



Is 'Dayenu' Really 'Enough' After All?

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This time of year, on the cusp of Purim and Passover, our thoughts turn to matters not only focused on Israel, but beyond Israel's borders to the entire Middle East region: Persia, i.e. modern-day Iran for Purim, and Egypt for Pesach. In this month's column, I look at the *Dayenu* text in our Passover *Hagaddah* along with the Middle East geo-political context from both an historical, as well as contemporary perspective, and as a Jew, ask the question, "Can we truly feel complete saying 'Dayenu' on Passover, when as Jews we feel such uncertainty resulting from the upheavals occurring in our Middle East neighbors' countries?" In other words, is 'Dayenu' really 'enough,' after all?

The text for the song 'Dayenu' which we have all sung since our childhoods around the Seder table is over 1,000 years old. It occurred for the first time in its complete form in the very first Medieval Haggadah, which is part of the ninth-century Siddur Rav Amram. Amram was the first to arrange a complete liturgy for use in the synagogue and home. His book forms the foundation both of the Spanish-Portuguese and of the German-Polish liturgies, and has had great influence. (Unfortunately, we do not know the origins of the familiar melody we sing to the words of 'Dayenu,' but it is my suspicion that it might have originated in a German (Ashkenaz) folk song.) Amram's siddur does not survive in its original. All we have today is his prayer book published complete for the first time in Warsaw in the year 1865, by N.N. Coronel, under the title "Seder Rab Amram Gaon." This publication reflects many changes from the original with interpolations by others and thus, we do not really know what the original Siddur Rav Amram really consisted of. But we do know that it contained the text of 'Dayenu.'

There are 15 verses for the Dayenu song and they can be divided into three equal parts:

The first five speak of leaving slavery:

1. "If He had brought us out of Egypt...Dayenu"
2. "If He had executed justice upon the Egyptians...Dayenu"
3. "If He had executed justice upon their gods...Dayenu"
4. "If He had slain their first born...Dayenu"
5. "If he had given to us their wealth...Dayenu"

The next five speak of Miracles:

1. "If He had split the sea for us...Dayenu"
2. "If He had led us through on dry land...Dayenu."
3. "If he had drowned our oppressors...Dayenu"
4. "If He had provided for our needs in the wilderness for 40 years...Dayenu"
5. "If He had fed us manna...Dayenu"

The last five stanzas speak of being with God:

1. "If He had given us Shabbat...Dayenu"
2. "If he had led us to Mount Sinai...Dayenu"
3. "If He had given us the Torah...Dayenu"

4. "If He had brought us into the Land of Israel...Dayenu"
5. "If he had built the Temple for us...Dayenu"

That the series of verses ends with the Temple, with no mention of its destruction, its second building and its second destruction, as well as any ensuing Jewish historical events gives us cause for pause. Why did the medieval author of this text stop with the building of the Temple, even though it was subsequently destroyed? And why were not more contemporary matters included in the original sequence of verses?

We will never know exactly what went on the mind of the medieval author of 'Dayenu,' but today we can certainly look back at the intervening 2,500 years of Jewish history since the last verse, right up to the present moment, and ask the question, "Do we really feel 'Dayenu?'" since 'Dayenu' is usually translated "That would have been enough," in essence thanking God for every step along the way, as reflected in the 15 verses from bringing us out of Egypt to building the first Temple. Do we as 21st century Jews, not Jews in medieval times, really feel that God has done 'enough,' ie. 'dayenu,' to stop our verses at number 15 with the building of the first Temple? I, for one, certainly feel we need to draft some new verses for Dayenu that reflect our gratitude to Adonai for the intervening period up to the very present.

To this end, I am challenging each and every one of us this Passover, as we gather with friends and family around the Passover table for our Seder, to consider adding verses to Dayenu that makes this ancient 'ditty' into one with tremendous contemporary *gravitas*. Are we not grateful that we were able to escape pogroms in Poland and the Pale of Settlement and settle in Palestine and the United States? Are we not grateful for God's giving us the State of Israel? True, along the way in the intervening 2,500 years post-first Temple there have been some horrific events affecting Jews, but in the end, we can always find the silver lining. After the horrors of the *Shoah*, there was *Eretz Yisrael*. And even though we cannot foretell the outcomes of the turbulence in the Middle East, from Morocco to Tunisia, to Libya, to Egypt, to Bahrain, to Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Jordan, can we not say with confidence "If He had only liberated the Egyptian people in the 21st century...Dayenu."

Let us pray in our homes and synagogues this Purim and Passover, that the will of the people, God's most magnificent creation of earth, will reflect God's goodness and compassion, and let our Purim and Passover holidays this year, while reminding us of the larger geographic history of Jews in ancient times, allow us to be hopeful about our Jewish survival in the midst of what is happening today in the Middle East. I wish you all a Happy Purim and Zissen Pesach...Dayenu!

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