

**BEYOND THE DOOR:
PROPOSING A NEW INTERPRETATION OF ESCHATOLOGICAL
EXPECTATIONS DURING THE PASSOVER-SEDER**

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ABSTRACT

The article compares traditional and liberal English and German *Haggadot*, analyzing the ritual of opening the door during the Passover-*Seder* in order to curse the nations and invite the prophet Elijah. Based on criticism towards mechanisms of “othering” in Judaism and Passover as raised by a leading contemporary Israeli philosopher, as well as on mitigating changes made to the ritual in the tradition of Liberal Judaism, the article proposes a new understanding of the passage in question. That which lies beyond the door, inconsistently characterized as being both a place of messianic expectation and danger from the gentile, should instead be re-imagined as a place of peaceful coexistence between Elijah and the gentiles, to be virtually un-locked by those celebrating Passover. Reflecting on interreligious theological thinking, this is shown to be an eschatological act.

INTRODUCTION¹

Passover is among the most meaningful celebrations in Judaism. With a history evidenced not only in biblical, but pre-biblical religious practice,² it has developed into a ritual commemoration of the founding event that defines Jewish history:³ The Israelites' salvation from ancient Egypt through God's intervention and the subsequent covenant between God and Israel.

Said commemoration is an ambivalent one: On the one hand, it is an expression of joy and humility for being freed from slavery and being selected as God's chosen people. At the same time, Passover serves as a bitter reminder of the many enemies of Israel who followed those mythological Egyptians in trying to enslave or destroy Judaism. Thus, Passover is also a celebration of continued survival,⁴ of overcoming current threats, and hoping for future salvation.

¹ Where German texts are quoted, we have translated them into English. Scriptural passages are either quoted directly from our sources (sometimes translated) or taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

² For an overview of Passover's historical development see: Galley, *Jahr*, pp. 135 ff., as well as, Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 40 ff.

³ The historicity of Exodus has long been the subject of debate. Coming from a historical-critical tradition, we tend to automatically assume a somewhat demystified perspective. Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 94 f., who won't deny the Exodus' historicity *per se*, but is more interested in its "character as a model", than in its "episodic" occurrence, notes, almost in passing, that there are no Egyptian sources corroborating the Israelites' exodus as narrated in the Bible. Conversely, critical views of the historicity of Exodus are strongly (and, judging from his absolutizing choice of words, probably for ideological reasons) rejected by Hertz in *The Passover Anthology* (ed. P. Goodman), pp. 10 ff., who refers to "the 'inconvenience' of biblical traditions" as indication of their truth. We were recently made aware of a position advanced by Hendel that may serve as a middle ground between a biblical and a historical-critical interpretation: According to Hendel, Exodus, the story of the exodus reflects a factual subjugation under Egyptian rule that extended to pre-Israelite Canaan territory (pp. 65 ff.). After the Egyptians' power over the land Canaan had waned in the 12th century BCE (p. 68), the original Song of the Sea, drawing upon and subverting images of Pharaoh as a divine conqueror of chaos, served to portray Pharaoh as a power of chaos in his own right that was in turn overcome by God (pp. 71 ff.), thereby creating a founding myth of Israel as a "cultural memory" that reflects historical experiences of political repression, but transforms them into a topical, religious idea to create a shared identity for the people (pp. 68 f., referring to Killebrew and others). Also compare notes 67-85.

⁴ Boeckler freely translates a passage of the Passover-*Haggadah* into German as reading "No one has ever managed to destroy us completely" (R. Shire, *Haggadah* [German version], p. 20).

On the evening of the first, or first two nights, of Passover, the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt is retold, while those partaking in the ritual share a symbolic meal, and fulfill a number of traditional, sometimes deeply earnest, sometimes playful actions. The structure of the evening, the *Seder*, is defined by the reading of the Passover-*Haggadah*. While the *Haggadah* mostly expresses joy for Israel's continued salvation and a, sometimes, melancholic hope for its future deliverance, critics have noted that some parts of the Passover ceremony seem belligerent or spiteful towards Non-Jews, i.e. the gentiles. This essay will take a closer look at one of those occurrences and propose a new interpretation of the passage in question.

After a quick walkthrough of the passage (I), we will at first deal with some of the critical positions towards Passover (II), the most notable among them being advanced by Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir, before presenting our own take on the problem at hand (III). The essay concludes with a contemplation on interreligious (eschatological) thinking between Judaism and Christianity (IV) that serves the double purpose of legitimizing our taking to the question despite writing from a Christian point of view.

Our understanding of the Passover-*Seder* is shaped by our own copy of the *Haggadah*, edited by Rabbi Michael Shire (currently of Boston Hebrew College, a German translation of which has been published in association with the Abraham Geiger Kolleg of Potsdam University in 2013). R. Shire's interpretation of Passover adapts the text of the *Haggadah* edited by the British Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues⁵ (now Liberal Judaism) in 1996, that puts a special emphasis on themes of peace and responsibility, thereby influencing our own approach to the Passover-ritual.

Where the texts of R. Shire's *Haggadah* and the Union's version deviate from one another, or from more common *Haggadot*, as is the case with the passage analyzed below,

⁵ Not to be confused with the American *Union Haggadah* as cited by Blank; see note 8.

we shall point out the differences. If in doubt, we will refer to the Passover-*Haggadah* edited by Rabbi Robert Raphael Geis and published by *Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland* (1954) as presented by fellow recipient of the Buber-Rosenzweig-Medal Schalom Ben-Chorin. Although R. Geis was a liberal Rabbi engaged in interreligious and intercultural dialogue himself,⁶ his edition of the *Haggadah* lends itself as a template for comparison as it is free of ideological alterations made to the text, maintaining critical passages that other versions omit. It in turn represents an adoption of the classically conservative *Haggadah* edited by Ernst Daniel Goldschmidt in 1936.

There are, of course, a multitude of *Haggadot* available today,⁷ in Germany and elsewhere (e.g. the United States and Israel). Some of them might have been equally suited to our purposes. We feel, however, that the versions we chose to compare⁸ for the present article act as highly reputable sources as all of them are connected to recognized religious and academic institutions or to scholars of renown. While these versions will continue to serve us as a foundation for our analysis, we will also consult the key existing American and Israeli literature on the topic in order to integrate the readings that have influenced us into the wider scholarly debate.

Accordingly, it should be noted, that the sources we cite in this essay stem from a variety of cultural backgrounds. It is, therefore, possible that American readers will encounter ideas that may seem self-evident, though novel to others (and vice versa). In addition, different cultural circumstances may lend peculiar layers of interpretation to different readings of the *Haggadah*. Certain customs may be typically American, a translation may carry a special connotation in the German language, or an idea may have

⁶ See [biographical notes on R. Geis in the digitized archives of the Leo Baeck Institute](#).

⁷ Compare Ophir, *Other*, pp. 206 f., 230, with reference to Goldstein, as well as Tabory, *Commentary*, p. 1, referring to Yudlov.

⁸ For a similar comparison of the way different *Haggadot* deal with the passage in question see Blank, *Sh'fokh Hamatkha and Eliyahu in the Haggadah: Ideology and Liturgy*, published in 1987. Also compare Balin, *The Modern Transformation of the Ancient Passover Haggadah*, 1999. Unlike Blank and Balin, who focus on publication history as well as the different ideologies and political circumstances behind the decisions concerning possible changes made to the *Haggadah*, we chose an imaginative, somewhat more "prescriptive" approach to the matter by arguing for an interpretation of our own.

strong political implications when read in a modern Israeli context.⁹ That being said, it is not our aim to focus on a single staked-out, predetermined field of interpretation. Instead, we will adhere to a rough distinction between “liberal” and “traditional” readings and otherwise make full use of the imaginative diversity of the existing material.

I. THE OPENING OF THE DOOR

During the course of the *Seder*, the participants each have to drink four cups of wine, each symbolizing one of the promises made by God to the Israelites according to Ex 6,6f.¹⁰ The passage of the Passover-*Haggadah* that shall concern us in this essay follows upon the finishing of the third glass of wine. In the liberal versions we analyzed, the fourth cup of wine is poured at this point.

Following this, R. Shire and the Union’s version have slightly different orders, the Union’s version now interposing the second part of the Psalms-group known as *Hallel* and songs in praise that conclude with the drinking of the fourth cup. R. Shire’s and the Union’s text converge again in pouring a fifth glass for the prophet Elijah, (R. Geis’ traditional version only has four cups, the last one being poured only after the following passage,¹¹) and **the door of the house is opened**. Next, according to R. Shire’s and the Union’s versions, the *Seder* community reads out the biblical text Mal 3,23-24a missing in more common *Haggadot* (the Union’s version framing the verses with some supplemental

⁹ For example, Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, p. 247, cites Sklare and Greenblum who, from a sociological point of view, explain the popularity of Passover in the USA through its compatibility with the American daily life and its conduct. Conversely, Eisen shows how Passover is celebrated in a different spirit in Israel (pp. 249 f.) where Jews are the “political majority” who enjoy “a redemption that has already occurred”. For a criticism of Passover’s function in modern Israel see note 83.

¹⁰ See Galley, *Jahr*, p. 131., Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, p. 116., and Ben-Chorin, *Bruder Jesus*, p. 182.

¹¹ Compare Arnow, *Mekhilta*, p. 32, with reference to Katsnellenbogen: “Customs vary as to whether we pour the fourth cup before or after reciting the biblical verses below.”

material) in which Elijah, who had previously been carried up alive to heaven according to 2 Kings 2,11, is prophesized to return before the eschatological Day of the Lord.¹²

Afterwards, passages from two Psalms (Ps 79,6-7; Ps 69,25) and Lamentations (Eichah 3,66) are recited (omitted in the Union's version), wishing ill upon the nations that do not believe in the (Jewish) God and who have proven to be a threat for the people of Israel, beginning with the verse that gives the passage its name: **"Pour out thy wrath (שפך חמתך) upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name."**¹³ Finally, the door is closed again and those partaking in the *Seder* praise God by singing the above-mentioned second part of the *Hallel* (the Union's version now having merry songs).

There are multiple interpretations of why exactly the door is opened. According to R. Shire and the Union, the ritual symbolizes the hope for the "Messianic Age"¹⁴ preceded by the second coming of Elijah. Those celebrating Passover have already prayed for the prophet's arrival in a passage of the "Blessing after the Meal"¹⁵ which precedes the rite at issue here. In addition, R. Shire and the Union quote Eisler, who assumes that the traditional game of hide-and-seek with the *Afikoman*, a piece of *Mazza*-bread singled out at the beginning of the *Seder*, likewise refers to the yet-to-be-revealed Messiah.¹⁶ It is to R.

¹² Golinkin, *Pesah*, 12)b), referring to Leiman, traces the custom of reading Mal 3 back to a forgery by R. Yudl Rosenberg. Faking historical documents seems to be a surprisingly common occurrence where the eschatological passages of Passover are concerned; compare notes 57-59. Yuval, *Middle Ages*, pp. 129, 134, 136 ff., shows how the passage from Mal has become associated with the tradition of the *Great Shabbat* preceding Passover where it is traditionally read as *Haftarah*.

