

“Our Own Joy is Lessened and Incomplete”: The History of an Interpretation of Sixteen Drops of Wine at the Seder

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Explaining the custom to remove sixteen drops of wine from the cup as we recite the ten plagues and words associated with them, the *Artscroll Youth Haggadah* writes that “we don't want our cups to be full when we tell about other people's pain.”¹ The idea that we remove some wine to show that we cannot fully rejoice when our enemies are destroyed is also found in the *Artscroll Mesorah Series Haggadah*: “Abarbanel, however, explains that we should remove the wine because “You should not rejoice when your enemy falls” (Mishlei 24:17).”² This idea does not actually appear in the Abarbanel's commentary to the Haggadah, or in any of his writings. In fact, this explanation for the custom of removing sixteen drops from the cup of wine is a recent innovation. By now it is so entrenched in Haggadot that it is often the only explanation offered. A typical presentation of this idea is, “By spilling a drop of wine from the Pesach cup for each plague, we acknowledge that our own joy is lessened and incomplete, for our redemption had to come by means of the punishment of other human beings. Even though these are just punishments for evil acts, it says, “Do not rejoice at the fall of your enemy” (Proverbs 24:17).”³ In this article we will trace the development of this interpretation of this cherished Seder-night custom.

¹ Rabbis Nosson and Yitzchok Zev Scherman, *Artscroll Youth Haggadah* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1995), p. 25.

² R. Joseph Elias, *Artscroll Mesorah Series Haggadah* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1977), p. 127.

³ Noam Zion and David Dishon, *The Family Participation Haggadah: A Different Night* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997), p. 101.

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Origin of the Custom

The earliest reference to this custom, and to an explanation for it, is found in a Pesach sermon of Rabbi Eleazer of Worms (c. 1176–1238), the Rokeach. “For each word a finger [goes] into the cup of wine and they spill out a drop, matching the sword of the Holy One, blessed be He, which has sixteen sides. And the sixteen mentions of plague in Jeremiah. [This custom] teaches us that we will not be injured. Based upon [this] our ancestors created this custom. And sixteen times the word *hayyim* [appears in Psalm 119], and sixteen people read the Torah each week,⁴ matching the sixteen lambs that are sacrificed in a week. Also, “She is [16 = ט”ה] a tree of life to those who grasp her” (Proverbs 3:18). And one should not ridicule the custom of our holy ancestors.”⁵ This explanation is quoted in *Sefer Amarcal* in the name of the Rokeach, along with a list of rabbis who observed this custom.⁶ That the Rokeach emphasized not to make fun of this custom, and that *Sefer Amarcal* brought “an impressive array of names of the German Hasidim”⁷ who kept this custom, indicates that it was one of the customs of Chasidei Ashkenaz that were indeed subject to ridicule.⁸ The custom is brought in *Sefer Maharil*, quoting the Rokeach and others, where it is explained that the idea is that God should “save us from all these and they should fall upon our enemies.”⁹ Thus, the sixteen drops are intended to ward off the danger from the sixteen-faced sword of God.¹⁰ The custom is mentioned by R. Moshe Isserles in his comments

⁴ Seven on Shabbat morning, three Shabbat afternoon, and three each on Monday and Thursday.

⁵ Simcha Emanuel, editor, *Rabbi Eleazar of Worms: Drasha l’Pesach* (Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 2006), p. 101. Translation based on the one in Joshua Kulp and David Golinkin, *The Schechter Haggadah: Art, History and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2009), p. 233.

⁶ Michael Hager, ed., *Sefer Amarcal al Hilbot Pesach*, siman 30, p. 164 in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume – Hebrew Section* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950). The author of *Sefer Amarcal* is unknown.

⁷ Heinrich Guggenheimer, *The Scholar’s Haggadah* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998), p. 302.

⁸ Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001), p. 230, note 105.

⁹ Shlomo J. Spitzer, editor, *Sefer Maharil* (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 1989), pp. 106-107.

¹⁰ Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Athenium, 1984), p. 167; Joshua Kulp and David Golinkin, *The Schechter Haggadah: Art, History and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2009), p. 233. In light of this, there may be an additional reason for the custom to use the pinky finger to remove the drops. *Magen Avraham* O.H. 473:28 brings opinions that

on the *Tur* (*Darkei Moshe*, O.H. 473:18) and in his glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch* (O.H. 473:7). In *Darkei Moshe* he quotes the Maharil, and adds that this custom hints to the “the angel in charge of vengeance.”

The original explanation can be somewhat difficult to use in the context of a family Seder, as it is based on the idea of the sixteen-sided sword of God and the general symbolism behind the number sixteen, something not widely known or easily related. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries we find a simpler reason offered in popular books of explanations for customs, that the removal of drops of wine from the cup parallels the Egyptians, who were “lessened” with every plague. This explanation is found in the widely read *Sefer Matamim*,¹¹ *Minbagei Yesburun*,¹² *Otzar Dinim u'Minbagim*¹³ and *Sefer Ta'amei haMinbagim*.¹⁴ *Mishna Berura* explains that the 16 drops represent the first two letters of God's Name (O.H. 473:75). R. Reuven Margaliot, in his 1937 Haggadah commentary *Be'er Miriam*, explains that the removal of drops represents that the plagues are only a small drop from the cups of retribution and punishment that the nations that persecute Israel will drink from in the future.¹⁵ These explanations generally relate the custom to some aspect of vengeance against enemies.¹⁶ They contain no trace of the idea of “incomplete joy” due to the suffering of the Egyptians, and seem diametrically opposed to it.

either the index, ring or little finger is used. It is known that the little finger was understood to have apotropaic powers in European folk culture; see A.B. Strachov, “Miscellanea Meterologica Slavica: “Breaking” the Rainbow in Poles'e,” *Die Welt der Slaven* vol. 33 (1988), pp. 338-339, where the little finger is used to ward off demonic forces and spells from water and wedding feasts. See also my article, “Pointing to the Torah and Other Hagbaha Customs,” *Hakirah* vol. 15, Summer 2013, pp. 301–303.

