

## Dayenu: Behind the Music (A Fictional Origins Story)

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Source: original, by Esther D. Kustanowitz



This is the fictional story of a song that everyone seems to know, whether or not they want to. To describe this song to you in a sentence would have been enough. But this song isn't known for its subtlety or its brevity. It's known for its repetition, its words that don't quite fit into the tune, it's barely-there-musical-tune reminiscent of the Pac-Man theme, and, of course, its repetition. So here's the previously untold story behind the music.

One Passover, before all of you were alive, a group of rabbis gathered in Bnei Brak. Rabbis were always gathering in Bnei Brak. In fact, you couldn't stop rabbis from gathering in Bnei Brak - it was like their version of Vegas, except whatever happened in Bnei Brak - instead of staying in Bnei Brak - ended up well-documented in the Haggadah.

But this is not the story of things that ended up well-documented in the Haggadah. And it's also not the story of how contemporary Bnei Brak became the home not just to one of Israel's most ultra-Orthodox communities but also the Coca-Cola factory. (That's got to be its own story, because, seriously?) It's the story of a plucky rabbi with a song in his heart who - like so many rabbis and non-rabbis before and after him - ignored his wife's plea to stay and help with Passover and instead went road tripping on a path of personal destiny.

Rabbi Dai Kvar was not the most popular rabbi in the village, but he had a way with those around him, always pointing out the obvious in a way that, though sometimes irksome, sometimes actually put things in perspective. It was this slavish adherence to the chain of events that led up to other events that would turn out to be his most annoying - and most enduring - quality.

One morning, Rabbi Dai Kvar awakened with a start. "If God had taken us out of Egypt, that would have been enough!"

"What ARE you talking about, Dai Kvar?" his wife asked, annoyed for what was decidedly not the first time

during their marriage.

"I've got an idea, no, it's THE idea. This is the one, Bina, I'm telling you! I've got to take this to the Bnei Brak boys immediately!" And with that, Dai Kvar jumped out of bed, threw a few of his portable Talmud volumes into a bag with some toothpaste, dental floss and two rocks, one to use for deodorant and the other one to use to light a fire.

"Be careful not to mix those two up," Bina shouted at her husband as he ran out the door. "He always leaves right before Passover," she said, shaking her head.

Later, Dai Kvar found himself in the synagogue in Bnei Brak, its major feature was an ark to end all arks - attached to a one-hundred-percent-electricity-free system of pulleys, the ark most resembled a giant slot machine. If you were to pull the lever on the left, it would spit out a Torah rolled up to that week's Torah portion.

The head of the Talmudic Council, Rabbi Dave, spoke first. "I now officially call all the Daves of the Talmudic council to order."

"I thought that was my job," said Second Rabbi Dave.

"Nope, that's me," Rabbi Dave the Third chimed in.

"Dave 3 is right, it's his job," said Just Another Rabbi Dave, which was also his JDate handle. "Here. Take this gavel. I got it from my JD program at Pumpeditha University."

"You went to PumpU?" Rabbi Dave could barely believe his ears. "I went to U of Sura! They're both in the Big Two of State Schools...."

"Small world," said all of the Daves in unison.

"First order of business," said Rabbi Dave (the one who was the head of the Talmudic Council, that is). "Rabbi Dai Kvar brings us a proposal for a new song."

Once he was in front of his boys from Brak, Dai Kvar was more excited than he'd ever been. "Gentlemen, I have a new song that traces our steps from the desert and toward a land that forged our peoplehood. My new song idea is so money that it doesn't even know how money it is."

"That's great, Dai Kvar, but how money is it, exactly? Is it more than two zuzim? Because I've got that number in my brain for some reason," said Reb Dave Gadya.

"Do you have a tune?" asked Just Another Rabbi Dave. "Who knows one?"

"It's got to be epic," said Rabbi Dave 3. "It should be grandiose, melodic and hauntingly beautiful as it helps us recall our years of oppression and subsequent redemption!"

"No," said Second Rabbi Dave. "It should be a still small voice, like God's in the wilderness."

"It should be intricate and unwieldy, but irresistible, maybe featuring lots of animals," said Reb Dave Gadya.

"Always the animals with you, Reb Gadya," Dai Kvar noted.

Reb Gadya shrugged and smiled. "I never had pets," he said. "But I always wanted one. Even just a worm to play with."

"A worm! That's it!" Dai Kvar exclaimed. The Daves stared at him, puzzled. "My friends," Dai Kvar explained, "we all know the story of the shamir, the giant worm that had the power to cut through stone, iron and

diamond and which King Solomon is said to have used in the building of the First Temple in Jerusalem? Is there such a thing as a shamir that can live inside the skull, cutting through the noise and annoying someone but not actually harming them in any way?"

"Wait just a minute...are you talking about an ear worm?" one of the Daves asked. Dai Kvar thought about it. That was exactly what he was talking about, and he nodded vigorously.

"With the agreement of the Council, I'd like to create an ear shamir. I have just the chord progression," said one of the Rabbi Daves, but by this point, even Dai Kvar wasn't sure which one.

"Thank you for stepping forward, Rabbi Dave. So how many verses will be enough for this ear worm?" Rabbi Dave (the head of the Council one) asked.

"Well, musically, only one verse is necessary," said Rabbi Dai Kvar. "But one verse is super-boring and only children will get a kick out of learning and performing a long song, so let's compromise and say...14 different lines. And that we'll sing 'da-dai-yenu' after every line to make sure the song lasts as long as possible."

And the Daves took a vote, and it was a unanimous decision, except for Reb Gadya, who suffered from a hanging Chad and subsequently had to move to Florida to vote in the 2000 US Presidential Election.

And so it came to pass.

And that's why when you sing Dayenu, it's not just a song acknowledging the significant milestones that the Jewish people reached on their journey out of Egypt and to the Holy Land, but a summary of how that song makes you feel.

That is why it always feels like one verse would have been enough.