**Mishael Zion:** So here's the most important key to understanding the Passover Haggadah, it is not a Siddur. It is not a prayer book, it is not liturgy that you are supposed to read from beginning to end and then you are allowed to eat. It's an instruction manual. It's the behind the scenes instructions for the director of the play—how to set up the production. That's what it is. Each portion of the Haggadah tries to tell you, as a parent or as a participant, as a Seder leader: oh, this is the part where we get to the five rabbis in B'nai Brak staying up all night, this is your chance to tell stories about the best Seders you've ever been to, the ones that kept you up all night. Now we're gonna get to the four children; you can read the four children we're going to tell you about or just notice the four children around your own table: the different kinds of responses, and let's talk about how children respond when their parents try to shove their story down their throat.

We're getting to *Ma Nishtanah*. Yes, it would be so great if the five-year-old stands on a chair and sings *Ma Nishtanah* the way they learned. But really, this is a moment for asking deep questions about how is this a night different from all other nights. It's about getting everyone interested and excited and engaged in the Seder.

So every portion of the Haggadah is an invitation to do something. If you want to read the instruction manual, you know, *g*[*ei gazinta hait*](https://stljewishlight.org/news/news-local/yiddish-words-of-the-week-gei-gazinta-hait/), as they say, “go and be healthy,” but it's not going to be interesting; Iti's not great literature. It's harder to take action. It's easier to just read the text. And that's what Jews have been doing for hundreds of years. But what we've been trying to do in our series of Zion family Haggadot is to empower people to say: oh, dayenu is an opportunity for me to be thankful for so much in my life. Let's talk about that for a second. And yes, we can also sing the song. But if we did a round of thankfulness, we don't actually have to sing the song again. Why? Because the rabbi's wanted a good parent, a good storyteller to close the Haggadah and say: “Now children, I'm going to tell you a story.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, we're continuing our series of Wartime Diaries, which is our attempt to collect slivers of life during these difficult days. Next week, Jews around the world will sit around their Passover tables for what will invariably be a very different kind of Seder. It goes without saying that the question of how this night or this Pesach is different from all other nights, and all other Pesachs since October 7th gained an entirely new and tragic dimension. And few, if any, have thought about this matter more than 43-year-old Mishael Zion.

Mishael is a liberal orthodox rabbi and Jewish educator from Jerusalem. In 1997 Mishael’s father, Noam Zion, together with his friend David Disho, published a popular English language Haggadah called “A Different Night.” Seven years later, Mishael himself joined his dad in creating an Israeli version: “*Halayla Haze: Haggadah Yisraelit.*” And this year, two decades after that Israeli Haggadah came out, Mishael and his father decided to update it for the first post-October 7th Seder. Mitch Ginsburg and I spoke to Mishael. Here he is.

**Mishy Harman:** Can you introduce yourself.

**Mishael Zion:** So my name is Rabbi Mishael Zion. But most of the world calls me Mish. I live in Jerusalem. I’m the father of four daughters, which on Passover feels especially meaningful.

**Mishy Harman:** And how did you get into the business of writing Passover Haggadot?

**Mishael Zion:** So for me, a lot of this actually goes back to one night. I was 22. I was serving in the Israeli army. And I just had this beginning of this idea to work with my father to create an Israeli Haggadah. He had created a Haggadah called “A Different Night” with his *hevruta*, David Dishon, his study partner. And yet, when we turned to create an Israeli version of the Haggadah, my father said to me: “I've been in Israel since 1973. I love Israel, but I'm not Israeli enough to create an Israeli Haggadah. Maybe you, my son serving in the Israeli army, maybe you can help me with this project. And I was very excited to jump on the bandwagon and get into the project with him.

**Mishy Harman:** Oh.

**Mishael Zion:** And we decided to call it the Israeli Haggadah. And we knew very quickly it wouldn't just be a translation of the American haggadah into Hebrew. It needed to be a bonafide Israeli story, representing the different ways that Israelis celebrate their Passover Seders.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** So then in 2002 you sort of test it out. Your Haggadah at your own family Seder.