¹¹ Yitzchak Liefitz, *Sefer Matamim* (Warsaw: 1890), p. 56, item 55. Although he seems to reference the *Hagabot haMinbagim* to R. Issac Tirnau's *Sefer Minbagim* as his source, the custom is found there (note 98) but without an explanation. In Haggadot that are more careful about quoting sources, this explanation is cited as being “in the name of *Sefer Minbagim*” rather than actually appearing there. See, Abraham Natan Barnett, *Haggadah Shel Pesach im Likutim Nechemadim* (Jerusalem: 1959), p. 3.

¹² Avraham Hershovitz, *Otzar Kol Minbagei Yesburun* (Vilna: 1899), p. 34, siman 120.

¹³ J. D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Dinim u'Minbagim* (New York: 1917), p. 282.

¹⁴ Abraham Sperling, *Sefer Ta'amei haMinbagim u'Mekorei haDinim* (Lemberg: 1928), p. 66, siman 538.

¹⁵ Reuven Margaliot, *Haggadah Shel Pesach – Be'er Miriam, Kehilat Moshe* (Tel Aviv: Margaliot, 1937), p. 40. This explanation is sometimes attributed to the Vilna Gaon, since it may be hinted to in *Biur ha-Gra* O.C. 473:45.

¹⁶ Israel Yuval, “Vengeance and Damnation, Blood and Defamation: From Jewish Martyrdom to Blood Libel Accusations,” *Zion* vol. 58:1 (1993), p. 38 (Hebrew).

Abbreviated Hallel

The disseminators of the “incomplete joy” explanation generally relate it to a reason given in the midrash for the recital on Sukkot of the full Hallel every day, but on Passover only on the first day, the rest having the abbreviated Hallel. The halachic reason for this, found in the Talmud (B. Arachin 10a, b), is that on Sukkot there are different *Mussaf* sacrifices offered each day, so each day of Sukkot is considered a distinct holiday, whereas on Pesach the same *Mussaf* sacrifice is offered each day. Because of this, on each day of Sukkot the full Hallel is said, but only on the first day of Pesach. Another answer, however, is found in the midrashic literature. The 13th-century work *Shibbolei haLeket* (siman 174), quoted by R. Yosef Caro (*Beit Yosef* O.C. 490:4), brings in the name of *Midrash Harninu*, a midrash collection lost to us today,¹⁷ that Shmuel b. Abba taught that the reason only an abbreviated Hallel is recited after the first day of Pesach is that the Egyptians drowned and “If your enemy falls do not exult” (Proverbs 24:17). This seems to be based on the episode mentioned in the Talmud (B. Megilla 10b, B. Sanhedrin 39b) that when the Egyptians were drowning in Yam Suf, God silenced the angels who wanted to sing, saying that it is not appropriate to do so when His “handiwork is drowning in the sea.” It should be noted, however, that the Israelites themselves did sing *Shirat haYam* at this point, and this was not viewed as problematic. Whatever the merits of this particular midrashic explanation for not reciting the full Hallel throughout Pesach,¹⁸ it does not seem to apply to the custom of removing drops of wine from the cup, since that is done on the Seder night when we do in fact recite the full Hallel and do not seem to limit our joy.

¹⁷ See J.D. Eisenstein, *Oẓar Midrashim* (New York: Noble Offset Printers, 1915), p. 137.

¹⁸ See the excellent overview of this midrashic explanation by Dr. Avi Zivotofsky in “What’s the Truth About...Hallel on Pesach?,” *Jewish Action*, volume 60, number 3, Spring 5760/2000. See also the comments of R. Avigdor Nebenzahl, *Yerushalayim be-Moadehab – Pesach* (Jerusalem: Machon Keren Reem, 2005), p. 160. It is worth noting that the idea of displaying mercy toward Egyptian adversaries is also found in the Pseudepigrapha, in *Joseph and Asenath*, a first-century Jewish romance written in Egypt. In the story, when Benjamin is ready to kill Pharaoh’s firstborn son, the villain of the story, he is stopped by Levi, who explains, “By no means, brother, will you do this deed, because we are men who worship God, and it does not befit a man who worships God to repay evil for evil nor to trample underfoot a fallen (man) nor to oppress his enemy till death” (29:3). See E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1994), p. 234.

This explanation for the abbreviated Hallel is also found in some versions of *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*¹⁹ and in *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Emor*, *remez* 654), but there the midrash begins by asking why the Torah uses the term *simcha*, joy, three times relating to Sukkot but not even once relating to Pesach. Two answers are given. The first is that since judgment is passed on the crops on Pesach and people do not know if their fields will produce crops or not in the coming year, there is incomplete joy on Pesach. The second answer given is “because the Egyptians died.” The midrash then says this is also why on Pesach only the abbreviated Hallel is recited after the first day, while on Sukkot a full Hallel is said every day. This expanded version of the midrash is more relevant to the “incomplete joy” explanation. The version in *Shibbolei haLeket* relates only to the abbreviated Hallel, making it irrelevant to the first day of Pesach. In the expanded version, the Torah’s omission of the term *simcha* when dealing with Pesach indicates that even on the first day of Pesach there is a lack of joy because of the death of the Egyptians.

English-Language Haggadot

The “incomplete joy” explanation was popularized by being the only one presented in many early English-language Haggadot intended for laypeople. A 1929 English-translation Haggadah published by the Austrian/Hungarian Schlesinger publishing house explains the custom as indicating that “we cannot celebrate the feast of our deliverance full of joy when so many thousands of human beings have perished,” and says that “from this cause also, in the last days of Passover, Hallel, the prayer of thanksgiving, is recited only to the half.”²⁰ The Schlesinger’s prayer books “were especially popular” throughout the early 1900s.²¹ Variations of this Haggadah were continually reprinted and expanded over the years in English-language Haggadot published in Israel after the Schlesinger publishing company moved to Tel Aviv in the late 1930s and changed its name to the Sinai Publishing Company.²²

¹⁹ Bernard Mandelbaum, editor, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1987), p. 458.

²⁰ Joseph Loewy and Joseph Guens, *Service for the First Nights of Passover* (Vienna: Joseph Schlesinger, 1929), p. 20.

²¹ Kinga Frojimovics, ed., *Jewish Budapest: Monuments, Rites and History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), p. 179.

²² In some later editions the authors of the notes are not even named. The “Bezalel” Haggadah illustrated by Zeev Raban (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1965), p. 31, for example, gives this explanation word for word, but no author is listed anywhere.

