

Ha Lachma Anya

Contributed by [Jane Taubenfeld Cohen](#)

Source:

Credit: Understanding 'Ha Lachma Anya'

By

[Rabbi Raphael Fuchs](#)

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In most texts of the Haggadah, *Magid* commences with the paragraph *Ha lachma anya*. In this Aramaic text we recite, "*Kol dichfin yeisei veyachol*— whoever is hungry come and eat." For several reasons, this is a rather peculiar statement to make before beginning the mitzvah of *sipur yetzias Mitzrayim*.

First, the Gemara in *Taanis* (20b) says that Rav Huna would make this very statement every time he would break bread. If Rav Huna would make this declaration on a daily basis, why do we only recite it on the night of the Seder?

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Additionally, it is very easy to make this declaration in the confines of one's home, where no one else can hear him. As the adage goes, "Talk is cheap." What is the purpose of inviting people when they cannot hear your invitation?

The Ritvah in his commentary to the Haggadah suggests that on the night of the Seder every person must envision as if he or she left Mitzrayim that night. One must feel as if he was just freed from slavery. A slave owns nothing. Only a free man can own things. A slave can never invite someone to his meal. Therefore, before we begin our first meal as free men, we declare that we would like to invite whomever would like to come. Even though we know that no one can hear us, we make the declaration to demonstrate to ourselves that we were just freed from slavery.

While Rav Huna made this declaration on a daily basis, this is not our custom. We do declare it at the beginning of the Seder to establish our freedom.

Alternatively, the Vilna Gaon says that the mitzvah of matzah is connected to the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. The Yerushalmi in *Bava Basra* says that there is an *inyan* to give *maos chitin* before *Pesach* to enable people to acquire matzah. Based on this we can suggest that the reason why we make an open invitation at the onset of the Seder is because the mitzvah of matzah requires us to ensure that others will have matzah as well. The passage begins with the words *Ha lachma anya*, which means this is the poor man's bread [that our fathers ate in Mitzrayim] referring to the matzah. As we mention the matzah, it is imperative that we invite others to join, as the mitzvah of matzah demands.

Ha lachma anya continues by stating, "*Kol d'tzrich yeisei v'yifsach*— whoever needs should come and eat the *korban Pesach*. Why is it necessary to invite people to eat from the *korban Pesach*?

Perhaps this invitation is not meant for poor people alone, but for anyone, even someone with the means to eat his own *korban*. The reason for this is because there is a dispute in the Mishnah in *Pesachim* 91a

whether one may *shecht* a *korban Pesach* for an individual or if it must be *shechted* for a group of people. We *pasken* that the *korban Pesach* may be *shechted* for an individual. However, the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Korban Pesach* (2:2) that ideally one should *shecht* the *korban Pesach* only for a group of people, not for an individual. It is conceivable that it is for this reason that we declare an open invitation to join in the eating of the *korban Pesach*.

Based on this the sefer *Harerei Kedem* (*biurim* on the Haggadah) says that the fourth question of the *Ma Nishtanah* may be interpreted differently from the general understanding. The wording of the Mishnah that has the questions is "*Halayla hazeh kulanu mesubin*– on this night we all [eat] *mesubin*." The general translation of *mesubin* is reclining. However, in the Gemara *Berachos* 43b the word *mesubin* is used to mean eaten in a group. Perhaps the question that the *Ma Nishtanah* was asking is why it is that tonight we all are careful to eat in groups, whereas on every other night we eat separately.