

Here we get to the second of the **four different ways** that we see degradation/praise. There is a classic disagreement in the Talmud as to what this means. This is between Rav and Shmuel. According to Rav, degradation means that we have to start with the fact that our ancestors were idolators. This means that we have to go back to the beginning of our story, even to before Abraham. According to Shmuel, degradation means that we have to begin with the fact that we were slaves in Egypt. This is where we begin here.

It is interesting to note, that this little paragraph itself begins with degradation (we were slaves) and ends with praise (all who elaborate deserve praise), however, the text has a concluding text of praise a little later in the Haggadah.

Rav's position is also preserved in the Hagaddah which we shall see later. We will also see 2 other locations in the text where degradation and praise can be demonstrated.

As we delve into the Hagaddah text, we are brought to this puzzling text about these five famous rabbis at B'nai B'rak. What is this text trying to tell us? The connection to Pesah is clear, they are "reclining" which is a keyword for being at the Seder table. There are at least two levels of understanding this text. In the previous text we are told that "whoever elaborates on the story of the exodus from Egypt deserves praise." The Hagaddah immediately wants to give us an example of elaborating on the story. These Rabbis were so engrossed in elaborating on the story that they did not realize that it was daybreak already. The phrase "time flies when you're having fun" clearly comes to mind here. And as we shall see in the coming paragraph, that is exactly what these Rabbis are doing, having fun. In the translation, I have put a question mark and an exclamation point following the words "Our Teachers," when the students come to the Rabbis. The question mark belongs with the way we have read the text above.

If you put the exclamation point, a whole new level can be seen. It has been suggested that these Rabbis were meeting in secret at this time planning the Bar Kokhba revolt of the years 132-135 C.E. The Jews were revolting against the Romans, and Rabbi Shimon Bar Kokhba was their military leader. Rabbi Akiva, was the first to proclaim him "messiah" or savior of the Jewish people. The revolt was carried out by guerilla forces who hid out in caves. The "students" (read guards) come in with a warning that it is now light out and they should be careful that no one find them. Any assembly such as this would risk certain death at the hands of the Romans.

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We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord our God took us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. And if the Holy One, blessed be He had not taken our ancestors out from Egypt, then we, and our children, and our children's children would still be slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. And even if all of us were wise, all of us were understanding, all of us were old, all of us were learned in the Torah, it would still be a Mitzvah for us to tell of the exodus from Egypt. And whoever elaborates on the story of the exodus from Egypt deserves praise.

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים.  
 ויוציאנו יי אלהינו משם, ביד  
 חזקה ובזרוע נטויה, ואלו לא  
 הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא את  
 אבותינו ממצרים, הרי אנו  
 ובנינו ובני בנינו, משעבדים  
 היינו לפרעה במצרים. ואפילו  
 כלנו חכמים, כלנו נבונים,  
 כלנו זקנים, כלנו יודעים את  
 התורה, מצוה עלינו לספר  
 ביציאת מצרים. וכל המרבה  
 לספר ביציאת מצרים, הרי זה  
 משבח :

A story is told of Rabi Eliezer, Rabi Yehoshua, Rabi Elazar ben Azaria, Rabi Akiva and Rabi Tarfon. They were reclining at B'nai B'rak and they were telling about the exodus from Egypt all that night, until their students came and said to them: "Our Teachers?! The time has come for the recitation of the morning Sh'ma!"

מעשה ברבי אליעזר, ורבי  
 יהושע, ורבי אלעזר בן עזריה,  
 ורבי עקיבא, ורבי טרפון,  
 שהיו מסבין בבני ברק, והיו  
 מספרים ביציאת מצרים,  
 כל אותו הלילה, עד שבאו  
 תלמידיהם ואמרו להם :  
 רבותינו, הגיע זמן קריאת  
 שמע, של שחרית :