



Be a Bearer of good news

Category: Shemos

What led the hostage activist to change her tune, and what does it have to do with the Seder?

The Siegel Family

Shir Siegel has become one of the most vocal activists fighting to bring the hostages home. On October 7th, her parents, Keith and Aviva Siegel, were kidnapped and taken to Gaza. From that moment on, she threw herself into protests, doing everything she could to push for their release. But as the days dragged on with no sign of the hostages coming back, her frustration and anger only grew.

After 59 long days, her mother, Aviva, was finally freed from captivity and returned to Israel. It was a huge relief, but her father was still in Hamas's hands—and just as Aviva was released, Israel resumed its military operations in Gaza. Shir couldn't shake the fear that with the war heating up, her father's chances of survival were getting smaller by the day.

That fear turned into fire. She started showing up at protests

with even more intensity, making her voice heard loud and clear. At one demonstration, standing in front of a massive crowd, she shouted that Israel needed to do *whatever it takes* to bring the hostages home. “We need to burn the country down!” These weren’t just words—protesters were actually lighting fires at major intersections in Tel Aviv.

The next day, a man named Haggai Luber—who had lost his son in the war since October 7th—spoke out against the calls to “burn the country down.” “This isn’t the way,” he said, “Not even the families of hostages, not even grieving parents, have the right to talk like this. We have a responsibility to keep our people united, not tear each other apart.”

When Shir first heard his words, she was just frustrated—*They don’t get it. They don’t understand my pain.* But something about what he said stuck with her. Maybe, just maybe, this kind of talk wasn’t the way forward.

A little while later, she ran into Haggai at an event. She walked up to him and, without hesitation, apologized. She admitted that she understood why people had a hard time with what she said. “I know my words won’t bring my father back. And if my parents had heard me say them, they wouldn’t have been proud of me.”

Little by little, Shir’s perspective started to shift. She met people who were fighting just as hard to bring the hostages home—but they were coming from a place of love, not anger. She even spoke with people who tried to understand those who opposed a hostage deal. Over time, her message changed. Instead of

fueling rage, she started speaking at rallies about unity. Instead of destruction, she talked about love and hope.

A Shabbat Together

And then, the miracle happened—Keith Siegel was freed and finally came home. He was thin and pale, but his spirit was unshaken. He said the only reason he survived captivity was because he found G-d there. Through everything, he kept thanking Hashem for whatever he had. Every time he was given a piece of pita, he said the *Hamotzi* blessing. He thanked G-d for being alive, for every sip of water, even for the rare chance—once every two months—to wash himself with a bucket of cold water. As our sages say, we must thank G-d “*for every single breath*” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 14:9).

Well, the entire time her father was in captivity, Shir imagined what it would be like when they were finally reunited—especially their first Friday night meal together, the whole family sitting around the table again.

Then, on that first Friday night after he came home, she asked him excitedly what special dish he wanted her to make. After everything he had been through, he must have been craving something delicious. But his answer surprised her. He looked at her and said, “*What I really want—what I’ve been waiting for the most—is a cup of wine for Kiddush and a kippah to put on my head.*”

In Jewish tradition, we start learning about an upcoming holiday 30 days in advance. Right now, we’re already within those 30 days before Pesach, and in preparation, we also read *Parshas*

Parah this week.

Since Keith longed for a Kiddush cup, it's a perfect time to talk about the four cups of wine we drink at the *Seder*. On Seder night, it's not just about one cup—we drink four. And this isn't just a custom; Jewish law actually says that even someone who has nothing, who depends on charity to get by, must still have all four cups. That's how important this part of the *Seder* is.

This brings up a question: Why four cups of wine? Drinking a lot of wine isn't usually a big part of Jewish practice. Yes, on Purim, there's a mitzvah to drink, but on most other holidays, it's not really emphasized.

The Four Cups

The truth is, that in Jewish tradition, big moments are often marked with a cup of wine. At a wedding, we say blessings over wine. On Shabbat and holidays, we make *Kiddush* over wine to set the day apart. Even when ending Shabbat with *Havdalah*, we don't just say the words—we say them over a full cup of wine to give them extra significance.

On Passover, wine has even more significance. The Talmud says, "*The Sages instituted four cups in the manner of freedom*" (*Pesachim* 109b). In other words, these four cups are meant to symbolize our liberation and show that we are a free people.

