע ק] in the fragment and [ז ע ק] in the verse, since these are nearly equivalent, both meaning 'to cry out'.

The potential for confusion that arises here is that the *Maggid*, after closely following the order of verses in the opening chapter of *Shemot* jumps suddenly to the end of the second chapter. The reason for this becomes clear when we observe that the first three chapters of *Shemot* actually contain two separate storylines which join up at the burning bush. The first is the story of the children of Israel being enslaved, crying out to God, and their prayer being answered. The second is the story of Moshe being rescued by Pharaoh's daughter from among the bulrushes, raised at Pharaoh's court and fleeing to Midian. The author of our *Maggid* chose to tell the first story in its entirety before moving on the birth of Moshe.³³ This has clear advantages from the perspective of oral storytelling.

וישמע ד' את קלנו

כמה שנאמר: וישמע אלקים את נאקתם ויזכר אלקים את בריתו את אברהם את יצחק ואת יעקב

The link between the fragment and the verse pointed to is established both by the content and the shared root [ש מ ע] 'to hear'. Again, the comment is entirely original to the author.

וירא את ענינו

זו פרישות דרך ארץ. כמה שנאמר: וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים

The link between the fragment and the verse pointed to is established by the shared root [ר א ה] 'to see'. Sticking with the normal formula, however, would create a redundancy, since there is no real difference, from a narrative perspective, in God 'hearing' the cry of

³² Safrai and Safrai (pp. 135-6) observe that these comments appear in מדרש תנאים, a reconstructed source built up in some respects following a dubious methodology. I believe that it is not longer controversial to state that these comments are not *tannaitic* in origin.

³³ This leaves the question of how one should categorize *Shemot* 1:15-22, in which Pharaoh orders the murder of the male babies. On linguistic grounds it seems more correct to include it with the first narrative describing the travails of the children of Israel. However, this section is also an essential prologue to the Moshe story, explaining why he was placed among the bulrushes by his mother. Since only the second consideration is really relevant when telling the story orally, the author of our *Maggid* includes it with the Moshe narrative.

the children of Israel and ‘seeing’ their suffering. The author of the *Maggid* therefore adds in an extra linking comment which we find in the Talmud *Bavli* (*Yoma* 74:b).

וְנִלְפֵךְ מֵעֲנִי דְמִצְרַיִם דְּכָתִיב וַיִּרְא אֶת עֲנִינֵנוּ וְאָמַר יִנְגַן זֶה פְּרִישׁוֹת דְּרַךְ אֶרֶץ

Let us learn it [i.e. the meaning of the Torah’s command to afflict oneself on Yom Kippur] from the affliction of Egypt. As it is written: ‘And he saw our affliction’ and we say about this: this is the interruption of conjugal activity.

The *Gemara* cites an interpretation of the fragment from *parshat habikkurim* as referring specifically to the inability of the Hebrews in Egypt to maintain normal marital intimacy. It is clearly citing some earlier source, which the author of our *Maggid* might possibly have had access to.³⁴

The use of this *d’rasha* in the *Maggid* strengthens the link between the fragment and the verse cited. On the side of the fragment, the connection is formed by the root [ע נ ה]. In context, this verb has its most common meaning of affliction or suffering, but it is also used frequently to denote sexual activity, not necessarily of the unpleasant variety. In Rabbinic discourse the two roots are combined to connote the *absence* of conjugal activity, which is a form of affliction. The allusion to sexual activity found in the verse from *Shemot* comes from its closing words ‘and God knew’. On the literal level, this can be taken as implying knowing something that others cannot see, that is to say something behind closed doors. On the linguistic level, the ‘biblical sense’ of the verb ‘to know’ is so well known as to be proverbial.

However, we still have not got any closer to explaining the function this comment has in the scheme our *Maggid*, namely mapping out the story in *Shemot* in order to facilitate oral storytelling. I believe the answer is found by looking back to the previous part of the story. There, the Torah tells us that God heard the cry of the children of Israel and remembered the promise he had made to their forefathers. One might ask, however, what He was doing with this promise in the preceding decades? We are not, presumably, supposed to think that he literally forgot it. One answer is that it needed to be activated by prayer, although this assumes that the children of Israel had hitherto remained silent. Another popular explanation is that the appointed time had been reached, though, if this were the case, God’s seeing the suffering of the children of Israel would be irrelevant. I believe that the author of our *Maggid* is suggesting a third explanation, and in so doing making a second insertion into the exodus story. God’s promise to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt could be activated at any time of his choosing *so long as the children of Israel existed*. However, if the oppression had started to achieve its goal of impeding reproductive activities, causing the Hebrews’ numbers to dwindle, then this would

³⁴ Some claim that the *Gemara* is actually quoting the *Haggadah*. It is not impossible that it is quoting an earlier *haggadah*, though we have no record of it (nor do we know that written *haggadot* even existed this early). There seems to me no compelling reason to assume that the author of the *Maggid* took the phrase from anywhere other than the *Gemara*.

effectively force God into acting to fulfil his promise. If so, it would be necessary to include this detail in the story.

It is also possible that the author of our *Maggid* is alluding to the midrashic tradition according to which either Moshe's father or the children of Israel in general chose to abstain from reproduction in response to Pharaoh's decree against the male babies. In that case, the *Maggid* is providing a neat way to segue from the story of the Children of Israel to the story of Moshe in general, which begins with Pharaoh's decree.³⁵

A further point to bear in mind is that this comment minus the words *זו פרישות דרך ארץ* is found in the short Babylonian *Maggid* we saw earlier. The author of our *Maggid* included that comment, the significance of which in its original context is not very clear, and adapted it to fit into his way of telling the exodus story. This comment must therefore be regarded, along with the three comments we have already specified, as part of the initial framework upon which the author built his structure. This explains the fact that, in a rather literal sense, it does not quite fit in with his usual method of telling the story as found in *Shemot*.

ואת עמלנו

אלו הבנים. כמה שנאמר: כל הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו וכל הבת תחיון

For most readers of the *Haggadah*, this looks like another example of the *Maggid* randomly jumping around the exodus story. We have already, seen, however, that this is not the case. After finishing the story of enslavement, suffering and turning to God of the children of Israel, it now begins the story of Moshe with Pharaoh's command to murder the firstborn Hebrew males.

However, there is an apparent problem at the technical level. There is no linguistic link between the fragment and the verse pointed. In very general terms, one can see the semantic relevance of *עמל* ('travail') to this episode, but no more so than for *לחץ* or *ענוי*. The reason for this is that this is not an original comment of the author, but lifted word for word from *Sifrei*.³⁶ Though it fits perfectly into the general system of our *Maggid*, it stands out from a formal perspective. The fact that the author did not add anything to

³⁵ Kulp (p.227) writes that the order of *d'rashot* is 'artificial': 'where did the boys come from if there was already sexual separation?'. Looked at from the purely logical standpoint, this objection is moot: there is no contradiction between a declining birth-rate and the existence of baby boys. However, even if we take the author to be referring to the midrashic tradition implying a complete cessation of reproduction, the progression is clear enough: this happened *because* of the decree. Obviously, moving from the story of the children of Israel to the story of Moshe involves going back in time somewhat; this is a way to do it.

³⁶ The original source even includes the rare formula *כמה שנאמר* and is perhaps the original model for the formula used throughout the *Maggid*. Another possibility is that the version found in *Sifrei* was 'corrected' by scribes familiar with the *Haggadah*. In either case, it seems that our author's immediate source for this formula was the earlier Babylonian *haggada's* comment on *וירא את ענינו*, see above.

create more of a link between fragment and verse is further evidence of his unwillingness to alter sources he incorporated unless absolutely necessary.³⁷

At this juncture, I wish to make a general point. Some readers may have decided by this stage that one or two of my explanations of how the *Maggid* works are somewhat forced. This is not wrong, but the forcing is inherent in the text itself, not my explanations. I hope that I have shown that our *Maggid* is not a randomly arranged list of obscure allusions punctuated by the odd lucid remark, but a sophisticated tool to expound *parshat habikkurim*, which testifies to the breadth of knowledge and intellectual powers of its author. However, identifying our *Maggid* as a project of great elegance and ingenuity is not to say it is one that was perfectly executed. Something like the opposite is the case. A corollary of recognizing the correct way to read our *Maggid* is acknowledging that it is an experiment that, in some respects, did not quite come off, since, had it done, there would be no need for anyone to explain how it works a millennium later.

ואת לחצנו

זה הדחק. כמה שנאמר: ... וגם ראיתי את הלחץ אשר מצרים לחצים אתם

After introducing the story of Moshe's life with Pharaoh's decree against the male babies, the *Haggadah* directs us to the revelation at the burning bush, from which the verse quoted is taken. The linguistic link established by the shared root [ל ח צ] is easy to discern, but there is a minor question about the introductory comment. דחק is simply a translation of the biblical term לחץ into Rabbinic Hebrew.³⁸ It is common enough to find explanations of obscure words in biblical exegesis, but it is not clear why the author of the *Maggid* thought it necessary to bother here. I do not have a good answer to this question.

