

determine Bruno's net salary. To relieve the boredom, I asked the computer a philosophical question: If I were on the bus and didn't have a seat, would you get me one?

The computer replied, There is no such information in this memory bank.

I had my answer. Another question appeared on the screen. "Do you care more about talking to a computer than you care about talking to the people?"

And I replied, "If I cared about the people, would you?"

## A note on the afikoman

EDWARD HALPER

**T**HE search for the afikoman is one of the high points of the Passover seder. Yet it is also very puzzling. The piece of matzah that we eat at the end of the seder meal clearly symbolizes the paschal sacrifice and for this reason it is eaten before midnight and on a full stomach. Why, though, should a symbol central to the seder ritual be designated with a Greek term that is generally understood to mean "dessert"? And why should this important symbol be reduced to an instrument for retaining the interest of children?

Traditional discussions of the afikoman generally begin with the Mishnah, which expressly forbids it. *Pesahim* 10:8 enjoins us not to add an afikoman to the Passover sacrifice. Here the phrase seems to refer to the Hellenistic custom of continuing a feast by parading from house to house. The term *afikoman* is usually thought to come from the Greek phrase ἐπὶ κώμον (epi kōmon—for the purpose of revelry).<sup>1</sup> It is not entirely clear whether the Mishnah intends to forbid additional eating or moving from place to place. While some commentators have proposed Hebrew origins for the term,<sup>2</sup> there are no historical or philological grounds for doubting its Greek roots.

After the destruction of the Temple, the term *afikoman* somehow shifted its meaning from something that should not be added to the paschal sacrifice to the matzah that represents that sacrifice. The afikoman becomes so important that there is a debate about whether it is the matzah that fulfills the commandment to eat

matzah on the evening of Passover. Although we recite the blessing over matzah before the meal, Rashi and Rashbam both think that the afikoman is the matzah that fulfills this mitzvah.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that the matzah representing the sacrifice could have come to be called by the name *afikoman* because it was seen as taking the place of Greek-style revelry. However, it seems odd to designate a central portion of the seder ritual with a term that was understood to refer to a sharply criticized Greek practice. It would be like using the term *baptism* to refer to a circumcision or like calling Rosh Hashanah a New Year's party.

In the Mishnah the term *afikoman* does apparently refer to additional feasting of one sort or another. The traditional derivation of the term from the Greek phrase ἐπὶ κῶμον (*epi kōmon*) is the most plausible explanation. However, it does not follow that the term had the same sense when it ceased to refer to something proscribed and came to symbolize the sacrifice. Whatever the word's initial origin and significance in Aramaic, it is possible that it could have come to have a secondary association with another Greek term by increasingly Hellenized Jews. Some have suggested as a secondary source of *afikoman* the Greek verb form ἀφικόμεν (aphikomēn), "I have arrived." The latter is the first person singular aorist of ἀφικνεόμαι (aphikneomai). Greek verbs can be made into nouns by placing an article in front of the infinitive or the participial form, and we would expect a Greek verb that appears in Aramaic as a noun to have had either of these forms in Aramaic. However, there are other instances of a finite verb from one language coming into another language as a noun (e.g., Latin *fiat* and *memento*). The secondary association of *afikoman* with ἀφικόμεν (aphikomēn) would have been facilitated by the phonetic similarity of the two forms. In the rest of this paper, I shall propose other, more important reasons why the first-person aorist form could be a source of the Aramaic term for the matzah that symbolizes the paschal sacrifice.

First, there are grounds for thinking that the afikoman symbolizes arrival. The paschal sacrifice, which the afikoman matzah represents, was a temple offering made in commemoration of the exodus, the end of slavery and the beginning of freedom. If the sacrifice represents the arrival at freedom, then the matzah that the sacrifice should also represent the arrival at free-

dom. Further, when the Hebrew slaves made the first paschal sacrifice in Egypt, they had arrived at freedom. Not freedom in the physical sense—the sacrifice was made before the tenth plague and before the exodus—but freedom in the spiritual sense, the freedom to worship God. Recall that Moses petitioned Pharaoh to let our people go in order that they may worship God. The sacrifice constituted the first communal worship of God, and it thus marked the arrival of freedom.

By designating the matzah symbolizing the sacrifice with a Greek word for arrival, the Haggadah suggests a contrast between Jewish and Greek views of freedom. Plato's Socrates regularly uses various forms of the word ἀφικνεόμαι (aphikneomai) to speak of the arrival of his soul in Hades after death (e.g., *Apology* 41a; *Phaedo* 113d). According to Plato, only in an afterlife, when the soul is free from the distractions of the body, is there genuine freedom and happiness. In contrast, Jewish tradition recognizes the possibility of a freedom that can be realized here and now in this world through sacrifice and the fulfillment of the other commandments. We can arrive at freedom by obeying the commandments. In using the term *afikoman* to refer (indirectly) to the paschal sacrifice, the Haggadah locates freedom in this world.

