**Personal Accountability and   
Blunting the Teeth of the *Rasha***

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**Introduction**

The Pesach *Haggada* contains many pedagogic insights and seems to even anticipate “modern” educational techniques.

One well-known section of the text draws upon a didactic *midrash* that describes the “Four Sons”[[1]](#footnote-1) and is found in two primary ancient versions. The one that appears in the *Haggada* is from the *Mekhilta* (Exodus 13:14),[[2]](#footnote-2) which introduces four children: *chakham* (wise), *rasha* (wicked), *tam* (simple),[[3]](#footnote-3) and *she-eino yode’a lish’ol* (does not know how to ask). The section is structured as questions posed by the four categories of children and the appropriate responses to each.

The questions are based on four different Biblical verses that are woven into one unified “story” by the *midrash*.

(a) The *chakham*’s question is from Deuteronomy 6:20,[[4]](#footnote-4) and the answer given to him, befitting his status as a “*chakham*,” is from a mishna. The Biblical response of Deuteronomy 6:21 does not appear in the *Haggada* in response to the *chakham*,[[5]](#footnote-5) but is rather paraphrasedto form the basis of the general answer provided in the paragraph of *Avadim Hayinu*, which follows the four questions of the *Ma Nishtana*.[[6]](#footnote-6)

(b) The *rasha’s* question is from *Shemot* 12:26.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Biblical part of the *Haggada*’s response to him is from *Shemot* 13:8.[[8]](#footnote-8)

(c) The *tam*’s question and answer are both from *Shemot* 13:14.

(d) The statement to the final son (“who is not capable of asking a question”) is from Exodus 13:8. This verse begins with “you [feminine] shall tell your son,” but has no prompting question. Note that this is the same verse used in the answer to the *rasha*.

**The Anomaly of the *Rasha***

The most perplexing part of the *Haggada*’s formulation, and the focus of this essay, involves the *rasha*, whose question is deemed to be outright heresy and who is met with a bafflingly severe response:

The *rasha* – what does he say? “What is this work for you?” “For you” – and not for him. Since he removes himself from the group, he denies the existence of God. And you should *hakheh* his teeth and say to him: “For this God did for me when I left Egypt.” “For me” – and not for him. Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.

The anomalies in the answer are also troubling from a stylistic viewpoint. Whereas the other three children each receive a straightforward verbal response**,** the *rasha* is treated to two additional components. The *Haggada*’s response to the *rasha* includes the instruction “*hakheh et shinav*” – do something to his teeth – and it additionally provides a stinging reprimand for his impudence. We inform the *rasha*, in third person,[[9]](#footnote-9) that had he been enslaved in Egypt, he would not have been redeemed.[[10]](#footnote-10) Why is he given these two extra responses, and is there a connection between these anomalous aspects?[[11]](#footnote-11)

In the remainder of this essay, we will first survey some of the standard answers offered to these questions, and we will then propose a novel explanation of the *Haggada*’s message.

**Previously Suggested Explanations**

The *Haggada Sheleima* translates “*hakheh*” as “anger him,” and thereby relates the two responses as cause and effect. The *rasha* is angered by the admonishment that he would not have been redeemed from Egypt. The “*hakheh*” is thus not an action that must be performed, but rather the natural consequence of the rebuke. In other words, to paraphrase Psalms 112:10, the *rasha* is answered with a provocation that will cause his teeth “to gnash and melt away.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Others similarly explain that “*hakheh*” is not active, but is rather related to the first half of the answer that declares the *rasha* a heretic. Since the *rasha* has demonstrated that he is removing himself from the Jewish community, he is viewed as a *ben nekhar*, and he is therefore prohibited from partaking of the Passover sacrifice (*Shemot* 12:43; *Pesachim* 96a). Indeed, the Biblical answer to his question (*Shemot* 12:27) discusses the *korban Pesach.* When we inform the *rasha* that he will have to watch everyone else eat the succulent, aromatic Passover sacrifice, while he will not be permitted to partake, his teeth will “stand on edge.”[[13]](#footnote-13) The Ramban (*Bereishit* 49:10) similarly explains that the meaning is “to weaken his teeth with your words.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Most explanations translate “*hakheh*” as to “blunt” or “dull” his teeth, and various explanations have been offered to clarify the intent here. R. Ovadia Yosef in his *Haggada* offers a creative and beautiful explanation that views this phrase as an analogy to the *rasha*.[[15]](#footnote-15) The *rasha* is bothered by all of the ritual activities performed at the *seder*, which he labels as *avoda* (work). It seems that he would rather meditate and think about the Exodus than do the actions mandated of him. He is the original “cardiac Jew,” an individual who has a Jewish heart but is not interested in active *mitzvot*.