ויוציאנו ד' ממצרים

לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי השליח אלא הקב"ה הוא בכבודו ובעצמו (שנאמר: ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים מאדם ועד בהמה ובכל אלקי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני ד'). [ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה] – אני ולא מלאך. "והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים" – אני ולא שרף. "ובכל אלקי מצרים אעשה שפטים" – אני ולא שליח. "אני ד'" – אני הוא ולא אחר.³⁹

As we saw earlier, this is one of three parts of the *Maggid* that the author inherited as part of a basic framework from earlier *haggadot*. Unlike the comment on אבי אבד ארמי, however,

³⁷ There is a separate question of how to interpret the logic of the *d'rasha* in its original context in *Sifrei*. I have no good answer to this question and will not suggest one since it is not strictly relevant.

³⁸ Ironically, לחץ is a common word in modern Hebrew while דחק is not, so the *Maggid* when read today is effectively translating a well-known word into an obscure one.

³⁹ In the version of Rav Sa'adya Gaon, the comment stops before the round brackets. The version of *Rambam* and the one attributed to Natronai Gaon include the verse in the round brackets, while the version of Rav Amram Gaon includes the further elaboration in the square brackets. The shorter version seems the most appropriate to the *Maggid's* purpose of directing the reader to *Shemot* 3:13-15.

he works this one seamlessly as a crucial element into his new structure. The previous comment directed the reader to the revelation at the burning bush. If we continue reading, we find one of the most interesting and most commented upon passages in the entire Torah.

יֹאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹקִים הַזֶּה אֲנִי בָּא אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹקֵי
 אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ־לִי מִה־שְּׁמוֹ מָה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים: ... וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹקִים
 אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה־תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ד' אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק
 וְאֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה־שְּׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכָרִי לְדֹר דָּר:

... behold, I (will) come to the children of Israel and say the God of your fathers sent me to you, and they will say, "What is his name?" What shall I say to them? ... And God said further to Moshe, 'thus shall you say to the children of Israel, "HASHEM the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, the God of Ya'akov, sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial from generation to generation. (Shemot 3: 13-15)

There is a great deal to unpack in this exchange, but the first thing we might note is that at the typical *Seder* discussion of this part of the story it is omitted entirely. This alerts us to one of the most important defining features of our *Maggid* that emerges when it is correctly understood.

The story of the exodus as told in *parshat habekurim* is essentially one about the people of Israel, their enslavement and their liberation. God certainly appears in this story, indeed, He is central, but He is an actor, not the subject. This is how the exodus story is most commonly told and conceptualized today, in particular at the *Seder*. If one reads *Shemot* in this frame of mind, however, questions start to build up. Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart when he could just have brought the Israelites out after the sixth plague at the latest? Since God has control over Pharaoh's heart why doesn't he just make him release the Hebrews straight away? Why do Moshe and God spend so much time talking to each other, and Moshe to Pharaoh before they actually do anything? Why did God engineer a final showdown with Pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds when the children of Israel had already been released? The more one reads, the deeper the questions become. Why an exodus at all? Why send down the children of Israel to Egypt just to bring them up again?

The answer that becomes more and more inescapable the more one pays attention is that the story of the exodus is not about Israel at all, it is a story about God. He starts the story with even His name unknown, perhaps, at most, considered one deity among others and ends it firmly established as supreme lord of all the earth. This is done through the multiplication of unprecedented miracles and the public humiliation of what was then the world's foremost imperial power led by a man who himself claimed divine status. Liberating Israel is an essential part of this process, for it is through designating for Himself a people, and through raising them out of the lowest possible social condition, that God establishes himself as the master of history. But it is a means to an end, not the end itself.

When the author of the *Maggid* maps *parshat habikkurim* on to the complete exodus narrative in *Shemot* he is doing much more than just creating a helpful aid. He is transforming the story from a liberation history into a deocentric epic, by directing you to tell the entire narrative as found in *Shemot*, not just the parts that might appeal to a secular Zionist.⁴⁰ In particular, he is finding a way to include chapters 3 through 6 which happen in between God hearing the cry of the children of Israel (related in verse 3 of *parshat habikkurim*) and His bringing them out (related in verse 4). It is to accommodate this extra material that the fourth verse of *parshat habikkurim* has to be mapped out by the *Maggid* twice. This is also the reason why all of the comments by the *Maggid* on this verse take the form of roundabout midrashic links: there exist no natural links between this section of *Shemot* and *parshat habikkurim*.

ביד חזקה ובזרע נטויה

זו הדבר. כמה שנאמר: הנה יד ד' הויה במקנך אשר בשדה בסוסים בחמרים בגמלים בבקר ובצאן דבר כבד מאד זו החרב. כמה שנאמר: וחרבו שלופה בידו נטויה על ירושלים

The key to understanding the *Maggid* here is to realize that the comments 'this is the plague' and 'this is the sword' are intended to be read as a pair. Once done, all one has to do is to continue reading. Sure enough, we find:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים נִקְרָא עָלֵינוּ גִלְכָּה נָא דָרָךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְנִזְבְּחָהּ לַד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּן יִפְגְּעוּנוּ בַדָּבָר אוֹ בַחֶרֶב:

And they said, 'The God of the Hebrews has happened upon us. Let us go, please, three days travel in the wilderness, and let us slaughter to HASHEM our God, lest he strike us with the plague or with the sword.' (Shemot 5:3)

The reference here is unmistakable. In the entire *Tanach* there are only two occasions when the words *דבר* and *חרב* are paired together in that order (the other being *Amos* 4:10, where they are separated by four words). The *Maggid* is, therefore, directing us to the next part of the story in which Moshe and Aharon ask to be allowed to bring the children of Israel out on a temporary basis and Pharaoh responds by intensifying their burdens. Again, we may remark that this part of the story is typically left out of the garbled

⁴⁰ It should be said that an honest reading of the exodus story as presented in *Shemot* is a challenging experience for more than just secular Zionists, and renders untenable (to say the very least) a great deal of mainstream orthodox theodicy.

A related question is whether, leaving aside the discomfort most moderns must feel about the true nature of the book of *Shemot*, it is really correct to tell the story of the exodus on *Seder* night specifically as a story about God rather than a story about Israel. *Shemot* 13:8, it seems to me, indicates the latter approach, as would *Hazal's* choice of *parshat habikkurim* as the base text. On the other hand, the symbolism of the *Pesah* offering eaten on *Seder* night is tied specifically to *מכת בכורות* – that is to say the penultimate revelation of God's power – while the seven-day festival of *matzot* is tied to redemption of Israel. More than that I do not wish to comment. The job of this explanation is to explain what the *Maggid* is, not what it should be.

account of the exodus given at a *Seder*, which is a great loss, even from a purely narrative perspective.

The *d'rashot* linking *ביד חזקה* and *זרע נטויה* to *דבר* and *חרב* respectively are both taken from the same source in *Sifrei* on *Bemidbar*, commenting on the last paragraph of the *Shema*:

אני ד' אלקיכם עוד למה נאמר והלא כבר נאמר אני ד' אלקיכם אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים ומה ת"ל אני ד' אלקיכם עוד כדי שלא יהו ישראל אומרים מפני מה צונו המקום לא שנעשה וניטול שכר לא עושים ולא נוטלים שכר כענין שאמרו ליחזקאל שנאמר יצאו אלי זקני ישראל וישבו לפני אמרו לו ליחזקאל עבד שמכרו רבו לא יצא מרשותו אמר להם הין אמרו לו והואיל ומכרנו המקום לאומות העולם יצאנו מרשותו אמר להם הרי עבד שמכרו רבו על מנת לחזור שמא יצא חוץ לרשותו. והעולה על רוחכם היה לא תהיה אשר אתם אומרים נהיה כגוים אשר סביבותינן וכמשפחות האדמה לשרת עץ ואבן חי אני נאם ד' אם לא ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה ובחימה שפוכה אמלוך עליכם ביד חזקה זו הדבר כמה שנאמר הנה יד ד' הויה במקנך אשר בשדה ובזרוע נטויה זו החרב כמה שנאמר וחרבו שלופה בידו נטויה על ירושלם ובחימה שכופה זו הרעב אחר שאני מביא עליכם שלש פורעניות הללו זו אחר זו ואחר כך אמלוך עליכם על כרכחם לכן נאמר עוד אני ד' אלקיכם.

'I am HASHEM your God' and why does it say it again? Did it not already say [at the beginning of the verse] I am the HASHEM your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt? And what does the extra 'I am HASHEM' teach? In order that Israel should not say: 'Why did the Omnipresent command us? In order that we should do it and receive a reward. Let us not do it and receive no reward!'. This is similar to what they said to Yehezqel, as it says 'The elders of Israel went out to me and they sat before me' (Yehezqel 20:1). They said to Yehezqel, 'A servant whose master has sold him, does he not go out from his authority?' He said, 'Yes.' They said to him, 'Then since the Omnipresent has sold us to the nations we have gone out from his authority!' He said to them 'Behold, a servant whose master sold him on condition of taking him back does he leave his authority?'