In the 1940s, 50s and 60s this explanation became ubiquitous in American Haggadot.²³ The explanation is presented in the “Introductory Note” by Louis Finkelstein to a 1942 English-translation Haggadah: “The spilling of wine at the mention of the plagues is interpreted as a symbol of regret that the victory had to be purchased by the death of the Egyptians.”²⁴ Finkelstein was “the dominant figure of Conservative Judaism in the twentieth century” and was chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary at the time he wrote that introduction.²⁵ The Haggadah edited by David and Tamar De Sola Pool, first published in 1943 by the National Jewish Welfare Board “for members of the armed forces of the United States,” similarly explains that “a drop of wine of rejoicing is diminished from the cup in sign of pity for the suffering Egyptians.”²⁶ This Haggadah, composed by a committee of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis for Jewish soldiers who were fighting in World War II, addresses the “compatibility of Jewish and American values.”²⁷ The American value

in the book. On the history of the Schlesinger publishing company, see Frojimovics, p. 179; Istvan Ormos, “David Kaufmann and His Collection” in Eva Apor, editor, *David Kaufmann Memorial Volume* (Budapest: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2002), p. 140, note 44.

²³ Earlier English-translation Haggadot generally either do not explain the reason for the custom, or still give explanations closer to the original one. For example, J.D. Eisenstein's *Hagada: Seder Ritual for Passover Eve* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1928), p. 18, explains that “we spill out a drop of wine at the mention of each plague to indicate we are immune from the plagues.”

²⁴ Maurice Samuel, *Haggadah for Passover* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1942), p. xvii.

²⁵ Lawrence Hoffman and David Arnow, editors, *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries, volume 1* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), p. 83.

²⁶ David and Tamar De Sola Pool, *The Haggadah of Passover* (New York: Jewish Welfare Board, 1943), p. 38. This Haggadah contains essentially no commentary and this explanation was written as part of the instructions before reciting the ten plagues. This Haggadah was republished throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

²⁷ Joel Gereboff, “One Nation, with Liberty and Haggadahs for All,” in Jack Kugelmann, editor, *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 285. Translated Haggadot often dealt with the changing sensibilities of their intended readership. See for example A.A. Green, *The Revised Hagada* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1897), p. 3, where the author explains that he did not translate “nine months of pregnancy” in the song *Echad Mi Yodea* and instead “substituted the nine Jewish festivals as more in consonance with our modern ideas of what is adapted for the perusal of children.”

here is “the liberal ethic, believing that all people are essentially good,” so that punishing the Egyptians “seems so vindictive and vengeful.”²⁸

The Haggadah edited by Philip Birnbaum for the Hebrew Publishing Company in 1953 also states that the custom “is intended to stress the idea that we must not rejoice over the misfortunes that befell our foes.”²⁹ The Birnbaum Haggadah was considered the standard traditional Haggadah for English speakers until the first Artscroll Haggadah was published in 1977³⁰ and, as noted above, also included this explanation. This explanation is brought in the 1959 *Passover Haggadah* by Morris Silverman,³¹ a Conservative rabbi responsible for the movement's *Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook*, whose “name had become synonymous with Conservative Judaism's liturgy.”³² Rabbi Shlomo Kahn's 1960 Haggadah, *From Twilight Till Dawn*, billed “the traditional Passover Haggadah,” also explains this custom as limiting our joy, reminding us that the Egyptians, “although our enemies and tormentors, were fellow human beings nevertheless.”³³ This Haggadah, reprinted in 1969, is the only English-language Haggadah prior to the late seventies that “includes much longer translations of traditional commentaries,”³⁴ so that even a more scholarly audience was presented with this explanation.

We can say that since World War II, every American Haggadah aimed at a primarily English-speaking audience and offering an explanation for this custom provided the “incomplete joy” explanation, and in most such Haggadot it was the only explanation offered.³⁵ By now it is widespread

²⁸ Nathan Laufer, *Leading the Passover Journey: The Seder's Meaning Revealed, The Haggadah's Story Retold* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), p. 92. See there his critique of this entire approach to the plagues.

²⁹ Philip Birnbaum, *Haggadah* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1953), p. 38.

³⁰ Hoffman and Arnow, p. 84.

³¹ Morris Silverman, *Passover Haggadah* (Hartford, Connecticut: Prayer Book Press, 1959), p. 20.

³² Hoffman and Arnow, p. 83.

³³ Shlomo Kahn, *From Twilight to Dawn* (New York: Scribe Publications, 1960), p. 60.

³⁴ Gereboff, p. 283.

³⁵ There are almost as many examples as there are Haggadot. See, for example, Sidney B. Hoenig, *The Haggadah of Passover with Introductory Notes and Supplement* (New York: Shulsinger Brothers, 1950), p. 11, “it may also show that we *symbolically* cast a tear at the mention of each plague” (italics in the original). Arthur Gilbert, *The Passover Seder: Pathways Through the Haggadah* (New York: Ktav, 1965), p. 31, writes that it is a “symbol of regret that the victory had to be purchased through misfortune visited upon God's creatures, the Egyptians.” This seems to be based on Finkelstein's phrasing. Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Family Seder – A Tra-*

and better known than the original one. It is even the explanation given on the Wikipedia entry for “Passover Seder”!³⁶

This approach is found in more scholarly Orthodox literature as well.³⁷ It is particularly prevalent in works written by people connected to English-speaking countries, where this explanation was most widely popularized. It is included, for example, in R. David Feinstein's *The Kol Dodi Haggadah*³⁸ and Rabbi Yaakov Wehl's *The Haggadah with Answers*, in both the Hebrew and English versions.³⁹ Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky discusses

ditional Passover Haggadah for the Modern Home (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1967), p. 38, states, “This practice has been explained as an expression of our unhappiness over the misfortune suffered by the Egyptians...The thought of rejoicing over the suffering of others is alien to Judaism, even where punishment may be justified.” Zev Schostak, *Why is This Night Different?* (New York: Artscroll Studios, 1977), p. 57, writes, “As we recall the downfall of our enemies, we recall that they were creatures of God and our joy is incomplete.” The famed Maxwell House Haggadah does not mention this explanation, nor did it even note the custom in its earlier editions. Later editions instruct that wine be removed from the cup but offer no explanation. The “incomplete joy” explanation is also brought in Yiddish in the Yiddish-and-English-translated *Passover Haggadah* by Nathan Mandel (New York: 1954), p. 65, the source given as “I have heard.” This explanation is featured in other translated Haggadot from this time period as well, and is the only one offered in the French *La Haggadah de Paque* by Joseph Bloch (Paris: 1950), p. 36. It is also the only explanation found in the National Jewish Outreach Program’s *Beginners Passover Haggadah* (New York: NJOP Publications, 2010), p. 18.

