

Four verses, two stories



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There are four verses in this week's parasha which are probably much better known from being recited at our Seder tables than from their place in the Torah.

"My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt, small in number, and stopped over there; but there he became a great and very large nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they forced hard labour upon us. We cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our plea and saw our troubles, our misery, and our oppression. The Lord freed us from Egypt by a

mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and wonders" (Devarim 26:5-8).

In the Haggadah, however, we translate "My father was a wandering Aramean" as "An Aramean sought to destroy my father" in order to demonstrate how bad Lavan was and what he did to Yaakov (Jacob). Read this way, the text places us firmly in the context of the terrible treatment of the Children of Israel, leading to 210 years of slavery in Egypt.

The original context of these verses in our parasha is very different, however. They are the words which are to be said during the ritual of taking the first fruits – wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates – to Jerusalem.

After being harvested, the

fruits are placed in baskets and the procession to the Temple is accompanied by a flute. After saying the four verses above, a fifth is added: *"And He has brought us to this place and has given us this Land, a land flowing with milk and honey"* (Devarim 26:9).

This puts a completely different outlook on our passage. Whereas the story told by the Haggadah only takes us as far as the Exodus from Egypt, this additional verse sums up the sequel: the successful crossing of the Jordan River and conquest of Israel. Saying this verse in Jerusalem becomes a public declaration of our connection to God, the Land of Israel and its produce.

We pray that one day soon we will once again be able to offer our first fruits at the newly built Temple in Jerusalem.

Four-Farmers Riddle

Four farmers are crossing a bridge over a river at night to take their first fruits to Jerusalem. Because it's night, a torch must be used to cross the bridge, but they only have one and it will last just 15 minutes. Sarah can cross in 1 minute, Abraham in 2 minutes, Eve in 5 minutes and Adam in 8 minutes. No more than two people can cross at a time, and when two cross, they have to go at the slower person's pace. How do they get across in 15 minutes?

(Hint: having the two slowest people cross together saves time).

Answer: Sarah and Abraham cross, taking 2 mins. Sarah returns, taking 1 min. Eve and Adam cross, taking 8 mins. Abraham returns, taking 2 mins. Sarah and Abraham cross, taking 2 mins. Sarah and Abraham cross, taking 2 mins.