'And that which has come into your mind surely will not be, when you say "We will be like the nations around us and like the families of the earth, to serve wood and stone." As I live, declares HASHEM, but with a strong hand, and an outstretched arm, and fury poured out I will reign over you. (Yehezqel 20: 32-3)

With a strong hand – This is the plague, like that which says 'Behold the hand of HASHEM against your cattle that are in the field [a very heavy plague]. (Shemot 9:3)

And with an outstretched arm – This is the sword, like that which says 'And his sword drawn in his hand stretched over Jerusalem.' (Divrei haYamim 21:16)

And with anger poured out – This is the famine.

After I bring over you these three catastrophes one after another, after that I will rule over you against your will. Therefore, it repeats 'I am HASHEM'.

This source is complex and seems to contain more than one historical layer edited together. It starts by attacking the view (quite popular in our own age) that the *mitzvot* are optional activities through which a Jew can accumulate merits. It then moves on, using a passage from *Yehezqel*, to condemning a different, if not unrelated, misconception, namely that in casting the people of Israel into exile, God had freed them from the obligation to continue keeping His laws. It is in giving concrete meaning to the

metaphorical terms used by *Yehezqel* to describe God's punishment that the midrash makes the statements incorporated into our *Maggid*.

Now, quite obviously, none of this has any more than the most tenuous connection to the exodus. Some commentators have come up with far-fetched claims that the *Haggadah* is alluding to something that they already believed, whereas others have concluded that the author stuck them in for no reason at all, bewitched by the discovery of a comment – *any comment* – on the words *ביד חזקה ובזרע נטויה*. If we understand how the *Maggid* works, however, then the whole puzzle doesn't even arise. The author wanted to link this fragment to the passage in *Shemot*; since no natural link existed he needed to find a roundabout one, which he did by splicing in this piece of midrashic exegesis.⁴¹

We should, however, ponder this a bit more. The words *דבר* and *חרב* appear together with reasonable frequency, especially in the books of *Yehezqel* and *Yirmiyahu*, but almost always as part of a trio with *רעב* (famine). As we have said, to find them directly juxtaposed together, alone, and in that order is very rare. Indeed, *Shemot* 5:3 is the only place where they come one after the other with a definite article. And yet here, lying ready in a midrashic source talking about something else entirely is a link between *ביד חזקה ובזרע נטויה* and *דבר וחרב* already mapped out,⁴² even though no proof-text is used in the midrash to connect the third part (*חימה שכופה* and *רעב*) of the respective trios!

This is, at any rate, a remarkable coincidence, and finding it testifies to the author's command of sources. I am inclined to believe, however, that he did not consider it a coincidence. It is well known that Sa'adya Gaon believed that the Ten Commandments are given special importance by the Torah and Jewish tradition, not so much for their explicit content but because they contain virtually all 613 *mitzvot* amongst them. It is my belief that the author believed a similar thing about *parshat habikkurim*. He was not, in his view, merely mapping a synopsis from *Devarim* onto a longer account in *Shemot*, he was *revealing* a connection that already existed. It is for this reason, I believe, that when a natural link between the fragment and the passage it is mapped to doesn't present itself, he turned to existing midrashic sources to create one and quoted them, as much as possible, in their original wording. If *Hazal* instructed us to tell the exodus story by means of *parshat habikkurim* it must be that, somehow, all of the exodus story is already contained within it, the secret of how this is so being contained in the works of the *תורה שבעל פה* which they bequeathed to us.

⁴¹ It is just possible to say that there might be a further thematic link because the source talks about Israel during a period of suffering and so does the passage in *Shemot*, but I don't believe that is necessary.

⁴² On the face of it, it is also remarkable that the source makes use of the rare formula *כמה שנאמר*. However, I do not want to make too much of this specific point, since it is not unlikely that the original text did not include this formula and that it was added in by a scribe familiar with the *Haggadah*. See also footnote 13.

ובמרא גדל

זה גלוי שכינה. כמה שנאמר: או הנסה אלקים לבוא לקחת לו גוי מקרב גוי במסת באתת ובמופתים ובמלחמה וביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה ובמוראים גדלים ככל אשר עשה לכם ד' אלקיכם במצרים לעיניך

There are many parts of the exodus story that could potentially be described under the term גלוי שכינה (revelation of the divine presence), and there are three separate options suggested by commentators on the *Haggadah*. Speculation, however, is quite unnecessary; the correct way to understand what the *Maggid* is getting at is, once again, to read on in *Shemot*:

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹקִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי ד': וְאַרְא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁקֵּי וּשְׁמִי ד' לֹא נֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם: ... וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהִיִּיתִי לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ד' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם:

And God spoke to Moshe, and He said to him 'I am HASHEM. And I appeared to Abraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov as El Shaddai and (by) My name HASHEM, I was not known to them... And I will take you for me for a people and I will be for you for a God and you shall know that I am HASHEM who brings you out from under the burdens of Egypt.' (Shemot 6: 2-3, 7)

Without delving into the many explanations of what these verses exactly mean, it is clear that they entail God announcing that he is about to reveal Himself in a way not hitherto witnessed. As we have discussed, in the exodus narrative as told in *Shemot*, this is not just a theme of the story, it is the story.

On a technical level, however, this section looks initially difficult. How does *מרא גדל* relate to *גלוי שכינה* and what is the relevance of the verse cited from *Devarim* aside from it including the words *מוראים גדלים*? The most popular theory among *Haggadah* scholars runs as follows. If we look at *Targum Onkelos* and other early sources, they seem to have understood *מרא גדל* ('great terror') as a variant spelling of *מראה גדל* ('a great vision'). *גלוי שכינה* therefore represents actually seeing a physical image of God and the significance of the verse cited from *Devarim* lies in its closing words, 'before your eyes'. This is all very learned, but it is quite wrong. There is no reference to an actual vision of God in this section or anywhere else in the exodus story, it goes against the whole thrust of the book, which is about God manifesting himself through miraculous acts, and any such vision is denied in *Devarim* not very far from the verse quoted. The way of resolving this problem is much simpler. Let us look at the verse cited from *Devarim*, along with a few verses before and after.

כִּי שָׂאֵל־נָא לִימִים רִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר־הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ לְמִן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶדָם עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלִמְקַצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד־קַצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם הַגְּהֵנָה כַּדָּבָר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה אוּ הַנִּשְׁמַע כְּמָהוּ: הַשָּׁמַע עִם קוֹל אֱלֹקִים מִדְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ־הָאֵשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַעְתָּ אֹתָהּ וַיַּחֲזִי: אוּ הַנִּסָּה אֱלֹקִים לְבֹא לְקַחַת לוֹ גוֹי מִקְרֵב גוֹי בְּמִסַּת בְּאִתַּת וּבְמוֹפְתִים וּבְמִלְחָמָה וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָאִים גְּדֻלִים כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לָכֶם ד' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ: אֹתָהּ הִרְאֵתָ לְדַעַת כִּי ד' הוּא הָאֱלֹקִים אֲיֵן עוֹד מְלַבְּדוֹ:

For ask now of the former days which were before you from the day God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven to the other: has there been anything like this great thing, or has there been heard like it? Has a people heard the voice of God speaking from a fire as you have heard, and lived? Or has God assayed to come, to take a nation from the midst of a nation with trials, with signs, and with wonders, and with war, and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm and with great terrors, like all that HASHEM your God has done for you in Egypt before your eyes. You have been shown this to know that HASHEM he is the God, there is none beside him. (Devarim 4: 32-5)

The subject of this passage is the unique and unprecedented revelations of God's power the children of Israel had witnessed both in Egypt and at Sinai. In a certain respect, it is the passage we are being referred to in *Shemot* viewed from the past tense. The linguistic link from the fragment to this passage is established by the position of מוראים גדולים at the end of the list of metaphors describing God's power. Since this passage is equivalent in meaning to the passage from the exodus story from *Shemot*, the author has done what he needs to do: map another part of *parshat habikkurim* on to the next section of *Shemot*. That's it. Not the least benefit of understanding how our *Maggid* works is being able to dispense with elaborate answers to questions that turn out not to be questions at all.

ובאותות

זה המטה כמה שנאמר: ואת המטה הזה תקח בידך אשר תעשה בו את האתת

When read as a *d'rasha*, this section looks odd. The staff was an instrument used to perform signs, it was not the signs themselves. However, by this stage you will probably have got the gist. Read on in *Shemot* and you will find Moshe and Aharon turning the staff into a crocodile at Pharaoh's court. The comment, like the previous one and the one after, appears not to be derived from a midrashic source – though that cannot be definitively proven - but is an original creation of the author.

ובמפתים

זה הדם כמה שנאמר: ונתתי מופתים בשמים ובארץ דם ואש ותימרות עשן

In the next part of the story, Aharon turns the waters of Egypt into blood. The author of our *Maggid* therefore required a text linking the word מפתים with blood and he found it in the book of *Yoel*. If one looks on this comment as a 'proof' then it must be said to be decidedly weak. After all, might not it equally be proved from this verse that מפתים refers to a fire? If I have done my job, then you will see why such a question is superfluous.

