The Passover Seder: A Prototype of Effective Education

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THE PASSOVER SEDER: A PROTOTYPE OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEDER AND THE HAGGADAH

The Torah (Jewish Bible) commands, "And you shall tell your son (meaning:children) on the day of Passover, 'because I agreed to do the commandments of the Lord, God did for me all these miracles when I left Egypt'."¹ This verse is the source for the scriptural commandment that a person must relate to his children what occurred when the Jews were slaves in Egypt and how they were redeemed. Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon) writes, "There is a positive commandment to tell over, on the night of the 15th of Nisan, (Name of Jewish month) the miracles and wonders that were done for our forefathers in Egypt. And even if there is no child, the commandment still exists."²

The Jews are commanded each and every year to recount the story of the Exodus. There are several reasons for this commandment. First, the fact that God was watching over the Jewish people and waiting for the proper time to take them out of Egypt, culminating with the Exodus, proves a fundamental concept in Judaism called divine providence. Contrary to Aristotelian philosophy which contends that God created the world and then totally ceased any future

¹Exod. 13:8.

²Maimonides, Sefer Hamitzvos, Mitzvah: 157.
involvement in its affairs, Judaism believes in God's continuing providence.³

A second reason for the commandment to recount the Exodus is that it is of great importance that Jews remember each year how God saved them from certain doom in Egypt and instead performed the greatest miracles the world has ever known so as to rescue them.⁴ It is important that this be remembered so as to call to mind why God saved them, namely, to bring them to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.⁵ The Torah clearly states "And you should remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and I redeemed you in order that you would serve Me."⁶ This in turn leads a person to consider whether or not he in his own life is following the correct path prescribed by the Torah.

A third reason for recounting the Exodus is that through the recitation of the story, one cannot avoid being overcome with a tremendous desire to give thanks to God for that which He has done. This gratitude ultimately causes a person to be drawn closer to the service of God as an individual looks for a way of expressing his thanks to God.

The most important element in the commandment of retelling the story of the Exodus is telling the story to a

³Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah: 21.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Exod. 3:12.
⁶Deut. 16:12.
person's children. The Torah specifically directs a father to tell the story to his children in the verse previously quoted. The reason for this is that the future of Judaism always rests with the next generation. Therefore, it is imperative that the children learn at a young age not only the story itself but the significance of the Exodus from Egypt. God commanded all future generations to retell the story of the Exodus on the anniversary of the departure from Egypt. The text that is used for this purpose is called the Haggadah, which means "relating".

The Haggadah contains within it all the steps of the Passover Seder, including the text of everything that must be recited as part of the service. The Haggadah is composed of passages from the Torah and Mishna (earliest codification of Jewish oral law) along with other teachings and prayers from the period of the Tannaim.

The Passover Seder is divided into fourteen parts. During the Seder, several commandments, some of which are Biblical and others which are Rabbinic, are performed. The Biblical commandments are the retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the eating of the matzo. Among the Rabbinic obligations are the drinking of the four cups of wine, reclining during specific parts of the Seder, the eating of the bitter herb, the charoses and the karpas, (Food dishes that will be explained later in this chapter.) and the recitation of the Hallel service.
The commandment to eat matzo is clearly stated in the Torah when it says "In the evening of the night of Passover you shall eat matzo." The reason for this commandment is mentioned in the Haggadah. The Egyptians, after seeing their firstborn being killed, hurried to get the Jews out of Egypt for fear the plague would get even worse and strike the entire population. The Jews were thrust out of Egypt so fast that the dough they had put in the oven for their trip out of Egypt did not have time to rise and they were left with matzo.

The obligation to drink four cups of wine is Rabbinic in origin. There are several different reasons why there is an obligation to drink four cups. One of the reasons is that there are four phrases of redemption mentioned in the Torah in reference to the salvation from Egypt. They are: "I, God, will take you out from under the bondage of Egypt; I will save you from the work of Egypt; I will redeem you from Egypt and I will take you Jews to me as a nation." The Rabbis enacted the law of drinking the four cups of wine to correspond with these four phrases.

The eating of the bitter herb is actually rooted in

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7Exod. 12:18.

8Haggadah of Passover, based on Exod. 12:39.

9Tractate Pesachim 117b.

10Exod. 12:6-7.

11Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Pesachim, 10:5.
Biblical law as it says "the bitter herb shall be eaten". The reason for the law is mentioned in the Haggadah. In order to remember the fact that the Egyptians embittered the lives of the Jews with hard bondage, a bitter herb is eaten. However, the law applies only when there is a Paschal Lamb brought as a sacrifice in the Temple; only then is the eating of the bitter herb mandated. Nowadays when there is no temple, the Torah obligation has been suspended. Nevertheless, the Rabbis instituted the Rabbinic law that it continue to be eaten to remember how the Jews suffered.

The purpose in reclining is to demonstrate freedom. Since Passover is the holiday of Jewish independence, the Rabbis commanded that the members of the Passover Seder recline at certain points during the service to act in a wealthy and free manner.

The Passover Seder must begin after nightfall on the fifteenth day of the Jewish month of Nisan. When the men return home from synagogue, the table should already be set and the seder should be ready to begin immediately, without

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12Exod. 12:8.
13Haggadah of Passover, based on Exod. 1:14.
14Tractate Pesachim 120a.
16Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 472:1.
delay. The finest dishes and cutlery are to be used in accordance with the festive spirit of the evening and the mood of freedom and independence. Pillows are placed on the chairs to make the reclining even more comfortable and to add to the feeling of luxury that is being expressed.

The head of the household is the person who usually runs the Seder. It is therefore he who is given the Seder plate. The Seder plate has on it the different foods that are required during the Seder. Also, three whole matzos are placed before the leader of the Seder as they too will be needed during the course of the evening.

At most Seders, the service begins by the singing of a song that lists the fourteen different steps of the Seder that will be performed throughout the evening. This is followed by the first step of the Seder called Kadesh, which means sanctification. The first of the eventual four cups of wine is filled and special blessings sanctifying God and the holiday are recited. The wine is then drunk in a reclining position.

