



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

Rav Kehilla, Nofei HaShemesh
Maggid Shiur, Daf Yomi, OU.org
Senior Ra"m, Kerem B'Yavneh

The Purpose of Simanim

Why do we announce the 14 Simanim (some hold that the count is 15) at the beginning of the Seder? We will provide a variety of explanations.

Order Highlights Freedom

There is a custom to start the Seder with the recitation of the 14 *simanim*, representing the various sections of the Haggadah (Kadesh, Urchatz, Karpas, Yakhatz etc.). We don't do this on any other holiday. We don't announce the different "yihei ratzon's" that we will recite Rosh Hashana evening at the beginning of our meal, nor do we have a similar custom on any other yom tov. Why don't we just begin the Seder. Why is it necessary to announce in advance what we will be experiencing?

We can glean an answer by looking towards the end of the Seder. Following our meal, we recite חסל סדור פסח כהלכתו... כאשר זכינו לעשותו – just as we merited organizing the evening, we should be able to sacrifice the Korban Pesach as well. The Shemen Hatov in his Haggadah explains that this is a sort of prayer. We left Egypt "*b'hipazon*"- in a hurried and unordered fashion. Yet, tonight as we recall that event, we organize the night into 14 sections- Kadesh, Urchatz etc... These juxtaposed positions

underscore that we are in fact now free and able to control our time. Not like slaves chaotically escaping their master. To maximize the experience tonight we carefully plan and prepare the meal and the *divre torah*, as well as the sequence of events that will unfold this evening. As Hazal tell us "*zerizin makdimin l'mitzvot*" – we should rush to fulfill mitzvot. There is no such concept as "*zerizin makdimin b'mitzvot*" However, once we are engaged in the mitzva, there is no rush. After all the preparation, let's relax and enjoy these monumental moments as we relive our past and transmit our traditions to future generations.

Maximize the Experience

Rabbi Sender in the Commentators Pesah Seder Haggadah addresses this question. He explains as follows. When one prepares for a long trip, he receives an itinerary detailing where he's headed, with all the stops along the way as well as the final destination. An itinerary prepares the traveler emotionally for the trip and enables the traveler to maximize his trip. Imagine traveling to Europe without preparing an itinerary. Deciding haphazardly to visit a museum this afternoon. Upon arriving, without an advance reservation, one may not be granted admission. Without a pre planned itinerary, inevitably, time will be wasted, and sights will be left unseen.

Similarly, at the Seder we are embarking on a journey. True, we are to experience the

Exodus from Egypt but as importantly, we are to arrive at a higher spiritual destination. The best way to achieve our goal, is to announce the way we seek to get there (like the route established by waze) so we all know how we will arrive at our endpoint. Staging the evening in an organized fashion guides the participants so expectations are clear, as well as the path and the destination.

The “Seder”

Why is the meal Pesach night referred to as the “Seder”? The term seder means order. Talmudo B’yado suggests, at the beginning, we list the *simanim* to inform all present regarding the structure of the evening. This is an important lesson in education. It is important for the student to understand the structure of a shiur. To better absorb the material, a student should be told what questions will be raised and answered and the structure of the lesson. This is the pedagogical nature of this night. There is a specific order to the ceremony tonight and we lay out the structure at the beginning so everyone can understand the progression of the evening. That is why we call it the seder – the order.

Simanim... – of lost objects

The Tiferet Ish, cited in the Ma’ayana Shel Torah, suggests *derekh drush*, “*aveida hushav b’simamanin*” – a lost object is returned after being identified by signs (particular to the item). If a person can relay a description of unique aspects of an object, it proves his ownership over such a lost item. Throughout the year, we’re lost. We lose ourselves while getting caught up in trivial matters. One night a year, on our national birthday, at the Seder, we provide *simanim*, declarations. When we partake in these *simanim*

throughout the night, we find ourselves, and return ourselves to where we ought to be. On the night of Pesach, we can return to ourselves, and that’s why it’s called *simanim*, the signs. These are the signs of every Jew, at the Seder. We sanctify ourselves this evening, beginning with kadesh.

Parenthetically, there are only two times of the year we have a Seder, Pesach night, and Seder Yom Hakippurim (reference to the Kohen Gadol’s services). These are the two nights of the year that we need to find ourselves, to get back to our true identity. On Yom Kippur, a Jew gets back to his true identity, uncovers his true self as an individual, and on Pesach we do so as a nation.

The Seder can have a tremendous impact on all present. May we prepare properly for the Seder to maximize the experience for all participants. Chag Kasher V’sameach! ■



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