דבר אחר

"ביד חזקה" – שמים. "ובזרע נטויה" – שמים. "ובמרא גדל" – שמים. "ובאותות" – שמים. "ובמפתים" – שמים. אלו עשר מכות שהביא הקב"ה על המצרים במצרים. ואלו הן....

The author of our *Maggid* now proceeds to expound the last verse of *parshat habikkurim* a second time. The reason is obvious: he has finished the last verse, but he hasn't got to the

end of the story. He therefore maps this verse on to *Shemot* once more using a *d'rasha* that, as we have seen, he inherited from earlier *haggadot*. However, he does more than this.

Straight after the listing the plagues, he quotes a mnemonic, in the name of Rabi Yehuda. This mnemonic appears in the earlier Babylonian *haggadah* we quoted above and is also in *Sifrei* on this verse.⁴³ The inclusion of this in the *Haggadah* has puzzled many. Memory aids are a perfectly respectable tool of pedagogy, but it's not clear why anyone would need one now given that the complete list of plagues is written on the exact same page. As pointed out by *Hizquni* and many subsequent commentators, however, the noteworthy feature of Rabi Yehuda's statement is not that he wrote down the first letter of each word, it is how he divided them up: דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב rather than, say, דצכ"ע דש"ב, אה"ב.⁴⁴ This reflects a real feature of the text in *Shemot* that has been recognized by many biblical scholars, both traditional and academic, namely that the first nine plagues are divided into three banks of three. In each set, the first plague is preceded by Moshe confronting Pharaoh in the morning 'at the waters'; the second ends with an observation about Pharaoh's hardened heart and the third is imposed without Pharaoh receiving a prior warning. Each set of three has a theme: the first is the power of God to work miracles beyond those of Pharaoh's necromancers; the second is His placing a distinction between Egypt and Goshen, the habitation of the children of Israel; the third is His sending 'all my plagues ... so you may know that there is none like Me on the earth'.

The author of our *Maggid* has, therefore, done a great service to the father at a *Seder*. If his audience are not flagging, he can give a proper account of the ten plagues, describing the process by which they progressively demonstrated God's rulership of the world and love for the children of Israel. If time is scarce, he can simply list the plagues and get to the next part of the story, which may not be exactly what you may think.

פסח מצה ומרור

At this point in our *Haggadah*, we find an extended piece of midrashic exegesis, lifted from *Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael* concerning the number of plagues at the sea. This passage is omitted from the *Haggadah* text of *Rambam*, as well a Geonic text sometimes attributed to Rav Natronai Gaon. In the Siddur of Rav Sa'adya Gaon it appears as an optional extra. It is clearly a sort of appendix to our *Maggid* and I believe that this was added for two reasons. The first is a general anxiety in the middle to late Geonic period to add as much midrashic material to the *Haggadah* liturgy as possible, motivated by the condemnation of existing *haggadot* as tainted by Qaraite influence.⁴⁵ The second is a more laudable concern

⁴³ It's presence in *Sifrei* has been regarded as anomalous. Some have suggested that it was back-inserted by a scribe working from the *Haggadah* on the grounds that it was attributed to a *tana*. I do not find this persuasive or necessary. As explained by *Hizquni*, Rabi Yehuda's comment is not just a memory aid, but a legitimate piece of exegesis.

⁴⁴ On *Shemot* 8:15. See also *Ritva* on the *Haggadah*.

⁴⁵ The most striking example of this is the inclusion before the four sons of the *halacha* from Mishnah *B'rachot* 1:5 discussing the proof-text for mentioning *yetziat mitzrayim* in the *b'racha* after *q'riat shem'a*

that by ending the story before the parting of the Sea of Reeds, the *Maggid* has cut off the story before its climax.

By including this section, however, I believe that it is possible we may have missed one final ingenious feature of our *Maggid*. The obligation to talk about *Pesah*, *Matzah*, and *Maror* is found in Mishnah *Pesachim*, in the *halacha* immediately following the one with which we began.

רבן גמליאל אומר כל שלא אמר שלושה דברים הללו בפסח לא יצא ידי
חובתו פסח מצה ומרורים. פסח על שם שפסח המקום על בתי אבותינו
במצרים. מרורים על שם שמררו המצריים את חיי אבותינו במצרים. מצה
על שם שנגאלו.⁴⁶

Raban Gamliel says: Anyone who did not say these three things on Pesah has not fulfilled his obligation: Pesah, Matzah and Bitter herbs. Pesah because the Omnipresent passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt. Bitter herbs because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt. Matzah because they were redeemed.

Usually, this *halacha* is read separately from the one before. One thing the father must do on *Seder* night is to expound *parshat habikkurim*; another thing he must do is talk about *Pesah*, *Matzah*, and *Maror*. That is not incorrect, but there is way of combining the two, which becomes apparent if we look at the book of *Shemot* with fresh eyes. The *Maggid* has already directed us to tell of the ten plagues, culminating in the slaughter of the firstborn. The structure of *Shemot* at this point is as follows:

<i>Shemot</i> 11:1-3	God tells Moshe there will be one more plague and then they will be freed
<i>Shemot</i> 11:4-10	Moshe tells Pharaoh that God will slaughter the Egyptian firstborn and then the children of Israel will leave
<i>Shemot</i> 12:1-13	God tells Moshe to tell the children of Israel to prepare a <i>Pesah</i> sacrifice and eat it with <i>matzah</i> and <i>marorim</i> so that they will be spared in the slaughter of the firstborn
<i>Shemot</i> 12:14-20	God tells Moshe that this will be a permanent seven-day festival based around eating <i>matzah</i> and not eating <i>hametz</i>
<i>Shemot</i> 12:21-28	Moshe instructs the children of Israel in how to prepare the <i>Pesah</i> and they do so
<i>Shemot</i> 12:29-36	God slaughters the Egyptian firstborn and Pharaoh allows the children of Israel to leave
<i>Shemot</i> 12:37-42	The children of Israel leave and bake <i>matzot</i> from the dough that they take with them

at night. Attempts to prove the contrary notwithstanding, this passage has absolutely no relevance to *Seder* night whatsoever.

⁴⁶ Many readers will again notice the numerous differences between the accurate text of this *halacha* and the one they are used to.

- Shemot* 12:43-51 God instructs Moshe in the laws of the *Pesah* sacrifice to be offered by future generations
- Shemot* 13:1-10 Moshe instructs the children of Israel on the seven-day festival of *matzot* and the laws of *hametz*.
- Shemot* 13:11-16 God instructs Moshe on the laws of firstborn animals
- Shemot* 14:1-31 The parting of the Sea of Reeds and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army

As you can see, *Pesah*, *Matzah*, and *Maror* are not *just* commemorations of the exodus from Egypt, they are part of the exodus itself, indeed, especially in the first case, crucial parts of the story. By moving on from discussion of the ten plagues to discussing them, the father is, in the most literal sense, just continuing with the story.

One question remains. What about the final confrontation between Pharaoh and God at the Sea of Reeds? Apart from being one of the most exciting parts of the story, it is also the theological climax, the moment when all doubts about the supremacy of *HASHEM* are dispelled and the Torah declares of the children of Israel *ויאמינו ב' ובמשה עבדו*. If the sections of our *Haggadah* that deal with the splitting of the sea are insertions of a later hand, does that mean the author of the *Maggid*, after his labours to include so many neglected parts of the tale, simply ignored the dramatic final scene? Perhaps not. Let us look at the conclusion of the *halacha* we just quoted:

לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות להלל לשבח לפאר לרומם לגדל למי שעשה לנו
ולאבותינו את כל הנסים האילו והוציאנו מעבדות לחירות ונאמר לפניו
הללויה

Therefore [i.e. because our fathers were redeemed] we are obligated to thank, to praise, laud, glorify, exalt, and magnify the One who did for us and for all our fathers these miracles and brought us out from slavery to freedom and let us say before Him: Halleluyah!

After discussing *Pesah*, *Matzah*, and *Maror*, the final stage before the meal is singing the first two paragraphs of *Hallel*. Over the centuries, a tradition developed of seeing this *Hallel* not merely as an expression of thanks for an historical event, but as something more. Everyone is familiar with the dictum with which our *Haggadah* introduces the *Hallel*: 'in every generation each man is obligated to see himself as if he went out from Egypt'. The *Hallel*, according to this view, is not a memorial, so much as a *re-enactment* of the song the children of Israel themselves sang when they left Egypt.

Except that is not quite right. In their haste, the house of Ya'aqov had no time to sing on the day they went out from among the people of strange tongue. For that, they would have to wait seven more days, for the moment when they turned around and saw Pharaoh's horsemen, dead on the shore of the sea.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In midrashic writings, the second verse of *Hallel* *בצאת ישראל ממצרים* is explained as referring specifically to the parting of the sea.

Primary Sources

The following is a list of the primary sources and their editions that I have cited or quoted in the above text.