Step two of the Seder is Urchatz, which means washing the hands. Jewish law mandates washing the hands in certain situations during a meal. One of these occurs when a person

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Mishna Brura, Ibid., 7.
21 Ibid., 2.
eats a fruit or vegetable that has been dipped in water or certain other liquids. Since the following step involves the dipping of a piece of celery in saltwater, each member of the Seder must wash his hands according to ritual law.²²

As just mentioned, the next act performed at the Seder is the dipping of a piece of celery in saltwater.²³ This is known as Karpas. It should be noted that there are varying customs as to what vegetable is actually used. For example, some use parsley and others potatoes.²⁴ The dipping of the vegetable was commanded by the Rabbis in order to attract the curiosity of the children. This unusual behavior will hopefully prod the child not only to ask questions about this abnormal behavior but about all the other unusual actions and rituals being performed throughout the evening.²⁵ The fact that the vegetable is dipped specifically in saltwater was prescribed in order to remind the members of the Seder about the tears and suffering that the Jews endured in Egypt.

Step four in the Seder is Yachatz, which means to break in half. The middle of the three matzos is taken and broken in half. The bigger piece is put away for use at a later step in the Seder called Zafon. The smaller of the pieces

²²Ibid., 5.
²³Ibid.
²⁴Ibid.
²⁵Tractate Pesachim 114b.
is put back between the two other matzos for use at the time of the Motzie Matzo, also a later step in the Seder.\textsuperscript{26} The matzo to be used for the Zafon is actually hidden away. This is done in order to prompt the children to ask about this unusual action of hiding food during a meal. The reason a matzo is broken in half is in order to recite the Haggadah in the proper spirit. The story of the Exodus must be told in front of a broken piece of matzo, resembling what a poor man gets to eat, rather than a whole piece of matzo. This connotes the state of slavery prior to the Exodus.

Immediately after Yachatz, the second cup of wine is poured. This is done at this point in order to arouse the curiosity of the children regarding the unusual behavior of drinking two cups of wine before the meal.\textsuperscript{27} The Rabbis wanted the children to start asking questions as soon as possible so as to arrive at the essential questions of the evening, those specifically relating to the story of the Exodus.\textsuperscript{28}

The next step is Magid, which means to tell. As the name implies, it is now that the recitation of the story of the slavery in Egypt and the Exodus from Egypt is begun. Passages from the Bible, the Mishna, Psalms and general Tannaitic teachings pertaining to the story of the Jews in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26}Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 473:6.
\item \textsuperscript{27}Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, Ibid., :7.
\item \textsuperscript{28}Mishna Brura, Ibid., 69.
\end{itemize}
bondage are recited. Many songs praising God are sung during Magid. At the end of Magid, the second of the four cups of wine is drunk.²⁹

Rachsa, which means washing the hands, is the next part of the Seder.³⁰ The Rabbis enacted a law requiring people to wash their hands to purify themselves before reciting the blessing over the bread or matzo and partaking of these foods, since they are considered to be the most important part of the meal.³¹ In the following step, matzo will be eaten, therefore the hands are washed now.

The next step is Motzie Matzo, which means eating the matzo. This is one of the most important parts of the Seder because a Biblical commandment is performed by eating the matzo. Pieces of both the top matzo and the broken middle matzo are distributed to all the members of the Seder following the blessings over the matzo. The pieces of matzo are eaten while the person reclines.³²

The following step is Maror, which means bitter herb. A piece of bitter herb is taken by all the members of the Seder and dipped into charoses.³³ Charoses is a food dish made up of several different ingredients. Typically, it

²⁹Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 474:1.
³⁰Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 475:1.
³¹Mishna Brura, 158:1.
³²Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 475:1.
³³Ibid.
consists of crushed apples, chopped nuts, red wine and cinnamon. The viscous nature of charoses is to remind the people at the Seder about the mortar that the Jews utilized in making bricks in Egypt.\(^{34}\) The red wine is to give the charoses the look of blood and thereby cause the participants of the seder to recall the hard, crushing work the Jews had to suffer.\(^{35}\) The people are to think about the bitter life the Jews endured in Egypt while they are eating the maror.\(^{36}\)

The step that follows is called Korech, which means sandwich. A piece from the bottom matzo is distributed to the members of the Seder along with more maror that has been dipped in charoses. The bitter herb and the charoses are placed on the matzo to make a sandwich.\(^{37}\) As the Haggadah states, the eating of this sandwich is in order to fulfill the opinion of the sage Hillel who ruled that the maror and matzo had to be eaten simultaneously.

The tenth step is the Shulchan Orech, or festive meal.\(^{38}\) At this point in the Seder the main holiday meal is served.

Following the meal, the next step is Zafon, which means

\(^{34}\text{Tractate Pesachim 116a.}\)

\(^{35}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{36}\text{Haggadah of Passover.}\)

\(^{37}\text{Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 475:1.}\)

\(^{38}\text{Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 477:1.}\)
hidden. This is because the larger of the two broken pieces of the middle matzo (Yachatz) which earlier had been hidden away, is now eaten.\textsuperscript{39} This step is also called by another name, that being Afikomen, which means dessert. It is so named, because after the eating of this piece of matzo, no other food may be eaten the rest of the night, in order that the taste of the matzo remain in one's mouth.\textsuperscript{40} Consequently, since it is the last food of the meal, the title of dessert is appropriate. The afikomen matzo is symbolic of the Paschal sacrifice that was brought at the time of the temple. The sacrificial meat from that offering was eaten at the end of the festive meal; therefore, this matzo is also eaten after the meal.\textsuperscript{41} This is also the reason why the bigger piece of the middle matzo was saved for this occasion because it represents this important sacrifice.

Barech, or grace after the meal, follows next. God is thanked for the food that has just been eaten. After the recitation of grace, the third of the four cups of wine is drunk.\textsuperscript{42}

Hallel, which means praise, is the second to last step in the Passover service. Many psalms praising God are

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 478:1.