The response of “*hakheh*” is a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the *rasha* contemplate what it would be like to live with blunted teeth that prevent him from eating. He could then ponder and speculate about the eating experience. He might even swallow a few vitamins, but he would not survive. As physical beings, humans require concrete activities in order to endure, and this applies to both the corporeal and spiritual realms. Hence, just as one must eat in order to survive physically, one must actively perform *mitzvot* in order to survive spiritually.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Interestingly, there is Biblical precedent for “bashing the teeth” of the wicked, although the word “*hakheh*” is not used in these sources. One example is Psalm 58, a condemnation of unjust judges. Verse 7 begins the psalmist’s prayer that God punish and incapacitate them, and his first request is, “O God, break (*haras*) their teeth in their mouths.” Psalm 112 is a prayer for the righteous individual who fears God and desires to imitate Him and fulfill His commandments. The response of the wicked to the triumph of the righteous is described as, “the *rasha* will see and be angry; he shall gnash his teeth and melt away” (verse 10). Here, the teeth are not broken by an outsider, but as a natural consequence of what the *rasha* observes. A similar phrase is used in Psalm 37, a psalm that discusses the problem of theodicy and asserts that the wicked will indeed be punished. Verse 12 states that a wicked person will plot against the righteous and gnash (*ve-choreik*) at him with his teeth. Similarly, in Psalms 35:16, the future King David complains that Saul and his party “gnash (*charok*) at me with their teeth.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Proposed Explanation**

All of the above explanations ring true, but it is unlikely that they reflect the original intent of the compiler of the *Haggada*. There is much more hidden within the unusual word “*hakheh*” that is used to describe blunting the teeth. Indeed, the entire response to the *rasha* presents an integrated message about Judaism’s system of reward and punishment. The anonymous compiler of the *Haggada* cleverly inserted this message, assuming a knowledgeable readership that would recognize it via particular words and phrases that would serve as hints or “hyper-links” to broader concepts.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The word “*hakheh*” is extremely rare in Biblical and liturgical literature. It is not the common word הכה, which means “hit,” but is rather הקהה, from the root ה.ק.ה. It appears in only three places in the Bible, *Yirmiyahu* 31:28-30, *Yechezkel* 18:2, and *Kohelet* 10:10, and all three citations are relevant to the *Haggada*’s usage.

The verse in *Kohelet* notes that if one desires to chop wood with an ax that has a dull blade, he will have to apply additional muscle in order to accomplish his goal: “*Im kaha* (קהה) *ha-barzel*.” From this verse, we can deduce an unequivocal definition; in the context of an ax, “*kaha*” clearly means “blunt.”

Indeed, *Metzudot Tzion* uses the meaning of *ka’ha* in *Kohelet* to derive its meaning in the less clear context of *Yirmiyahu* 31:28, where the word describes teeth. He explains that this refers to the “weakening of the teeth’s ability to cut food, just like the iron [of the ax] is weakened in its ability to cut wood,” i.e., a blunting of the teeth.

The contexts of the word’s appearance in *Yirmiyahu* and *Yechezkel* both address the culpability of one generation for the sins of another, an issue that appears to have conflicting sources in the Torah. *Devarim* 24:16 states, “Fathers shall not be put to death for the [sins of] children and the children shall not be put to death for the [sins of] fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.” This seems to clearly dissociate the actions of one generation from the responsibility of another, be it previous or subsequent. A seemingly contradictory statement is found in both versions of the Ten Commandments (*Shemot* 20:5; *Devarim* 5:9) and in the Thirteen Attributes with which Moshe pleaded with God to forgive the Jews after their sin with the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 34:7) and after the sin of the spies (*Devarim* 14:17-18). For example, *Shemot* 20:5 describes God as “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the third and upon the fourth generation of those that hate Me.” While the first source appears to state that Divine punishment does not cross generational lines, the others imply that it does. Many resolutions to this apparent contradiction have been suggested.[[19]](#footnote-19)

This same apparent contradiction is found in *Nakh* as well. *Yirmiyahu* 32:18 presents an example of intergenerational merit and culpability along with the associated reward and punishment: “And who recompenses the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Additionally, *Yirmiyahu* 36:31 states: “And I will visit their iniquity upon him and his seed and his servants.” However, the contrary notion of personal responsibility, as expressed in Deuteronomy 24:16, is also found in the prophets. *Yechezkel* expresses it in a number of places, most prominently in chapter 18, where he states: “(v.17)… he shall not die for the iniquity of his father... (v.20) the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father... neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son ... (v.26) for his iniquity that he has done shall he die.”

