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Archways
IN TORAH

COLLECTION OF INSIGHTS FROM STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

SHABBOS HOUSE CHABAD - UALBANY

WELCOME TO “ARCHWAYS IN TORAH”

Welcome to our third edition of “Archways in Torah” for the Passover holiday of 5781/2021.

We first began this “Archways” publication concept for Shavuot 2020 when most everyone was staying home during the intensity of Covid-19. It was a platform for alumni and students to share words of Torah with one another and to have interesting reading material for the holiday.

The circumstances have changed for the better since June of 2020, most of us are not in the lockdown experience anymore, though we still have a long way to go before things get back to normal. While we had less student and alumni contributors to this Passover booklet (perhaps this was a busy time and we did get a late start with it) we decided to go ahead and put it together because we had increased interest from alumni and others who were interested in reading it.

Why the title archways? First of all, everyone who went to UAlbany is very familiar with its ubiquitous myriad of archways. Archways have lots of symbolism: They are supportive yet open, they are entrances and exits at the same time, they are guideposts that draw and raise our eyes upward and frame our perspective. UAlbany buildings have many archways on every side, for all its length and breadth, from every angle, inside and out. All of this can be a metaphor for Torah.

Archways certainly have extra symbolism on Passover, as the Jews in Egypt on the first-ever Passover were commanded to smear blood of the Paschal Lamb on their doorposts and lintel and to stay inside their homes while the Angel of Death went through Egypt during the plague of the firstborn. And a homophone of the word Pesach (spelled with the letter Samech) is Pesach (spelled with a letter Taf) which means doorway or opening. Indeed, Passover was (and is) a break-through!

Love,
Mendel and Raizy
Shabbos House

Greeting and Blessing:

On the occasion of the forthcoming Yom-Tov Pesach, I send you my prayerful wishes that the Festival of Our Freedom bring you and yours true freedom, freedom from anxiety material and spiritual, from anything which might distract from serving G-d wholeheartedly and with joy, and to carry over this freedom and joy into the whole year.

Wishing you and yours a kosher and happy Pesach,

Cordially m. Schneerson

“Freedom from Anxiety”

from a Pre-Passover letter of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

3 ESPECIALLY RELEVANT MESSAGES FOR PASSOVER 2021

First of all, the unusual timing of Erev Pesach falling on Shabbat (it happens next in 2025 but after that not again until 2045!) with the first Seder on a Saturday night. Erev Pesach is usually a very hectic time, there's lots to do in preparing for the Seder. Not this year! Shabbat precludes many of those preparations which should to be done either before or after Shabbat instead.

This sense of "nothing we can do about it right now" during the Shabbat before the Seder, has a sense of equanimity & serenity to it, like a calm before the storm. It is the acceptance of a situation or reality without pressure & stress. This year's Passover opens with this introduction and background and is especially relevant during Covid. Of course, we must do our utmost and not wait around for solutions to land in our laps. We must take initiative and be proactive, try out best and make things happen. Yet, at the same time Covid taught us how so much is out of our hands, we will not have everything figured out, there are some things that try as we may, we simply can't control. We have to let go and just have faith.

Secondly, this Passover is over a year into Corona, now at a critical tipping point of vaccinations, at the cusp of a positive shift and Covid redemption. We are starting to get a glimpse of a better future, but with lots of uncertainty and unknowns still ahead of us. Obviously, this is no biblical Exodus, we're not talking Splitting of the Sea here, but there is certainly relevance to our time:

Imagine the very first Seder, back in Egypt, on the night before the Exodus: Did the Jews know their dough would turn to Matzah or that the Sea would split? Did they imagine they would eat Manna and be protected by Clouds of Glory? No. They had no plan, no guidebook, no strategy. And yet, as the verse

says, they went out triumphantly. Faith and trust allows and accords us not to be fazed or deterred by uncertainty, to go forth without having it all figured out, to venture beyond our comfort zone, limited horizon and understanding.