\textsuperscript{41} Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 477:1.

\textsuperscript{42} Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 479:1.
recited at this point in the Seder. Many of the praises deal with the miracles and wonders that God performed for the Jews as they left Egypt. After the Hallel, the fourth cup of wine is drunk.\textsuperscript{43}

The final step of the Seder is Nirzah, which means accepted. As the conclusion of the Seder draws near, we are confident that God has been pleased with our Passover service and has accepted it. Additional prayers praising the greatness of God are also sung.

After the Seder, Jewish Law dictates that one involve himself with additional study of the Exodus until he or she feels too tired to continue anymore.\textsuperscript{44} This emphasizes the paramount importance of recalling the events of the exodus on this first night of Passover.

\textsuperscript{43}Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 480:1.

\textsuperscript{44}Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 481:2.
CHAPTER 2

DESCRIPTION OF EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PASSOVER SEDER

The main educational objective of the Passover Seder is to fulfil the Torah commandment of "And you shall tell your son (meaning: children) the story of the Exodus"\(^1\). The children at the seder, and for that matter the adults as well, must conclude the evening with a greater knowledge and understanding of what occurred to the Jews in Egypt.\(^2\) However, the mere repetition of the story of what happened over three thousand years ago is far from what the Rabbis wanted everyone to attain from their Seder experience.

In the Haggadah itself it says, "In every generation, each person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt." Thus, part of the educational objective of the Seder is for each member of the Seder to actually live and feel as if he or she were there. The Seder was never meant to be a retelling of some historical facts which occurred many thousands of years ago. Rather, it is supposed to be an opportunity for Jews the world over to imagine being part of the slavery in Egypt and to experience the exhilarating feelings of freedom and independence. Maimonides had a

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\(^1\)Exod. 13:8.

\(^2\)Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah: 21.
slightly different version of the above quoted text from the Haggadah. His text reads, "In every generation, each person is obligated to demonstrate himself as if he, himself, had presently left the slavery in Egypt."  Maimonides' text is basically the same as the other text with one significant difference. Whereas the first text directs the person to feel as if he was a slave and was freed, this second text exhorts a person to actually act out physically the events of the Exodus. According to either text, a critical objective of the Seder is being enunciated. The participants must become living members of this historical event.

This objective is critical to one of the major reasons why we are commanded in the first place to recount this story. We are to see the hand of God at work in our own lives and realize that God continues to provide for us, albeit not in such a supernatural way. We are to feel love, awe and gratitude towards Him, which will in turn lead us to greater service of the Almighty. Only through really experiencing the Exodus and thinking we were there, can we come to feel and appreciate the freedom that we now have. Parallel objectives are therefore, for all the members of the Seder to first experience slavery and then to feel freedom.

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⁴Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah: 21.
Another important objective is for the children to take an active role in the learning process. The Rabbis felt that only through asking questions and inquiring for reasons and explanations for the actions at the Seder would the children have a productive and enjoyable learning experience. Also, children must learn to want to ask questions and expect to have answers given to their questions. Learning to ask questions is most important. The Rabbis say "an embarrassed person cannot learn." In other words, if a student is always afraid to ask questions, countless unclear points will remain cloudy in his mind. The Rabbis sought to habituate children to ask questions and expect to have their questions immediately answered, thereby encouraging them to continue to do so in the future.

Other objectives of the Seder involve the educators who are present. The Rabbis wished to convey a critical fact to all teachers and particularly to fathers, who much of the time are teachers of their children. Since there are so many types of people in the world, it is very important that each student or child be taught according to his or her abilities. King Solomon taught us "Teach a child according to his ways." The successful dissemination of Torah to the next generation can only be accomplished if this most important aspect of teaching is heeded. The Torah refers to

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5Tractate Avos, 2:5.
four different types of children and explains how each of them should be taught. The Rabbis specifically incorporated these verses from the Torah into the service of the Passover Seder, in order to show all instructors of students this important principle.

As mentioned above, an important objective of the Seder is to teach the children to want to inquire. However, sometimes a teacher comes along who hampers the child’s growth or even extinguishes his desire to inquire forever. The Rabbis teach us "A teacher must not be too strict with his students." Unfortunately, many times teachers become frustrated with students’ questions or embarrass a student for asking relatively foolish questions. The Rabbis greatly desired that this never occur. A child’s losing his desire to learn the Torah is an eternal disaster and must be avoided. A further objective of the Seder is to convey this message.

In summation, the objectives of the Seder focus on the teachers as well as the students. By the conclusion of the Seder, the Rabbis wanted the parents to have become better educators of their children. In addition, they wanted the children not only to know the facts of the story of the Exodus, but, more importantly, to have developed a greater desire and love for the study of Torah, which is so essential.

"Tractate Avos, 2:5."
CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF THE METHODS EMPLOYED TO ACHIEVE THE EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PASSOVER SEDER

The Rabbis used many different methods of teaching to achieve their educational objectives for the Passover Seder. The most widely used method is the stimulation of the various senses. The Rabbis obtained this idea from the Torah itself. In the Haggadah it states, "The story of the Exodus should be told at a time that the matzo and the bitter herb are laid out in front of you." This is derived from one of the verses in the Torah.¹ The Torah clearly desires that the participants of the Seder visualize what is being spoken about in the Haggadah. This brings the story to life and increases the impact of the written text immeasurably. The Rabbis then expanded on this concept throughout the different steps of the Seder.

