

POUR OUT YOUR WRATH

Divine Wrath and Divine Love

שפוך חמתך



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- 1. How does Professor
 Kasher's strategy strike
 you? What do you think
 about the idea that "Pour
 out your wrath" is a relic
 of the past?
- 2. The verse from the
 Psalms calls for God to
 pour out God's wrath.
 Which punishments
 should we leave for God,
 and which should we
 arrogate to ourselves?
- 3. How does reading this passage feel this year?

By Jan Katzew

שְׁפֹּךְ חֲמָתְךָ אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יְדָעוּךְ וְעַל־מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְךָ לֹא קָרָאוּ. כִּי אָכַל אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת־נָוֵהוּ הֵשַׁמּוּ. שְׁפָּךְ־עֲלֵיהֶם זַעֲמֶךְ וּחֲרוֹן אַפְּךְ יַשִּׂיגֵם. תִּרְדֹף בְּאַף וְתַשְׁ־ מִידֵם מִתַּחַת שָׁמֵי ה'.

Pour your wrath (Shfokh Chamatkha) upon the nations that did not know You and upon the kingdoms that did not call upon Your Name! Since they have consumed Ya'akov and laid waste to his habitation (Psalms 79:6-7). Pour out Your fury upon them and the fierceness of Your anger shall reach them (Psalms 69:25)! You shall pursue them with anger and eradicate them from under the skies of God (Lamentations 3:66).

The passage above from the Haggadah was added during the time of the Crusades (11-12th Century CE), almost a thousand years after most of the Haggadah was created. Its context is future oriented, since it is recited just after a door is opened for Elijah to herald the coming of redemption. It calls for divine vengeance against the enemies of the Jewish people. It leaves no room for doubt or equivocation. Its language is absolute and unforgiving. On Passover, the God whose mercy is sought for a thousand generations elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in Rabbinic literature, and in the daily prayer book, is invoked and implored to eradicate nations and kingdoms that destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and exiled the people of Israel from the land of Israel.

The echo of vengeful rhetoric has been used by some to justify political policies. Indeed, along with the return of hostages from Gaza,



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the current war is being waged to pursue and eradicate Hamas. This Pesach, there may be no escape from coming to terms with the idea embedded in the Haggadah that no mercy is to be shown against people like Hamas whose avowed purpose is your destruction.

Despite the passage's compelling urgency, there are people who annually skip it entirely. The Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai wrote in one of his epic poems that we all live censored lives, that everyone chooses to omit passages, prayers, books, stories, and perhaps people as well from our lives. Whether you decide to include this section in your Passover Seder or omit it, please consider the following alternatives and questions.

Professor Asa Kasher, the primary author of the Israeli Defense Forces Code of Ethics, teaches that some parts of the Haggadah are exclusively about history, and this section is one of them. He does not eliminate the passage from his Haggadah, but he relegates it to the past, and regards it as no longer authoritative or relevant.

In addition, some Haggadot have added a prayer that asks for God to "pour out divine love" (Shfokh Ahavatkha) as a compensatory, comforting and caring display of Divine Power.