**Mishael Zion:** Yeah. When we came around to Seder night, my father did a move that is a masterful educational move. He said: “You know, why don't you lead the Seder this year, since you're researching all this stuff about the Haggadah?” And I remember that Seder night vividly. We were at my parents house in the neighborhood of Talpiot. I had just finished learning about all the different customs that Jewish families from around the world do on Seder night, and I said: “This year we're going to do all the customs together.” So we sat the the floor the way the Yemenites do it, and we covered the whole Seder table with lettuce leaves and parsley leaves the way the Yemenite tradition does. And we wore white clothes the way German Jews do. And we took the Seder plate and we swerved it around everyone's heads in a blessing of *Bibhilu tatzanu mimitzrayim* (In haste we left Egypt): that's the Moroccan and North African tradition. And when it came to *dayenu* we took out green onions and leeks, and we beat each other over the head the way the Persian Jews do. And it was a beautiful night.

And my sister read a feminist version of *Avadim Hayinu*, you know, if we were slaves. And my mother told the story about the devout Protestant family that saved my grandfather during the Holocaust. And then when we got to Shulchan Orech, the part where we all sit down and eat, and finally the person who’s leading a Seder can sit down and rest, my uncle Bensi turned to me and he says: “Mish [Hebrew] I was on the porch just now [Hebrew]. I was listening to the radio (in Israel everyone has an uncle Bensi who listens to the radio every hour). And he said: “There was a terrorist attack in a hotel in Netanya, a lot of people are killed. What do we do? Do we tell everyone?”

And in that moment I felt how here's a nation that's trying to tell the story of freedom, trying to tell a story of Egypt behind us, and the promised land in front of us, and again we're pulled into this other narrative, of in every generation they seek to destroy us. And I felt the pull of those two narratives: the Exodus story that believes that we can change history and change our situation and believe in freedom, and the story of we’re stuck in this constant vicious cycle of antisemitism and attacks. A story I did not want to believe in, and I still don't want to believe in it. And it keeps raising its face to us. So that's my sort of pivotal moment of leading a Seder. And when we created the Israeli Haggadah so many of those energies and customs and stories were poured into the Israeli Haggadah.

**Mishy Harman:** So then a couple of years later the Haggadah actually came out and was a wild success: very, very popular—used in many, many homes, translated into many languages. And then this year, on the 20th anniversary of the publication of that Haggadah you decided to publish a new version.

**Mishael Zion:**  Yeah, but I also felt like it really needed to be recreated, that it deserved new life. I would say that I really wanted this Haggadah to reach middle Israel, for as many families across the board of Israelis to sit down around their Seder table and read the words of Martin Luther King at their Passover Seder: to feel that the message of the Haggadah is not just a Jewish particular message, it's also a human, universalist message. And that the Western tradition learned from the Passover story to believe in freedom, to believe in revolution, to believe that there is a tomorrow and that we can change history. And that story starts at the Passover Seder. And I wanted to show Israelis that they are part of a greater tradition of freedom that they celebrate at their Passover tables.

So when October 7th came around, we were already knee deep in working on this new version of the Haggadah. But I also have to admit, I wasn't as energized as I thought I would be. I kept looking at the text and saying: “We can include this, we can change that,” But it didn't feel as crucial as I hoped it would. And ironically, once October 7th happened, suddenly we got a new understanding of why this night is so important, and also a new set of stories that we wanted to tell. I'll admit that in the first few weeks after October 7th, I didn't want to have anything to do with the Haggadah. I think like so many of us in Israel and maybe across the world, the project that we were already in the middle of felt flat and irrelevant. And then two things happened: one is that two young soldiers who are connected to families that are deeply connected to the Haggadah were killed in fighting in Gaza. And that hit us in the stomach very deeply. One is Lavi Lifschitz who was a photographer and a creative soul, and his great aunt Devorah Lifschitz is the brilliant designer of our Haggadah—we owe so much to her creativity in creating the great look of the Haggadah. And the other one is a Eitan Dishon, who is the grandson of David Dishon who wrote the original “A Different Night,” with my father. And as my father and I were walking out of Har Herzl after Eitan Dishon’s funeral, we said to ourselves: *okay, we are going to publish the Haggadah this year*.