- תורת חיים חמשה חומשי תורה, (ed. Katzenelenbogen, Mossad HaRav Kook, 1996)
- הגדה של פסח עם פירושי הראשונים, (ed. Katzenelenbogen, Mossad HaRav Kook, 1996)
- מכילתה דרבי ישמעאל ברכת הנצי"ב, (ed. Shapiro, Volozhin Yeshiva Jerusalem, 1996)
- משנה תורה להרמב"ם מנוקד ומדויק מכתבי יד בצירוף מפתחות, (ed. Makbili, Or Vishua, 2009)
- סדר רב עמרם גאון, (ed. Goldshmitt, Mossad HaRav Kook, 2004)
- ספר מצוות קטן עמודי גולה, (יריד ספרים), (2005)
- ספרי על ספר במדבר וספרי זוטא, (ed. Horowitz, Shalem Books, 1992)
- ספרי על ספר דברים, (ed. Finkelstein, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2001)

Secondary sources

The following is a list of books that I have cited or referred to in the above text along with some articles by Rovner that provide indispensable background material. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list of *Haggadah* scholarship. In particular, it does not include a number of older works (by Goldschmitt, Bokser, Fleischer, Kasher, Tabory, and Yuval) that are basic texts in the field, but which for most practical purposes have been superseded, at least as far as the *Haggadah* goes. Most of the works included here are also of interest because of the primary sources they contain.

Boyarin, D.

2004 *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia)

[A summary of the more important material found in this book can be found in 'Two Powers in Heaven, Or the Making of a Heresy' available online in pdf, though one has to wade through a large amount of obfusatory 'theory', which, in the book, is better segregated into separate chapters.]

First, M.

2012 'Arami Oved Avi, Uncovering the Interpretation Hidden in the Mishnah', *Hakirah* 13

[available online in PDF]

Gerald Janzen, J.

1994 "The "Wandering Aramean Reconsidered", *Vetus Testamentum* 44:3

Kulp, J.

2009 *The Schechter Haggadah: Art, History and Commentary* (Jerusalem)

Rovner, J.

2000 'An Early Passover Haggadah According to the Eretz Yisraeli Rite, *JQR* 90

2002 'A New Version of the Eres Israel Haggadah Liturgy and the Evolution of the Eres Israel 'Miqra Bikkurim' Midrash', *JQR* 92

2004 'Two Early Witnesses to the Formation of Miqra Bikkurim Midrash and Their Implications for the Evolution of the Haggadah Text', *HUCA* 75

Safrai, S. & Safrai, Z.

1998 הגדת חז"ל (Jerusalem) [Also available in an English translation]

Appendix i – Map of the *Haggadah*

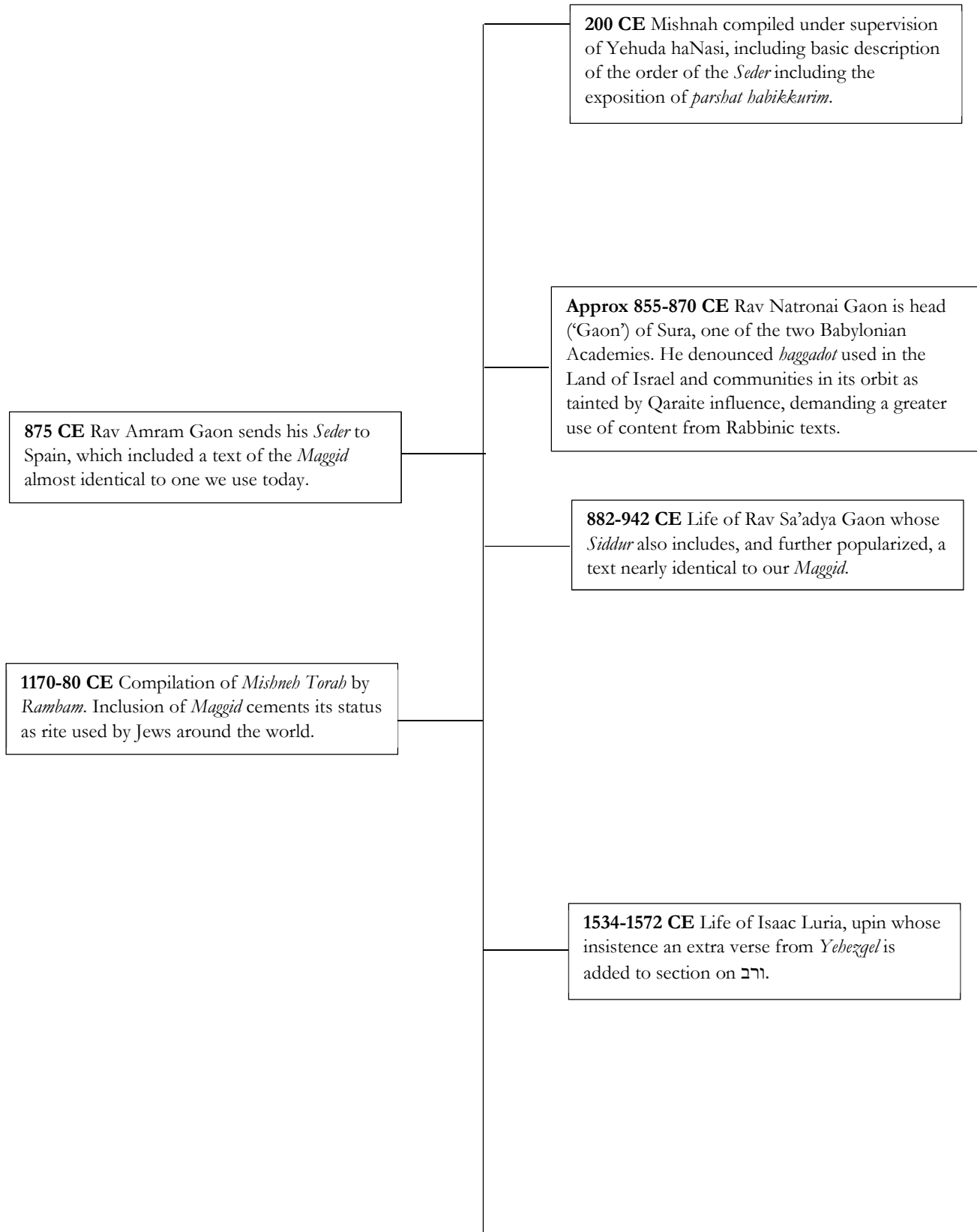
The following is a map of every part of the *Maggid*, describing briefly both how to use it as a tool for telling the exodus story (the second and third columns) and the original source for the *Maggid's* comment establishing the link between *parshat habikkurim* and the story in *Shemot*.

Fragment of <i>parshat habikkurim</i>	Section of exodus story	<i>Synopsis of Story</i>	Original source of <i>Maggid's</i> comment
ארמי אבד אבי	Introduction, also possible ref. to <i>Bereishit</i> 33:1 – 45:28	(The sale of Yosef through to his invitation to the family to settle with him in Egypt)	Earlier <i>haggadot</i> (universal).
וירד מצרימה	46:1-7	God instructs Ya'aqov to descend to Egypt and promises to bring back his descendants	Earlier <i>haggadot</i> from the land of Israel
ויגר שם	46:28 – 47:12	Ya'aqov's family are settled in Goshen	Earlier <i>haggadah</i> , possibly originally derived from <i>Sifrei Devarim</i>
במתי מעט	<i>Shemot</i> 1:1-6	The counting of Ya'aqov's clan	Adapted from <i>Sifrei Devarim</i> via earlier <i>haggadah</i> traditions.
[ויהי שם לגוי]	N/A	N/A In my opinion this comment is not part of the <i>Maggid</i>	<i>Sifrei Devarim</i>
גדול עצום	1:8	The children of Israel rapidly expand	Original comment
ורב	N/A	The children of Israel prosper and fall into sin prior to being enslaved	Original comment based on <i>Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael</i>
וירעו אתנו המצרים	1:8-10	Pharaoh plans to enslave the children of Israel	Original comment
ויענונו	1:11-12	The children of Israel are enslaved and afflicted	Original comment
ויתנו עלינו עבודה קשה	1:13-14	The Egyptians place hard work on the Hebrews	Original comment
ונצעק אל ד' אלקי אבתינו	<i>Shemot</i> 2:23	The children of Israel cry out to God after the accession of a new Pharaoh	Original comment
וישמע ד' את קלנו	2:24	God hears the cry of the children of Israel and remembers His covenant	Original comment

וירא את ענינו	2:25	God 'sees' the suffering of the children of Israel	Earlier Babylonian <i>haggadah</i> , also incorporating text from <i>Bavli Yoma</i> or possibly unknown earlier <i>haggadah</i> .
ואת עמלנו	1:15 – 2:22	Moshe is rescued from the drowning of the males, raised by Pharaoh's daughter, kills an Egyptian officer, flees to Midian, becomes a shepherd and finds the burning bush	<i>Sifrei Devarim</i>
ואת לחצנו	3:1-12	God tells Moshe that he is to be His emissary in freeing the children of Israel	Original comment possibly incorporating unknown source.
ויוצאנו ד' ממצרים	3:13 – 5:2	Moshe learns <i>HASHEM</i> 's name and reveals it to the children of Israel	Earlier <i>Haggadot</i> (universal) originally adapted from <i>Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael</i>
ביד חזקה ובזרע נטויה	5:3 – 6:1	Pharaoh responds to Moshe's demands by worsening the burden on the children of Israel	<i>Sifrei Bemidbar</i>
ובמרא גדל	6:2-12	God declares that He will hereafter be known as (or by) <i>HASHEM</i>	Probably original comment
ובאתות	7:8-13	Moshe turns his staff into a crocodile at Pharaoh's court	Probably original comment
ובמפתים	7:14-25	The plague of blood	Probably original comment
ויוצאנו ד' ממצרים ביד חזקה... (2nd time)	7:14 – 12:36	The 10 plagues	Earlier <i>haggadot</i> (universal)
דצ"ך	7:14 – 8:15	Plagues of blood, frogs and lice	Earlier Babylonian <i>Haggadah</i> . Probably originally taken from <i>Sifrei Devarim</i>
עד"ש	8:16 – 9:13	Plagues of stinging flies, disease and boils	
באח"ב	9:14 – 12:36	Plagues of hail, locusts, darkness and the killing of the firstborn	

Appendix ii – Timeline

Many readers will find this timeline helpful in achieving clarity about the historical process of the development of the *Maggid* as we know it.