Matzah is called the "bread of faith" a tangible & edible (absorbable!) symbol of certainty amidst uncertainty, going forward with the clarity of conviction, proceeding determinedly with an inner known into and despite the murky confusion of the unknown, to Pass-over our doubts and hesitations with an uplifting and redemptive Exodus.

Thirdly, it so happens that the largest stimulus payment was deposited as we are all preparing for Passover 2021. Whatever your thoughts on the stimulus, the Baal Shem Tov taught to learn lessons from everything! One of the big questions you see going around is "What will you do with your stimulus?" Obviously this depends on each person and family, and their particular circumstances and situation. But the same can be true of Passover! Think of the holiday and all of its mitzvot and meanings as a spiritual stimulus package. The question is what will we do with these opportunities? How to best to utilize? In what do we spend its energies and mental, emotional and spiritual gifts? What should we do to take the most advantage of Passover? How to save, stretch and make the most of it?

Wishing one and all of Passover's blessings and opportunities and all that it represents, may we absorb and internalize the Matzah of faith and the Matzah of healing, and have a truly liberating holiday and year ahead.

Love,
Mendel and Raizy



ALUMNI INSPIRATION

THIS IS THE YEAR OF THE SIMPLE SON

SHAUN ZEITLIN - 2001

The song “Baruch Hamakom” lists the word “Baruch” (blessed) four times and is the Haggadah’s introduction to the famous piece on the four sons.

Some commentaries compare the four expressions of this song to the respective four sons in order:

Baruch Hamakom (blessed be “the Place”) = Wise Son

Baruch Hu (blessed be He) = Wicked Son

Baruch Shenatan Torah (blessed be He who gave the Torah) = Simple Son

Baruch Hu (blessed be He) = Son that doesn’t know how to ask.

But wait, according to this correlation, why is the simple son the one who gets the Torah?

Here’s a possible understanding of this:

“Hamakom” (“the place”) is a euphemism for G-d, but literally it refers a physical space. Think of it this way, a person who views himself as and considers himself wise dismisses what he cannot comprehend, whatever is outside “his place” and thereby limits his potential and his reach.

“Hu” simply refers to G-d as “Him”. Both the wicked-son and the one who doesn’t know how to ask are ascribed this phrase, because they are stuck in the abstract since they both do not feel a real connection to G-d, so they just leave it as “Him”.

But the simple son is willing to learn and expand beyond his horizons. We answer him with the verse that says that “G-d took us out with an outstretched arm”. This focuses on the idea that Hashem reaches out to and leads us when we are willing to be lead.

This year has been a year when the wisest among

us were challenged by a crisis beyond their areas of expertise. Corona baffled everyone, even top scientists and heads of state. Our leading doctors and politicians were only successful when they focused less on what they already knew and more on what they needed to find out. We were unable to answer our children’s questions because their questions were the same questions we had ourselves.

It was also a tough year politically, with lots of strong views and people ever eager to point out how their side is right and the other side is wrong. We have a lot to learn from the simple son who isn’t already hardened into a firm position, and is open to things he doesn’t (yet) understand.

This is the year where the “Tam” (the simple son) shines. In Hebrew, Tam means simple and wholesome, but it can also mean flavor. You might say that this son’s simplicity allows him to be enhanced and enriched by other flavors. People who are too flavored already can’t absorb new flavors.

There is so much we can learn when we allow ourselves to be a Tam.

The Jews who accepted the Torah said “Naaseh Vnishmah” we will do and we will understand. The Jewish people at Mount Sinai had the Tam or simple son attitude.

It may take days or years or lifetime but Torah is about always trying to learn more and looking for a better understanding. Just because I think I know the answer does not mean I should stop looking for better or new ways to understand it today.

“NEXT YEAR WITH A CHILD”

ALEXANDRA NEWMAN-KOFINAS - 2006

This is a D'var Torah I wrote a few years ago leading up to Passover. I'd like to share it with you all again as we approach the holiday. While much in our world has changed and our holiday may not look as it did back then the thoughts here still apply.