¹³ R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 46, offers a quite modern translation of the verses, having ממלכות "kingdoms", as "governments" and having "those who do not know You" instead of "the heathen that have not known thee", thereby avoiding the problematic term גוים. In the [German version] of R. Shire's *Haggadah*, p. 46, Boeckler chooses the more conservative "realms" and translates גוים with "peoples". See Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 78, for an overview of the multiple possible variants of the curses.

¹⁴ R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 45.; Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 48 f., 68.

¹⁵ Compare R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 43, and other versions. The blessing is customary after every meal and doesn't necessarily relate to Passover; compare Tabory, *Commentary*, pp. 7, 53. Nonetheless, the close proximity of the prayer to the ritual of opening the door seems scarcely coincidental. Indeed, Rosenberg includes the verses in his (forged) alternative version: See Golinkin, *Pesah*, 12)b).

¹⁶ R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 40; Union, *Haggadah*, p. 67; referring to Eisler. Compare Yuval, *Middle Ages*, pp. 146 f., 149, referring to Eisler and Daube.

Shire's and especially the Union's credit that they apply a universalistic understanding of Messianism to the passage in question [see below, Chapter III] that anticipates and influences our own approach.¹⁷

The messianic understanding of the open door stands to reason and is shared by Galley who notes that the opening of the door is also a reference to the opening of the ancient temple's gates in Jerusalem at midnight on Passover.¹⁸ In a different context, Galley describes a mystic tradition from the *Kabbalah* concerning *Sukkot*. According to said tradition, the pious is visited by seven "holy guests" in his tent over the course of the festivities, starting with Abraham and ending with David.¹⁹ Elijah plays no part in this; however, the motif of a divine visitor seems somewhat similar to that of Passover. R. Shire notes in turn that Elijah is not only expected during Passover, but also at the end of a Sabbath as well as during ritual circumcision.²⁰ Conversely, Golinkin gives some examples of the door being opened for more earthly visitors, that is, for the poor and hungry, according to the verse recited near the start of the *Seder*: "[W]hoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is needy, let him come and make Pesah."²¹ Nevertheless, Golinkin, too, knows of the more metaphysical Elijah-tradition as well.²²

¹⁷ For another example of the Union's declared universalism see Union, *Haggadah*, p. 69.

¹⁸ Galley, *Jahr*, p. 133. Also see Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 121 ff., and R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 54, on the significance of midnight for Passover, as well as Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 131 f., who understands the night of Passover as a special vigil (ליל שמורים). Also see Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 272, referring to Safrai and Safrai. Compare once again Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 116 f., and id., *Bruder Jesus*, p. 176, 181 f., who shows how the motif of the vigil is adapted and turned on its head in the New Testament account of Jesus' sleeping disciples and the night of Judas' treason. Yuval, *Dialogue*, pp. 100 f., referring to Elliot and others, shows how the vigil later reappears in a Christian apocryphal story alluding to the apostle Peter in jail.

¹⁹ Galley, *Jahr*, p. 99.

²⁰ R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 45. Compare Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 269.

²¹ Golinkin, *Pesah*, 4), with reference to Scheiber and others. Also compare Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, p. 229, referring to Jeremias and Goldschmidt. Note, however, that the door could stay closed in some cultures for pragmatical reasons as well: Golinkin, *Pesah*, 4), with reference to Goldberg and others. Compare Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 268.

²² Golinkin, *Pesah*, 4), with reference to Lewinsky and Liebermann.

Ben-Chorin is also aware of the Elijah-tradition but offers a different explanation for the prophet's appearance. According to Ben-Chorin, there had been a conflict between the followers of the great Rabbis Hillel and Schammai about the correct interpretation of Ex 6,6f. The followers of Schammai were of the opinion that V8 and its promise of the holy land should be included in the *Seder* as well, thus demanding a fifth glass of wine to be poured. Since the dispute could not be decided, the cup was to be poured but left untouched until Elijah would return to decide the question – a role that was in turn attributed to him based on a wordplay with the Aramaic term for an unsolved problem.²³ According to Ben-Chorin, the popular messianic interpretation is a later one,²⁴ the second coming of Elijah “not [being] originally intended,”²⁵ by the *Seder* ritual, that is, at least not as a purely messianic idea.

Ben-Chorin goes on to show that instead of the “friendly”²⁶ purpose of inviting the returned prophet, the opening of the door could be explained by two altogether different concepts as well. The first one is a pragmatical one: Since Passover is celebrated close to Christian Easter when Christians commemorate the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it was often accompanied in medieval Europe by an increase in Anti-Judaism and the old accusation of Jews being the murderers of Christ.²⁷ The enemies of Judaism used a legend about Jews murdering children and taking their blood to prepare the *Mazza*-bread eaten during Passover to incriminate them, even going so far as to lay down the

²³ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 38 f.: “The question remained ‘tejku’, undecided. The aramaic term tejku was, by way of Aggadah, read as an acrostic: ‘until the Tishbite (Elijah) comes and settles controversies.’” See also Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 48, 68, Noy, *Elijah* (Encyclopedia Judaica), p. 335, and Ginzberg, *Legends*, p. 233. Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, pp. 9, 15, 24 f., referring to Rabbinowicz and others, contemplates the controversy about the fifth cup being rooted in the idea of a special cup associated with the *Great Hallel* or reserved for the “weak or sick” instead; compare Kulp, *Schechter*, pp. 175 f., referring to Tabory and others, as well as p. 271, referring to Safrai and Safrai. Kulp (p. 269.), with reference to Rosenthal, rejects the idea of Elijah “as a halakhic decision-maker” in this context

²⁴ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 38 f.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 110 f. According to Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 24, referring to Lewy and others, the eschatological interpretation of the ritual is younger than the ritual itself.

²⁶ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 109.

²⁷ Compare Galley, *Jahr*, pp. 145 ff.

bodies of dead children in front of Jewish houses to falsely accuse them of infanticide.²⁸ According to Ben-Chorin, the opening of the door could have served the purpose of checking one's doorstep for a maliciously deposited corpse.²⁹

The second interpretation proposed by Ben-Chorin is that the door is opened to "let out the curses" uttered during the recitation of the verses from Psalms and Lamentations, describing this understanding of the ritual as a "magic" one.³⁰

Ophir, in noting that the *Haggadah* has a continuing influence on contemporary Jewish thought, the traditional text still being regularly read even by secular Jews in modern Israel,³¹ would agree that the invitation of Elijah, to whom he attributes the role of a "Jewish Santa Claus",³² distracts from a darker interpretation of the opening of the door: "It is interesting to note that among secular Jews in Israel, the original meaning of the open door has almost been forgotten.

Today, opening the door is associated with Elijah, the always-expected invisible guest. A simplistic, benign messianic interpretation suppresses the original hostile attitude toward the Gentile."³³ According to Ophir, said hostility carries a sense of dire reality into the *Seder* ritual:³⁴ "[T]his playful act [...] reflects a common perception of the fundamental Jewish condition: even in times of temporary relief, Jews are continually confronted by the

²⁸ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 108. Yuval, *Middle Ages*, pp. 140 ff., shows a further connection to "the charge of host desecration."

²⁹ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 108 f.; also compare Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 24, referring to Steinschneider and others. Ben-Chorin also refers to H. Heine's story "The Rabbi of Bacharach" (see *The Passover Anthology* [ed. P. Goodman], pp. 207 f.). By contrast, see Tabory, *Commentary*, p. 110: "The earlier custom seems to have been to leave the doors open throughout the evening. Deteriorating security caused people to limit opening their doors to short spans of time while reading [the aforementioned] verses." Compare Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 268 f., referring to Kasher.

³⁰ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 108.

³¹ Ophir, *Other*, pp. 206 ff.

³² *ibid.*, p. 226.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 224 f.

threat of danger and persecution.”³⁵ It is therefore that Ophir understands the opening of the door as an act of defiance, in which “Jews act *as if* they are not afraid of the Gentile.”³⁶

II. CRITICIZING PASSOVER

Not only the ritual of opening the door and wishing ill upon the gentiles but the spirit of Passover in general has been subjected to criticism from different scholars across history for the attitude it displays towards Non-Jews.

In the *Haggadah*, there’s a passage in which the **Ten Plagues** that allegedly forced the Egyptian Pharaoh to set the Israelites free are recited. During the reading of the passage, participants of the *Seder*-ritual dip their fingers into their cups of wine and deliberately spill some drops of liquid. According to R. Shire, this “reminds us that our freedom should never be at the expense of any other” and alludes to the *Midrashic* legend of God spilling tears over the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea.³⁷ The Union’s version cites another *Midrash* that has God reprimand his angels for striking up a song of triumph

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Also compare Jacobs, Passover (Encyclopedia Judaica), p. 679: “[T]oward the end of the *seder*, the front door of the house is opened to demonstrate that this is a ‘night of watching’ (Ex. 12:42) on which Israel knows no fear”; compare note 18 for an interpretation of Passover as a “vigil”.

³⁷ R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p.27; also compare Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 19, 66. According to *The Passover Anthology* (ed. P. Goodman), pp. 444 f., it is out of compassion for the drowned Egyptians and in adherence to Prov 24, 17 (“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth”) that “[o]n the intermediate and the last two days of [Passover] an abbreviated *Hallel* is said”. Compare once again Union, *Haggadah*, p. 67.

when the Egyptians perish.³⁸ These examples show that there may have always been some hesitancy towards the fate of the Egyptians being a cause for celebration.³⁹

Ben-Chorin traces the interpretation of the spilling of the wine being a sign of sympathy back to R. Samson Raphael Hirsch who encouraged an “ethicizing” reading of the Passover *Haggadah* in the 19th century.⁴⁰ In contrast to the compassionate interpretation of the gesture, Ben-Chorin originally understands the ritual as a “magic” rite to apotropaically protect oneself from the plagues evoked.⁴¹ In fact, the rite has lately been traced back to the late 12th/early 13th century writings of R. Eleazar ben Judah of Worms,⁴² who, based on a *gematrical* interpretation, did indeed understand it as “a means to ward off the potential danger inherent in God’s sixteen-faced sword”.⁴³ The compassionate understanding is therefore more recent.⁴⁴

Ophir calls the account of the plagues a “horrible show of destruction” and views *Midrashic* stories of God’s mourning for the Egyptians as a “counterdiscourse that challenges the dominant discourse”.⁴⁵ According to his analysis of how the ritual is commonly viewed in contemporary Israel, however, the spilling of the wine primarily serves as an “allusion to the drowning” rather than an expression of pity, and Ophir even considers the “additional noise and activity” during this part of the ceremony as a means

³⁸ Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 21, 66; compare *The Passover Anthology* (ed. P. Goodman), p. 444. Just like R. Shire, the Union wants “to rejoice in freedom, but not in its cost for us and our enemies,” praying for the coming of “a day when violence is no more”.