So in December, trying to think how do we make this Haggadah relevant in a post October 7th world, I turned to the National Library in Jerusalem, which just opened its new campus. And I was very excited to see the building. And I turned to the librarian, and I said: “Can you give me all the Haggadot written by the kibbutzim that were near the Gaza Strip—names that we in Israel have been saying again and again over the last few months: Kibbutz Be’eri, Nir Oz, Nahal Oz. Each one with their intense stories of what happened on October 7th, but all of them also have a rich tradition of writing their own Haggadot and turning their Jewish values—which in their case, are secular, socialist, universalist values, into the Passover story, into the Jewish particularist narrative.

And the fact is that one of the most creative moments of Haggadah history is the way that kibbutzim in the 30s and the 40s rewrote their Haggadah. You weren't a serious kibbutz if you weren't rewriting your own Passover story. And they had a great secular vibe to their Haggadot. It was all about how Moses redeemed us from Egypt, not necessarily God. And they also brought a creativity and a relevance of their own story to their Haggadot. So when I opened up the Haggadot I was blown away. In 1956, Kibbutz Nahal Oz, which is a kilometer and a half away from Gaza City wrote their Haggadah. And they are so excited that they can say: “How is this night different from all other nights. On all other nights our ancestors were slaves to Egypt, subject to their taskmasters. But on this night we are free, and we are settled on the border of Egypt, and now our own hands are ready to defend our lives.” Reading that after October 7th when Kibbutz Nahal Oz was not able to defend their own lives is chilling. In another set of Haggadot I found the Haggadah of Kibbutz Nir Oz, a kibbutz that was attacked viciously during October 7th. Many of its members were killed or taken hostage. And yet their Haggadah, written in the 90s is full of hope, and full of a discussion of the kind of world that we hope to build and sort of the best spirit of the hope of the 90s, And one of the texts there caught my eye immediately. It talks about Israeli society as a fruit salad. Now I haven't often seen discussion of Israeli society as a fruit salad so I was immediately intrigued, and I want to read to you the text.

**Mitch Ginsbug:** Please.

**Mishael Zion:** “Look at the fruit salad: some fruits are sour, and some fruits sweet. Some are more juicy, some harder to eat. Some are more smooth, some rougher skinned treats. Each fruit brings its own taste and colors and texture, and when all mixed together, they create something new, far more than just each fruit alone. So too with us, we’re made up of all kinds: some work the land, some look to heaven for signs, some of us are visionaries, some more practical types. We come in all sizes, all shapes and all stripes. Some set out on new paths. Some settle rather than roam. And each brings their own language, customs and beliefs from home. We are an ingathering, a kibbutz of peoples, a multicultural nation, an immense breathing and living creation, renewing itself with so much innovation. We lift up a glass to all who return to our land, to the ingathering of exiles, to immigration, to integration, both present and past—we lift up a glass.

**Mitch Ginsbug:** Oh wow. Amen.

**Mishael Zion:** Yeah, So when I read this text about the fruit salad I called Alon Palca from Kibbutz Be’eri. He’s one who sent me the PDF of this Haggadah from the 90s. And I said: “Alon, this talks about the fruit salad, it's beautiful. I want to quote it in the Israeli Haggadah. Who should I reference it to?” And he said: “Oh, the fruit salad, actually I didn't write that,” Alon says, “my friend Avner wrote it: Avner Goren. Avner was killed on October 7th in his *mamad* (shleter). His wife, Maya, who was the caretaker for children at Kibbutz Nir Oz, ran to the childcare center when the sirens went off to make sure there wasn't anyone there. And that's where the terrorists found her, shot her, and took her into Gaza, and her body hasn't been returned yet.

**Mitch Ginsbug:** Wow.

**Mishael Zion:** And I would like as many Jewish families around the world and across Israel to read Avner’s text, both because Israel needs this message right now, but also in memory of a man who loved Haggadot and who apparently had a good sense of humor about fruit salads and Israeli society, and who gave us a text that is so meaningful to us, both because of his death, but also because of his life. And we hope Avner’s words being read around tables on Passover night will be a meaningful memory to him, and also an inspiration for us to work harder at this crazy fruit salad that we're all living in.

**Mishy Harman:** So we're recording this conversation after a night in which we were all up hearing the booms of Iranian missiles being intercepted, and going into our *miklatim* (shelters) and sirens. And it seems as if in some fundamental way, this night is very, very different than all other nights. And yet, on some deeper level, or looking at this with sort of a longer view of history—as you know, you have this long list on one of the pages of all the various different calamities of the Jewish people. It seems as if there's nothing different, that this is yet another line in a very long list.