One of the clearest statements of individual accountability is a proverb found in almost identical form in *Yirmiyahu* 31:28-29 and *Yechezkel* 18:2-4, and it is in that context that the uncommon word “*hakheh*” appears. *Yirmiyahu* states: “In those days, they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten unripe (sour) grapes,[[21]](#footnote-21) and the children’s teeth are set on edge (*tik’hena*).’ But everyone shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge (*tik’hena*).” In *Yechezkel*, the proverb is formulated as a question: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge (*tik’hena*)?” Thus, in the Bible, this unusual word appears as part of a parable to teach that there is no intergenerational accountability.

It seems that the word “*hakheh*” in the response to the *rasha* is designed to recall for the reader the verses and parables from *Yirmiyahu* and *Yechezkel*. Seeing that unusual word is supposed to be like a hyperlink that reflexively brings to mind the rare Biblical occurrences of its use and its meaning in that context. Certainly for Rashi, this association is self-evident. In *Ta’anit* 7b (s.v. *kaha ha-barzel*), Rashi explains the word “*kaha*” in the verse in *Kohelet* by citing the verse from *Yirmiyahu* 31 and by quoting the response to the *rasha* from the Passover *Haggada*!

The message of the parables is clear – there is no cross-generational reward or punishment. Merit and culpability are individually accrued and do not get passed down from previous generations, nor is the next generation burdened or rewarded with them: “Every man that eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.” That is the message transmitted to the *rasha* in the *Haggada*.

As noted above, the passage about the four sons in the *Haggada* is taken from the *Mekhilta*. This is the only occurrence of the root ק.ה.ה. in the *Mekhilta* and, indeed, it is rare in all of Rabbinic literature. The root sometimes refers to its plain meaning of “blunted” or “bitter.” However, it seems that it is more often summoned from obscurity by the rabbis to link the reader to the Biblical parables and hint at an intergenerational context, or, more precisely, an unsuccessful transfer from one generation to another.

In *Avot* 4:2, R. Yossi bar Yehuda compares the disadvantages of learning from a young person to eating unripe grapes (“*anavim keihot”*) and drinking freshly squeezed wine from the winepress. There are many other ways to say unripe grapes that are used throughout the Mishna, but the word of choice here is “*keha*,”in the context of an unsuccessful intergenerational transfer.

In *Sota* 48b-49a, the Gemara analyzes *Zekharia* 4:10 and suggests that the verse refers to the young children of the wicked who died for the sins of their fathers. The bereavement over their deaths would spare the wicked fathers additional punishment in the World to Come. The children petition God that if His intent was to exact punishment from the wicked in the future, why did He “blunt their teeth” (“*hek’heita* *shineihem*”)? Here, children being killed for the sins of their fathers, i.e., intergenerational transfer of guilt, is termed “blunting teeth.”

Later on the same page, the Gemara relates that R. Huna found a special type of date, which he proudly gave to his son Rabba after he had established the latter’s spiritual purity. Rabba’s son Abba soon arrived, and Rabba gave the date to him without ascertaining his spiritual level. To this show of generosity, R. Huna responded that Rabba had blunted his teeth (“*hikeita et shinai*”), indicating an attempt at intergenerational transfer of merit. Generally, however, there is no intergenerational transfer of guilt or merit.

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 109b engages in exegetical analysis of Korach’s name, as the Torah refers to him as Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehat. As he was a descendent of Kehat,[[22]](#footnote-22) the Gemara explains that his name characterizes him as a son who set the teeth of his ancestors on edge by embarrassing them through his actions. Again, the word is not merely used as an expression of upset or disappointment, but rather in the context of a perceived intergenerational relationship.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The Ramban suggests that this same root is actually found in several other Biblical verses. Commenting on *Bereishit* 49:10, “*ve-lo yik’hat amim*,”the Ramban understands the word “*yik’hat*” differently than Rashi, connecting it to *Yirmiyahu* 31:29,where it means weakness or breaking. The Ramban explains the verse to mean that the scepter of kingship will not leave Yehuda until his son (i.e., the messiah) comes and defeats the nations. This understanding of “*yik’hat*” adds a multi-generational component that is not explicit in the verse.