³⁹ By contrast, Tabory, *Commentary*, p. 47, referring to Goldschmidt, gives account of “a passage that portrays the attempt of the angels to punish Egypt. God rejects their attempt, stating that He wishes to avenge His children personally.” Compare Ophir, *Other*, p. 232.

⁴⁰ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 80 f. Compare Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, pp. 23 f. According to the Union, *Haggadah*, p. 66, Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508) linked the spilling of the wine to the above mentioned Prov 24, 17. Compare Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 233.

⁴¹ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 80. Compare Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 23.

⁴² Tabory, *Commentary*, pp. 26 f.

⁴³ Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 233, referring to Emanuel and others. Compare Tabory, see above.

⁴⁴ Tabory, *Commentary*, pp. 26 f.

⁴⁵ Ophir, *Other*, p. 220.

to distract from the misery of the Egyptians,⁴⁶ deadening any compassion possibly felt for the Israelites' enemies, who are in turn being dehumanized:

"The Gentile himself has not been removed, of course. There he waits, outside the door [...] But something essential to the Gentile's mode of being and representation has been erased: He has lost his position as a speaker or listener, as an interlocutor in the discourse, while the children of Israel have lost the ability to identify with his suffering. At the risk of anachronistically employing modern language, one may say that what has been erased is the Gentile's humanity."⁴⁷ Based upon Ophir's excellent analysis of the problem at hand, the present essay will later aim to reconstitute the gentile during the *Seder* by proposing a different understanding of his position during the ritual.

Ophir's criticism of the passage mentioned above already encompasses its supplementing by an **expansion of the biblical account**⁴⁸ that tries to prove that there were *more* than ten plagues visited upon the Egyptians.⁴⁹ According to Ben-Chorin, who calls this particular section "not very tasteful", the passage was created in the context of Bar Kokhba's uprising against the Romans who were representatively identified with the Egyptians.⁵⁰ Ophir terms it a "calculus of evils,"⁵¹ while Krochmalnik reads the listing of the plagues as an expression of "reveling in dreams of revenge."⁵²

However, according to Krochmalnik, this is corrected by the subsequent intonation of the *Dajenu*, a song praising God's deeds and his abundant mercy towards the Israelites. When the song says, "If he had [...] merely saved us from the Egyptians without

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 222. Ophir's analysis proves especially impactful if we take into account what Heschel, *Island*, p. 120, believes to be the foundation of (interreligious) dialogue: "My first task in every encounter is to comprehend the personhood of the human being I face, to sense the kinship of being human, solidarity of being."

⁴⁸ R. Shire and the Union's version omit the passage as well as any more vivid descriptions of God's actions and their victims. Compare by contrast R. Geis' (more traditional) version of the *Haggadah*, cited by Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 138 f.

⁴⁹ See Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 81 f., as well as Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, pp. 57 ff.

⁵⁰ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 81 f. Arnov, *Mekhilta*, p. 32, traces the passage back to the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael.

⁵¹ Ophir, *Other*, p. 221.

⁵² Krochmalnik, *Haggadah*, p. 199.

punishing them, this would have been sufficient for us”, Krochmalnik understands this as a “renunciation of revenge.”⁵³ This seems unlikely, though, since the *Dajenu* ultimately expresses *gratitude* for God’s complete triumph over Egypt, the humble attitude towards the thoroughness of God’s actions being a display of thankfulness rather than pity for the Egyptians.⁵⁴

The passages from **Psalms and Lamentations** cast against the gentiles in the passage that shall concern us have been criticized as well. Ben-Chorin cites a 1521 copy of the *Haggadah* by a certain Jehuda Bar-Jekutiel in which what he calls the “song of hate” has been changed to read “Pour out Your love on the nations who have known you” instead of “Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee.”⁵⁵ Ben-Chorin considers the possibility that the section has been redacted for apologetic reasons.⁵⁶

The same variant is also quoted by Tabory, who traces its 20th century publication back to Chayyim Bloch whom he suspects of having made up the text himself despite his claims of having found it in a 1521 *Haggadah*⁵⁷ – the very same one as cited by Ben-Chorin.⁵⁸ Since Ben-Chorin doesn’t give a source for his presentation of the changed passage, we

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ See also Ophir, *Other*, p. 217. Note that R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 28, presents a shorter version of the *Dajenu* in which the plague of the firstborn, Israel’s spoils of war and the drowning of the Egyptians are left out. The Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 24 f., 66, has gone even further, erasing any allusion to violence from the *Dajenu* and stressing instead that Israel is a “light to the nations” (also compare pp. 2, 64) and should “perfect the world”. In addition, the Union cites a poem by C. Zeldis (pp. 23, 66) in which the drowning of the Egyptians is interpreted at least partly allegorical: “They drowned in the raging waters of their hate!” Compare by contrast R. Geis’ (more traditional) version of the *Haggadah*, cited by Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 139 f. Further references to the plague of the firstborn and conquered kingdoms are omitted by R. Shire (p. 49) and the Union (pp. 44 f.) in the *Great Hallel* as well; compare once again by contrast R. Geis (Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 150 f.). In addition, R. Shire (pp. 47 f.) and the Union (pp. 41 ff.) omit the Verses Ps 118,10 ff. usually recited as part of the *Hallel* in which God is praised for helping the worshipper overcome the גוים (see R. Geis, p. 149, as well as Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 82).

⁵⁵ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 110; translation according to Tabory, *Commentary*, p. 55.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Tabory, *Commentary*, p. 55.

⁵⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the literary connections see Golinkin, *Pesah*, 12)c), with reference to Ben-Menahem and others.

cannot discern if he possesses additional knowledge regarding the authenticity of the text or if he fell for Bloch's supposed "hoax" himself.⁵⁹

Still, regardless of when and how the text may have been changed, it seems that the adjustment is essentially technical. The version quoted by Ben-Chorin and Tabory ultimately won't distance itself from the original reading, merely stating the positive flip side to what the older version expresses in a negative way: Blessed are those who believe in the (Jewish) God and support the people of Israel. The blessing is not extended to the enemies of the Jews, otherwise the passage should read: *Pour out thy love upon the heathen that have not known thee so that they may recognize you.* Accordingly, Tabory quotes a longer version of the variant featuring a second stanza that begins with the conventional "Pour out Your fury on the nations that do not know You" etc. Tabory states, however, that some who have accepted the variant recite only its first part.⁶⁰

Arnou cites an interpretation of the "Pour out thy wrath"-passage by 16th century Rabbi Eliezer ben Elijah Ashkenazi who understood the verses to only apply to "nations that know neither God nor of the exodus. The curse cannot therefore apply to Christians and Muslims."⁶¹ This interpretation has had some impact, as Arnou shows that it found its way into a 17th century commentary on the Shulḥan Arukh, "perhaps Judaism's most influential law code", that "appears in all printed versions" of the book.⁶²

Further efforts to give a new meaning to the passage in question were made, according to Tabory, by German scholar Israel Levy in the 19th century who "replaced [the original curse] with verses that call for all nations to return to God". For Tabory, this "exemplifies the alternate rabbinical approach to the future redemption - that it will come together with the salvation of the nations."⁶³ Golinkin cites a similar version of the passage published by 19th century Reform Rabbi Leopold Stein: "Pour out Your spirit on

⁵⁹ Tabory, *Commentary*, p. 55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Arnou, *Mekhilta*, p. 33.

⁶² *Ibid.*, referring to Rosinger.

⁶³ Tabory, *Commentary*, pp. 54 ff., with reference to Yuval.

all flesh [-] May all nations come to serve You [-] Together in one language [-] Because the Lord is the Sovereign of Nations.”⁶⁴

Aside from textual adjustments such as these, the most profound criticism of Passover has finally been voiced by Ophir,⁶⁵ who views the whole idea of the *Seder*-ritual to be **fundamentally flawed when considered from a meta-perspective**. In this, Ophir draws upon the work of Yerushalmi,⁶⁶ and his distinction between “memory” as a way of establishing a sense of identity and the factual “detachment” encountered in scholarly “historiography”.⁶⁷ Yerushalmi believes that Judaism throughout the ages has been more interested in finding *meaning* in history than in giving a historically precise account of its events. He argues that, while other cultures ascribed meaning exclusively to the “mythic”, Judaism conferred meaning to *history* because it was understood as the place where God’s actions became *immanent*.⁶⁸

As a result of being thus theologically charged and canonized,⁶⁹ the Biblical accounts and their interpretation,⁷⁰ started taking precedence over merely temporary details, the Holy Scripture in Rabbinical Judaism being understood as a “pattern of the whole of history.”⁷¹ Since a meaningful *connection* to history was favored over the (sometimes quite impossible) “recollection” of factual events,⁷² there emerged within Judaism a peculiar approach to the past. Yerushalmi’s observation that even in biblical times “the collective memory is transmitted more actively through ritual than through

⁶⁴ Golinkin, *Pesah*, 12)c), referring to Ettelson and others.

⁶⁵ Although not the most recent anymore, since Ophir has by now put further research into the topic; compare id./Rosen-Zvi, *Goy* (see note 83).

⁶⁶ Ophir, *Other*, pp. 231, 234.

⁶⁷ See note 128.

⁶⁸ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 6 ff., with reference to Eliade and others; compare pp. 89 ff., referring to Spinoza and others, as well as p. 120, referring to Daube.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ See note 129.

⁷¹ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 21 f.; compare pp. 34, 36, 50 f.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 107 ff.; compare p. 10.

chronicle,"⁷³ therefore applies to later periods as well, which goes especially for the Passover-*Seder* and its story of God's redemptive actions that Yerushalmi terms a "quintessential exercise in Jewish group memory."⁷⁴ Yerushalmi believes that this search for what he later calls an "eternal contemporaneity,"⁷⁵ did inspire the use of "anachronism" often encountered in Rabbinic stories,⁷⁶ and that the traditional "yearn[ing]" for meaning might still not be rivalled by secular historiography.⁷⁷

Consequently, according to Ophir, an anachronistic re-telling of the Exodus,⁷⁸ such as described by Yerushalmi eventually "reproduces" ancient concepts of an enemy, Pharaoh,⁷⁹ generalizing and projecting them as an "archetype,"⁸⁰ on contemporary

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 15; compare pp. 11 f., 40.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44 f.; compare p. 120, referring to Daube.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.; compare pp. 41 f. as well as note 81.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 16 ff.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 114 f; 96 ff.

⁷⁸ Ophir, *Other*, pp. 209 ff., referring to Yerushalmi, views this re-telling as a performative one and therefore calls the *Haggadah* a "ri/te/xt".

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 213 f., 217, 221, 227.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* On the use of the historical "archetype" see Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 36, 120, referring to Daube. Also see Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 152 ff., who calls the Egyptians a "prototype for the godless and evil" and shows that "Egypt" could even gain metaphorical status as a symbol for "carnal desire as well as sin" in the dualistic philosophy of Philo; compare pp. 163 f.