³⁶ “With the recital of the Ten Plagues, each participant removes a drop of wine from his or her cup using a fingertip. Although this night is one of salvation, the sages explain that one cannot be completely joyous when some of God’s creatures had to suffer.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover_Seder.

³⁷ To name a few, it is brought in the name of Abarbanel in Yaakov Weingarten, *ha-Seder ha-Aruch, volume 2* (Jerusalem: Machon Otzar HaMoadim, 1992), pp. 178, 179; it is brought without attribution in R. Ephraim Greenblatt, *Rivevot Ephraim, Orach Chayyim, volume 2* (Brooklyn, NY: Deutsch Printing and Publishing Co., 1978), siman 137, p. 361; R. Moshe Zvi Holzberg, “*Biur Makkot Mitzraim*” in *Kovetz Beit Abaron* 33, Shvat-Adar 5751/1991, p. 50; and in the name of Abarbanel in R. Yoel Friedman, “*Yayin Shel Shvi’it b’Leil haSeder*,” in *Emunat Itecha* 3, Shvat-Adar 5755/1995, reprinted in R. Yoel Friedman, ed., *HaTorah v’HaAretz* (Jerusalem: Chemed, 2001), p. 227.

³⁸ R. David Feinstein, *The Kol Dodi Haggadah* (Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications in conjunction with Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem, 1990), p. 106. There it is stated that the wine is removed “in consideration for the losses caused by the plagues.” This appears in the Hebrew original (New York: Tiferet, 1970), p. 21, as the somewhat more ambiguous “גוהגים ששופכים לאיבוד המכות.”

³⁹ R. Yaakov Wehl, *The Haggadah with Answers* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1997), p. 143. Not attributed to any authority, it is introduced by “It is also

it and explains, “The four cups were instituted by the Sages as a demonstration of our joy over having been redeemed from Egyptian servitude and our becoming God's chosen people in the process. In order to ensure that there is no trace of other emotions involved in our celebration of the Exodus, so that there will be no gloating over the misfortune of the Egyptians rather than joy at our own good fortune, some wine is spilled as we recount the frightful plagues that were visited upon our former tormentors. The spilled wine represents a symbolic reduction in the tone of our joy, to remind us to keep our celebrations within the limits of propriety and sensitivity.”⁴⁰ The Bostoner Rebbe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz, gives a similar explanation: “Our cup is also lacking when God strikes them.”⁴¹ The “incomplete joy” explanation is the only one offered in some Modern Orthodox Haggadot. The *Yeshiva University Haggada* brings it in the name of Abarbanel.⁴² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks calls it “the most beautiful” explanation for the custom, and does not offer alternative explanations.⁴³ Rabbi Shlomo Riskin includes it in his Haggadah, stating that “it symbolizes our sadness at the loss of human life—even that of our enemies.”⁴⁴ It is also found on Orthodox “Ask the Rabbi” forums on the Internet.⁴⁵ By now it appears in many mainstream scholarly Hebrew Haggadot, one version brought in the recently published Haggadah based on

possible to suggest another reason...” The Hebrew original, *Haggadat Ki Yishalcha Bincha* (Brooklyn, NY: Tova Press, 1993), p. 202, introduces the explanation with “לכאורה אולי יש לומר.”

⁴⁰ R. Yaakov Blinder, *The Haggadah of the Roshei Yeshiva – Book Two* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1999), pp. 136, 137, translated from Asher Bergman, *Haggadah Shel Pesach – Arẓei haLevanon – volume two* (Bnei Brak: Mishor, 1999), p. 154; Yaakov Abramsky, *Chazqon Yechezkel* (Bnei Brak: 2009), p. 398.

⁴¹ *Seder Haggadah Shel Pesach – Ezrat Avoteinu* (Jerusalem: New England Chassidic Center, 1997), p. 146.

⁴² Steven Cohen and Kenneth Brander, editors, *The Yeshiva University Haggada* (New York: Student Organization of Yeshiva, 1985), p. 19.

⁴³ R. Jonathan Sacks, *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's Haggadah* (New York: Continuum, 2010) p. 36.

⁴⁴ R. Shlomo Riskin, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: Ktav, 1983), p. 90.

⁴⁵ This is the answer given in the Ohr Somayach “Ask the Rabbi” question on “Drops of Wine”: “While we rejoice at our salvation, we nonetheless retain our sensitivities to the suffering of the Egyptians by diminishing our joy, if only in the mildest extent.” <http://ohr.edu/ask_db/ask_main.php/273/Q3/>. It is worth noting that the Chabad “Ask the Rabbi” site gives not the “incomplete joy” explanation, but one more closely resembling the original explanation: “The Ten Plagues, describing the affliction of the Egyptians, represent negative energy that we would rather not bring into our system. So after reading each plague we spill wine from the cup, banishing the forces of punishment and its curses,

the teachings of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv.⁴⁶

Abarbanel and Avudraham

Some Haggadot attribute this explanation to Abarbanel. The earliest such attribution seems to be in the “*Fun Unzer Alten Otzar*” column of the Warsaw newspaper “Hajnt” from March 26, 1937.⁴⁷ This was a column, considered innovative at the time, that Moshe Bunem Justman (1889–1942) began writing in 1930, collecting short Torah ideas related to the weekly portion or upcoming holiday.⁴⁸ These were later collected in the “*Fun Unzer Alten Otzar*” series of books. In the Haggadah of this series, published in Warsaw in 1938, the “incomplete joy” explanation is brought in the name of Don Isaac Abarbanel, as it appeared in the newspaper column a year before.⁴⁹

This explanation is included in a Hebrew translation of material on the holidays and Pirkei Avot compiled from Justman's books, *MeOtzareinu haYashan*,⁵⁰ first published in 1965, and from there has made it to various collections of material on Pesach.⁵¹ The same explanation, worded slightly differently, also appears in the name of Abarbanel in the “overwhelmingly popular”⁵² Hebrew *Yalkut Tov* Haggadah by R. Eliyahu Kitov, first published in 1961 and many times since.⁵³ From there it was copied word for word in *Yalkut l'Moadim: Haggadah Shel Pesach*, compiled by Rabbi Chaim

and leaving the cup with only blessings. The spilled wine should then be discarded, for drinking it would be drinking in the plagues.” http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1814212/jewish/Why-Do-We-Spill-Wine-on-Passover-Night.htm.