In actuality, the Rabbis introduce some sensory aids even before the formal Seder begins. The use of one's fanciest dishes for the Seder was mandated by the Rabbis in order to add meaning to the theme of the evening, Jewish freedom.² The Rabbis instituted several laws at the Seder

¹Mechilta, Parshas Bo:17.
²Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 472:2.
to demonstrate and give a feeling of freedom to the Seder participants. Thus, there is a requirement that at certain points during the Seder, specifically during the drinking of the four cups of wine and the eating of the matzo, the members of the Seder recline while eating or drinking.\(^3\) Pillows are placed on everyone’s chair to make the reclining all the more lavish, comfortable and freedom feeling.\(^4\)

There are several special laws for Kadesh, the first step of the Seder. One rule is the beverage should preferably be red wine.\(^5\) The reason being, to remember the Jewish babies that were slaughtered by Pharaoh.\(^6\) Another law is that the head of the household should not fill anyone else’s glass of wine and, in fact, someone else should fill up his glass.\(^7\) The reasoning behind this action is once again to convey the idea of being honored as a free man.\(^8\) The head of the house, who is the leader of the meal, is given this special honor. There is a custom in many homes that each person pours the cup for someone else, so that everyone, not just the head of the household, has the wine poured for them, giving all the participants at the Seder

\(^3\)Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 473:2, 475:1, 477:1.

\(^4\)Mishna Brura, 472:7.

\(^5\)Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 472:11.

\(^6\)Mishna Brura, 472:38.

\(^7\)Rama, 473:1.

\(^8\)Ibid.
this feeling of honor and freedom.

During the third step of the Seder, Karpas, a vegetable is dipped into saltwater. Saltwater is used to remind everyone of the tears that the Jews shed in Egypt during their bitter slavery.

Several forms of educational media are used during the recitation of the Magid. During the retelling of the ten plagues, a little bit of wine is emptied from each participant’s wine cup utilizing the person’s index finger (there are varying customs as to which finger). The bit of wine is emptied from each cup to show that what occurred to the Egyptians is only a "drop" in comparison to the "full cup" of retribution that will be poured upon the doers of evil in the Messianic era. The index finger is used as an allusion to the verse "It is the finger of God", proclaimed by the Egyptian magicians after seeing the third plague of the lice. When the part of the Magid which describes the reasons for the commandment to eat the Paschal lamb, matzo and maror is read, the foods are lifted or pointed to as the explanation about them is being read. Also, as the paragraph of "This is the bread of affliction"

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9Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 473:6.

10Rama, 473:7.

11Exod. 8:15.

is being read, the matzo is lifted.\textsuperscript{13}

As mentioned in the last chapter, Maimonides has a different version of the text of the Haggadah, as regards one sentence. According to his version, the person must actually act out in a physical manner that he is leaving Egypt.\textsuperscript{14} For this reason, in many Sephardic communities where the version of Maimonides is read, members of the Seder place the matzo in a bag and put it on their shoulders and walk around the table as if they are leaving Egypt. This is in commemoration of the verse "And they put the remnants of the Passover meal on their shoulders."\textsuperscript{15}

The Motzie Matzo step also uses symbolism. First of all, it has the same symbolism that is used in all Sabbath and Holiday meals, that being the two loaves or two matzos.\textsuperscript{16} In the desert, the manna fell from heaven every day so that the Jews would have food to eat. However, on Saturday, the Sabbath, and on holidays, no manna fell as God had declared the seventh day of the week and the holidays to be days of rest. Instead, a double portion fell on Friday and the day before the holiday, so that the people would have food for the next day too.\textsuperscript{17} To recall this event, on

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{14}Maimonides, Hilchos Chametz U'Matzo, 7:6.

\textsuperscript{15}Exod. 12:34.

\textsuperscript{16}Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 274:1.

\textsuperscript{17}Tractate Shabbos 117b.
every Sabbath and holiday two loaves or two matzos are used at the festive meals. In addition, God caused dew to come onto the ground before the manna fell to protect it, and more dew fell after the manna had fallen to cover the food. Consequently, Jews have the custom of placing their double loaves or matzos on top of something like a cutting board, and to cover it with a special cover.\textsuperscript{18} The night of the Seder is no exception to this rule and these remembrances of the manna are carried out completely. At the Seder, one of the matzos consumed in the Motzie Matzo is the middle, broken piece. This is to commemorate the fact that just as a poor person or slave usually has only scraps and morsels of food to eat, similarly we eat a broken piece of food to remember the affliction of our forefathers.\textsuperscript{19}

The next step is Maror. The eating of the bitter herb is to recall the bitter life the Jews had in Egypt.\textsuperscript{20} This is acted out by the eating of the bitter herb. Before eating the bitter herb, it is dipped into a food called charoses.\textsuperscript{21} This food was described in chapter one. The Talmud explains all the different ingredients that go into maror and charoses and how they represent different aspects

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Shulchan Aruch}, Orach Chayim, 271:9.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Kolbo.
\item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{Haggadah of Passover}.
\item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Shulchan Aruch}, Orach Chayim, 475:1.
\end{itemize}
of the slavery in Egypt.²² Once again, the Rabbis tried to bring the written text to life and to give the participants of the Seder a real sense of feeling and focus. The step following the festive meal is called the Afikomen or Zafon.²³ This step commemorates the eating of the Paschal lamb sacrifice.²⁴ That sacrifice had to be eaten by midnight.²⁵ Therefore the law is that the Afikomen likewise is to be eaten by midnight.²⁶ Also, just as the Paschal lamb was to be the last thing eaten on the night of Passover, similarly, nothing is to be eaten following the Afikomen.²⁷ Thus, the Rabbis felt that to make the maximum impression upon the Seder participants, they should live that experience to the fullest.

The Torah states that the night of Passover is "A night of watching", which means that God displays an extra special level of protection and gives salvation to the Jews on this night.²⁸ In keeping with this concept, the Rabbis ruled that immediately following the grace after meals, the front door is opened to show that the members of the Seder have no

²²Tractate Pesachim 116a.
²³Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 477:1.
²⁴Ibid.
²⁵Tractate Pesachim 120b.
²⁶Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 477:1.
²⁷Ibid., 478:1.
²⁸Exod. 12:42.
fear of the outside world and are secure in the knowledge that God will protect them from all evil.\(^{29}\)

The Rabbis employed other educational techniques at the Seder, as well. The Sages believed that the maximum amount of learning could be generated through a verbally interactive learning experience. They were greatly opposed to just lecturing to the students and preferred dialogue whenever possible. During the Seder we see these ideas employed. The numerous changes in behavior from the norm during the course of the Seder arouse the curiosity of the children to ask questions that will eventually lead to discussion about the Exodus.\(^{30}\) For this reason, the law is that nuts and other goodies are distributed to the children before the meal begins.\(^{31}\) The Seder plate, with all the foods on it, is moved off the table right at the beginning of *Magid*.\(^{32}\) Also, the second cup of wine is poured before the commencement of *Magid*.\(^{33}\) The child sees these unusual behaviors and is prompted to start asking questions. The Rabbis in fact composed the text for the initial four questions the children are to ask. This is not to say that the child shouldn’t ask other questions. On the contrary,

\(^{29}\) Rama, 480:1.