And I was thinking about it, you know there are so many families who are going to be sitting down to a Seder table next week and when they come to the question of how is this night different than all other nights the answer is not going to be some sort of playful game about *hametz* (food prepared from five species of grain–wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye–that has been allowed to leaven) and matza or *maror* (bitter herbs) or *yiracot* (vegetables) or whatever. It's going to be a palpable difference.

**Mishael Zion:** I think just sitting down with our families and our loved ones on Seder night, and asking how is this night different from all other nights is super important this year. And just leaving room for that question. As educators we often run to the answers. As parents we want to give our children answers. But I think this year, this night, just leaving room for the questions, and when you ask that question, you feel you know the winds of history blowing through what's happening. We don't know what the next episodes of this crazy series that we're all watching and participating in are going to bring. And so it's going to be really a night of questions. And that scares me as a parent. It scares me as a Jerusalemite. But then knowing that question has been asked before, it's been asked during World War Two, it's been asked, during the Crusades, it's been asked throughout Jewish history, it does give me a modicum of comfort. And more than that, I think not so much looking for comfort, it gives me that sense of resilience that we'll face what we'll face and we’ll find a way to bounce back.

**Mishy Harman:** And Mishael, in this new edition of the Haggadah, you included many passages relating specifically to the war.

**Mishael Zion:** Yeah, so as we think about this year Seder I think the story of the families of the hostages is going to be on everyone's mind: that empty chair at the table. The sense of families even till the moment of Passover night that they don't know if their loved ones will be with them or not. And I wanted to include their voices. They're the ones that I feel closest to. But there was another thing that was important to me and I think it's really important for this night as well, and that is hope. The Seder night ends with *L’Shana haba’ah b’Yerushalayim* (Next year in Jerusalem). We have to end this year Seder with hope; with a belief that the world can be different. And when I sought out texts from families of hostages, I was specifically looking for texts that also bring in hope. Not a naive hope, but a deep belief that if we hold on to the values that are most important to us, that we will be able to tell this story for many more years. And that's the hope that I think we need to build on Seder night this year specifically. And to hear that from the families of hostages specifically, with all that they've been through is I think the greatest source of strength and resilience that we can find. And I'll give two examples: Jacky Levy, who's an Israeli storyteller and comedian who has two nephews who were taken into captivity, and their father as well. He wrote a beautiful text about how when Sahar and Erez Calderon who were 14 and 16, if I'm not mistaken, were led out of captivity he suddenly felt what *hallel* really is about. *Hallel* is that moment of praise and thankfulness that we say during the Seder And he says: “How many times have I said words like ‘praise the Lord, all those who have been redeemed from captivity?’” Right, big deal. We say those words like we say, you know, Jews who are religious say all kinds of prayers all the time. They don't necessarily stop to notice what they mean. And suddenly, Jacky says: “I looked at those words, and I said, ‘Oh my God, praise God, all those who have been redeemed from captivity. My nephew's have been redeemed from captivity.” And he looked at their mother, Hadas Calderon, his sister- in-law, and she, though being a devoutly secular person, sort of cried out: “*Yesh Elohim*,” there is a God , thank God, “*Hodu Lashem ki tov*” (Give thanks unto the Lord for God is good), as the prayer book would say, or as the Haggadah would say it. And he said: “I want to bring in that energy of “*Hodu Lashem ki tov*” into the room on Seder night. Sahar and Erez’s father, Ofer Calderon, is still a hostage in Gaza. We deeply hope that he's alive, and we deeply hope that he'll be able to come back to his family, if not for this holiday than for the next holiday. And part of what gives us that hope and that resilience to hold on to that hope despite the harsh news that we're facing every day, is that sense of *hallel*…thanks for what has happened in the past and for what will hopefully happen in the future.

