

### *A Sample Of Some Of The Vilna Gaon's Pesach Practices According To מעשה רב With Notes Provided By Rabbi Yaakov Zelichinski*

1.

מעשה רב הלכות פסח קעז' – בשבת הגדול במנחה אין אומרים עבדים היינו מטעם המבואר במכילת' ונתקנה בהגדה יכול מר"ח תלמוד לומר בעבור זה בשעה שמצה ומרור בו' (ע' ש"ע שלו סי' ת"ל ס"ק ב'):

*Translation: On Shabbos Ha'Gadol at Mincha, he would not read the Haggadah for the reason stated in the Mechilta; i.e. the Haggadah was composed to be recited at the time provided by the Haggadah as follows: perhaps we should hold the Seder on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the day G-d commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to tell the Jews that the Jews should prepare a lamb to be slaughtered on the night of the 14th of Nissan. We do not hold the Seder on Rosh Chodesh Nissan because the verse teaches that we should fulfill the mitzvah of relating the story of Exodus at the moment that you are obligated to eat Matzah and Marror.*

Note: We find that the Ramah in OH Siman 430, 1, writes in the name of the Sefer Ha'Minhagim (R. Issac Tyrna) that it was a custom to read the Haggadah on Shabbos Ha'Gadol. In the comments of the Vilna Gaon on that Siman, the Vilna Gaon explains that basis for the practice was that the redemption began on the day that the Jews brought a lamb into their homes, the Shabbos before they were rescued from Egypt. So we begin relating the great miracles that G-d performed on behalf of the Jews beginning on Shabbos Ha'Gadol. (See the comments of the Peulat Sachir who provides an additional basis for the custom reported by the Ramah). The Ravva wrote: Children would review the Haggadah in advance; particularly on Shabbos Ha'Gadol; and similarly wrote Rav Amrom Gaon. It appears that the practice began so that the words would be familiar to people and they would understand their meaning so that they were in a position to ask questions at the Seder, so wrote the Maharil. But the Vilna Gaon held that since we say in the Haggadah "because of this" that means that we should recite the Haggadah only when Matzah and Marror are in front of us; i.e. the time to perform those Mitzvos has arrived. We learn that you should not read the Haggadah until the obligation to fulfill those Mitzvot has arrived. So wrote R. Yaakov Emden in his Siddur. See also Beur Halacha Siman 430 who cites the Vilna Gaon's practice.

2.

מעשה רב הלכות פסח, קצא – סדר של פסח מוזגין הכוס ומקדש ונוטלין לידים ומברכין על נטילת ידים ומטבל בחומץ ומברך בפה"א ואוכל כזית ואינו מברך ברכה אחרונה.

*Translation: This is the order of the Seder. They pour the first cup of wine and recite Kiddush. They wash their hands and recite the Bracha of Al Netilas Yadayim. They then dip a vegetable in vinegar and recite the Bracha for a vegetable and eat an olive sized portion of the vegetable and do not recite a closing Bracha.*

# להבין את התפילה

Note: Some say that the Vilna Gaon recited a Bracha on washing his hands out of concern for purity. See below for a further reason.

3.

ואח"כ מביאין הקערה עם המצות מגולין מסודרת שני מצות (ע' ש"ע שלו סי' תע"ג ס"ק י"א) ומרור וחרוסת וזרוע וביצה כזה ובוצע ומטמין לאפיקומן ונשאר פרוסה ושלימה פרוסה מלמעלה ומניח הזרוע והביצה תחת השלימה והמצה מחפה אותם ומרור וחרוסת מלמעלה ומגביה הקערה בעצמו ואומר הא לחמא עניא וכלם שומעין

*Translation: They then bring in the Seder plate with two Matzos which are covered. This follows the custom of the Rambam and the Rif-some say that if you have three Matzos and you break one in half, you still have two complete Matzos over which you make Ha'Motzi and Al Achilas Matzah. Since that is the same number as are used all year round on Shabbat and holidays, you are not fulfilling the obligation of eating Lechem Oni-poor man's bread. When you use one full one and one broken one, you do fulfill the obligation of using "poor man's bread." On the plate are also found marror, charoset, the shank bone and the egg. They split one Matzoh and hide one half of the Matzoh to serve as the Afikomen. They are left with one whole Matzoh and one broken Matzoh. The broken Matzoh is put at the top and the full one under the broken one. The shankbone and the egg below the whole Matzoh and the Marror and Charoset on top. The head of the household then says: Ha Lachma Anya and those present listen. Here is how the Seder plate looked:*



3.