The Ramban does not explicitly explain the appearance of the root *ק.ה.ה.* in *Mishlei* 30:17, “*tavus lik’hat eim*,”but he alludes to the same explanation as Menachem ben Saruk (s.v. *kuf* *heh*), writing that the phrase means something like “He scorns the mother when she is weakened,” i.e., in her old age. In this case, the verse itself uses the word “*keheh*”to describe an intergenerational process.

What is the significance of this association between the word “*keheh*” and intergenerational relationships in the *Haggada*? Possibly this: The *rasha* excludes himself from all of the Passover rituals, yet he is seemingly not concerned about his fate. Surely, he thinks, if all of the ritual that he rejects is truly required, he has no cause for worry. After all, the people around him are his family, and they are all engaged in performing God’s commandments. In his way of thinking, some of that merit would transfer to him.

The compiler of the *Haggada* therefore instructs, “Blunt his teeth!” In other words, remind him of the “sour grape” verses. Remind him of the message of those parables. Neither guilt nor merit crosses generational lines. The code-word “*hakheh*” reminds him (and us) of the Biblical parables that teach that there is no intergenerational transfer.

Based on this, the logical conclusion is exactly what the compiler of the *Haggada* writes next. If the *rasha* were in Egypt and had not behaved properly, he would not have been redeemed. The merit of his family would not have helped. The universal message is that there is no transfer of merit.

The prophets in the books of *Yirmiyahu* and *Yechezkel* stressed personal accountability. Each person is responsible for his own deeds and is capable of *teshuva*. The burden of one’s sins and the suffering that one might endure as a result of them cannot be attributed to previous generations. Neither can one sin in the anticipation that the burden of guilt will be borne by subsequent generations or that he will get a free ride on the backs of meritorious previous generations. Jews cannot rest on the laurels of righteous ancestors; rather, each generation must establish its own merits and legacy. This is the meaning of the keyword “*hakheh*” and the Biblical parallels associated with it.

It might be suggested that there is one exception to the rule of individual accountability – the concept of community *zekhut*, merit. That is why, for example, *tefilla be-tzibbur* is so important. Someone who falters can continue to be supported by the community that surrounds him. This is why we stress to the *rasha* that this merit will be of no avail to him, because he has removed himself from the community.

In 1985, I was fortunate to spend the Passover *seders* in Odessa, Ukraine at the home of some real Jewish heroes, the Nepomnaschys. Yehudit, a courageous young woman whose father and fiancé were both rotting in Soviet prisons, explained to me and Baruch Sterman, my traveling partner, what was an important concept for these returning Jews of the Soviet Union. Although they were now practicing Jews, many of their close friends and relatives were not. She emphatically stated that in Judaism, almost no one is beyond the pale of hope. At the *seder*, one of the sons is labeled a *rasha*, an evil son, which is not a trivial designation. And yet he is given a seat at the table and even dignified with an answer to his insolence! We invite all “children” to the table and respond to their questions in an appropriate manner.

The new understanding of the blunting of the *rasha*’s teeth makes Yehudit’s insight even more meaningful. We answer the *rasha* in a seemingly harsh manner. However, in reality, it is a subtle yet powerful reminder of his personal responsibility. This individual accountability has the potential to doom him, as he is explicitly told, but it can just as readily rescue him, because he is judged on his actions alone. We tell him that he is not beyond hope, but it is up to him to rescue himself.

The message to the *rasha* is a powerful message to us as well – each person is given free choice and sinks or swims on his own merit.

