

Order of the Seder

✧ A Metaphoric Poem ✧

Kaddesh	We sanctify the day by reciting <i>Kiddush</i> on the first cup of wine.	קִדְּשׁ
Urchatz	We wash our hands, but do not recite a blessing of <i>al netilas yadayim</i> .	וּרְחַץ
Karpas	We eat a vegetable after it has been dipped in saltwater or vinegar.	כַּרְפָּס
Yachatz	We divide the middle matzah and save the larger piece for the <i>afikoman</i> .	יַחַץ
Maggid	We tell the narrative of the Exodus and begin <i>Hallel</i> (<i>Tehillim</i> 113–114).	מַגִּיד
Rachtzah	We wash our hands and recite the blessing of <i>al netilas yadayim</i> .	רְחַצְהָ
Motzi Matzah	We recite the blessings of <i>Hamotzi</i> and <i>al achilas matzah</i> , and eat the matzah.	מוֹצִיא מַצָּה
Maror	We dip maror in <i>charoses</i> , recite the blessing of <i>al achilas maror</i> , and eat it.	מָרֹר
Korech	We eat a sandwich of matzah and <i>maror</i> as Hillel did when the Temple stood.	כּוֹרֵךְ

Shulchan Orech	We set out the rest of the meal on the table and enjoy a traditional feast.	שֻׁלְחַן עוֹרֵךְ
Tzafun	As the last course of the meal, we eat the <i>afikoman</i> that we had hidden earlier.	צָפוֹן
Barech	We recite <i>Bircas HaMazon</i> , the Grace after Meals blessings.	בְּרַךְ
Hallel	We complete the recitation of the <i>Hallel</i> praises (<i>Tehillim</i> 115–118).	הַלֵּל
Nirtzah	We pray that Hashem has found favor with our Seder service.	נִרְצָה

On a simple, practical level, everyone readily understands what we, the Jewish people, gained when Hashem chose us as His nation and wrought the miracles that broke the shackles of our Egyptian bondage. It is therefore our obligation to acknowledge what He did for us by becoming as close to Him as humanly possible. But we cannot make that connection unless we rid ourselves of the malevolent *yetzer hara* that dwells within us, constantly seeking new ways to lead us into sin. Is it any wonder, then, that the Sages refer to the *yetzer hara* as “the leavening in the dough”?¹ Indeed, the search for and destruction of *chametz* can be taken as a metaphor for

1. *Talmud Bavli, Berachos* 17a and *Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachos* 4:2. Just as yeast and other leavening agents agitate the dough and cause it to rise, so does the *yetzer hara* agitate a person and incite him to haughtiness and sin. (See p. 32, footnote 6.)

seeking out and getting rid of the *yetzer hara* within each person. Therefore, the ideal time for us to connect to Hashem is at the Seder, after we have rid our homes of all physical *chametz*. With this in mind, we may reinterpret the succinct poem above, which the Sages of an earlier generation composed as a mnemonic to help us remember the order in which we are to perform the mitzvot of the Seder.

✧ *Poetic Allusions* ✧

EVERY PERSON WHOM Hashem has blessed with a modicum of insight and intelligence understands that our deeds are not really as pure and as righteous as they should be. We know that, to some degree, the innocence of our youth has been tarnished by the darkness of sin. Accordingly, we should begin to think of ways that will enable us to focus on our relationship with the Creator and draw closer to Him even before we begin to feel the consequences of our misdeeds. Indeed, this is the purpose of the opening poem: it addresses us as we seek to rectify our ways by teaching us to walk the path of repentance, one small step at a time. This is how it exhorts us:

Kaddesh — Sanctify yourself by refraining from partaking of or engaging in something that is technically permitted,² as the Gemara says (*Yevamos* 20a), “Sanctify yourself by restraining yourself from even those things that are permitted to you.” When you feel that you have succeeded in setting limits for yourself in what is permissible, you may proceed to the next

2. Apparently, the Alshich is suggesting that in this way a person can train himself not to succumb to his desires. Yet even if he does slip and partake of what he is trying to avoid, he will not be committing any sin.

step: *Urchatz* — Wash your hands. Utilize any strategy or method by which you might cleanse yourself of sin and bring yourself to sincere repentance. Thus, you will rid yourself of any spiritual contaminants you may have acquired. Once you have cleansed yourself of the grime of sin, you are ready to improve your entire spiritual, as well as physical, self — to exchange any questionable character traits for traits that will endear you to Hashem. You can accomplish this by minimizing your indulgence in excesses and luxuries, and adopting a simpler lifestyle.