(foreign) relations,⁸¹ thus obstructing the development of a nuanced view of the gentiles.⁸²

Instead, Ophir argues, the gentiles are subjected to a religious *othering*,⁸³ that takes away

⁸¹ Ophir, *Other*, p. 227, referring to Yerushalmi. Ophir, pp. 210, 213, believes that the reading of the *Haggadah* establishes a “transhistorical community” by “dehistoricizing the Passover rite [...] Thus, the contemporary reader is placed on one temporal plane together with the children of Israel who came out from Egypt.” Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 94 ff., uses the term “Gleichzeitigwerden” to describe this. Compare Theißen, *Eschatologie*, p. 272. For an in-depth analysis of the temporality of Passover see Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 202 ff. Fitting this characteristic concept of time, Arnow, *Mekhillta*, pp. 33 f., 44 f., 53 f., proposes that the curses against the gentiles were inserted into the Passover-ritual as an answer to the question whether the Exodus “deplete[d] God’s power or desire to intervene in history”. Arnow believes the verses to be taken from the 2nd century Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael (pp. 33, 38 ff.) where they are part of a *Midrash* about the Song of the Sea, originally meant to remind those who suffered under the failed uprisings against Roman occupation (pp. 44 ff.) of God’s “redemptive power” (p. 53) that had already shown itself before – not only in the Exodus, but also in the end of the Babylonian exile (p. 47, referring to Goldin). Arnow thinks that medieval believers might have fallen back onto this *Midrash* in the context of the atrocities of the early crusades (pp. 49 ff.; compare Tabory, *Commentary*, p. 54), taking up the verses as part of the *Haggadah* where they reflect “the yearning for the return of an interventionist God” (p. 51). In accordance with the original aim of the *Midrash* to show that the Song of the Sea “should not be understood as referring merely to a one-time historic case of divine salvation, but also to subsequent instances of God’s redeeming role in history and to the ultimate messianic redemption” (p. 44; compare Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 25, regarding Hanukkah), they sit “just at the moment when the seder’s focus on redemption shifts from past to future” (p. 53). Also compare Balin, *Transformation*, pp. 196 ff., 203 f., referring to Yerushalmi, who observes how both the Holocaust as well as the founding of the State of Israel were “interpreted [...] as a replication of an old pattern to history” in contemporary *Haggadot*. Indeed, the notion also appears in Ben-Chorin’s interpretation of temporality. Compare Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, p. 244.

⁸² According to Ophir, *Other*, p. 215, the “separation” of Israel is “remove[d] [...] from its historically contingent and ontologically meaningless political context” and interpreted as a basic principle instead. **This is especially problematic with regards to the verses wishing ill upon the gentiles: “Rather than traces of a concrete historical context, the verses of the curse provide a general relational pattern between Israel and its Other, a pattern of constant threat, coercion, and persecution. Instead of a particular Jewish response to a particular case of Gentile persecution, we encounter a general prescription for such a response, a topos of complaint and appeal to God”** (p. 226) [highlighting added for emphasis].

⁸³ For Ophir, *Other*, pp. 207 ff., Passover therefore has a “nationalistic” dimension in modern Israel: “The text currently resides at the intersection of several cultural mechanisms, in three related domains: the production, reproduction and distribution of collective memory; the production of national identity and social solidarity; and the demarcation of the culture’s outer boundaries, which set the limits of inclusion and exclusion, frame the metanarrative of the relation with the Other, and constrain the conception of the Other in both popular and political culture”. In his most recent work on the subject of *othering*, written together with I. Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel’s Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile*, Ophir expands upon the topic of “separation” by tracing the historical development of the term *goy* and criticizing its discursive use to create a “generalized” figure (pp. 233 ff.; compare pp. 57 ff. for an early prefiguration of the concept in Ezra/Nehemia and prophecy) opposed to Judaism in Rabbinic literature. Since Ophir and Rosen-Zvi show the “binary dichotomy” (p. 213) in question as having fully developed only in Rabbinic times (pp. 177 ff., 208 ff., 220), it is not clear if Ophir maintains his harsh criticism of Passover, the basic *narrative* of the Exodus retold within the *Haggadah* being biblical, not Rabbinic. Accordingly, Ophir and Rosen-Zvi believe *God* to be “Israel’s

their dignity,⁸⁴ and depicts them as incompatible with Judaism – according to Ophir, the *Seder*-ritual implies that whenever God is absent, the gentile world rises up against Israel, and whenever God reveals himself, his revelation has to be accompanied by the gentiles' destruction.⁸⁵ By contrast, in the next chapter we shall present a new understanding of the ritual of opening the door that may serve to overcome said logic of antagonistic ethnic/religious difference.

Of course, others have tried to solve the problem of the more offensive or hostile passages of the Passover-*Seder* before. We have already encountered some of those efforts in the examples given above, some of the most obvious changes to Passover being made by the Union's version and R. Shire.

Commenting on the prospect traditionally expressed at the end of the Passover-ritual – “Next year in Jerusalem!” – R. Shire wishes for this to mean “a peaceful Jerusalem for all”, the city “represent[ing] the spiritual ideal of a heavenly place where tranquility and harmony reign”, a “Messianic Age of justice and freedom for all.”⁸⁶ Accordingly, R.

significant Other” in the Exodus (as portrayed and invoked in Ex and Dtn), not the nations (pp. 36 ff.): “The latter are, so to speak, [read: just] ‘second degree’ others, an effect and implication of the constitutive relations between God and His people” (p. 39), the most important distinction taking place with regards to the worship of other *gods* (in Deuteronomist text; pp. 39 ff.) or that which is *impure* (in Priestly and Holiness text; pp. 51 ff.), not to other *nations* (pp. 25, 39, 45) *per se*. Even though Ophir and Rosen-Zvi refer to Bickerman who voices similar concerns towards Purim and the Greek Esther (p. 113) as Ophir does towards Passover, Ophir's essay itself is not among their book's bibliography. Nonetheless, pp. 225 ff. are strongly reminiscent of Ophir's original hypothesis, reaffirming the idea of an interplay between God's and the Gentiles' absence or dominion respectively. Although the narrative of Passover is based on the book of Exodus, we should also keep in mind that the *Haggadah* structuring the *Seder* is itself Rabbinic and might therefore differ from the underlying biblical reading. Notably, the *Haggadah* includes the *Havdalah* (compare Tabory, *Commentary*, pp. 7, 79 ff.) and its thanksgiving for the ability to “distinguish between [...] the House of Israel and the other peoples” (the Hebrew uses עמים, not גוים) and stresses that the people of Israel “remained distinctive” during their time in Egypt (Israel being called a גוי in this context); R. Shire, *Haggadah*, pp. 12, 22, and other versions. For a perspective on the general etymology and logic involved compare Ophir/Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, pp. 114, referring to Bertram and others, as well as Ophir, *Other*, pp. 214 ff. For the conception of the Gentile in Rabbinical literature also see Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 36 f.

⁸⁴ See above, note 47.

⁸⁵ Ophir, *Other*, pp. 215 ff. Compare Ophir/Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, pp. 225 ff.

⁸⁶ R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 52.

Shire understands Passover as a reflection on “freedom from prejudice” as well.⁸⁷ In this, R. Shire is in line with the Union’s interpretation of Passover, in which “the land of Israel” evoked at the beginning of the *Seder* “is the symbol of the hope of redemption” for “every people”, that is, for “all God’s children.”⁸⁸ The Union’s version even goes so far as to complement the closing prayer of the *Seder* with an outlook for “the Passover of the future, when all humanity will live in harmony and peace”, adding the verse “Next year in a world redeemed!” at the end.⁸⁹

In the same vein, Ben-Chorin proposes to have the last verse of the *Seder* speak of a “Jeruschalajim schel Schalom”, a “Jerusalem of peace.”⁹⁰ While R. Shire views man to be endowed with the potential and responsibility to realize said vision of peace,⁹¹ Ben-Chorin seems to stress the importance of the implementation of a messianic utopia remaining in the hands of God. Analyzing one of the songs sung after the *Seder*, titled *Adir hu*, he notes that the singers express hope for God himself building the Third Temple of the messianic time: “This mythical concept is of eminent political significance today. Not through

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* Compare Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 61 ff., 68 f., for a similarly metaphorical/spiritual interpretation of freedom.

⁸⁸ Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 6, 65.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 69.

⁹⁰ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 125.

⁹¹ R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 45: Elijah is expected during ritual circumcision (see note 20), because “every child born has the potential to bring about [the] Messianic Age”; in *Chassidic* tradition, “each participant at the *Seder* pours wine from his or her glass into Elijah’s cup. This is symbolic, too: We all need to make a personal contribution to help bring about the Messianic Age”; compare p. 52: “[a]s Jews, it is our duty to work toward a peaceful Jerusalem for all”. Also compare Boeckler’s (free) translation in the [German version] of R. Shire’s *Haggadah*, p. 43: “May our deeds that serve to keep the peace be noticed above high.” The Union’s version omits the verse (as well as a passage referring to God being a “tower of righteous victories” for “David and his seed” that R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 44, keeps) but has additional material (pp.61ff., 68f.) that stresses the responsibility associated with Passover. Both the Union (pp. 1, 14, 65) and R. Shire (pp. 6, 15, 34) view the Israelites’ liberation as a reminder to stand up for freedom wherever there is oppression. Also compare Ophir, *Other*, p. 214, as well as Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 228 f., concerning the Israelite laws towards the ethical treatment of foreigners that are rooted in the Exodus-narration. For the socio-religious mechanisms involved compare Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, pp. 254 ff.

terrorist acts of violence can the Third Temple come into being, but through the merciful intervention of God alone.”⁹²

Earlier, Ben-Chorin gives an account of 20th century American Reconstructionists emending passages of the Passover-*Haggadah* that speak of Israel as the *chosen* people.⁹³ He goes on to show, however, that the biblical understanding of being chosen doesn't necessarily imply that one is superior compared to others, referring to the prophet Isaiah's "eschatological vision of [a] coalition" between Israel and its enemies Assur and Egypt[!], each of them being described as having a special relation with God in their own right (Is 19,25).⁹⁴

Füglister even notices a possible connection between Passover and an (universalistic) end times like the one just described, considering that the account of the celebration of Passover under King Josiah in 2 Chron 35 might be an allusion to the eschatological feast between all nations as described in Is 25,6ff.⁹⁵

It has to be said, though, that the theology of Passover doesn't necessarily have to culminate in a vision of immaculate peace and understanding. Is 19,25 is preceded by a number of verses that imagine Egypt being threatened into submission by God before becoming part of the aforementioned "coalition", the description reading like a reference to the ten plagues. Is 25,6ff. is in turn preceded by a praise for God laying waste to "a palace of strangers,"⁹⁶ (V2), while the nation of Moab is still said to be crushed according to Is 25,10ff., despite the eschatological feast already being enacted. Accordingly, Füglister cites instances in which the eschatological feast can have a negative connotation for the "enemies of Yahweh" as well, referencing (among others) the depictions given in Jer 46,10

⁹² Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 125 f. In the Union's version, allusions to the Temple are avoided completely, the text being changed to express hope for *the redemption of the people* instead (Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 52 ff., 68)

⁹³ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 47 f.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48. Ben-Chorin also explains Israel's election with reference to Dtn 7,7-8, Am 3, 2 and Am 9,7 (pp. 47 f.). Accordingly, in R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 21, and Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 15, 65, the reading of Dtn 7,7-8 is added to the *Seder*.