1. There is a vast literature on the subject of the four sons. Practically every *Haggada* – of which there are hundreds, if not thousands – includes a discussion on this section. In addition, a list of free-standing articles can be found in Joseph Tabory, “Jewish Prayer and the Yearly Cycle: A List of Articles” (1995), and a list of books that contain material on the topic can be found in Tabory’s Hebrew books *Pesach Dorot* and *Jewish Festivals in the Time of the Mishna and Talmud*. A few articles of particular interest are: F.O. Francis, “The *Baraita* of the Four Sons,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42 (1974), pp. 280-297; Mira Friedman, “The Four Sons of the *Haggada* and the Ages of Man,” *Jewish Journal of Art* 11 (1985), pp. 16-40; R. Ari D. Kahn, “The Wicked Son in the Passover *Haggada*,” in *The Annual Volume of the Council of Young Israel Rabbis in Israel*, ed. R. Emanuel B. Quint (Jerusalem, 5747/1987), vol. 1, pp. 31-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The other version is found in the Yerushalmi (*Pesachim* 10:4). On these two versions and their differences, see R. Menachem Kasher, *Haggada Shleima*, pp. 120-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The other version of the four sons refers to this son as *tipesh* (stupid); see also Rashi, Exodus 13:14. A translation for *tam* is difficult, but it is likely a complimentary term. Thus, for example, the Torah uses the word *tam* to describe Yaakov Avinu, seemingly in a positive manner (*Bereishit* 25:27). However, since the *tam* is not the focus of this discussion, the standard translation will be used without further discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This verse includes the phrase “that our God has commanded *you*,” the same troubling word used in the wicked son’s question. The Yerushalmi (*Pesachim* 10:4), *Mekhilta* (*Bo* 19), and Rambam all modify the verse quoted in the wise son’s question, replacing “you” with “us,” possibly to make it more palatable and less like the *rasha*’s question. This is also how the verse itself appears in the Septuagint. The Glatzer *Haggada* (Schocken), p. 26, notes that old versions of the *Haggada* quote the phrase in a modified manner, as “which our God has commanded us (*otanu*).” Similarly, the Venice *Haggada*, the Sarajevo *Haggada*, and the Prague *Haggada* all have “us” instead of “you.” Note that in contrast to the *rasha*, the *chakham* does say “*our* God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. There are actually three textual answers: Deuteronomy 6:21-23, 6:24, and 6:25 (see end of Ibn Ezra to Exodus 20:1), and none of them are told to the *chakham* in the *Haggada*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This seems to imply that the generic child who asks the *Ma Nishtana* is treated as the Biblical *chakham*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As presented in the Torah, what the *rasha* articulates is somewhat less of a question than that of the *chakham* or *tam*, both of which are introduced with “*va-haya ki* yishalkha,” “and when your son will *ask* you.” The *rasha*’s question, in contrast, is introduced with, “*va-haya ki* yomru *aleikhem beneikhem*,” “and it shall be when your sons *tell* you.” This impudence may be an indicator that the speaker is a *rasha*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The answer provided to the *rasha*’s question by the Torah in *Shemot* 12:27 is used later in the *seder* in Rabban Gamliel’s explanation of the main points of the *seder*. It is possible that *Shemot* 12:27 is not used to respond to the *rasha* in the *Haggada* because it discusses the redemption of the nation. The *Haggada* wants to emphasize to the *rasha* that not all of the Jews were saved, and indeed, he is told that he would not have been redeemed. As Rashi points out, the word “*li*” in 13:8 is an indication that that verse is intended as the response to the *rasha*.

   For an alternate, beautiful explanation of these verses and why the *Haggada* does not quote Exodus 12:27 see Maier Becker, “Lest Your Sons Tell You – Insights into the *Ben Rasha*,” *Young Israel of Cleveland Torah Journal in Memory of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik*, vol. 4 (5757/1997), pp. 48-50. He postulates that the Biblical answer should be viewed as a preventive lesson to ward off a son who would ask such a damning, rhetorical question, rather than a response to the question once it is asked. The Biblical introduction of *ki* in this verse should be translated as “lest,” rather than “when.”