\(^{30}\) Mishna Brura, 472:50.

\(^{31}\) Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 472:16.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 473:6.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.,:7.
it is highly encouraged. Rather, there is something unique about these four particular questions which led the Rabbis to establish them as an integral part of the Haggadah text for young and old alike. That is, they focus upon the internal contradiction of the Seder, the intermingling of freedom and bondage. On the one hand, there are acts of the wealthy such as the dippings and the reclining. Yet, there are also actions of the poor, such as eating bitter herbs and eating the matzo, the poor man's bread.34 The Avadim Hayenu paragraph that immediately follows the four questions addresses this contradiction. The explanation is that the Jews at the beginning of the night of the fifteenth of Nisan were, as the Haggadah points out, "slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt". However, by the end of the night, the Haggadah continues, "God had taken us out of there". Thus, in a single night the Jews went from being slaves to being free men. These two situations are commemorated every year on the night of 15th of Nisan.

Another educational point utilized by the Rabbis at the Seder is the ability to recognize the limitations of the students. The pupils at the Seder for the most part are little children for whom staying up late is difficult. Therefore, several rules were enacted by the Rabbis to keep the children from falling asleep too early. The Seder is

supposed to start immediately after the adults return from synagogue. Nuts and sweets are to be handed out to the children to help keep them awake. The children are given their part in the Seder. They have the opportunity to get up in front of everyone and recite the Ma Nishtana, the four questions referred to above. The Ma Nishtana is placed toward the beginning of the Magid after the first few steps are performed, while even the smallest children are still alert. The dipping of the celery, for example, is done specifically right before Magid to provoke the child's curiosity. In many homes, the Afikomen is hidden by the head of the household and the child has to try to find it. This game also serves as a vehicle for keeping the child awake.

The Rabbis also used mnemonic aids in order to facilitate the ability to remember information. The Haggadah lists the ten plagues and then cites a statement made by Rabbi Yehuda. He says "Desach, Adash B'Achav". In Hebrew, these three words are made up of a grand total of ten letters. Each letter corresponds to one of the ten plagues. The commentators explain that Rabbi Yehuda made up this formula in order to follow the principle set forth by the Rabbis that a person should always teach what he has

35Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 472:1.
36Tractate Pesachim 108b.
learned in a shorter version.\textsuperscript{37} This is done to make it easier for the students to remember the material being studied.\textsuperscript{38} In fact, this type of mnemonic aid is used many times in the Talmud in order to facilitate the memorization of the material by the student studying the Talmud.

One of the more critical educational principles taught in the Haggadah is how a teacher must vary his teaching methods to meet the needs of each student. The Haggadah tells us about the four classic sons. They are: the wise son, the wicked son, the simple son and the son who does not know even how to ask a question. These four sons represent all the different types of children and students that fathers and teachers will encounter. The sources for these four sons are biblical verses. The Torah says, "In the future when your son asks 'what are these laws, statutes and judgments that God commanded you'?" This is the source for the wise son.\textsuperscript{39} The Torah alludes to the wicked son in the verse which says, "And when your son asks 'what is this service of yours'?"\textsuperscript{40} The simple son's source is "In the future when your son asks 'what is this'?"\textsuperscript{41} The son who does not know how to ask is alluded to in the verse which

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 3b.
\textsuperscript{38}Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki).
\textsuperscript{39}Deut. 6:20.
\textsuperscript{40}Exod. 12:26.
\textsuperscript{41}Exod. 13:8.
states "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'This is because of what the Lord did to me when I came out of Egypt.'"  

The commentators explain how each verse refers to the respective son. The first verse refers to the wise son since he has the understanding to divide the commandments into categories.  

The Haggadah itself explains that the second verse refers to the wicked son since he says "service of yours" which implies that he is excluding himself from the service. The wise son is asking in a way that shows he desires knowledge. The wicked son, however is telling you that he has all the answers. His question is purely rhetorical, as if to say, "What good is all this to you?"  

The third verse refers to the simple son as can be seen by the nature of his question, a very simple "What is this?" However, it should be pointed out that not all commentators understand the appellation of simple in a derogatory way but rather as an example of a person who has an unintellectual faith in God. He is a God-fearing person, sincere in his quest for knowledge, without any taint of antagonism in his question.  

The fourth verse clearly deals with the son who does not know how to ask as the verse does not contain a

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42 Ibid.  
43 Abarbanel, 42.  
44 Ibid., 46.  
question but rather a statement initiated by the father to his child about the Exodus.

The Haggadah derives from the Torah a different answer to each of the son's questions. This clearly shows the idea that a teacher must be prepared and ready to give an answer in accordance with the student's abilities and understanding. And, through the answers given, additional educational principles are realized.