⁹⁵ Füglister, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 28 f., referring to von Rad and Cazelles. See also pp. 119, 124.

⁹⁶ זרים; other sources have זדים ("insolent/godless").

and Ez 39,17-20 and the Rabbinic tradition of understanding the lamb being eaten on Passover as an allusion to the Egyptian gods getting slaughtered in the Exodus.⁹⁷

Efforts towards mitigating those aspects of Passover that may seem hostile or offensive towards Non-Jews can finally be found in Christian theological interpretations relating Passover to the account of Jesus Christ's last supper.⁹⁸

In this light, the cup of wine blessed by Jesus during that final gathering is contrasted by Ben-Chorin with the "cup of wrath,"⁹⁹ over which the curses against the gentiles are uttered. According to Ben-Chorin, the motif of the cup is taken up by the New Testament account in multiple ways: When Jesus prays in Gethsemane that God might "remove this cup" from him, this alludes to the glass of wine poured for Elijah, thus signifying that Jesus wishes he wouldn't have to be the foretold (suffering) Messiah at this eve of his Passion.¹⁰⁰ When the cup blessed by Jesus is associated with his blood, he becomes like the slaughtered Passover lamb, the cup of blood – similar to the blood of circumcision – symbolizing the "New Covenant" with God as well as becoming a means of spiritual revitalization in the Christian tradition of Communion.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, p. 124. Compare pp. 56 f., referring to Bertholet-Lehmann and others.

⁹⁸ It is Füglistner's, *Heilsbedeutung*, aim to show the close analogy between Passover and Christian soteriology. For further parallels between the two festivities compare Yuval, *Dialogue*, as well as id., *Middle Ages*.

⁹⁹ For an explanation of the motif of the cup see Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, p. 116, as well as Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 16. Arnow, *Mekhilta*, pp. 34 ff., is skeptical of the connection between the curses and the biblical cups of wrath.

¹⁰⁰ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 112 f. Compare id., *Bruder Jesus*, pp. 182 ff.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 114 ff. Ben-Chorin proposes, however, that the institution of the Eucharist is partly based on a misunderstanding of a Hebrew saying. Compare id., *Bruder Jesus*, p. 166, referring to Kosmala, for a more cautious approach to the motif of Passover blood. For an in-depth analysis of the topic see Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 77 ff.

Finally, Ben-Chorin and Kosmala consider the (merciful) cup of Jesus to be an antitype of the cup of wrath and the promise of punishment it holds, said cup supposedly stemming from a “zealot” tradition under Roman occupation.¹⁰²

Like every organized religion, Christianity is, of course, not a unified entity. Among the many different currents of Christianity, we personally profess a liberal, academically secured, conciliatory and universalistic stance. Based on this declared point of view, the re-interpretation of the “cup of wrath” as explained by Ben-Chorin and Kosmala might allow us to understand the rite in question to have been transformed into one of inclusion,¹⁰³ as envisioned by the Christian way of thought we identify with ourselves. This idea is in itself hardly an answer to our questions regarding the Passover-*Seder*, however, as it already presumes a Christian *adaptation* of a Jewish ritual. Ben-Chorin himself strongly warns against the risks of succumbing to a “theology of substitution”.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Heschel, in a rejection of Christian mission to the Jews, rightly states: “Judaism has allies but no substitutes.”¹⁰⁵ The dangers associated with the implicit assumption that Christian thought is more universalist than Jewish tradition,¹⁰⁶ becomes even more apparent as we note that Liberal Judaism’s understanding of the eschatology of Passover is in no way less universalistic than our own.

Accordingly, the idea we propose in the next chapter will remain within the boundaries of Jewish thought, despite probably being inspired not only by R. Shire’s and

¹⁰² Ben-Chorin, *Bruder Jesus*, pp. 165 f., referring to Kosmala, as well as id., *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 111 f., 117 ff. Ben-Chorin’s and Kosmala’s stance may suffer from their assumption that the curses against the gentiles or the cup of wrath were (at least in part) already known in the times of Jesus; compare by contrast Arnow’s hypotheses, see notes 81, 99. Ben-Chorin partly pays heed to the problem in the second of the two cited works (*Narrative Theologie*, pp. 117 ff.).

¹⁰³ It remains somewhat unclear if Ben-Chorin and Kosmala understand their reading to be universalistic in scope or to only apply to “all Israel” (!) (*Bruder Jesus*, pp. 165, 170). Matters are complicated further by the closing passage of the corresponding chapter in *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 117 ff., that reads as if Jesus had expressed his *support* for the zealot movement. We also suspect there to be a grammatical error in Ben-Chorin’s text (“den der” instead of “der den”); for the meaning that was probably originally intended see again *Bruder Jesus*, pp. 172 f.

¹⁰⁴ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 96 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Heschel, *Island*, p. 130.

¹⁰⁶ For a more in-depth analysis of the problem see note 182.

the Union's liberal understanding of Passover, but by the author's own set of Christian ethics as well.

III. REDEFINING THAT WHICH LAYS BEYOND THE DOOR

Our efforts towards developing a conciliatory understanding of the Passover-*Seder* are based on a new interpretation of that which lies beyond the door. In this, we come to a similar conclusion as R. Shire and the Union's version, although by way of another methodological approach. For our purposes, we will identify a structural flaw stemming from the historical development of the Passover-*Haggadah*, and, by addressing it, turn it into an asset.

Kulp warns that "the Haggadah as we have it today was a text that took hundreds of years to coalesce. Much of the material in the Haggadah [...] originally existed in other literary settings [...] Therefore, we must constantly distinguish between the meaning of these sources in their original literary contexts and their meaning and function in the context of the Haggadah."¹⁰⁷ In a similar vein, Arnow notes that the ritual of opening the door, the recitation of the curses and the tradition of having a cup of wine for the prophet Elijah were added to the *Seder* at different points throughout history.¹⁰⁸ Blank remarks that the Elijah-tradition originally constitutes an element of "folk religion,"¹⁰⁹ and that the combining of the curses with the opening of the door "becomes a breeding-ground for confusion" for those who are not sure how to reconcile the two motifs: "Since [in a common *Haggadah*] little or no information is likely to be given regarding the two elements in question, we can imagine that generations of Jews have welcomed Eliyahu through the open door with vindictive declarations, without the benefit of explanation of *leyl shimurim*,

¹⁰⁷ Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 11; compare p. 230., as well as p. 268.

¹⁰⁸ Arnow, *Mekhilta*, p. 34, referring to Safrai and Safrai; compare note 81.

¹⁰⁹ Blank, *Ideology*, p. 84, referring to Routtenberg; compare p. 77.

or of the rationale behind *Sh'fokh*, or of any expressed connection between vindication and the final redemption!"¹¹⁰

In the end, however, there appears to be a way for Blank to bring the different elements of the ritual into accordance: Sympathizing somewhat with Goldschmidt's and Birnbaum's approach of relating the curses, Elijah, the idea of Passover as a night of vigil and the Hallel (Ps 115 criticizes the nations for idolatry, while Ps 116 intones the personal creed of one who has been saved from danger),¹¹¹ the above-mentioned "connection between vindication and the final redemption" seems to be explainable after all.

For the motifs involved to make sense to the modern reader when combined, the *Haggadah* has of course to be explained from a *synchronic* perspective as opposed to taking an interest in its *diachronic* development. As Ophir puts it in the beginning of his criticism of Passover: "In this essay [...] I am not concerned with the text's historical development [...] My concern is rather with the text that appears at a contemporary Seder table".¹¹²

We concur with both Blank's and Ophir's synchronic¹¹³ approaches to the text, and our proposition will aim to enable the reader to apply our findings to their own celebration of the *Seder*. We also agree with Blank's observations on a *formal* level: There is indeed a discrepancy to be found with the ritual actions involved. However, we believe the problem to apply mainly to the use of *metaphor* in the passage in question.¹¹⁴ By correcting our

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76. For the motif of the night of vigil see note 18.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74 ff., referring to Goldschmidt and Birnbaum; compare pp. 81 ff. Also see Kulp, *Schechter*, p. 268, referring to Goldschmidt, and pp. 269 f.

¹¹² Ophir, *Other*, p. 206; compare pp. 209 ff. where Ophir proceeds to show how the enacting of the *Seder* helps lending a sense of "unity" to the text of the *Haggadah*, thereby contributing to the anachronistic mechanisms criticized above.

¹¹³ One might not describe Blank's approach to be synchronic *per se*, but by taking serious the problems arising from a contemporary reading that has to reconcile the different elements of the ritual and by expressing some approval both towards a historical explanation of the passage as well as to a contemporary interpretation (*Ideology*, p. 81 f.), she seems to tread a middle ground between both perspectives.

¹¹⁴ See note 144.

understanding of the *imagery* used in the section, we will finally be able to give a new *meaning* to the passage as well, *decoupling* the idea of redemption from that of vindication.¹¹⁵

Our reading of Ophir and other scholars has shown that the “outside of the door” can be seen as a place where the hostile gentile lies in wait as well as the sphere from which Elijah may appear. **Thus, an inconsistency arises: That which lies beyond the door is contradictorily characterized as being at once a place of danger and one of salvation.**¹¹⁶

We would like to revise this concept by making both traditions compatible and merging them into a new one. We therefore propose that **that which lies beyond the door should be imagined as a place where Elijah (standing for Judaism) and the gentiles coexist, representing a peaceful (festive) eschaton. This yet-to-be-unveiled realm can be symbolically¹¹⁷ un-locked by those celebrating Passover by opening the door that separates our present reality from the envisioned future.**

¹¹⁵ It should be noted that Berlin, *Lamentations*, pp. 97 ff., argues for one of the verses making up the curses against the gentiles (Eichah 3, 66) to be, within its original biblical context, a call for “a return to the world order that pertained before the destruction [of Jerusalem in the 6th century BCE], for the post-destruction world seems lacking in divine justice” rather than a cry for vengeance. Also compare pp. 60 f. One might reason, however, that the concept of justice, as far as it includes punishment, automatically implies some form of vengeance, albeit cast in a more civilized mold. In addition, the rabbinical use of the verse within the *Haggadah* again does not have to concur with the biblical reading.

¹¹⁶ In *The Passover Anthology* (ed. P. Goodman), pp. 38 f., Kasdai describes a custom among Caucasian Jews that portrays elements of both aspects: One of the participants of the *Seder* dresses up in costume and knocks at the door of the gathering, asking for permission to be let in. At first, none of the others may trust him, but when the door is finally opened, he is revealed not as an enemy, but as a fellow Jew bearing news from Jerusalem. The *Midrash Tehillim*, on the other hand, has the defeated Pharaoh himself knock at Moses’ and Aaron’s door (loc. cit. p. 155). For the custom of dressing up in costume (sometimes as Elijah!) compare Golinkin, *Pesah*, 5), 12a). The Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 7, 65, has a Yiddish poem by S. Halkin in which the “festal day” of universal freedom “will pass through every door without the need to knock”. Tabory, *Commentary*, pp. 61 f., 126, presents a poetic passage by late 6th/early 7th century Rabbi and writer of *piyyutim* Eleazar Kallir in which there is made a connection between Passover and God’s angels visiting Abraham and Lot by knocking at the door.

