

Arami Oved Avi: Az Nashir Hagaddah 5786

Why, ask the sages, does the Torah not begin with the first mitzvah – *Hachodesh Haze Lachem*? The answer is simple: Torah is not merely a book of law but also a book of narrative. It is our story that allows us to connect – to our people, to God, to that transcendent, invisible thread that binds us to something larger than ourselves.

Today's post-identity culture has abandoned such grand narratives. Individuals drift as free-floating atoms, inhabiting only the present, without belonging, without rooted identity, without responsibility to anything beyond immediate gratification.

The Haggadah is a defiant protest against this outlook. Once a year, we sit around a table with our families and read the Haggadah – literally “the telling.” And we tell stories about stories. We weave layer upon layer into the intergenerational conversation that stretches across time and space. At the centre of that conversation lies the declaration from the *bikkurim* (first fruits) ceremony, recorded in Moshe's swan song in Parshat Ki Tavo: “*Arami oved avi – my forefather was a wandering Aramean.*” (*Devarim 26:5*)

The Torah lets Moshe's voice echo with a simple but profound message: When you enter the land you will become farmers. You will cultivate the earth with love and labour. And once a year, at harvest time, you will resist the instinct to keep those crops for yourself and your family. Instead, you will set out on a long, sometimes treacherous journey to the Temple. There you will lay your first, most cherished fruits before the Priest – and you will tell a story. The story of a wandering Aramean. The story of the Exodus, of God's saving hand, of your people's long journey through wilderness.

And you will align yourself with the indomitable spirit of your nation. You will proclaim that you – yes you – a single, anonymous farmer – are part of that incandescent, transcendent, unbroken journey. You are not a solitary atom, consuming your private harvest in isolation. You are an actor on the stage of Jewish history. You are bound by that invisible string – horizontally to your people's story, vertically to God and His covenant. And you will come to see how this small, seemingly insignificant ritual is, in fact, the secret of Jewish eternity and hence forms the core text of the Haggadah. For God, in His wisdom, knew: stories shape identity, identity shapes community, and community shapes responsibility. Without responsibility, no society can endure.

And so, after these proclamations, you are commanded to take those lovingly nurtured fruits and share them with the needy. For a story is only as powerful as the moral demand it makes upon us. Through this simple act of generosity, hubris is reshaped into humility, and self-interest into communal responsibility. We take our place on the stage of history, yet never lose sight of the other actors, and the supporting roles – nor of the ultimate Producer and scriptwriter. And we remember that our story, our moment, the fruits of all our labour, begins in the humble origins of a wandering Aramean.

Who was this Aramean? The sages suggest Abraham. Perhaps Jacob. Or perhaps that is precisely the point. It is no one. And it is everyone. We are the messy, complex, beautiful fusion of the bold, innovative, proud Jewish farmer and the reverent, humble, wandering Aramean. At every stage of our national story, we carry their dreams, their prospects, their fears, their pain, their

joy, and their pride. History has taught us the fragile, precarious contingency of the wilderness wanderer, and the strength of the rooted, prosperous accomplishments of the farmer in his land.

Today, we live an unprecedented chapter of that ancient story. Around our Seder tables, we must teach our children how to weave this present moment into the collective consciousness of our people. We must tell them of the bittersweet new thread being stitched into our collective memory: the profound privilege of living in our old-new land, heirs to an ancient story yet citizens of a sovereign, democratic state. From Abraham the wanderer to the skyscrapers of Tel Aviv's high-tech hub. From Joshua's conquest to the paratroopers weeping at the Western Wall. From King David's harp to modern Israeli music – a story being revitalised daily through extraordinary fortitude. We must remind them that ours is a story that defies natural causality, a story of partnership between Divine demand and human greatness that produces daily miracles. A story that turns dreams into reality, sorrow into song. A story that transcends time and space.

We are immortal precisely because we are both the wandering Aramean and the proud farmer. We are immortal because we never stopped telling our story. We are immortal because we never abandoned our grand narrative. We are immortal because even when Lavan, Pharaoh, Hitler, or Hamas sought to erase us, we never forgot who we are or where we come from.

And we are immortal because we know this: whenever we tug that invisible string, whenever we tell the story of a wandering Armenian and an ancient farmer, millions of ancestors, thousands of years of Jewish history, and One Supreme Master are tugging it back. And so, even when we feel isolated – we are never alone.