Appendix iii – Earlier *Maggids*

In this appendix, I have transcribed the known versions of the *parshat habikkurim* section found in earlier *haggadot* with some comments. This will be of some interest to the general reader who will get a better sense of the range – and lack of range – in earlier *haggadot* and also, I hope, be of some small assistance to those who wish to carry out further scholarly work.

In all the following texts, bold type indicates the verses from Devarim and normal type indicates additions, including other cited verses. These texts cannot also be read side by side in J. Rovner, ‘Two Early Witnesses to the Formation of the “Miqra Bikkurim Midrash” and their Implications for the Evolution of the Haggadah Text’, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 75 (2004), p. 102-106.

(i) The standard Land of Israel version

This is the basic text found in many manuscripts from the Land of Israel and communities that followed Land of Israel traditions. Minor differences are found in different manuscripts, but they mostly indicate no more than scribal errors or quirks. The following text was first published in D. Goldschmitt, *הגדה של פסח ותולדותיה*, (Jerusalem, 1960). It also appears in S. Safrai & Z. Safrai *הגדת חז"ל*, (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 287-8 and J. Kulp, *Schechter Haggadah*, (Jerusalem, 2009), p. 218.

Go and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to Ya'aqov our father, for Pharaoh the wicked only decreed over the males and Lavan sought to uproot the whole, as it says **My father was a wandering Aramean**

And he went down to Egypt forced according to the word.

And he dwelt there, few of number, and he became there a nation, great, mighty and numerous. And he Egyptians did bad to us and they afflicted us and they placed upon us hard work. And we cried out to HASHEM the God of our fathers and he heard our voice and he saw our affliction and our travail and our oppression

And HASHEM brought us out from Egypt not by means of an angel, and not by means of a seraph, not by means of an emissary, but the Holy One Blessed be He by Himself.

With strong hand two with and outstretched arm two [with great terror two] with signs two and with wonders two these are the ten plagues which the Omnipresent Blessed be He brought on the Egyptians in Egypt and these are they: blood, frog, lice, *arov*, animal plague, boil, hail, locust, darkness, plague of the firstborn.

And he brought us out from there as it says ‘and us he brought out from there.’

צא ולמד מה לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב
אבינו שפרעה הרשע לא גזר אלא על הזכרים
ולבן בקש לעקור את הכל שנאמר **ארמי אבד
אבי**

וירד מצרימה אנוסה על פי הדבר

ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול
עצום ורב וירעו אותנו המצרים ויענונו ויתנו
עלינו עבודה קשה ונצאק אל ד' אלקי
אבותינו וישמע ד' את קולינו וירא את ענינו
ואת עמלינו ואת להצינו

ויוציאנו ד' ממצרים לא על ידי מלאך ולא על
ידי שרף לא על ידי שליח אלא ה'ק'ב'ה בעצמו

ביד חזקה שתיים ובזרוע נטויה שתיים
ובמורא גדול שתיים באתות שתיים ובמופתים
שנים אלו עשר המכות שהביא המקום ברוך
הוא על המצרים במצרים ואלו הן דם צפרדעה
כנים ערוב דבר שחין ברד ארבה חושך מכת
בכורות

והוציאנו משם שנאמר ואתנו הוציא משם

This text includes the three items we identified as part of the universal framework present in all *Haggadot* and one more comment, which the author of our *Maggid* also incorporates. Rovner is of the view that this *Maggid* was developed no earlier than the 8th century, but it is much easier to explain the addition of the three comments (and perhaps also **אנוס על פי הדבר**) to the exposition of the *parshat habikkurim* if it happened at an earlier stage. The absence of any earlier documentary evidence means that we cannot say anything more.

An odd element in this *Haggadah* is the closing words ‘And he brought us out from there’ as it says “and us he brought out from there.” The quotation is *Devarim* 6:26 and, oddly enough, in the Talmud *Bavli Pesachim* 116a, Rava says that it is an obligation to say these words, though he doesn’t specify at what point. One possible explanation is that he was citing a tradition from the Land of Israel. What purpose this aggressively tautological statement is supposed to have as conclusion to *parshat habikkurim*, however, is a question that I have not seen adequately resolved.

N.B. Some manuscripts of this *Maggid* omit the actual list of the plagues and the concluding statement, thus ending with the words **על המצרים**. Rovner assumes that this is the more original version on the general principle that liturgies are more frequently added to than subtracted from.

(ii) An expanded Land of Israel Version

In some Byzantine manuscripts, a version of the *Haggadah* has been discovered that can be summed up as basically following the Land of Israel rite, but with changes made to accommodate Babylonian practices and formulas popularized by Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Sa’adya Gaon. Interestingly, however, the *Maggid* shows evidence of an independent development of the Land of Israel version unaffected by Babylonian influence. The text can be found in J. Rovner, ‘A New Version of the Eres Israel Haggadah Liturgy and the Evolution of the Eres Israel ‘Miqra Bikkurim’ Midrash’, *JQR* 92, pp. 423-4. It can also be found in J. Kulp, *Schechter Haggadah*, (Jerusalem, 2009), p. 220 (though with the omission of the first line).

Clearly, this text builds upon the land of Israel version, adding comments with particular teachings. There are two rather otiose comments on how cherished Ya’aqov and the children of Israel are respectively, which Rovner discusses at length. In addition, there is an elaboration of the postscript giving it a theological significance. It also has a longer version of the comment on **ויוצינו ד' ממצרים**.

Unlike the earlier Land of Israel text and the early Babylonian text (below) this seems to have had relatively little influence on the author of our *Maggid*. It is just possible that he was influenced by the citation of *Devarim* 10:22 though this is already there in *Sifrei* and is included in another text that it seems more likely the author did have access to (below iv). Further, if he used this *haggadah* as a source, it seems odd that he did not include the citation of *Bereishit* 46:4 appended to **אנוס על פי הדבר** since this would fit in perfectly with his general system. It seems to me probable either that he never saw this text or, if he did, that he didn’t care for it.

Note that here two verse of *parshat habikkurim* are omitted entirely. Rovner argues that this was part of a move away from explaining the verse themselves to a formalized liturgy in which the focus was on the quasi-midrashic comments. This does not seem to me correct as I will explain in the next section.

Go and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to Ya'aqov our father, for Pharaoh the wicked only decreed over the males and Lavan sought to uproot the whole, as it says **My father was a wandering Aramean**

And he went down to Egypt forced according to the word (*logos?*). Go and see the how cherished was our father Ya'aqov, how cherished he was before the Omnipresent, as it says 'I, I will go down with you to Egypt and I, I will surely bring you up.' (*Bereishit* 46:4)

And he dwelt there, few of number, and he became there a nation, great, mighty see how cherished Israel is, how cherished they are before the Omnipresent since they did not go down to Egypt but few of number, as it says 'Seventy souls your fathers went down to Egypt and now *HASHEM* your God has placed you like the stars of the heavens for multitude. (*Devarim* 10:22)

And *HASHEM* brought us out from Egypt not by means of an angel, and not by means of a seraph, not by means of an emissary, but the Holy One Blessed be He by Himself. As it says, 'And I will pass through the land of Egypt in that night and I will strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt from man unto beast and upon all the gods of Egypt I will perform judgments, I am *HASHEM*.

With strong hand two with and outstretched arm two with great terror two with signs two and with wonders two these are the ten plagues which the Omnipresent Blessed be He brought on the Egyptians in Egypt and these are they: blood, frog, lice, *arov*, animal plague, boil, hail, locust, darkness, plague of the firstborn.

And he brought us out from there as it says 'and us he brought out from there.' Not for our merits did *HASHEM* bring us out of Egypt, but in the merit of Avraham, Yitzhaq, and Ya'aqov, as it says 'And God heard their cry and God remembered his covenant with Avraham, with Yitzhaq and with Ya'aqov. And God saw the children of Israel and God knew.