⁴⁶ Moshe Israelzon, *Haggadah Shel Pesach* (Jerusalem: Machon Keren Reem, 2006), p. 106. There it is brought as “ואפשר לומר” and suggests that God is unhappy because of the death of the Egyptians.

⁴⁷ *Fun Unzer Alten Otzar*, Hajnt, March 26, 1937, p. 6.

⁴⁸ H. Justus (Justman), *MeOtzareinu haYashan – Bereishit* (Tel Aviv: Mofet, 1976), p. 8.

⁴⁹ B. Yoashson (Moshe Bunem Justman), *Haggadah shel Pesach mit a Modern Yiddish Iberzetzung – Fun Unzer Alten Otzar* (Warsaw: Yehudiah, 1938), p. 57. It was republished in New York by Saphrograph in 1947.

⁵⁰ Shimshon Meltzer, translator, *MeOtzareinu haYashan* (Tel Aviv: Modiin, 1976), p. 109.

⁵¹ To name two, the exact formulation is copied in Chaim Zuckerman, *Birkat Chayyim al Moadim – vol. 2* (Tel Aviv: 1971), p. 133, and Chanan Levi, *be-Shvilei ha-Chodashim* (Rechasim: Tiferet Ram, 2001), p. 923.

⁵² Introduction to the Feldheim English translation of the Kitov Haggadah (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1999), p. vi.

⁵³ Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, *Haggadah Shel Pesach: Yalkut Tov* (Jerusalem: Alef, 1961), p. 79.

Becker, published in 1968,⁵⁴ part of a series of books he wrote collecting short ideas related to each holiday. From there it was copied for later collections.⁵⁵ R. Kitov is also the source used by the 1977 Artscroll Haggadah.⁵⁶ These two slightly different Hebrew texts of this “quote” from Abarbanel seem to be based on different ways to rephrase Justman's original Yiddish misattribution.

In the 1978 Artscroll *The Haggadah Treasury* this explanation is given in the name of Avudraham,⁵⁷ an approach followed in *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's Haggadah*.⁵⁸ Since this idea does not actually appear in the writings of either Avudraham or Abarbanel,⁵⁹ scholarly works that bring this explanation are generally careful not to attribute it to a particular early rabbinic authority, instead attributing it to ambiguous “later sources”⁶⁰ or

⁵⁴ R. Chaim S. Becker, *Yalkut l'Moadim: Haggadah Shel Pesach* (Jerusalem: Hatechiya, 1968), p. 103. He also copies the *Mesech Chochma* brought right after from the Kitov Haggadah, as well as the same exact formulation of the Maharil's explanation. The book *Yalkut l'Moadim: Haggadah Shel Pesach* was not very meticulous about citing references. On the same page he gives the Vilna Gaon as the source for the explanation found in *Sefer Matamim* that the custom symbolizes the diminishing of the Egyptians, an idea not found in the writings of the Vilna Gaon. See R. Yosef Eliyahu Halevi Movshovitz, editor, *Haggadah Shel Pesach im Perush haGra* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2009), p. 63. The source of the confusion, it seems, is Yosef Leser's *Haggadah Shel Pesach – Ma'atayim Shloshim v'Shemoneh Peirushim* (Cracow, Poland: 1905), p. 39, where two paragraphs in small print are found under a large print heading “From Rabbenu the GRA,” but the second paragraph actually begins with the words “In the name of *Sefer haMinhagim*” and gives the explanation found in *Sefer Matamim* in the name of *Sefer Minhagim*.

⁵⁵ Two examples: Bezalel Landau, *Haggadah Shel Pesach – l'Avot ul'Banim* (Jerusalem: Mifal Torah mi'Tzion, 1972), p. 49; Meir Cohen, *Sefer Pesach ke-Halacha* (Ashdod: 1997), p. 130.

⁵⁶ R. Kitov is listed in the bibliography of the Artscroll Haggadah, and in a footnote to the explanation of Abarbanel the Artscroll Haggadah brings an idea from the *Mesech Chochma*, which in *Yalkut Tov* is also brought right after the Abarbanel.

⁵⁷ R. Nosson Sherman, editor, *The Haggadah Treasury* (New York: Mesorah Publications in conjunction with Zeirei Agudath Israel of America, 1978), p. 92.

⁵⁸ R. Jonathan Sacks, *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's Haggadah* (New York: Continuum, 2010) p. 36.

⁵⁹ David Arnov, *Creating Lively Passover Seders* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), p. 192, correctly notes that it is “widely (but questionably) attributed to Isaac Abarbanel.”

⁶⁰ Joseph Tabory, *The JPS Commentary on the Haggadah: Historical Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008), p. 27.

“the opinion of some,”⁶¹ or stating that “it is commonly said.”⁶² In later additions to the commentary of Abarbanel on the Haggadah,⁶³ the “incomplete joy” explanation is also absent. Modern English-language Haggadot that give Avudraham or Abarbanel as the source for the “incomplete joy” explanation seem to be using these Artscroll Haggadot from the 1970s as their source.

The Earliest Sources

What is the actual origin of this explanation for the custom? Since it seems to smack of political correctness, some claim that this particular interpretation was started by Reform rabbis, an idea propagated by the Reform movement itself. It was claimed that this “beautiful and moving interpretation” of the removal of drops of wine as symbolizing “the diminishing of our joy at our own redemption as we recall the sufferings of our oppressors” was “originated by Rabbi Herbert Bronstein in the 1974 CCAR Haggadah.”⁶⁴ We have seen, however, that this interpretation was already popular decades before that.