Traditionally, discussions of the afikoman have tried to ground seder practice by referring to Temple rituals. Not surprisingly, Temple practice does not explain why a Greek term should designate an important item in the seder. To explain this point I have thus far argued for a secondary source for *afikoman* by examining the meaning of the sacrifice it represents. In what follows I shall discuss the significance of the afikoman in the context of the seder service. This material provides another reason for interpreting the afikoman as a symbol of arrival. More important, it shows how this interpretation allows us to attain some insight into the structure and goal of the seder.

The afikoman is but one use of matzah in the seder. During the course of the seder the matzah symbolizes three different ideas. At the very beginning of the service we point to the matzah and describe it as the "bread of affliction" (*lahma anya*), the bread that our fathers ate while slaves in Egypt. After recounting the story of Passover, the Haggadah discusses the symbols on the seder plate. We point to the matzah and repeat the well-known

lament that in their haste to leave Egypt, our fathers lacked sufficient time to wait for the bread to rise. Here the matzah represents the exodus. Finally, there is the afikoman. As mentioned, it represents the sacrifice made in the temple. If, though, it were primarily intended to represent the paschal sacrifice made by the slaves in Egypt, it would come at the wrong point in the seder. And, besides, there is already another symbol of the historical sacrifice, the roasted bone. The Haggadah discusses the latter before the meal along with the bitter herbs and the matzah that represents the exodus, just where we would expect it. Unless the symbolism is redundant, the afikoman represents the spiritual dimension of the sacrifice, God's redemption of the Jews from slavery and the arrival at freedom. Thus, the matzah alters its significance as the seder progresses. First, it refers to slavery, then to the exodus, and finally to redemption, i.e., to freedom. In the context of the seder, the afikoman represents the arrival at freedom.

This alteration in the meaning of the matzah corresponds to the progression of events in the story the Haggadah recounts. As we recognize the symbolic significance of the matzah, we re-experience and re-enact these events. When we begin we are slaves in Egypt, staring at the bread of affliction. We tell the story of coming into slavery, of the Egyptian oppression and of the plagues. Then we re-experience the preparations for the departure by explaining the matzah as dough that did not have time to rise, the bitter herbs as the bitterness of slavery, and the Paschal sacrifice as a sign to God to pass over Jews in executing the final plague. With the seder meal we leave Egypt, and with the capstone of the meal, the afikoman, we arrive at freedom. How appropriate it is to spend the rest of the seder praising God and hoping for the Messianic age.

Thus, in recognizing the succession of meanings of the matzah and also the other seder symbols, we re-enact the exodus. The alteration in the meaning of the matzah allows it to represent not merely a single idea but the process of transformation from slavery to freedom. A recurrent theme of the seder is that each Jew should think of himself as if he personally had come out of Egypt. We do not usually notice that the seder is constructed in a way that enables us to fulfill this obligation. By using the matzah and the

other symbols, we each re-enact the events as we perform the ceremony. Thus, the final matzah is justly designated with a Greek term (the first-person aorist) meaning "I have arrived." Further, because the order is crucial, the ceremony is rightly named "seder," i.e., order; and Passover is indeed a "festival of matzah." This understanding of the seder supports the interpretation of *afikoman* that I propose. More significantly, the proposed interpretation of *afikoman* allows us to understand the structure of the seder in a meaningful way, as a re-enactment of the events of the exodus.

One loose end remains: Why hide or steal the afikoman? Throughout the seder there is a play on the celebration of Passover as a festival of freedom and the recognition that we remain unfree. The afikoman represents our arrival, but we also recognize that we have not yet arrived. The hidden afikoman is the compromise that reflects both truths. Freedom is at once present and not present. Significantly, it is the children who must find or steal the afikoman: If the Messiah has not yet come in our time, we still hope for the future.

While Sephardic Jews do not hide the afikoman, their rituals, even more clearly suggest that the afikoman represents the beginning of the Redemption. Jews of Bagdad dress as a traveler carrying the afikoman to Jerusalem; the Jews of Djerba used to carry the afikoman in a ritual announcing the coming of the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> Customs as diverse as these all make sense and are consistent with Ashkenazic practices if the afikoman symbolizes arrival.<sup>5</sup>

1. See Jastrow, *ad loc.*

2. See M. M. Kasher, *Haggadah Shelemah*, 3d ed. (Jerusalem: Torah Shelema Institute, 1967), pp. 171-72. Rashbam proposes Hebrew "derivations" of *afikoman* to account for the divergence of opinion between Rav and Shmuel.

3. The Tosefoth disagree. See Kasher, pp. 173-74.

4. Sephardic practices concerning the afikoman are described in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, *ad loc.*, and in *Passover*, ed. Mordell Klein (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), pp. 54-57.

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