**Mishy Harman:** And the second example.

**Mishael Zion:** So one of the most challenging texts in the Haggadah for many of us, for me personally, is toward the end of the Seder, we fill a glass…

**Mitch Ginsburg:** I know what you’re going to say, go ahead.

**Mishael Zion:** I mean, for many of us when we say, “*s*[*hefoch chamatcha*](https://www.haggadot.com/clip/shefoch-chamatcha) *el hagoyim”* (pour out your wrath against the Gentiles).Now some people are mistaken to think that is a text that speaks about all Gentiles, that the Haggadah creates a line and says there's Jews, and there's non Jews and non-Jews are the ones that we need to pour out our wrath against. That is a bad reading of a text. Someone who says that just doesn't know how to read the Haggadah properly. The Hagaddah says: “Pour out your wrath against the Gentiles who do not know your name, who seek to destroy your people.” Within the people of the world, we have enemies, we have those who do not know God's name, or I would say in a different way who do not see the divinity that is in every human being, the infinite worth of human life regardless of nation and ethnicity and religion. Those who do not see that, they are the ones who deserve to find wrath. And that's what we call out on Seder night. And I think on this Seder night, there's a lot of anger. I feel a lot of anger toward those who seek destruction and violence instead of moderation and solutions. And it's against those people that I want to ask God to pour out his wrath. But at the same time, a family like ours also knows that we are alive thanks to people who believe in God, maybe not exactly our story of God, were people who see the infinite value of human life, maybe they didn’t do it in exactly the same language or values that we do it, and who have risked their own lives in order to save lives, any lives, and specifically Jewish lives. And so when my father first put out his Haggadah, “A Different Night,” he added to the text: “Pour out your wrath,” he also added a text called “Pour out your love.”

When we went back to the Haggadah now after October 7th, and we said: “Okay, how are we going to relate to this text?” There is a lot of wrath, and there also is a lot of love. How do we share those two elements. And that's where I turned back to the words of Rachel Goldberg, the mother of Hersh Goldberg Polin, who is a hostage in Gaza wounded. We haven't had a sign of life for him. And I think for many of us Rachel has been a beacon of hope and values and ethics in this time. And in one of her speeches at the UN, she spoke about how she refuses to be seduced by hatred. That hate is so easy. It's the easy solution, and she refuses to be seduced by it. And she asks all of us not to be seduced by the easy solution that is hatred. So when she speaks about not being seduced by hate she mentioned a story about the shelter where Hersch and Aner Shapira and 19 other revelers from the Nova party were all trying to wait out the sirens, and together with them was a Bedouin man who was a guard at the kibbutz across the street, and he also ran inside for cover. And as Hamas closed in on the bomb shelter, this man told the young people inside the shelter with him: “Stay quiet and let me go out and talk to them.” And the Bedouin man who had been guarding the kibbutz goes out and in Arabic says to the Hamas terrorists: “I'm a Muslim, everyone inside is my family, we are Muslim, you don't have to search in there.” He tried to save them. He could have just said, “I'm a Muslim,” and just saved himself. But he tried to do the right thing even though it was terrifying, and even though it required unimaginable courage. And Rachel says that he was brutally beaten, and that the witnesses do not know what his fate was. But that she takes comfort, even for a fleeting moment knowing that there was someone trying to do the right thing there, even when everything in the universe has turned upside down. And I feel like that's part of what I want to channel, that's what I want to teach my daughters. This year when we get to “pour out your wrath,” yes, there's a lot to be angry about.

There's a sense as a religious person, I do want to believe that there's a sense of justice in the world, and that God will act on the side of justice in this world. And at the same time, I know that we as human beings, we are not God, we do not see history in the big ways that divinity does. And our work is not to be seduced by the easiness of hatred. And those are the words that Rachel gave us all. And I hope many families will read it around their Seder table this year.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Amen.

**Mishael Zion:** And that's why I'm proud that the Haggadah came out in Hebrew in time for a Seder night and we translated it into English and volunteers translated into French and German and Spanish and Portuguese. I think because there's a real thirst to make this night a meaningful night. And for me this has *mamash* (really) kept my sanity in so many ways working on this project. The Passover Seder tells me there is a tomorrow and it can be better than yesterday. And I refuse to let go of that narrative. So that's the story that I'm gonna be…my daughters on this Passover night. Yes, in every generation they rise up against us to wipe us out. But yes, there is a tomorrow. We can believe in a promised land. It's going to take us much longer than we thought to get there, but we're not going to stop.