¹¹⁷ Compare the role of symbolism in the *Chassidic* ritual described by R. Shire; see note 91.

If, in addition, we were to leave out the critical verses wishing ill upon the gentiles (as the Union's version consciously does),¹¹⁸ the (only) text recited while the door is opened would – in accordance with R. Shire's *Haggadah* – be the verses Mal 3,23-24a, announcing the apocalyptic return of Elijah, turning “the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.”¹¹⁹ The Union's version has some additional material preceding and following the verses, the most interesting being the commentary that “[t]he fifth promise [the one associated with Elijah's cup] is a promise of the future, when God will bring our people, and all peoples, into the messianic land of freedom, harmony and peace.”¹²⁰ This fits our own proposition and could therefore easily be adopted by us.

In R. Shire's version, the ritual of opening and closing the door is followed by the (second part of the) *Hallel*. Both R. Shire and the Union's version omit the verses cited from Ps 115 + 116, thereby paying heed to the tradition of abbreviating the *Hallel* as a sign of compassion for the drowned Egyptians.¹²¹ The Union, however, presents the *Hallel* before the ritual so that the door is opened “at the climax of the whole Seder.”¹²² While this seems to be in line with our own proposition, it would be just as appropriate to keep the order presented by R. Shire, therefore continuing the ritual with the first verses of Ps 117 in which **all the nations** are called on to praise God, fitting the idea of reconciliation. One might even consider leaving the door opened for this part of the song.¹²³

That the *Hallel* emphasizes God's “kindness” may also serve to tone down the threat accompanying the verses Mal 3,23-24 (V23: “the dreadful day of the Lord”; V24b: “lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”; left out by R. Shire and the Union's version).

¹¹⁸ Union, *Haggadah*, p. 68.: “To us it seemed preferable [...] that the imprecation ‘Pour out your wrath...’ should be replaced by a more positive expression of the messianic hope.”

¹¹⁹ We understand that it is nowadays customary in the USA to sing the song “Eliyahu Ha-Navi” when the door is opened, the song showing some similarities to “Addir hu”. Compare Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 109.

¹²⁰ Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 48, 68.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67; compare above note 37.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹²³ As the (American) *Union Haggadah* (1923) apparently does: See Blank, *Ideology*, p. 77.

We agree with R. Shire and the Union’s version, however, in that the verses praising God for the plague of the firstborn as well as similar allusions to violence should be omitted.¹²⁴

In comparison, the following variants of the ritual emerge (barring the different instructions on the cups of wine):

Traditional (R. Geis):	Opening the door	Curses: Psalms and Lamentations	Closing the door	Ps 115-118 (Hallel); Ps 136 (Great Hallel); Songs in Praise	
Union’s Version:	Ps 117-118 (abbreviated and redacted Hallel); Ps 136 (redacted Great Hallel); Songs in Praise	Opening the door	Mal 3,23-24a, framed by additional material	Closing the door	Merry songs

¹²⁴ See note 54.

R. Shire:	Opening the door	Mal 3,23-24a	Curses: Psalms and Lamentations	Closing the door	Ps 117-118 (abbreviated and redacted Hallel); Ps 136 (redacted Great Hallel); Songs in Praise
Our own proposition:	Opening the door	Mal 3,23-24a; additional material; imagining a peaceful coexistence	Ps 117	Closing the door	Ps 118 (abbreviated and redacted Hallel); Ps 136 (redacted Great Hallel); Songs in Praise

It has become obvious that our own proposition is heavily influenced, in spirit as well as in its liturgical structure, by the Union's and R. Shire's understanding of Passover in general and of the ritual of opening the door in particular. This is only reinforced when we consider how the closing verses of the *Seder* are in these versions read to express hope

for a peaceful eschaton.¹²⁵ We are also inspired by our own conviction in the **all-will-be-saved-doctrine** within Christian dogmatics and putting **loving the enemy** above worldly divide, thereby reflecting the re-interpretation of the cup of wrath that is already discernible in Ben-Chorin's and Kosmala's reading.¹²⁶ **Genuinely new, however, should be our idea to root this peaceful understanding of Passover in the historically contradictory assessments of that which lies beyond the door, thus converting a structural inconsistency of the Seder into positive imaginative potential.**

For all that, our answer to the problems associated with Passover hinges on a number of critical factors that shall be considered hereafter.

a) THE LEGITIMACY OF ARTIFICIALLY INTERFERING WITH AN ESTABLISHED TRADITION

Any proposition to change the understanding of certain passages of the Passover-Seder, or even the passages themselves, may at first seem arbitrary. However, we uphold that an imaginative approach to scripture is not only characteristic for a "vibrant" and individualistic attitude towards one's spirituality,¹²⁷ but for Judaism's interpretations of sacred texts as well.¹²⁸ Not only is the Rabbinic tradition famous for its creative treatment

¹²⁵ Compare notes 86-92.

¹²⁶ See notes 98-103.

¹²⁷ For an extreme example of this compare Schleiermacher, *Reden*, p. 51 (2nd speech), who pointedly states that a truly religious person could very well make a holy scripture of their own. Also see R. Shire, *Haggadah* [German version], p. 6, editors' foreword: "Therefore, we who are celebrating Passover today always have to ask anew what God expects from us. The Seder especially goes to show that the experience of being delivered from Egypt has always been understood in new ways and reinterpreted by later Jewish thinkers [...] This tension between continuity and change is a natural phenomenon of **a vibrant approach to religious experience**" [emphasis added to stress the terminological concordance with our approach]. Also compare Balin, *Transformation*, pp. 209 ff.

¹²⁸ In fact, Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 98, 100, 114 f., attests in the Jewish thought of his contemporaries a tendency to find identity and meaning, which Yerushalmi calls "memory" as opposed to (secular) "historiography", in "the novel", that is, in "literature", rather than in the "detachment" of modern scholarly work.

of biblical texts,¹²⁹ and for developing the genre of *aggadic* literature, but there is ample precedent for changes made to the rite of Passover as well.

We have already encountered multiple examples for this above: the *midrashic* texts grieving for the drowned Egyptians,¹³⁰ the reformulating of the Psalms wishing ill upon the gentiles by some (early) modern Rabbis,¹³¹ the many changes made to the *Seder* in the Union's and R. Shire's versions of the *Haggadah* etc. Geffen describes a modern feminist Passover tradition in which a cup of water is added to the *Seder*-table to evoke Miriam, the sister of Moses.¹³² Ophir seems somewhat bewildered by an Israeli politician publishing a *Haggadah* annotated with "campaign propaganda" during an election.¹³³ Balin notes how Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism have changed their *Haggadot* to represent universalistic and "humanistic" ideas in the past,¹³⁴ and even gives examples of Communist, "Hippie" and animal rights *Haggadot*.¹³⁵

Considering these cases,¹³⁶ it seems that Ben-Chorin can be agreed with when he judges *aggadic* scripture in general and the Passover *Haggadah* in particular to "somewhat remain in the realm of poetic freedom", *aggadic* texts focusing on "subjective interpretation without aspiration to any general binding character" and therefore having a "meditative

¹²⁹ On one occasion, Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 52, uses the fitting term "religious and intellectual creativity" to describe Jewish philosophy, Kabbalah and Halakhah. Concurring with Yerushalmi's emphasis on the role of literature, Harold Bloom, in his foreword to Yerushalmi's "Zakhor", pp. XXII ff., portrays Kafka and Freud as *the* modern Jewish writers *par excellence*, defining their writing by its "intense obsession with interpretation" and coming to the conclusion that "[w]hat Jewish writing has to interpret, finally, and however indirectly, is the Hebrew Bible."

¹³⁰ See notes 37-38.

¹³¹ See notes 55-64.

¹³² R. M. Geffen, *Passover* (Encyclopedia Judaica), p. 682. Compare Balin, *Transformation*, p. 207, as well as Eisen's analysis, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, pp. 242 ff.

¹³³ Ophir, *Other*, p. 207.

¹³⁴ Balin, *Transformation*, pp. 190 ff.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 204 ff.

¹³⁶ More examples can be found in *The Passover Anthology* (ed. P. Goodman), pp. 79 ff. Compare, however, Ophir, *Other*, p. 207., who observes that "secular Jews in Israel [...] reproduce only the Orthodox authoritative version. Although sometimes improvising on the graphic design, they leave the main body of the text untouched, acknowledging as it were its 'authenticity'". Also see Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, pp. 257 ff., who notes that even new interpretations of the *Seder* still adhere to its traditional structural elements. See also p. 250.: "The structure and content of the *Haggadah* are ideally suited to the quest for innovation within the framework of the given."

character.”¹³⁷ Balin puts it best when she – albeit in a different context – writes: “*Aggadah* [...] connotes imaginative exegesis, akin to what we mean by fiction.”¹³⁸ Accordingly, we too deem it legitimate to offer our own understanding of the Passover-*Haggadah*.

b) THE ESHATOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF PASSOVER

Passover is associated with a broad range of eschatological expectations,¹³⁹ to which our proposition may add.

Galley shows how the historical Passover in the times of the Second Temple stirred messianic hope in the Israelites who longed for being freed from Roman domination the same way Moses and his people had been freed from Egypt.¹⁴⁰ According to Galley, this expectation could either be directed toward a worldly Messiah leading a political uprising or toward a transcendent Messiah bringing about an “eschatological-cosmic new world order.”¹⁴¹ Ben-Chorin is aware of the tension between these two different approaches toward eschatology as well, noting that in Reform Judaism a passage describing future sacrifices in the yet-to-be built Third Temple is left out in favor of a “transcending” interpretation that stresses the “deliverance of our souls” (albeit maintaining the questionable notion that Judaism, in contrast to Christianity, still keeps prioritizing “national deliverance”).¹⁴² We have already dealt with Ben-Chorin’s and R. Shire’s opinion

¹³⁷ Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 14 f. Also compare Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 12.

¹³⁸ Balin, *Transformation*, p. 213.

¹³⁹ Compare Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 16, 45, as well as Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 140 ff., 218 ff. See also notes 91, 95.

¹⁴⁰ Galley, *Jahr*, pp. 139 ff.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, p. 101. R. Geis’ version has both, see p. 142., while R. Shire, *Haggadah*, p. 38., and the Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 29, 66, leave out the sacrifices to the benefit of themes of “peace” and “inner freedom”.

on how (not) to bring about (utopian) visions of the future, namely by human responsibility or an act of God.¹⁴³

Our own proposition is neither to be seen as an unsubtle exhortation towards taking political action or acting as a peacemaker, nor as a merely theoretical idea. Although if in question we would prefer the former, our proposition, drawing on the logic of *Aggadah*, serves first and foremost as a counterfactual imagination influencing one's ethos.¹⁴⁴ On a psychological level, this imagination may at once be *comforting* when

¹⁴³ See notes 91-92.