   The *Torah Temima* to Exodus 12:26-27 (notes 201, 203) suggests, contrary to the simple reading of the text, that 12:26 and 12:27 should not be paired as a question and answer. Rather, 12:26 is the question of the *rasha*, to which no answer need or should be given, and 12:27 is a new topic, teaching various laws about the Passover offering and the *seder*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In the Biblical verse quoted in response to the *rasha*, he is not answered directly, but rather in third person. He is not confronted, and there is no desire to debate. The response merely states the facts amongst those assembled. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Yerushalmi’s version of the text adds only the rebuke and omits the teeth blunting. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A final question, which will not be addressed here, is that the same verse is used to answer both the *rasha* and the *she-eino yode’a lish’ol*, yet only the *rasha* is deemed a heretic and is responded to with the additional two components. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Haggada Sheleima*, p. 24, text near notes 258-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For support for this theory, see the *Be’er Miriam* commentary in the *Haggada* of R. Reuven Margoliot. This also may be what the 18th century Moroccan *paytan* R. David ben Chasin (1727-1792) had in mind when he wrote, “It is the *Pesach*, and the teeth of the *resha’im* will be blunted when they do not have a portion in it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Ramban cites a similar explanation from *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabba* (1:12). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I originally heard this idea many years ago from my good friend, R. Reuven Halpern. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See *Sefer Ha-Chinukh*, *mitzva* 16 (the prohibition to break bones of the *korban Pesach*), where he first presents his important principle of “*adam nifal kefi pe’ulatav*” – people behave based on their actions. In other words, a person develops a certain personality and attitude based on the activities that he engages in. The *Sefer Ha-Chinukh* reiterates this fundamental tenet again in *mitzva* 40 (not to cut the stones for the altar with metal), *mitzva* 95 (to build the *Beit* *Hamikdash*, albeit with a slight change in the phrase), *mitzva* 99 (the special garments for the priests), *mitzva* 263 (the obligation for a *Kohen* to become *tamei* for relatives), *mitzva* 266 (a *korban* must be unblemished), *mitzva* 270 (*korban musaf* on Pesach), and *mitzva* 285 (*lulav*). In *mitzva* 264, he suggests that observing the rules of mourning leads to the emotion of *tza’ar*, pain, once again invoking the principle of *adam nifal kefi pe’ulotav*. The *Sefer Ha-Chinukh* emphasizes the idea that humans require physical activities via other principles as well. For example, in *mitzva* 265 (the *Kohen* *Gadol* must marry a *betula*, virgin), he writes, “*acharei ha-machshavot yimshakh ma’aseh ha-gufot*,”and in *mitzva* 275 (prohibition of a *Kohen* with a blemishperforming the *avoda*), he explains that a person is influenced by external actions, “*lefi she-rov pe’ulot bnei adam retzuyot el lev ro’eihem lefi chashivut oseihen.*” This idea, which is beyond the scope of our present discussion, is central to the Torah view of *mitzvot*. Rather than actions that express existing emotions, *mitzvot* are intended to instill within us proper ideas. Thus, for example, *Chazal* instituted the recitation of *Asher Yatzar* not because every time one says it, he feels inspired to acknowledge the wonders of the creation, but rather because that is an opportune moment in which to remind the person who has just relieved himself that he *should* now be aware of God’s magnificent world. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Note that the root used here, ח.ר.ק., is relatively rare, appearing in only 5 places in *Tanakh*: 3 times in the psalms cited here, in *Iyov* 16:9, and in *Eikha* 2:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. It is unclear whether the *Haggada*’s author expected a similar familiarity with Rabbinic literature. For example, is a phrase such as “*kol dikhfin*” meant to trigger an association with a similar phrase found in the last line on *Ta’anit* 20b? There, one of the praises of R. Huna is that when he would sit down to eat, he would open his door and declare, “whoever is in need, let him come and eat.” Regardless, it is fairly certain that the *Haggada* assumes familiarity with *Tanakh*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For a survey, see Ari and Naomi Zivotofsky, “Inter-Generational Accountability in the Torah Judicial System,” *Young Israel of Cleveland Torah Journal*, vol. 2 (May 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This verse is a paraphrase (with some important variations) of Exodus 20:6: “Who shows mercy to the thousands and pays the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Rashi, *Sanhedrin* 39a. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The *Torah Temima* (*Bemidbar* 16:1, note 2) similarly notes that the verse that states that Korach was ben Kehat, the son of Kehat, means that with his actions he blunted the teeth of his parents.

    Note that in later generations, the word may have lost its Biblical and Talmudic meaning. Hence, the Shela posits that the names of Levi’s three sons are intended to show the empathy that the Levites felt for their oppressed brethren. Gershon indicated that they felt like strangers, Merari that their lives were embittered, and Kehat that their teeth were blunted (*kehot*) by the misery of the exile. (Cited in *Torah Lodaas*, vol. 4, p. 156, commenting on *Shemos* 6:14-16.) [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Gemara (*Ta’anit* 7b) analyzes *Kohelet* 10:10, where the word “*keheh*” appears, but none of the suggested exegeses relate to intergenerational issues. Rather, it explains that the verse is either ascribing lack of rain to a degenerate generation, as describing a student who struggles because he has not organized his studies, or as referring to a student having difficulty because his teacher does not encourage him. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)