In his introduction to his 1947 commentary to the Haggadah, Daniel Goldschmidt writes that “in recent times an attempt has been made to explain this custom in a more ethical manner, and give it a meaning that is appropriate for modern sensibilities, as if we are symbolically lessening the joy of the holiday due to consideration of the downfall of the Egyptians, based on the verse “If your enemy falls do not exult” (Proverbs 24:17).” In a note he attributes this explanation to Rabbis S. R. Hirsch and Eduard Baneth.⁶⁵ We do not find this reason for the custom of taking out

⁶¹ R. Menachem Kasher, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: 1957), p. 159.

⁶² Lawrence Hoffman and David Arnow, editors, *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries, volume 2* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), p. 45.

⁶³ Israel Meir Perser, *Haggadah Shel Pesach Abarbanel – Zevach Pesach* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2007), p. 13.

⁶⁴ “Selections From *The New Union Haggadah*,” *The Reform Advocate*, volume 6, number 1, Spring 2014, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Daniel Goldschmidt, *Haggadah Shel Pesach* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1947), pp. 20-21. This is also noted in the English-language Passover Haggadah edited by Nahum Glatzer, published in 1953, which incorporated Goldschmidt's comments, “in recent times an attempt has been made by S.R. Hirsch and Eduard Baneth to interpret this custom as a symbolic tempering of the joy of the evening in order to show sympathy for the misfortune of the Egyptians.” Nahum Glatzer, editor, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. 41.

drops of wine in the writings of R. Hirsch,⁶⁶ but we do find it in the writings of Baneth. Eduard Ezekiel Baneth (1855–1930) studied at the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin and was ordained by Rabbi Israel Hildesheimer.⁶⁷ He served as the rabbi of Krotoszyn, Poland, and later was a professor of Talmud at the Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, where he was succeeded by Chanoch Albeck.⁶⁸ Baneth was known in Germany as a *talmid chacham* and an academic. While he was completely observant and a member of *Mizrachi* (he was one of the founders of the weekly national-religious Hebrew newspaper “*Ha-Ivri*”),⁶⁹ he was not considered part of the official Orthodox establishment due to his position at the Lehranstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, a liberal institution.⁷⁰ Today Eduard Baneth is mostly remembered for giving a score of “Good” to Regina Jones’ paper “Can a woman hold rabbinical office?” shortly before his death. Regina Jones went on to be the first

⁶⁶ In the original German edition of his Schocken Haggadah, *Die Pessach-Haggada* (Berlin: Schocken, 1937), pp. 23, 24, Goldschmidt attributed this explanation to R. Hirsch but did not provide a source for that attribution. R. Hirsch did not write a commentary to the Haggadah, as noted in the introduction to the Feldheim *Hirsch Haggadah*. He does discuss the idea “If your enemy falls do not exult” (Proverbs 24:17) in his commentary to *Pirkei Avot* 4:23, but does not connect it with this Passover custom. In the material on this verse brought in the collection of R. Hirsch’s writings on Proverbs, *From the Wisdom of Mishlei* (New York: Feldheim, 2000) there is also nothing related to Passover. The explanation is also brought in the name of R. Hirsch, but likewise with no actual reference, in Yehuda David Zinger, *Ziv haMinhagim* (Jerusalem: Kollel Ziv haMinhagim, 2000), p. 125.

⁶⁷ *Jewish Encyclopedia – volume 2* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), p. 489. A photo of Baneth can be found in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia vol. 2* (New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., 1948), p. 63. An early Hebrew-language Haggadah with this explanation, but without any attribution, is R. Zev Klein, *Haggadah shel Pesach – Chochmah im Nachalah* (Buenos Aires: Julio Kaufman, 1948), p. 38. It is significant that R. Klein was a member of Kahal Adass Yisroel in Berlin, led by R. Hildesheimer, and often quotes R. Hirsch in his Haggadah.

⁶⁸ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Dictionary of Jewish Biography* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 22.

⁶⁹ Baneth’s connection to Mizrachi may have contributed to the inclusion of this explanation in the German guidebook on the Seder for Mizrachi Youth. Bernhard S. Jacobson, *Pesach: Arbeitsplan und Stoffsammlung* (Hamburg: 1936), p. 25. Bernhard Jacobson would go on to write the *Netiv Bina* series on the prayers as Yissachar Yaakovson.

⁷⁰ Mayer Bar-Ilan, *From Volozhin to Jerusalem - volume 2* (Tel Aviv: Pilei, 1939), p. 394 (Hebrew).

woman ordained as a rabbi in 1935.⁷¹ Eduard Baneth mentions the “incomplete joy” explanation for taking some wine out of the cup at the Seder in his lecture on the Pesach Seder, “*Der Sederabend: Ein Vortrag*,” published in Berlin in 1904, a work considered significant in its time.⁷² There he writes that when he was “still a boy, the strange custom was explained” to mean that wine is a symbol of joy and because each plague caused our tormentors to suffer on our account, we diminish our joy over our own liberation. He notes that “whether this explanation may make claim to historical truth” is an open question, but “one must recognize the poetic truth” and that it “breathes the spirit of Judaism” as reflected in the midrash quoted in *Beit Yosef* O.C. 490.⁷³

One of Baneth's contemporaries, Rabbi Eliyahu Klatzkin (1852–1932), the famed “ilui from Shklov” who served as Chief Rabbi of Lublin from 1910–1928,⁷⁴ also mentions this explanation. Rabbi Klatzkin authored many books, and was considered a major halachic authority, particularly in the area of releasing *agunot*.⁷⁵ He was also known for his knowledge of medicine, pharmacology, mathematics, history, and geography, and was conversant in Greek, Latin, German, French, English, Russian and Polish.⁷⁶ *Kuntres l'Dugma* is a 24-page booklet of miscellaneous material from works that Rabbi Klatzkin began writing but never completed. The beginning section has homiletic material related to the weekly

⁷¹ See Michael Meyer, “Women in the Thought and Practice of the European Jewish Reform Movement” in Marion Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore, editors, *Gender and Jewish History* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), p. 152; Tiffany Wayne, editor, *Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World: A Global Sourcebook and History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), p. 504; George Kohler, *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy in 19th Century Germany: The Guide to Religious Reform* (New York: Springer, 2012), p. 8, note 22.

⁷² Glatzer considered it worthy of “special attention.” Nahum Glatzer, editor, *The Passover Haggadah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. 14. It is noted as “a penetrating analysis” in Goldschmidt, “Studies on Jewish Liturgy by German-Jewish Scholars,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1957) 2 (1), p. 129.