¹⁴⁴ We concur in this with Ricoeur, *Metapher*, p. 70., whose theory of metaphor calls for ethics to be initially "subordinated to a *poetry* that opens up new dimensions to our imagination". Also compare how Füglistler, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 222 ff., defines both Passover as well as the Christian Eucharist as being an "anticipation" of the coming eschaton and partly realizing something that is not yet real in itself. For further insights into this concept of "already...but not yet" see Theißen, *Eschatologie*. **When we propose our idea to be understood as counterfactual, we aim for a similar experience. Although our vision of peace has not yet come to pass, it may already influence the way we feel and think by way of our imagination. In this sense, it is eschatological.** This understanding may correspond to R. Shire's reading of the Passover-*Haggadah* to instill a sense of responsibility toward the future in its contemporary readers; see note 91 as well as Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 61 ff., 68f. The same stands even more to reason when Krochmalnik, *Haggadah*, and others understand the whole Passover-ritual from a didactic-pedagogic point of view. The *hopefulness* of the act of opening the door is stressed by the Union, *Haggadah*, pp. 49, 68: "We open the door to let [the time of redemption] enter, though we know it may still be distant [...] with the faith that has strengthened our people throughout the ages". Also compare Theißen who defines eschatological thinking as being structured through "time and infinity", "Parousia", "metaphor" and "eschatological anthropology" (pp. 267 ff.). In this, the "promise" to man has a dialectical function, mediating both present and future as well as temporality and infinity, "connect[ing] human hope to God's future" (p. 270.). This, too, may correspond to our own proposition concerning the hopeful nature of imagination as well as to the Union's interpretation, especially since Theißen later quotes the apostle Paul's idea of "believing in hope against hope" (Rom 4, 18) (p. 293 f.), thereby fortifying the notion of counter-factuality. Theißen stresses, however, that the aforementioned "promise" should not be reduced to a counter-factuality of merely transcendent "truth" and "possibility" but should instead be understood as having a "reality" of its own (pp. 272 f.). It is therefore that Theißen prefers a biblically inspired set of (eschatological) metaphors rooted in this reality (pp. 284 ff., compare 272) over the supposedly more volatile concept of "living metaphors" as proposed by Ricoeur and Jüngel (p. 283.). Although our own proposition of understanding the opening of the door as a literal un-locking and revealing of the (peaceful) eschaton, as a crossing of the threshold, draws upon established biblical/religious imagery, it probably shares, in its "creative" [*Ibid.*] and "playful" (compare Jüngel, *Geheimnis*, p. 398.) counter-factuality, greater similarities with the concept of living metaphor as criticized by Theißen. Note, however, how Jüngel himself states that the New Testament "kingdom of God" can be addressed in metaphors and parables (a special case of metaphorical speech; see Ricoeur/Jüngel, *Metapher*) only because God has priorly made himself known to man by "identifying" with the world of humans, that is (in the New Testament) by "identifying" with Jesus of Nazareth (Jüngel, *Metapher*, pp. 111 ff.; compare *Geheimnis*, pp. 400 ff.). It is therefore questionable if Jüngel's understanding of metaphor is in any way less grounded in a divine "reality" than that of Theißen. It has to be admitted, though, that especially Ricoeur puts greater emphasis on the role of imagination (see above; *Metapher*, p. 70.). In addition, parables, being special cases of metaphorical speech, do not

experiencing conflict with the threatening “Other” (as capitalized by Ophir) and *lay the ground* for subsequent acts of conciliation.

c) THE PROPHET ELIJAH’S ROLE IN JUDAISM

The figure associated with the eschaton during Passover is the prophet Elijah. In our proposition, it is he who has reconciled with the gentile world (and vice versa). In biblical and Rabbinic tradition, he is portrayed in a number of different ways. We shall analyze some of the character traits attributed to him and examine if his description fits our concept.

Biblical stories seem somewhat problematic in this respect. In 1Kings 18,40 Elijah has rival priests of Baal massacred. Although Cogan warns against “introducing contemporary moral sensitivity foreign to the text”,¹⁴⁵ the portrayal of the prophet is completely different to our imagination at this point. With regards to 2 Kings 1, Cogan and H. Tadmor describe Elijah as “an uncompromising man of God, zealous in his demand for exclusive loyalty to YHWH and terrifying in his acts of retribution.”¹⁴⁶ Gutmann and Sperling note: “Elijah brought matters to a head by stressing the idea of zeal for YHWH, which unconditionally opposed the toleration of any cult [...] other than that of YHWH in Israel. This extremist position [...] was a minority opinion among Israelites”.¹⁴⁷

Similarly, in Mal 3,24, one of the verses announcing Elijah’s eventual return added to the Passover-*Seder* by R. Shire and the Union, “[t]he messenger arranges no ‘truce’

depend as much on a constant renewal and are thus somewhat timeless (pp. 63 f.) as well as biblically founded. It might therefore not be expedient to try and disprove Theißen’s criticism by referring, of all things, to parables.

¹⁴⁵ Cogan, 1 Kings, p. 444., against Montgomery, Gehman and others.

¹⁴⁶ Cogan/Tadmor, II Kings, p. 28. If Elijah is indeed a “zealot”, the possible contrast to the Christian adaption of Passover as described by Ben-Chorin becomes increasingly stark; see notes 102-103.

¹⁴⁷ Gutmann/Sperling, Elijah (Encyclopedia Judaica), p. 331.

between warring parties. Rather, this Elijah figure interposes an ‘unconditional surrender’ to Yahweh upon his audience and effects a complete reorientation in the operative worldview of the religious community.”¹⁴⁸ *Aggadic* legend has Elijah sometimes be more uncompromising than God himself.¹⁴⁹ He is said to be Israel’s “guardian spirit” tasked with “spread[ing] the belief in [God] abroad in the whole world.”¹⁵⁰

While the latter already sounds quite universalistic in scope, the biblical announcement of Mal 3,23-24 that Elijah will turn “the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,” is ultimately not a vision of universal conciliation, but remains rather confined to Israel.¹⁵¹ Therefore, if *aggadic* legend reads: “On [judgement] day the children of the wicked who had to die in infancy on account of the sins of their fathers will be found among the just, while their fathers will be ranged on the other side. The babes will implore their fathers to come to them, but God will not permit it. Then Elijah will go to the little ones and teach them how to plead in behalf of their fathers [...] God will give assent to their pleadings, and Elijah will have fulfilled the word of the prophet Malachi,”¹⁵² we should probably think foremost about the *Israelites* who have gone astray.

It is tempting, however, to take into account the children of (e.g.) the Egyptians as well who have succumbed to the plague of the firstborn during the Exodus. If we were thus to choose a more universalistic approach, the *aggadic* conviction that “the evil-doers [...] will rejoice” when hearing Elijah announce the messianic time and that Elijah will help reawake the dead who will “assemble around the Messiah *from all corners of the earth*,”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Hill, *Malachi*, p. 387. By speaking of an “Elijah figure,” Hill makes clear that the name of the prophet should not be understood literally in this biblical passage; see note 161.

¹⁴⁹ For an example of this see Ginzberg, *Legends*, pp. 195 ff.

¹⁵⁰ Ginzberg, *Legends*, p. 202.

¹⁵¹ Hill, *Malachi*, p. 379., citing Petersen: The “conflict” is “a generational one because ‘without the integrity between generations, Israel would not be Israel’”. Compare pp. 387 f.: The post-exilic Israelites are to turn back towards the ways of their “forefathers”, that is, accomplish a “covenant renewal” with God.

¹⁵² Ginzberg, *Legends*, p. 235.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 234.; emphasis added to stress the possible universalist dimension of the quotation.

suddenly reads like a vision of universal forgiving and loving one's enemy, not one of Israel's purification alone. That it is also Elijah's eschatological duty "to establish peace and harmony in the world,"¹⁵⁴ fits our proposition very well. Accordingly, *Tannaitic* tradition knows Elijah as "the great peacemaker in the world."¹⁵⁵ Our proposition is further helped by the fact that Elijah is by some scholars considered to have been a foreigner to Israel himself,¹⁵⁶ therefore taking up the theme of the gentile. In addition, in folklore Elijah "wander[s] the earth, usually disguised as a poor man, a beggar, or a gentile[!] peasant."¹⁵⁷

Hill shows, however, that the eschatological "Day of the Lord" envisioned in our passage Mal 3,23-24 is commonly thought of as "'terrible' because the aftermath of divine judgement, with its carnage and destruction, leaves survivors aghast and reeling in disbelief,"¹⁵⁸ and is in its depiction (indirectly) influenced by the story of the Egyptian plagues.¹⁵⁹ If this implies punishment for the nations,¹⁶⁰ we should be careful to imagine it as a day of peace and understanding after all.

Nonetheless, it has become obvious that Elijah can be characterized in multiple, sometimes even contradictory ways, depending on textual genre. This is due to him having ultimately reached the status of a literary figure.¹⁶¹ As such, we believe that he can be subject to interpretation (as demonstrated by past believers and scholars).¹⁶² Falling back

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁵⁵ Aberbach, Elijah (Encyclopedia Judaica), p. 333.

¹⁵⁶ The issue is discussed by Cogan, 1 Kings, p. 425., with reference to Keil and Walsh. Cogan is skeptical of this particular reading.

¹⁵⁷ Noy, Elijah (Encyclopedia Judaica), p. 335. Note, however, that it can also be Elijah's role to defend the *Seder*-community from blood libels (p. 334).

¹⁵⁸ Hill, *Malachi*, p. 386.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 385 f., with reference to Wolff and Allen.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 383 f., shows the "Elijah figure" of Mal 3 to have *topical* character and emphasizes "[t]he appeal to the idealized personages of Moses and Elijah" that is indicative of a "typological approach" found in this part of Mal. Also see Ahad Ha-Am (*The Passover Anthology* [ed. P. Goodman], pp. 192 f.) who – in a similar vein – argues for the Moses of Exodus to be an "ideal archetype" whose very existence has become *independent* of historical fact.

¹⁶² Compare once again Hill, *Malachi*, pp. 383 f. Also see Blank, *Ideology*, pp. 76 ff., who gives some examples of Elijah being re-interpreted as a universalist figure in 20th century *Haggadot*. Note,

upon above mentioned imaginative approach, we can therefore uphold the image of a reconciliatory Elijah for our proposition.

d) THE STRUCTURE OF PASSOVER

Only two problems remain to be analyzed. Both of these are related to the *structure* of Passover, the first being a *narrative* problem, the second a “*discursive*” one.¹⁶³

The first problem concerns another inconsistency in the ritual of opening the door and can be solved very quickly. In the biblical tale of the Exodus, the Israelites are urged to stay inside their houses during the fateful night of Passover (Ex 12,22-23),¹⁶⁴ while God roams the streets punishing Egypt. It is easy to imagine that the Israelites’ doors were to remain closed that night, and if they weren’t, the true danger from outside would have come from God, not the gentiles.¹⁶⁵ Since God is thought to have rescued Israel,¹⁶⁶ however, it is understandable that he is ultimately not seen as a threat, the true enemy still being the Egyptians. Therefore, Passover seems to have undergone a transformation. Instead of *hiding* from God’s punishing actions, the believers now take *courage* from them to confront the gentile world.¹⁶⁷ Presently, this courage stems from the fact that the Egyptians have

however, Blank’s remarks, pp. 79 f., on the danger of the original ideas presented in the *Haggadah* losing their impact due to “whitewashing.”