The answer given to the wise son is "You must tell him all the detailed regulations of the Pesach; for instance, that we do not partake of a desert after eating the paschal lamb." The Abarbanel asks why the Haggadah doesn't answer the question of the wise son with the answer given it in the Torah, "And you will tell your son, we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and God took us out of Egypt with a strong hand, and performed signs and wonders?" The Torah's answer is to the point, in that it explains what the commandments are for, whereas the one given in the Haggadah doesn't appear to be. The Abarbanel explains that the answer given in the Torah is definitely appropriate for the wise son, however it is only the beginning of the response. Rather, since it is obvious that the wise son is proud of his ability to categorize all the different types of commandments, the father must continue to convey more and more information until the very last law of the evening,

"Deut. 6:21."
that "It is forbidden to eat after the consumption of the paschal lamb". In this manner, the father shows the wise son that just because he has attained an ability to understand one facet of the laws of Passover doesn’t mean he has reached his full potential, for there is a lot more to be learned and mastered. It is critical for a student with high intellect to understand that even after complex material has been understood, there is always more to learn. Granted, that the achievements that have been made are noteworthy, nevertheless, complacency in knowledge is not something the Rabbis wished students to have. Rather, continued pursuit of knowledge of Torah is what must occur."

The answer in the Haggadah to the wicked son’s question is "You should set his teeth on edge, and say to him: 'It is because of this that God did so for me when I went out of Egypt.' For me, but not for him. Had he been there he would not have been redeemed." The Abarbanel again questions why the Haggadah does not use the answer given to the wicked son in the Torah. The Torah says "And you will say, It is the sacrifice of Pesach to God Who passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt when He smote Egypt, and saved our houses". The verse the Haggadah does direct to the wicked son is the same verse the father tells the son who

47Abarbanel, 43.

48Exod. 12:27.
does not know how to ask, so why use it for the wicked son also? Again the Abarbanel explains that the verse used in the Torah for the wicked son is certainly appropriate. But the verse used in the Haggadah additionally shows the father's displeasure with the attitude of his son." Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the father responds by saying "This that God did so for me" to show his great conviction for what the laws of God mean to him. He is to show the joy and satisfaction he finds in fulfilling the mitzvos all the more firmly and decisively in the face of his son's skepticism, and he is to state his certainty and faith all the more firmly and clearly in the face of his son's disbelief. A father and teacher must try to combat an arrogant attitude and a student who doesn't really want to learn, but would rather mock the studies. One must show the student your dissatisfaction with him but at the same time lay the seeds for the possible future cultivation of his interest. If the student sees the love, belief and conviction the teacher has for what's being studied, then there is that chance that the student will change his ways.  

The answer to the simple son is "God took us out of

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49 Abarbanel, 47.

Egypt, from the house of slaves, by strength of hand." The simple son is given a rather basic response to his question. This is what he is intellectually able to comprehend. There is no need for elaborating, unlike the more sophisticated responses that were given to the first two sons. Maimonides says all the answers given should be in accordance with the child's ability to understand. The important lesson in the Haggadah is that every child must be taught. It is the manner of teaching which must be adjusted to fit the child's needs. Just because a child wasn't blessed with the highest intellect doesn't mean that he should be neglected. Rather every child-student is important and every child-student must learn about the basic principles of Judaism.

This theme is carried out further by the child who does not know how to ask. A teacher must try to excite a student to ask. Just because a student lacks the ability or courage to open his mouth and ask doesn't mean he should be deprived of an education. Rather, more effort must be employed by the teacher. The teacher, seeing that the student is not involving himself in the class, must start the discussion.

The Haggadah teaches the important concept of answering the questions of one's pupils and children. The evening of

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51 Exod. 13:14.

52 Abarbanel, 49.

53 Maimonides, Hilchos Chametz U'Matzo, 7:2.
Passover, which is the prototype for education throughout the year, goes out of its way to get the children to ask questions. If answers would not be given or if questions would be met with disapproval and lack of interest, the child’s desire to ask in the future would be quelled. Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains,

In what way is man’s superiority over beast manifest? It would not be wrong to say: ‘Man questions.’ Undoubtedly, the very first reaction of a newborn child to the sight of the world is: ‘What is this?’ The human spirit seeks to understand what is happening around it and the question, ‘What is this?’ arises in the child’s heart even before his mouth can articulate the words. If only we could read the expression in his eyes, we could understand the query in his mind. Questioning sums up the entire nature of the child’s soul, and only because his soul continues to ask incessantly, does the child learn so much in his first few years.

Later, when the child’s mouth can serve his soul and he continues to ask and ask untiringly, ‘What is this?’ we must not tire of answering. We must look upon his thirst for knowledge as a healthy sign and devote the same willingness and painstaking care with which we satisfy our child’s hunger for food, to quenching their thirst for knowledge, thus providing them with mental nourishment.

Let us not imagine that when the child begins to attend school, answering his questions will become the province of the teacher, not the parent. Let us, rather, enter the school, where the child’s soul is nurtured. It is easy to identify those children who received answers at home to their childish questions, who did not raise the question: ‘What is this?’ in vain, whose fathers and especially whose mothers chatted with their children, satisfied their thirst for knowledge and properly cultivated their minds. These are the fortunate ones! While other women delighted in idle gossip, or wasted time at the theater and at parties, the mothers of these children derived satisfaction from the company of their children, and occupied the time being their teachers and educators.

Accordingly, we should not feel annoyed when a child asks questions, even when he asks the same questions repeatedly and frequently. We must not answer him reprovingly and we must take care to answer him
correctly, not to distort reality with fairy tales and foolish fantasies... At the Seder, the son asks: 'What is this?' At that moment, he will hear the answers from his father, who is joyfully performing the deeds. At that moment, the son will learn the truths and facts to which these commandments testify.\textsuperscript{54}

An analysis of the words of Rabbi Hirsch clearly reveal the concept of the importance of dealing seriously with the questions of one's children. However, we must take care to contemplate how Rabbi Hirsch places the onus of teaching one's children not only upon the father but also upon the mother. Indeed, King Solomon states in Proverbs "Listen my son to the chastisement of your father and do not turn away from the teachings of your mother."\textsuperscript{55} The mother is the parent who normally spends the most time with the children during the all important formative years. Jewish mothers are exhorted to utilize this opportunity to further the educational development of their children.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54}Hirsch, \textit{The Hirsch Haggadah}, 60-62.

\textsuperscript{55}Prov. 1:8.