(iii) An early Babylonian version

This is taken from a Babylonian *haggadah* text of the 10th century. It was first published in J. Rovner, 'Two Early Witnesses to the Formation of the "Miqra Bikkurim Midrash" and their Implications for the Evolution of the Haggadah Text', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 75 (2004), p. 83. It can also be found in J. Kulp, *Schechter Haggadah*, (Jerusalem, 2009), p. 220.

צא ולמד מה לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב
אבינו שפרעה הרשע לא גזר אלא על הזכרים
ולבן בקש לעקור את הכל שנאמר ארמי אבד
אבי

וירד מצרימה אנוסה על פי הדיבר ראה חיבתו
שלאבינו יעקב כמה הוא חביב לפני המקום שנ'
אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלך גם עלה

ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול ראה
חיבתן של ישראל כמה הן חביבין לפני המקום
שלא ירדו במצרי אלא במתי מעט שנ' בשבעים
נפש ירדו אבותיך מצרימה ועתה שמך ד'
אלקיך ככוכבי השמים לרוב

ויוציאנו ד' ממצרים לא על ידי מלאך ולא על
ידי שרף לא על ידי שליח אלא ה'ק'ב'ה בעצמו
שנ' ועברתי בארץ מצ' בלילה הזה והכיתי כל
בכור בארץ מצרים מאדם ועד בהמה ובאלקי
מצרים אעשה שפטים אני ד'

ביד חזקה שתים ובזרוע נטויה שתים
ובמורא גדול שתים באתות שתים ובמופתים
שנים אלו עשר המכות שהביא המקום ברוך
הוא על המצרים במצרים ואלו הן דם צפדעה
כנים ערוב דבר שחין ברד ארבה חושך מכת
בכורות

והוציאנו משם שנאמר ואותנו הוציא משם לא
בזכותינו הוציאנו ד' ממצרים אלא בזכות
אברהם יצחק ויעקב שנ' וישמע אלקים את
נאקתם ויזכור אלקים את בריתו את אברהם
את יצחק ואת יעקב וירא אלקים את בני
ישראל וידע אלקים

This text more or less proves that the *Maggid* we use does not back to the *Tannaitic* period (let alone the second Temple as some have claimed!), and was composed no earlier than the Geonic century in Bavel itself before spreading around the globe.

And Lavan sought to uproot the whole, as it says,
My father was a wandering Aramean

And he went down to Egypt and he dwelt there, few of number, and he became there a nation, great and mighty

And he saw out affliction as it says 'And God saw the children of Israel and God knew'

And HASHEM brought us out from Egypt not by means of an angel, not by means of a seraph, not by means of an emissary, but the Holy One Blessed be He.

With strong hand two with and outstretched arm two [with great terror two] with signs two and with wonders two these are the ten plagues which the Omnipresent Blessed be He brought on the Egyptians in Egypt and these are they: blood, frog, lice, *arov*, animal plague, boil, hail, locust, darkness, plague of the firstborn.

Rabi Yehuda made a mnemonic: *Dtzech 'Adash B'abav*

ולבן בקש לעקר את הכל שנ' ארמי אבד אבי

וירד מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי שם לגוי גדול ועצום

וירא את ענינו כמה שנ' וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים.

ויוציאנו ד' ממצרים לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף לא על ידי שליח אלא הקב"ה.

ביד חזקה שתיים בזרוע נטויה שתיים [במורא גדול שתיים]* באותות שתיים ובמפתים שנים אילו עשר מכות שהביא המקום ב"ה על המצרים במצרים ואלו הן דם צפדעה כנים ערוב דבר שחין ברד ארבה חושך מכת בכורות.

רבי יהודה היה נותן בהם סימנים דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב.

Two other interesting facts must be pointed out about this *Maggid*. The first is that it does not even include all the verses of *parshat habikkurim* despite having only the barest bones of supporting midrashic material. I believe that this proves conclusively that it was **not** meant to be read off the page as written, but to serve as a tool to help with *ad hoc* exposition of *parshat habikkurim*, which the reader was expected to remember. I believe *all* such short *Maggids* should be read in this way and, so, in a modified sense, should the *Maggid* we use. The second is that it includes apparently original comments that were incorporated by the author of our *Maggid*. The first is the comment beginning **וורא את ענינו כמה שנאמר** on **וירא את ענינו**, which may have served as a sort of prototype for the many comments in the same format that our author added. The second is the mnemonic in the name of Rabi Yehuda. This mnemonic appears in *Sifrei Devarim*, but the author's decision to include it in his *Maggid* probably came from here. It has also been suggested that the mnemonic is an addition to *Sifrei* by a later scribe, in which case this *Haggadah* would be its earliest source.

In fact, all five comments in this text were incorporated by the author of our *Maggid* and thus this may represent the starting point upon which he built. However, he did not stick to the wording used here, but adapted it, using a longer version of the introductory comment to **ארמי אבד אבי** found in the Land of Israel *haggadot* and adding a clause to the comment on **וירא את ענינו** in order to fit it into his system.

(iv) A Mixed Version

This *haggadah* comes from the Cairo Genizah and it is unclear whether it represents a basically Land of Israel rite with Babylonian influence or an earlier Babylonian rite that had developed independently of the tradition later authorized by the Geonim. It can be found in J. Rovner, ‘Two Early Witnesses to the Formation of the “Miqra Bikkurim Midrash” and their Implications for the Evolution of the Haggadah Text’, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 75 (2004), p. 91.

And Lavan sought to uproot the whole, as it says,
My father was a wandering Aramean

ולבן בקש לעקר את הכל שנ' ארמי אבד אבי

And he went down to Egypt forced according
to the word (*logos?*)

וירד מצרימה אנוסה על פי הדיבר

This teaches that he did not go down to settle, but
to dwell temporarily

מלמד שלא ירד להשתקע אלא לגור

Few of number as it says ‘Seventy souls your
fathers went down to Egypt and now *HASHEM*
your God has placed you like the stars of the
heavens for multitude. (*Devarim* 10:22)

במתי מעט שנאמר בשבעים נפש ירדו אבתך
מצרימה ועתה שמך ד' אלקיך ככוכבי השמים
לרוב

And *HASHEM* brought us out from Egypt
not by means of an angel, and not by means of a
seraph, not by means of an emissary, but the Holy
One Blessed be He by Himself.

ויוציאנו ד' ממצרים לא על ידי מלאך ולא על
ידי שרף לא על ידי שליח אלא הק' בה בעצמו

**With strong hand two with and outstretched
arm two [with great terror two] with signs two
and with wonders two** these are the ten plagues
which the Omnipresent Blessed be He brought
on the Egyptians in Egypt and these are they:
blood, frog, lice, *arov*, animal plague, boil, hail,
locust, darkness, plague of the firstborn.

ביד חזקה שתיים ובזרוע נטויה שתיים
ובמורא גדול שתיים באתות שתיים ובמופתים
שנים אלו עשר המכות שהביא המקום ברוך
הוא על המצרים במצרים ואלו הן דם צפדעה
כנים ערוב דבר שחין ברד ארבה חושך מכת
בכורות

Rabi Yehuda made a mnemonic: *Dtzach 'Adash
B'ahav*

רבי יהודה היה נותן בהם סימנים ד'צ'ך ע,ד'ש
ב'א'ה'ב.

This text has the shorter introductory formula used in the Babylonian version, as well as Rabi Yehuda's mnemonic. It includes the **על פי הדיבר אנוסה** formula from the Land of Israel, along with the citation of *Devarim* 10:22 found in the expanded Land of Israel version. Its unique feature is the comment found in our *Maggid* on **ויגר שם**, though oddly enough the fragment itself is not cited (even more interestingly, there is a gloss by another hand adding *Bereishit* 47:4, the same verse quoted in our *Maggid*). For the third time, we find that every comment in this *haggadah* was incorporated by the author of our *Maggid*, further demonstrating his desire to work with existing sources.

By comparing all the different manuscripts we have, it can be seen that our *Maggid* did not arise out of a process of slow accumulation. We have three short texts that were incorporated into our *Maggid* and one more developed one that was not. While we cannot rule out the future discovery of a missing link, at the moment, the fossil record strongly suggests intelligent design rather than evolution. Scholars have hypothesized a slow process of accretion to deal with the fact that the text in front of them didn't seem to make a great deal of sense. Given that, as we have explained, the *Maggid* actually has an elaborate structure, there is no longer any reason to posit what the documentary record denies.

Appendix iv – Geonic texts

There are hundreds of texts of the *Haggadah* that have survived from the middle ages. There are, however, five particularly important sources for establishing an accurate text our *Maggid*, all of which differ in minor, but sometimes important, ways from the standardized text used in *Haggadot* today. These are:

- (i) The *Seder* of Rav Amram Gaon, sent to the Jews of Spain in C.E. 875.
- (ii) The *Siddur* of Rav Sa'adya Gaon, which started to be circulated in the early-mid 900s.
- (iii) An anonymous manuscript published by Menashe Raphael Lehman as authored by Rav Natronai Gaon.
- (iv) A version from the Schechter manuscript that stops a few lines into *parshat habikkurim*.
- (v) The *Mishneh Torah* of *Rambam* compiled between 1170 and 1180 C.E.
- (vi) An anonymous manuscript (TSH 108/2) which shows the Land of Israel rite after it had already been highly influence by Geonic Babylonian customs, including the use of our *Maggid*.