¹⁶³ For an analysis of how historical, scriptural and discursive dimensions converge in Rabbinic law see Ophir/Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, pp. 222 ff.

¹⁶⁴ Note how the Rabbinic tradition prohibits those celebrating Passover to leave their houses after the *Seder*, lest they (drunkenly) wander around in groups: Ben-Chorin, *Bruder Jesus*, pp. 179 f.; id., *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 104 f.; *The Passover Anthology* (ed. P. Goodman), p. 378.; Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 42.; Kulp, *Schechter*, pp. 261 f., referring to Lieberman and others.

¹⁶⁵ Compare Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, p. 162 f., who notes a reflection of this idea in Is 26,20 and the Hellenistic tradition despite preferring a more “*positive*” reading of the passage himself. Ben-Chorin, *Bruder Jesus*, p. 184., impressively (albeit somewhat overdramatically) describes the more dangerous aspects of God as his “nocturnal side [...] which is demonic” and which “only the blood of the lamb [...] could appease. It is blood that this incomprehensible one craves at night.” Ben-Chorin extends the motif to Jesus’ misery in Gethsemane where he is said to be sweating blood. Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 149 ff., discusses the question whether it is God himself who causes the suffering of the Egyptians or an angel of Satan/death against whom God protects the Israelites. Ophir, *Other*, pp. 219 f., 232, notes that the Passover-*Haggadah* stresses that it was God himself who inflicted the damage done to Egypt. Also compare note 39.

¹⁶⁶ Compare Füglistner, *Heilsbedeutung*, pp. 157 ff.

¹⁶⁷ See note 36.

been conquered. We too propose that the door should be opened, but we'd like to see the courage necessary for this rooted in the hope,¹⁶⁸ that all has become well outside between the warring parties.

The second problem is a principal one. Ophir and Rosen-Zvi demonstrate how the "dichotomous" distinction between "gentiles" and "Jews" could emerge in the first place.¹⁶⁹ According to them, said distinction is not based on "empirical" facts but is purely "discursive", a way of thinking that creates (potentially harmful) categories to help classify the world.¹⁷⁰ Ophir and Rosen-Zvi show that this mental figure cannot simply be overcome by questions of unification or inclusion since any kind of bond between Jews and gentiles already presupposes the very "binary" structure it aims to mediate.¹⁷¹ This problem appears to already be prefigured in eschatological visions¹⁷² as well, be they belligerent or peaceful: "The unthought discursive formation shared by the triumphalist-chauvinist and peaceful-universalist prophecies reveals how limited is the power of the conceptual distinction that sets them apart. Both express a commitment to what appears to be a kind of quasi-transcendental separation between Israel and other nations. In this sense, the universalist prophecies are even more revealing of the power of the structure by which they are bound."¹⁷³

Ophir and Rosen-Zvi contemplate the possibility that the formation of the discursive distinction between Jews and gentiles might have ultimately been influenced by the works of the apostle Paul and the concepts of ethnicity later derived from them:¹⁷⁴ "Paul calls upon [the Romans] to recognize themselves as gentiles – a Jewish category – and, at the same time, renders this recognition all too obvious and transparent [...] Paul

¹⁶⁸ See note 144.

¹⁶⁹ See note 83.

¹⁷⁰ See Ophir/Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, pp. 12 ff.

¹⁷¹ Compare, for example, Ophir/Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, p. 7.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 74 ff.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 80., referring to Bytner.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 140 ff., 177 f.

thus interpolates the Romans into 'gentility', so they may later become men and women of the spirit. Discursively, he creates the 'twain', so that he can then turn them into 'one'. Paul introduces the gentiles as an explanation for the rift Christ healed."¹⁷⁵

Our proposition, despite its good intent of serving as a vision of reconciliation between Jews and gentiles, falls into the exact same trap. We see no way how to avoid the dichotomous way of thinking exposed by Ophir and Rosen-Zvi in our case. This is due to the criticized structure already being inscribed into the problem we are proposing our solution for. However, even though we are not able to overcome the idea of a (hostile) alterity on a structural level, we are confident that our proposition at least does so on a contextual level.¹⁷⁶

IV. INTERRELIGIOUS THINKING BETWEEN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

To conclude this essay, we shall justify our addressing the question of Passover ritual despite writing from a Christian theologian's point of view.

For this purpose, we can begin by referring back to what has been said about the apostle Paul. If Ophir and Rosen-Zvi are correct, the pioneer of Christian theology may have (involuntarily) contributed to the consolidation of the structural problem at hand. If the problem itself has been generated at an early interreligious intersection, we deem it legitimate to propose an appropriate resolution as well.

In this, our proposition is partly inspired by our personal understanding of the Christian ethos to be one of reconciliation, loving one's enemies and the all-will-be-saved-doctrine. It refrains, however, from forcing Christian dogma into the Passover-*Seder*, thus

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159., with reference to Althusser and Sanders.

¹⁷⁶ As is the case with Paul: "[S]cholars tend not to distinguish between attitude toward gentiles and the conceptualization of 'the gentile'. We tend to assume that forging the 'gentiles' inevitably leads to exclusion. But for Paul, it is exactly the combat for inclusion that leads him to reform and to individualize the biblical *ethnē*" (Ophir/Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, p. 167).

heeding Ben-Chorin's warnings of what we might call a dangerous cultural appropriation.¹⁷⁷

We wish to inspire, not to censor, and confess to our delight in developing an interpretation that uses the tools of Jewish creativity which we hold to be especially representative of the essence of religion in general. We therefore agree with Heschel's conviction that "[t]he purpose of religious communication among human beings of different commitments is mutual enrichment and enhancement of respect and appreciation rather than the hope that the person spoken to will prove to be wrong in what he regards as sacred."¹⁷⁸

In addition, our discussion of R. Shire's and the Union's interpretation of the *Haggadah* should have shown that especially Liberal Judaism is quite similar to our own interpretation of the Christian ethos when it comes to universalistic eschatological thinking. We are aware, of course, that any kind of Christian universalism itself could probably not have emerged independently from Jewish thinking.¹⁷⁹ Nonetheless, we have encountered examples for both particularist and universalistic eschatology¹⁸⁰ in Judaism that seem mutually exclusive.¹⁸¹ Our own proposition campaigns for the latter tradition. In

¹⁷⁷ See note 104.

¹⁷⁸ Heschel, *Island*, p. 126.

¹⁷⁹ Theißen, *Eschatologie*, pp. 190 f., with reference to Schweitzer and Buri, describes how early 20th century "Konsequente Eschatologie" at once stressed that Jesus' teachings cannot be understood independent of the historical influence of Jewish apocalyptic thinking and at the same time tried to remove this (citing Buri) "contemporary" influence as a mere "form" from the core of Christian eschatology (compare p. 286). By contrast, Theißen demonstrates (pp. 170 ff.) how Kähler believed Jesus' very "self-conception" to be inspired by a universalist (pp. 159 ff.: "Menschheitsreligion") eschatological reading of the Old Testament that still holds true for both Judaism and Christianity and is not superseded by the latter's advent. Kähler narrows the scope of viable Christian approaches to scripture and Judaism to that same reading as a result while at the same time refraining from passing judgement on other aspects of Judaism. Note, however, Kähler's anti-Semitic thoughts concerning Judaism as a *cultural* entity (pp. 176 ff.).

¹⁸⁰ Cn. 93-97, 140-142, 172-173.

¹⁸¹ Also see Ben-Chorin, *Narrative Theologie*, pp. 56 ff., as to the conflict between particularistic ("splendid isolation") and universalistic, interreligious intellectual currents in Judaism. On an interesting note, Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, p. 259, in a socio-religious prediction of the religious life of our times, shows that particularistic and universalist elements do not always have to

this, we don't want to be understood as to be "admonishing" the Jewish tradition from a supposedly more universalistic point of view.¹⁸² Instead, we are writing from the viewpoint of a supporter of universalistic thought within the Christian tradition to those who agree with us within their own faith.

To quote Heschel once again: "What, then, is the purpose of interreligious cooperation? It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another; to share insight and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures [...] and, what is even more important, to search in the wilderness for wellsprings of devotion [...] for the power of love and care for men."¹⁸³ All in all, our commitment should therefore not be understood as a "correction" of Judaism by a follower of a *foreign* tradition, but as a reaction stemming from a conviction that owes its very existence in huge parts to Judaism and may now serve to further enrich its progenitor religion,¹⁸⁴ in our case by way of a methodological contribution to the question of Passover.

be opposed to each other: "'Canonical' messages proclaimed by the ritual - 'eternal truths' - will be universal and personalist rather than tribal, even if the ritual vehicle that 'carries' these truths is particularist and the 'historical truth' it recalls pertains specifically to Jews. To most American Jews, therefore, Passover is 'about' freedom or liberation from bondage rather than God's salvation of one people through the infliction of deadly plagues on another." Compare p. 250.

¹⁸² From a historical point of view, this idea can pose a threat: Ophir and Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, pp. 167 ff., with reference to (among others) Buell, Richardson, Nirenberg and Gager, show how patristic ideas of Christianity being the new, universal "*genos*" may have contributed to the beginnings of anti-Semitism. Theißen, *Eschatology*, wrote his whole monograph on the topic of how Protestant eschatology in the tradition of Schleiermacher has (mis-)perceived Judaism, criticizing it for being (metaphysically) particularistic and overly immanent (as opposed to transcendent) in structure (pp. 17 ff., 62 f., 208 f., 227 f., 233, 263 f.), sometimes culminating in anti-Semitic stereotypes (pp. 63, 176 ff.) or Christian eschatology's very own way of *othering* (pp. 21 ff.). Despite this, Theißen extracts genuinely positive ideas towards an interreligious dialogue from his thorough analysis.

¹⁸³ Heschel, *Island*, p. 135 f.

¹⁸⁴ In an interview ("Das Prinzip Hoffnung") with German newspaper "Welt am Sonntag" (No. 16, April 21/22, 2019) on the occasion of Passover and Easter, former Protestant Bishop Wolfgang Huber and Rabbi Andreas Nachama stress the closeness of Judaism and Christianity, R. Nachama describing both present-day Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity to interact as "subsidiary religions, so to speak, of the ancient Israelite sacrificial religion". Also compare n. 104 as well as Yuval, *Dialogue*, pp. 103 f., referring to Visotzky and Segal, and Heschel, *Island*, pp. 125 ff.

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