\textsuperscript{56}Hirsch, \textit{The Hirsch Haggadah}, 61.
CHAPTER 4

APPLYING THE METHODS OF THE PASSOVER SEDER IN THE MODERN CLASSROOM

How we teach in our classrooms today could well be influenced by the educational principles used in the Passover Seder. First and foremost, the Rabbis were greatly opposed to the concept of simply lecturing to the students, in which the students for the most part have a very passive role. Throughout the Seder, actions are done to motivate the child to take a more active role in the events that are transpiring before their eyes. If teachers are to follow the lead of the Jewish sages, then educators must do as much as they can to get their students involved in the learning situation. The Passover Seder is a good model for how this can be accomplished.

The most widely used technique for education throughout the Passover Seder is the stimulation of the various senses. Over and over again, the Rabbis utilized the idea of bringing to life the subject that was being discussed in the text. The Rabbis set up the Seder in a way that the participants are actually able to recreate what happened by use of symbolism, visual and other sensory aids.

It would seem very appropriate in today's classrooms to
adopt the methods the Rabbis used in the Seder. A large body of the research of today suggests that using pictures in combination with text generally increases recall.¹

Today, through the use of television, videos and computers, there are many new and innovative ways to bring to life the material that is being studied. There are countless ways teachers can find to disseminate material in a more interesting and entertaining way that will make the whole learning situation that much more productive. The common denominator most important to remember is to follow the lead of the Rabbis and take the time to think how to teach the class in a more interesting way. It should be pointed out, that the physical preparations for the Seder take a very long time and involve a lot of effort. Teachers too must realize that to teach successfully, a lot of time and effort must go into the preparation of the class.² The Rabbis teach us, "According to the pain is the reward."³

Having the students act out what is being learned is clearly an idea that the Rabbis felt was useful. In today's classroom, the Role Playing Model can help students increase their abilities to recognize their own and other people's


³Tractate Avos 5:23.
feelings, they can acquire new behaviors for handling previously difficult situations, and they can improve their problem-solving skills."  

The Torah refers to a person’s students as his children. Quite obviously, there is a clear message being relayed. A teacher must develop the feelings and care that he has for his own child and transfer those same feelings to his students. Just as a caring father would do all that is in his power to educate his own children, he must be ready to make those same sacrifices for his students. If this be the attitude of a teacher, then he will devote the time to prepare a class that will be more and more interesting. He will take the time to answer all the questions that are asked, and not make the student feel guilty for asking too much. Most importantly, he will not only direct his teaching toward those students who are blessed with the "wise son’s" capabilities but he will also help the "simple son" students that he has and even the slower, less talented students that don’t even raise their hands to ask questions in the class.

An important prerequisite to being a good teacher is to master the subject matter." The Torah says "And you shall

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*Sifre to Deut. 6:7.

*Tractate Makkos 10a.*
are displayed during this evening. Rules for proper teacher
conduct can also be found throughout the Seder.

A study of the Seder clearly shows how important is the
idea of bringing to life the written text. When the
Haggadah mentions matzo or the bitter herb, that object is
pointed to and shown to all the participants. When the
Haggadah mentions the bitter life the Jews had in Egypt,
everyone eats the bitter herb to try to experience those
bitter feelings. Since it is the night which commemorates
freedom, the participants are surrounded with the most
expensive cutlery and dishes while reclining on pillows and
having their wine poured for them.

The concept of not just lecturing but involving the
students in dialogue is an essential part of the Seder. The
 Ма Nishtana paragraph which is recited by the smallest child
at the Seder, asks the four most important questions of the
evening. The unusual extra dippings of food is done to
prompt the children’s curiosity to ask questions.

Altering the techniques used to teach a particular
student, based on the individual student’s needs, is a Torah
principle of great importance used in the Seder. The four
sons which represent four different types of students,
conveys this invaluable lesson. Also, the concept of taking
the time to answer one’s student’s questions and taking
their questions seriously is an idea conveyed throughout the
Seder.
the abilities and personalities of our students. Again, the idea of a father son relationship can be utilized. Just like a father knows the characteristics and make up of his son, both his strengths and his weaknesses, so a teacher must learn the same about his students.\(^{12}\)

Most important, perhaps of all the educational principles is the crucial role that parents play in the child's education. It is no coincidence that the Passover Seder is conducted at home rather than in the classroom. The home is where a child's education must begin. Rabbi Hirsch explains,

> The commandment of education devolves upon the father, whom God has endowed with the necessary abilities. Where a father neglects this duty, no other means can compensate. All the textbooks, all the teaching aids that have been invented as surrogates for the consecration of our youth in the home, will be of no avail. Not even the best teachers and schools can take the place of the Passover Seder table at which the child observes him in solemn, joyful fulfillment of the commandments, at which he allows him to perform these commandments with his own hands, saying to him: Look! 'It is because of this service that God acted for me when I came forth out of Egypt'.\(^{13}\)

There are many other teaching techniques that can be learned from the Seder. A teacher must be aware of the limitations of his students from various viewpoints, not only the cognitive one. The Rabbis enacted laws to ensure


\(^{13}\)Hirsch, *The Hirsch Haggadah*, 87.
the earliest possible starting time of the Seder. Also, sweets are handed out to the children. These rules were established to ensure that the children stay awake for the Seder. In today's classroom, considering the needs of the students in order that they be able to cope with the learning situation is advisable. For example, an effective teacher will attempt to liven up material that may have a tendency to bore the students. The giving of candy, sweets and prizes, similar to the Seder, is a very effective method of keeping children attentive, excited and awake. 14 Many students find it difficult pay attention past the time of the scheduled end of the class. This must be considered by teachers who feel the necessity to finish their lesson even though it requires continuing beyond the class period.

Following the lead of the sages, teachers should try to condense and simplify the material as much as possible in order to facilitate the processing of all the information by the students. This should be done regardless how great the intelligence level of the students.