I have elected not to transcribe all six. Those who wish to see the first five side by side can look in S. Safrai & Z. Safrai *הגדת חז"ל* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 271-4 and the last on p. 287. Instead I will list the different points where they differ, providing the text where appropriate.

First, we should say a brief note about establishing the proper text. A reasonable starting assumption is that the earliest source is the most correct, but in practice this is problematic. The *Siddurim* of Rav Amram and Rav Sa'adya were copied around the Mediterranean and Middle East by different scribes who often made changes or additions to reflect their local practice. Establishing a completely accurate version of either text is impossible. What I quote here should therefore be taken with a pinch of salt, though it is based on the best versions now available. Thanks to the extraordinary labours of Rav Kapah and his successors in the last half century we can be sure that we possess an accurate copy of *Mishneh Torah* down almost to the last letter, but *Rambam* was writing three centuries later. As for the two anonymous Geonic versions, we simply do not know who wrote them or when. Another consideration is that it is more likely than not that the later writers did not copy from Rav Amram Gaon, but had their own source which could have been more (or less!) accurate. When establishing the best version of the text I believe that one of the factors that should be taken into consideration is what version fits best with the structure of the *Maggid* as we have described it above.

(i) Quoting verses

In Rav Amram Gaon's version only the first few words of each quoted verse are cited, except for when the verse is seven words or less and the comment on **ורב**, in which he also includes the last two words **ערם ועריה**. In some cases, it would be clearly necessary to read the entire verse, but his *Seder* was intended for a learned audience who could be presumed to remember the entire verse, as is often the practice in the *Gemara*. Rav Sa'adya Gaon is eclectic, sometimes quoting all of a verse, sometimes only a few words. The other versions quote the verses in full.

Another important point to note is that *all* the early versions do not follow the modern practice of quoting an entire verse from *parshat habikkurim* then dividing it up into fragments. Instead, they simply go through the entire passage bit by bit. The later practice gives the false impression that the verses are being 'explained' by the comments because they appear to be quoting a verse then explaining it bit by bit. The original approach is more certainly more correct. Since the goal is to map the fragments of the verses onto *Shemot*, there is no point in repeating the verse.

(ii) כמה שנאמר

This formula is closely associated with the *Haggadah* and was already used in the early Babylonian version upon which it was built. It is not a little odd, then, to find that *none* of the authoritative texts use it. Instead we find a variety of different formulas, all of which are less cumbersome:

- (i) Rav Amram Gaon – כמו שנאמר and occasionally שנאמר.
- (ii) Rav Sa'adya Gaon – כמשנאמר and sometimes שנאמר
- (iii) *Rambam* – כמו שנאמר
- (iv) Anon. Geonic (Lehmann) – כמו שנאמר
- (v) Anon. Geonic (Shecter MS) – שנאמר
- (vi) Anon. Land of Israel – כמו שנאמר

(iii) אנוס על פי הדבור

This entire comment is missing in the version of *Rambam* and the anonymous Geonic versions. In both Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Sa'adya Gaon's version it appears as **אנוס על פי הדבר**, which must be regarded as the correct version, though it is not clear whether it makes a difference to how it should be vocalized. In the Israeli *Haggadah* it appears as **אנוסה**, which reflected earlier Land of Israel texts.

My belief is that this comment should be included because it fits in with the structure of the *Maggid*, however, it is possible that this is serendipitous, especially since it appears at the beginning of the story where accidental additions are less likely to stand out. *Rambam* who would have had access to texts both with and without probably chose to omit it for theological reasons, likely unaware that originally this comment had been a polemic *against logos* theology. The Geonic

manuscripts that omit it may simply be in error, but it is also possible that some copyists rejected it as a polemical text alien to the Babylonian tradition.

(iv) ויציאנו ד' ממצרים

There is a great deal of variation in the versions of the *midrash* on this fragment.

Rav Amram Gaon	Rav Sa'adya Gaon	Rambam	Anon. (Geonic pub. by Lehmann)	Anon. (Land of Israel)
לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי השליח אלא הקב"ה בכבודו ובעצמו שני ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה...ועברתי בארץ מצרים. אני ולא מלאך. והכיתי כל בכור. אני ולא שרף. "ובכל א-להי מצרים אעשה שפטים. אני ולא שליח. אני ד'. אני הוא ולא אחר.	לא על ידי המלאך ולא על ידי השרף ולא על ידי השליח לא על ידי הדבר אלא ה'ק'ב"ה הוא בעצמו.	לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי שליח אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא בכבודו כמו שנאמר: ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים מאדם ועד בהמה ובכל אלקי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני ד'.	לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי שליח אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא בכבודו שנאמר: ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים מאדם ועד בהמה ובכל אלקי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני יו'.	לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי שליח ולא על ידי הדבר אלא הקב"ה בכבודו שנאמר: ועברתי בארץ מצרים בלילה הזה והכיתי כל בכור בארץ מצרים מאדם ועד בהמה ובכל אלקי מצרים אעשה שפטים אני ד' ולא אחר

The differences are as follows:

- Only the version of Rav Amram Gaon quotes the full version of the *midrash* with which we are familiar. Rav Sa'adya Gaon simply quotes the initial sentence. The others quote only the verse. However, the version from the land of Israel also includes the concluding exclusion from the full version **ולא אחר**.
- Rav Amram's version includes the double formula **בכבודו ובעצמו** the others include only one of the other. It is likely there were two separate traditions which at some point were combined.
- The version of Rav Sa'adya Gaon and the version from the Land of Israel have the added exclusion **לא על ידי הדבר** a reference to the *logos*, though it is doubtful that this was understood by his time.
- The versions of Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Sa'adya Gaon read **השליח** (*the emissary*).

With regard to establishing the correct text, it seems to me that it does not matter too greatly since the purpose within our *Maggid* is to direct the reader to the passage where God reveals to his name to Moshe. However, using one of the shorter versions is probably less distracting and it seems likely that the text we have for the *Seder* of Rav Amram Gaon is not accurate. Probably it is also preferable to quote the verse ending **אני ד'** in order to make the link between the fragment and the section of *Shemot* clearer. The formula **בעצמו ובכבודו** is rather cumbersome and arguably something of a hostage to theological fortune, so one or the other should be chosen.

(v) רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר

This passage is included in the *Seder* of Rav Amram Gaon with no indication that it is any more or less optional than the other sections. In the *Siddur* of Rav Sa'adya Gaon it is explicitly marked as an optional extra. In all the other texts it is absent.

(vi) ורב

We have already discussed this in the introduction, but it is important to note that *all* of the early versions, and indeed all later medieval versions, do not include the second verse from *Yehezqel*.

(vii) A different Land of Israel version

The version from the Land of Israel is almost identical to the Babylonian version, and is certainly imported rather than a parallel development. However, there is one section that is markedly different:

Standard version	Modified Land of Israel version
<p>וישמע ד' את קלנו כמו שנאמר: וישמע אלקים את נאקתם ויזכר אלקים את בריתו את אברהם את יצחק ואת יעקב.</p> <p>וירא את ענינו זו פרישות דרך ארץ. כמו שנאמר: וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים.</p> <p>ואת עמלנו אלו הבנים. כמו שנאמר: כל הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו וכל הבת תחיון.</p>	<p>וישמע ד' את קלנו כמו שנאמר: וישמע אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים.</p> <p>ואת עמלנו זו פרישות דרך ארץ. כמו שנאמר: כל הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו וכל הבת תחיון.</p>

At first glance, this looks like the work of a distracted scribe making a mistake. The first comment quotes a verse that doesn't exist, but is made up of the beginning of the *Shemot* 2:24 and the end of 2:25. The second part appears to move פרישות דרך ארץ into the comment about decree against the male children by splicing together the verse that goes with ואת עמלנו and the remark that goes with וירא את ענינו. It may, indeed, just be a mess. However, I believe it is possible that this bares witness to an abortive attempt to improve the *Maggid*.

As we discussed in the introduction, the *Maggid's* comment on וירא את ענינו is not original, but taken from the earlier Babylonian *Haggadah*. It fits in somewhat awkwardly to the *Maggid's* structure since it points to something that is not actually part of the story in *Shemot*, though it may be of benefit to insert it. This version may be an essay at an improvement. Whereas in the original, וישמע ד' את קלנו and וירא את ענינו point to two consecutive verses whose meaning is equivalent, the land of Israel author combines them into one comment. He then moves זו פרישות דרך ארץ to the discussion of the decree against the male children, which fits in well with the midrashic tradition according to which the one happened as a result of the other. The result is rather clumsy, but with some extra editorial input one can see how this could result in a version of our *Maggid* that did not have to resort to inserting an extra part into the story