⁷³ Eduard Baneth, *Der Sederabend: Ein Vortrag* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1904), pp. 28–29.

⁷⁴ Jacob Klatzkin, “Eliyahu Klatzkin,” in Leo Jung, editor, *Jewish Leaders, 1750–1940* (New York: Bloch, 1954), p. 340. Aviad Hacohen, *The Tears of the Oppressed* (Jersey City, New Jersey: Ktav, 2004), p. 62, note 125.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Shimon Yosef Meller, *The Brisker Rav: The Life and Times of Maran HaGaon HaRav Yitzchok Ze'ev HaLevi Soloveichik zt"l* – volume one (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 2007), p. 233, note 2.

⁷⁶ Shnayer Z. Leiman, “Rabbinic Openness to General Culture in the Early Modern Period in Western and Central Europe,” in Jacob J. Schacter, editor, *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1997), p. 213, note 178.

Torah reading, and in the section on *Parasbat Ve'era* he writes that “We do not act like the Gentiles who are joyous at the downfall of their enemies when they...kill them, rather we follow the ways of the Holy One Blessed be He (B. Sotah 14a), and it is written, “The Holy One Blessed be He is not happy at the destruction of the wicked...He said to them ‘My handiwork is drowning in the sea and you sing before me’” (B. Sanhedrin 39b), and when we mention and tell of the plagues...we pour out and diminish the cup through dripping out drop by drop...” He continues that in addition to the original reason for the custom given by the Rokeach, “it makes sense to say that it is also to show that...when we recall this we are pained...and to remember the pain mixed with joy, we take away from the cup...”⁷⁷

Both Klatzkin and Baneth indicate that this explanation is not the historical reason for the custom, an assessment echoed in the *Schechter Haggadah*, which, after giving Abarbanel as the author of this explanation, states that “although it does not seem that this is the origin of the custom, it is a notion connected to Pesach in classical rabbinic sources” and goes on to quote the midrashim mentioned earlier.⁷⁸ It should be noted, however, that although this idea might be connected to Pesach in general, until the innovation of the “incomplete joy” explanation, the message of the plagues was understood to emphasize that “only the exercise of overwhelming force...ultimately succeeded in freeing the Jewish people from slavery.”⁷⁹

While it is clear that the latter formulations of this idea were derived from Eduard Baneth, as they make reference to the reciting of the partial Hallel, an idea noted in the discussion of the custom by Baneth but not mentioned by Klatzkin, we now see that the “diminished joy” idea was being stated by learned Orthodox rabbis in the early 1900s. Seeing as Eduard Baneth was only three years younger than Eliyahu Klatzkin, it is clear

⁷⁷ R. Eliyahu Klatzkin, *Kuntres l'Dugma* (Lublin: 1921), pp. 4, 5. Rabbi Klatzkin moved to Jerusalem in 1928, and this explanation is included in his name in Haggadot that focus on the rabbis of Jerusalem. See, Shabbtai Rosenthal, *Haggadah Shel Pesach – Geonei v'Chachmei Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem: Mifal Moreshet Yerushalayim, 1996), pp. 95, 96; Shlomo Verner, *miShulchanam Shel Gedolei Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem: Machon Keren Re'em, 2008), p. 121. Both books change the order of the sentences in Rabbi Klatzkin's original formulation, but are otherwise true to the source material. R. Klatzkin is also quoted in Pinchas Issac, *Pninei Pardes – Haggadah Shel Pesach* (Rishon LeZion: 1995), pp. 87, 88.

⁷⁸ Joshua Kulp and David Golinkin, *The Schechter Haggadah: Art, History and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2009), p. 233.

⁷⁹ Laufer, p. 98.

that Klatzkin was not the source of the explanation that Baneth heard as a young boy at the Seder.

The True Origin

Is there any way of determining who originated the idea that was told to a young Eduard Baneth? The book *Divrei Yirmiyahu – Drashot* is a collection of the drashot of R. Yirmiyahu Löw (1812–1874), compiled by his grandson, R. Binyamin Zev Lev (Löw). In the last pages of the book, some extra material is added “in order not to leave blank pages.” There, the author, R. Binyamin Zev Lev, brings the “incomplete joy” explanation in the name of his grandfather, indicating that it was a nice idea that his grandfather originated.⁸⁰ He writes that his grandfather explained that “since the Jewish people are merciful, and since through the rescue from Egypt many of God's creations were destroyed and drowned, although it is a great joy for us that God took us out of Egypt and redeemed us, it is still painful for us that through this others were destroyed...and if God would have rescued us without the destruction and death of others it would be a greater joy for us. Therefore our joy is a little diminished, and to show that Israel are merciful and the children of merciful, we pour out a little at every plague.”⁸¹

Although this book was published in 1934, making Baneth's record of this explanation published in 1904 the earliest, this represents the earliest legitimate named attribution for this explanation, placing its origin in the 1800s. This explanation does not connect the drops of wine to the midrashic explanation for the abbreviated Hallel; that connection was made by Baneth. In the formulation of R. Yirmiyahu Löw, there is nothing inherently unethical or inappropriate about celebrating the destruction of their enemies, but “since the Jewish people are merciful” and “to show that Israel are merciful and the children of merciful,” we go beyond normal moral standards and express diminished joy because of the deaths of the Egyptians. This aspect was also stressed by Klatzkin, who emphasizes

⁸⁰ He writes that his grandfather “gave a nice explanation” (בתן טעם לשבחה).