ואח"כ נוטלין הקערה מעל השולחן ואז מוזגין הכוס ושואלין מה נשתנה ואומר הגדה וכולם שומעין וכשמגיע לעשר מכות נותנין לו כלי והוא שופך יו"ד פעמים וכן בסימן דצ"ך וכו' שופך ג"פ.

*Translation: Then they remove the Seder plate from the table and pour the second cup and ask the Mah Nishtana questions and answer by way of the words of the Haggadah. Everyone listens and when they come to the ten plagues, they would bring the Vilna Gaon a dish into which he poured a little out of his cup of wine, ten times. He did it in this manner so that it would not be seen as wasting food (even though no one was going to drink that wine since it represents the ten afflictions that G-d will bring upon the nations of the world before the coming of the Moshiach). He did the same for each of the words Ditzach, etc.,*

4.

וכוס שלו עומד מעוטר בכל הכוסות של בני הבית והכוס שלו באמצע ואומר הגדה עד שמגיע למצה זו מביאין הקערה ואומר ממצה זו עד אשר גאלנו ומכסים הקערה ואומר אשר גאלנו ומברך בפה"ג ושותה הכוס.

*Translation: The cup of the Vilna Gaon was the most elegant of the cups being used at the Seder. It corresponds to the cup of a groom at a wedding. It is symbolic of the Seder night serving as the anniversary of the marriage of the Jewish People to G-d which took place at the Exodus (which is why some read Shir Ha'Shirim after the Seder). His cup was placed in the middle with six cups surrounding it. He would continue with the Haggadah until he would reach Rabban Gamliel Omer and before saying "this Matzoh", they would return the Seder plate to the table and he would continue until Asher Go'Alnu when they would cover the Seder plate and would say Asher Go'Alnu, recite the Bracha over the second cup of wine and would drink the wine.*

5.

ואח"כ מגלים פני הכלה לאחר שבע ברכות הנ"ל דהיינו יין קדוש זמן ענט"י בפה"א אשר גאלנו היא ברכת שעשה נסים ובפה"ג על כוס שני

*Translation: Then they reveal the face of the Kallah after reciting seven Brachos which are: Kiddush (3) (over the wine, Mikadesh Yisroel V'Hazmanin and Shebecheyanu), Al Netilas Yadaim before the dipping, Borei Pri Ha'Adama over Karpas Asher Go'Alnu, which represents a substitute for the Bracha of Sh'Asa Nissim L'Avoseinu, and Borei Pri ha'Gafen on the second cup.*

Note: The link between the Seder and the spiritual marriage between the Jewish People and G-d that took place during the Exodus, is expressed in the Talmud Yerushalmi in the following context: (Maseches Pesachim 10, Halacha 1) anyone who eats Matzoh on Erev Pesach is like someone who sleeps with his future bride during their period of engagement. The Rishonim explained: Just as a bride is celebrated with seven Brachos before she can be alone with her groom, so too we recite seven Brachos before we are authorized to eat the Matzoh. Others calculate the seven Brachos differently since they do not make a Bracha when washing hands before dipping the Karpas.

*Editor: Concerning the Bracha of Sh'Asa Nissim, consider the Bracha that is found in the Haggadah that follows Minhag Eretz Yisroel:*

נוסח ארץ ישראל – ברוך אתה ה' א-להינו מלך העלם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על אכילת מצה מרור בלילה הזה להזכיר גבורתו של מלך מלכי המלכים ברוך הוא שעשה נסים לאבתינו בזמן הזה בעבור אברהם יצחק ויעקב ברוך אתה ה' זוכר הברית. ברוך אתה ה' א-להינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מן הארץ אמן.