A good place to start is your diet: *Karpas* — Eat vegetables dipped in saltwater. This means limiting yourself to a plain diet, rather than eating exotic foods. But why does the poem specifically mention the vegetable called *karpas*, instead of using the generic term *yerakos* for “vegetables,” as we find in the Four Questions? The answer is that there is a subtle lesson hiding in the Hebrew word כַּרְפָּס. Its first two letters are כ and ר,³ which, when spelled out, form the words כַּר, meaning “the palm of the hand,” and רֵשֶׁת, which means “poverty.” So while we should control our own appetites by eating simple vegetables, the names of the first two letters combine to teach us that we must extend our hand to fill the plates of the impoverished with everything they need. The last two letters are פ and ס, which are פֶּה, “mouth,” and סִמְךָ, “support.” Together, they teach us that in addition to assisting the poor with food and other creature comforts, we must support them with our mouths by speaking words of encouragement. Indeed, the Gemara tells us that one who supplies the poor with his physical needs receives six

3. The name of every Hebrew letter is also a word with an independent meaning. In the realm of *remez*, allusion, lessons are often derived from the names of the letters in a particular word.

blessings from Heaven, but one who also supports him with words receives eleven blessings.⁴

If you feel that you do not have the means to support the poor on a regular basis, the poem goes on to suggest other ways in which you can help them: *Yachatz* — Divide your food and set the larger part aside for later. That is, eat part of your food, but share part of it with the hungry;⁵ later, in the World to Come, you will “eat” the rewards of sharing your food with the less fortunate.

Once you have purified yourself and earned Heavenly merit by helping your fellow Jew in his time of need, *Maggid* — tell others these ideas. Teach them: “*Rachtzah* — Cleanse yourselves,” as you have done. By doing so, you will bring them to *teshuvah*, thereby joining the ranks of those righteous people who are not only deserving themselves, but who make others worthy as well.

You are now well on your way to serving Hashem properly, fully aware that puffed up *chametz* symbolizes the haughty *yetzer hara*. But that metaphor has a second side, that of the flat, unleavened matzah,⁶ which represents the humble *yetzer*

4. *Bava Basra* 9b.

5. See *Yeshayahu* 58:7.

6. As with the word *karpas*, the lesson can be derived from the letters of the *alef-beis*. The two words are almost identical: *מִצָּה* and *חֲמֵץ* both have a *מ* and a *צ*. They only differ in that *מִצָּה* has a *ה*, while *חֲמֵץ* has a *ח* — and the only difference between these two letters (*ה* and *ח*) is a tiny opening on the left side of the *ה*. The Gemara (*Menachos* 29b) states that this world was created with the *ה* of God’s Name (*יהוה*), while *Olam Haba* was created with the *ו*, and explains that the tiny opening on the side of the *ה* is there so that the repentant person can “return” through it to Hashem. It follows from this Gemara that the word *מִצָּה* represents repentance. In contrast, if a person holds on to his *yetzer hara* and refuses to repent, he seals up the opening of the *ה* and it becomes a *ח*. Therefore, *חֲמֵץ* represents the *yetzer hara* — called by the Sages of the Talmud *שְׂאֹר שְׂבִיעִיסָה*, *se’or she’ba’isa*, the leavening in the dough (see p. 29, footnote 1).

hatov. This is your achievement: **Motzi Matzah** — You have “brought forth” [*motzi*] the matzah, that is, the *yetzer hatov*, both yours and that of those whom you have influenced for the good.

When you have succeeded in bringing the *yetzer hatov*, in all its strength, to the forefront, you are ready for **Maror** — You immerse the *maror*, the bitter consequences of following the *yetzer hara*, in the muddy *charoses*, thereby sapping the evil inclination of its power to entice you into bitter sin. Then, **Korech** — You make a sandwich of the matzah and the *maror*; the *yetzer hatov* and the product of the *yetzer hara*. You thereby subjugate the unique strengths of your *yetzer hara* and utilize them in your service of Hashem.⁷

If you have successfully followed the procedures prescribed in this poem, you are ready for **Shulchan Orech** — the prepared feast that is **Tzafun** — hidden and stored away for you in the World to Come, for you are truly **Barech** — blessed by Hashem. Then, **Hallel** — You will recite the *Hallel* psalms of freedom, rather than the *Hallel* recited in Gehinnom.⁸ And **Nirtzah** — All that you have done, reflected as it is in your recital of *Hallel*, will have found favor before Hashem.

7. The Gemara explains the words “and you shall love Hashem your God with all of your heart” (*Devarim* 6:5) as referring to the two opposing inclinations of your heart, the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara* (*Berachos* 54a).

8. According to the Gemara, the sinners in Gehinnom praise Hashem as they thankfully accept and appreciate the spiritual cleansing provided by their punishments (*Eruvin* 19a). Their *Hallel* praise is recited in pain, while the *Hallel* of the penitents who have followed the metaphor of this poem, is recited in joy.