⁸¹ R. Binyamin Zev Lev (Löw), *Sefer Divrei Yirmiyahu – Drashot* (Satmar: Meir Lev Hirsch, 1934), 42b. In Shaul Yechezkel Weiss, *Haggadah Shel Pesach – Otzar Divrei Hamefarshim* (London: 2010), p. 321, he mistakenly attributes this explanation to R. Elazar Löw of Santov in the name of his own grandfather, but the writer of this particular section is the compiler of the book, R. Binyamin Zev. It is clear that he is referring to his own grandfather, whom he calls זקני הקדוש ז”ל, as distinct from his great grandfather, R. Binyamin Wolf, whom he refers to as זקני ז”ל בעל הקדוש בעל שערי תורה ז”ל in the very next paragraph.

that not expressing joy at the death of enemies is a particularly Jewish trait. It would seem that the ultimate origin of the “incomplete joy” explanation is R. Yirmiyahu Löw. Although the “incomplete joy” explanation seems to express modern sensibilities and possibly political correctness, R. Yirmiyahu Löw was not known for these characteristics, and in fact was known as a “recognized leader of Hungarian Orthodoxy” who was a vigorous opponent of Hasidism, Reform⁸² and Haskalah.⁸³

Eduard Baneth was nineteen years old when R. Yirmiyahu Löw passed away, and it is reasonable that a member of the Baneth family related an explanation heard from Löw. The rabbinical figures in the Löw and Baneth families were connected for generations. R. Yirmiyahu Löw's grandfather, R. Elazar Löw (1758–1837, author of *Shemen Rokeach*), became the rabbi of the Moravian community of Triesch at the recommendation of his friend, the famed R. Mordechai Benet of Nikolsburg (1753–1829),⁸⁴ and his aunt Gittel married R. Mordechai Benet's son Yishayahu.⁸⁵ Benet gave one of the *baskamot* to the first volume of his father R. Binyamin Wolf's *Shaarei Torah*.⁸⁶ Most significantly, both R. Yirmiyahu Löw and his brother studied under R. Mordechai Benet.⁸⁷ R. Mordechai Benet's cousin Joachim Markus (Yaakov) Banet (1750–1812) was the

⁸² *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* vol. 7 (New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., 1948), p. 213.

⁸³ See Yechiel Michel Stern, *Sefer Gedolei haDorot* (Jerusalem: Minchat Yisrael, 1996), p. 690, and David Halachmi, *Chachmei Yisrael* (Bnei Brak: Tiferet Hasefer, 1980), p. 303.

⁸⁴ Zahava Stessel, *Wine and Thorns in Tokay Valley: Jewish life in Hungary* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 120. R. Mordechai Benet also recommended to R. Elazar Löw not to rewrite his commentary on *Choshen Mishpat* after the manuscript was lost once, then rewritten and burned in a fire. R. Benet said this should be taken as a divine sign not to rewrite this work so that scholars would have to study the original source material, p. 121.

⁸⁵ Moshe Samet, *baChadash Assur Min haTorah* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2005), p. 272; Zahava Stessel, *Wine and Thorns in Tokay Valley: Jewish life in Hungary* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 126.

⁸⁶ Yitzchak Yosef Cohen, *Chachmei Hungaria v'haSafrut haToranit Bab* (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 1997), p. 254.

⁸⁷ Stessel, p. 124; Yirmiyahu Feldman, *Divrei Yirmiyahu – Kiddushin* (Jerusalem: Machon Yerushalayim, 1984), p. 12.

great grandfather of Eduard Baneth.⁸⁸ Thus it is possible that young Eduard Baneth heard the explanation of R. Yirmiyahu Löw through a relative at a family Seder.

Many of the elements found in the “incomplete joy” explanation as stated by Löw, Klatzkin and Baneth are found in the book *Mesbech Chochma* by their contemporary, Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926). In his commentary to Exodus 12:16,⁸⁹ Rav Meir Simcha explains that the Israelites were told about the holiday on the seventh day of Pesach while still in Egypt “to teach that the holiday is not due to the downfall of the Egyptians at the sea, for God commanded them before the Egyptians drowned...and so it is explained in *Yalkut Shimoni* (*remez* 654), that this is the reason that *simcha* is not written by Pesach and we do not complete Hallel all seven because “If your enemy falls do not exult” (Proverbs 24:17).” He specifically states that other nations establish holidays to celebrate the downfall of their enemies, but Jews do not do this, an element also stated by Löw and Klatzkin. Although he does not refer to the custom of dripping out wine, there is a clear affinity of this commentary of *Mesbech Chochma* to the “incomplete joy” explanation, showing that the general gist of this interpretation was “in the air” during this time period. This connection was noted by Kitov, who included it in his Haggadah right after bringing the explanation from “Abrabanel.”⁹⁰ Seeing as the first part of *Mesbech Chochma* was published decades after the death of R. Yirmiyahu Löw,⁹¹ Löw remains the earliest representative of this interpretive approach.


It remains unclear how the explanation offered to the young Eduard Baneth came to be associated with Abarbanel and Avudraham. What these authorities have in common is that their names begin with the letters אב, the same letters as the Hebrew initials of Eduard Baneth. Thus it is possible that a writer saw this explanation written in Hebrew in the name of אב ר' and misunderstood these letters as referring to the first two letters of either Abarbanel or Avudraham.

⁸⁸ Benet, Banet and Baneth are all variant spellings of the same name and were variously used by the different members of the extended family. Benzion Kaganoff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and Their History* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996), p. 131.

⁸⁹ In some editions it is attached to the comments on Exodus 12:15.

⁹⁰ Kitov, p. 79. It also appears there in the 1977 Artscroll Haggadah, which used Kitov as a source.

⁹¹ The earliest any part of the *Mesech Chochma* was printed was 1902. See the introduction to the *Mesech Chochma* by Avraham Avraham in the Feldheim edition.

We have seen that the modern popularity of the “incomplete joy” explanation can be traced back to an approach originating with R. Yirmiyahu Löw and related to the young Eduard Baneth, and reported by him years later in a lecture. Eduard Baneth is the earliest written source for this explanation. Although sometimes claimed to originate with Reform rabbis, it actually originated with an Orthodox rabbi in the 1800s. It resonated with the sensibilities of English-speaking American Jews in particular, and was popularized through being presented as the only explanation for the custom in American Haggadot from the 1940s and on. This explanation came to be seen as more humane and understandable than the original explanation that this represents the 16-faceted sword of God, and by now has eclipsed the original meaning of the custom, certainly in the English-speaking Jewish world.⁹² 

⁹² Thanks to R. Beinisch Ginsburg for asking me about the source of this explanation, an inquiry that led to the writing of this article; Claudia Bollag for helping translate German material; and my students, Ephraim Hollander, Eli Genauer and Avi Hoffman who helped me go through all the Haggadot at the Hebrew Union College library. Special thanks to my friend Avi Levine for all-around help and for the many stimulating conversations we had about this issue, which opened up new areas of research.