*Translation: Baruch Ata Hashem . . . Asher Kidishanu B'Mitzvosav V'Tzivanu to eat Matzoh and Marror on this night to remember the show of might that G-d demonstrated when He performed miracles for our forefathers at that time in the merit of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov. Baruch Ata Hashem who remembers His covenant.*

6.

ואח"כ נוטלין לידים ומברכין ענט"י והמוציא ועל אכילת מצה על הפרוסה ובוצע שניהם  
ואח"כ אוכלים מרור מרוסק בזית ושיעורו ביצה ומשקעו בחרוסת וכן הכריכה ג"כ משקע  
בחרוסת ואח"כ אוכלין הביצה. וטעם האכילה לא מפני אבילות כי ח"ו להזכיר אבילות ט"ב  
היום רק הטעם שהוא זכר לחגיגה כי צלי אין לאכול בפסח זכר לפסח רק בשר זכר לפסח  
וביצה זכר לחגיגה ואח"כ אוכלין אפיקומן בזית ודוקא קודם חצות אבל הלל אין להקפיד אם  
הוא אחר חצות בהמ"ז הכוס מעומר שפוך חמתך והלל וא"א יהללך כלל רק הודו ונשמת  
וישתבח וחיותם בברכות ישתבח הפייט אחד א-להינו:

*Translation: Then they wash their hands and recite Al Netilas Yadayim, Ha'Motzei and Al Achilas Matzoh over the broken piece of Matzoh and he splits both Matzohs. Then they eat an olive size amount of grated Maror that is now the size of what used to be the size of an egg. They dip it into Charoset. The matzoh/maror sandwich includes Charoset and then they eat the egg. They eat an egg not as a sign of mourning-G-d forbid that we should be thinking of the theme of the mourning that takes place on Tisha B'Av at the Seder. We eat the egg as a memorial to the festive sacrifice that was the main meal at the Seder while the Beis Hamikdash stood since we are prohibited from eating grilled meat at the Seder. So we eat meat that is cooked differently to remember the Korban Pesach and we eat an egg to remember the festive sacrifice. Then we eat an olive size of the Afikomen. It must be eaten before half the night but Hallel we can say later. Birkat Hamazone is said over the elegant cup. Then they say Shifoch Chamascha, Hallel, and do not conclude Hallel with Yihalelucha. They do not say that paragraph at all. They say Hallel Ha'Gadol, Nishmas and Yishtabach and close with the Bracha that concludes Yishtabach. Then they recite one song; i.e. Echad Eloheinu.*

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In a note provided by the editor of the new edition of **מעשה רב**, he includes information from the **הגדה של הרמ"מ משקלוב**, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Shklov, a student of the Vilna Gaon, who writes:

Before eating the Karpas, the Vilna Gaon would wash his hands as he did before eating any food that was to be dipped into a liquid and he would recite the Bracha of Al Netilas Yadayim. He would say that at the seder he was obligated to make the bracha of Al Netilas Yadayim before dipping the Karpas so that he would be reciting seven Brachos before eating the Matzoh. They are: Kiddush (3) (over the wine, Mikadesh Yisrel V'Hazmanin and Shehecheyanu) Al Netilas Yadaim before the dipping, Borei Pri Ha'Adama over Karpas, Asher Go'Alnu, and Boreh Pri ha'Gafen on the second cup.

The total number of Brachos that are recited at the Seder are 18; the seven mentioned above; Al Netilas Yadaim before Hamotzie; Ha'Motzei, Al Achilas Matzoh; Al Achilas Marror, 4 Brachos of Birkat Hamazone, the last two cups of wine, the Bracha after drinking wine. That totals 18 Brachos; when you include Birchah Ha'Shir (Bracha after Hallel), you have recited nineteen Brachos.

Editor: That we recite 18/19 Brachos at the Seder supports the view that the Seder corresponds to **תפלת שחרית**; i.e. that the Seder is a prayer for G-d to once again perform the same miracles that G-d performed during the Exodus from Egypt as a prelude to bringing on the Messianic days with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. Based on this model, the rule of **מתחיל בגנות** and **גאל ישראל** corresponds to **פסוקי דזמרה** and the closing **ברכה** corresponds to **סמיכת גאולה לתפילה**.