Probably the most important message conveyed through the course of the Seder is how important parents are to the educational growth of their children. The bottom line is that all the lessons given by teachers cannot replace the moment a child actually sees his father praising God,

14 Biehler and Snowman, 540.
reciting the Haggadah and living the Exodus. Teachers must be aware of the fact that when all is said and done, the main teaching comes from the examples and teaching received at home. Parents and teachers must try to work together to create the best possible learning experience for the pupil.

As we have seen, the Passover Seder is indeed filled with many effective methods of teaching. We should endeavor to employ the wisdom of the Torah and the Jewish Sages wherever possible to help us improve our own classrooms.

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16 Orlowek, 163.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Passover Holiday commemorates the Jewish People's liberation from bondage in Egypt. God commanded the Jews to retell the story of the slavery in Egypt and the following redemption each and every year on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, which is the anniversary of the departure from Egypt. The story is told during the Passover Seder using a text called the Haggadah. Each and every Jew is to read and understand the story. Most important, however, is the Biblical requirement that the children be taught the story.

The Rabbis, however, did not simply want the facts of the story to be told. Rather, they wanted the participants at the Seder to try to experience the feelings the Jewish people had as slaves and then as free men. They wanted the members of the Seder to leave the evening with a feeling of gratitude to God for the good he has bestowed upon his people.

The Seder therefore becomes a dynamic classroom with the Haggadah as the textbook. In addition, the entire Seder process becomes a prototype of effective education. Many of the favorite teaching techniques of the Torah and the Rabbis
are displayed during this evening. Rules for proper teacher conduct can also be found throughout the Seder.

A study of the Seder clearly shows how important is the idea of bringing to life the written text. When the Haggadah mentions matzo or the bitter herb, that object is pointed to and shown to all the participants. When the Haggadah mentions the bitter life the Jews had in Egypt, everyone eats the bitter herb to try to experience those bitter feelings. Since it is the night which commemorates freedom, the participants are surrounded with the most expensive cutlery and dishes while reclining on pillows and having their wine poured for them.

The concept of not just lecturing but involving the students in dialogue is an essential part of the Seder. The Ma Nishtana paragraph which is recited by the smallest child at the Seder, asks the four most important questions of the evening. The unusual extra dippings of food is done to prompt the children’s curiosity to ask questions.

Altering the techniques used to teach a particular student, based on the individual student’s needs, is a Torah principle of great importance used in the Seder. The four sons which represent four different types of students, conveys this invaluable lesson. Also, the concept of taking the time to answer one’s student’s questions and taking their questions seriously is an idea conveyed throughout the Seder.
Perhaps the most important educational point learned from the Seder is how crucial is the classroom in the home. The Seder is performed at home and not at school to teach us the critical role parents play in the education of their children.

Judaism places an enormous stress on education. The study and learning of Torah is essential for the continuation of the religion. While many principles of Jewish education can be found in the Seder, there are numerous other sources as well. Maimonides should be studied since he cites many of the principles that are scattered throughout the Talmud.

A careful analysis of the Seder should lead to an improvement in anyone's ability to teach more effectively. It therefore should be included as one of the great textbooks on teaching.

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¹Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah: 419.
²Maimonides, Hilchos Talmud Torah.
GLOSSARY

Avadim HaYeenu. One of the passages in the Haggadah. The words literally mean, we were slaves.

Avos. Fathers

Babylonian Talmud. Traditions, discussions, and rulings of the Jewish scholars (3rd to 6th centuries) in the land of Babylonia commenting on and supplementing the Mishna.

Chametz. Leavened bread

Haggadah. The text used at the Passover Seder to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt by the Jewish people.

Haggadah Zevach Pesach. The name of the Haggadah written by the Abarbanel. The words Zevach Pesach mean, the Passover sacrifice.

Hallel. One of the fourteen steps of the Passover Seder. Psalms praising God are recited.

Hilchos. Laws

Hilchos Chametz U'Matzo. The name of one of the sections in the code of Jewish law of Maimonides, which deal with the laws of Passover.

Jerusalem Talmud. Traditions, discussions, and rulings of the Jewish scholars (3rd to 6th centuries) in the Land of Israel commenting on and supplementing the Mishna.

Kidushin. Marriage

Mannah. A food miraculously provided to the Jews in their journey through the wilderness.

Matzo. Unleavened bread

Mechilta. Much of Talmudic literature is devoted to the exposition of Biblical verses, or Midrash as it is known in Hebrew. One of these Midrashic works is
called the Mechilta. In this book, the verses of the book of Exodus are expounded.

Midrash. The exposition of Biblical verses.

Mishna. Earliest codification of Jewish oral law

Mishna Brura. Name of a work on Jewish Law written by Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan. The words Mishna Brura mean, clear codification of Jewish Law.

Mitzvah. Commandment

Mitzvos. Commandments

Orach Chayim. Name of one of the four sections of the Shulchan Aruch which deals with the laws of everyday life in Judaism. The words Orach Chayim mean, the way of life.

Paschal lamb. The name of a sacrifice the Jews were commanded to bring on the day before Passover.

Pesachim. Passover

Sefer HaChinuch. The name of a book which describes all the commandments of the Torah. The words Sefer HaChinuch mean, the book of (mitzvah) education.

Sefer HaMitzvos. The name of a book which describes all the commandments of the Torah. The words Sefer HaMitzvos mean, the book of commandments.

Shabbos. Sabbath

Shulchan Aruch. The name of a four part book which lists many of the laws of Judaism. The words Shulchan Aruch mean the set table.

Sifre. Much of Talmudic literature is devoted to the exposition of Biblical verses, or Midrash as it is known in Hebrew. One of these Midrashic words is called the Sifre. In this book, the verses of the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy are expounded.

Talmud. Compendium of discussions on the Mishna by generations of scholars who lived between the 3rd to 6th centuries in Babylonia and Israel.

Tannaim. The generations of scholars who lived between the years 10 and 220. It is their teachings which make up the Mishna.
Torah. Jewish Bible

Tractate. A volume of the Mishna or Talmud
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PERIODICALS

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The thesis is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master Of Arts.

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