Back in the days of slavery and empires, wine was a drink of the wealthy and powerful. Water, on the other hand, was seen as lowly—something only animals and slaves would drink. So to emphasize our freedom, the Sages established that every Jew,

no matter their background or status, should drink four cups of wine at the Seder as a declaration of being free.

Each cup is placed at a different part of the *Seder*, making them a central part of the night's experience.

- Kiddush - like on Shabbat and holidays, this marks the start of the meal.
- The Haggadah - telling the story of the Exodus, which is the whole point of the *Seder*.
- Grace after meals - traditionally said over a cup of wine.
- Hallel (songs of praise) - celebrating our freedom.

The *Talmud* says: "*The Sages instituted four cups in the manner of freedom, and for each one, a mitzvah is performed*" (*Pesachim* 117b). (see also Likutei Sichos volume 11, p 19-21.)

Why Four

Why does the Seder specifically include *four* cups of wine? It's not just a random number—there's meaning behind it. In the Rebbe's Haggadah, he brings a few explanations for this tradition.

One well-known answer comes from the Jerusalem Talmud (*Pesachim* 10:1), which connects the four cups to four powerful promises in the Torah about the Jewish people's freedom from Egypt.

At the end of the story in *Shemos*, Moshe turns to G-d, frustrated, and says: "*Why are You making things worse for this*

nation? Why did You send me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh, things have only gotten harder!” In response, at the start of *Va’eira*, G-d reassures Moshe with four clear promises:

“Tell the people of Israel: I am G-d—

- I will take you out (*vehotzeisi*) from under Egypt’s oppression.
- I will save you (*vehitzalti*) from being their slaves.
- I will redeem you (*vega’alti*) with great strength and miracles.
- I will take you (*velakachti*) to be My people.”

According to the Jerusalem Talmud, these four phrases of redemption are why we drink four cups of wine at the *Seder*—each one represents a different step in the journey from slavery to freedom.

Another explanation for the four cups comes from *Bereishis Rabbah* (88:5), which connects them to the story of Joseph—the first Jewish man to be taken hostage and sold into slavery.

One morning, as Joseph was languishing in prison, the Torah tells us that he noticed two of his fellow prisoners—the chief butler and the chief baker—looking upset. They were walking around with gloomy expressions. Joseph, who had an unshakable sense of optimism and trust in G-d, asked them, “*Why do you look so down today?*”

They explained that they had both had strange dreams but had no idea what they meant, so Joseph offered to help.

The *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 88:5) explains that every piece of Joseph's interpretation reflects the story of the Jewish people:

"The butler told his dream: 'There was a vine before me...'" The vine, the *Midrash* explains, represents the Jewish people. The three branches of the vine symbolize Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. The budding of the vine represents the beginning of Israel's redemption. The blossoms sprouting symbolize the next stage of redemption. The clusters ripening into grapes show that, just like a vine quickly produces fruit, Israel's redemption will come swiftly.

In other words, Joseph saw in this dream a message of hope for the Jewish people: their suffering wouldn't last forever, and redemption would come.

The *Midrash* goes on to say that when the butler described *"Pharaoh's cup was in my hand,"* this was a hint to the four cups we drink at the *Seder*. The word "cup" appears four times in the butler's dream, and since this dream was about redemption, the Sages saw it as a connection to the redemption from Egypt.

That's why we drink four cups of wine.

In Conclusion

The *Midrash* wraps up the story with Joseph telling the butler: *"You shared with me good news, so I will bring you good news: In three days, Pharaoh will restore you to your position."* Just as the butler's dream was a message to Joseph of good news for the Jewish people, in turn, Joseph was happy to interpret the

dream with good news for the butler.

So, my friends, here's the real takeaway: The *Midrash* is teaching us a powerful lesson about how to bring good things into our lives. If you want to receive good news, be the bearer of good news. Instead of focusing on negativity and everything that's wrong, let's choose to highlight what's right. Instead of dwelling on what divides us, let's focus on what brings us together.

When we spread hope and positivity, we create a ripple effect that lifts up everyone around us. And maybe, by bringing light into the world, we'll be lucky enough to see Elijah the Prophet bring the ultimate good news—the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days.