I became a mom 2 years ago (*since this article was first written, the Kofinas family has since recently celebrated the birth of a second child – Ed.*) and celebrated my first Passover as a mother and my last in New York. We arrived in Atlanta just at the end of Passover in 2016, with a 2-month-old baby girl. Passover has always been a very special Holiday for me. I love getting together with family, I love the Seder and I love that I get to pass that love down to my own daughter, as my mother did for me.

When most people tell the story of Passover they think of Moshe, the burning bush, maybe some plagues and crossing the red sea. For me these may be the most memorable aspects of the Passover story but they aren't the most meaningful. As a woman who struggled and still does with infertility I have always been drawn to the idea that the Israelite women continued to try to have children and that two midwives, Shifra and Phua would help these laboring women even knowing the consequences.

The Israelite women struggled over and over, faced

incredible loss, sacrificed so much; and yet they knew they wanted to give life, be mothers, give of themselves regardless of how long or how harsh it was. These powerful women are truly what stuck with me. I spent over 3 years working to create my family, as it exists now. Those years felt like my own personal Mitzrayim, my pregnancy was my Exodus, and the last two years with my daughter my own land of milk and honey. And yet even in the land of milk and honey there are times and moments that send me back to Mitzrayim. I am often asked when my daughter will be getting a sibling, or told that I should hurry up and have another before it is too late. These moments take me back to my time in fertility treatments, give me pain, and make me wonder when questions like these became acceptable to ask.

This year as Passover arrives and we prepare our homes and families for this holiday let us take time to be kind and sensitive to others. We don't always know the truth behind the smile at our Shabbat tables or in our offices, or in our own family. Let us think of the four children this year as examples of how we might respond or treat those who struggle publicly or more often in silence with infertility or struggle to expand their families. Let us remember when we say "Next Year in Jerusalem" that for some this is really a plea of "Next year with my own child!"

IT'S ABOUT TIME

SETH BROOKS - 2020

There are so many parts to Passover, but one aspect often gets overlooked. It's the first mitzvah the Jews got as a people. This first mitzvah wasn't at Mount Sinai but when they were still in Egypt, even before all the plagues were done. What is this mitzvah that we got before anything else, even before our freedom from Egypt was in the bag?

See Exodus 12:1, where the verse says: "G-d said to Moshe and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying, this month shall be for you the beginning of months, it shall be for you the first month of the year." They got the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh, the sanctification of the new month, and setting up the Jewish calendar. Here's an interesting thing most people don't realize. The Jewish New Year is on Rosh Hashanah in the Fall, but the "first of the months" and the annual cycle of Jewish holidays is Rosh Chodesh Nissan, in the springtime, the month of Passover.

Why is this the first mitzvah? And what's the Passover connection?

This is because freedom and time are very much connected. Slaves have no true concept of time because every aspect of their lives is controlled. Time becomes meaningless. You see this in the Passover story. The Egyptians controlled everything, they could not even have children without the Egyptians getting in the way. They told the Jews when to eat, when to sleep, so time became meaningless. But with

freedom, time matters. What you do with your time matters.

This past year during Corona made this evident. When people are home all the time and movement is restricted and they don't have control of things – time starts to become less meaningful.

But this isn't the perspective we should have! As Jews, the calendar is our very first mitzvah as a people! We have kept the calendar for thousands of years through trials and tribulations. No matter what the circumstances we have kept our holidays going strong, demonstrating that true freedom is not just sitting back and doing nothing. True freedom is choosing to make most of our time, being proactive and using our G-d-given time to the utmost possible. Time is one thing we can never get back. By giving us the calendar as the first mitzvah, as we left from slavery from freedom, G-d reminds us that good time management skills are important. We have to keep track of our days, as we learn from Abraham, who "got old and came with his days" he left no day behind!

When days seem to blur together and time seems be less urgent and meaningful it is all the more important to remember this very first mitzvah we received as a people. Make time important and don't let it go to waste!

PESACH HUMOR BY ALUMNI COMEDIAN

JERRY KAHN - 1990

We're grateful to Jerry for sharing these with us for this publication. Of course, it's altogether different with his unique delivery style in-person, but in the spirit of Corona we're sharing them here remotely. Also in the Corona spirit, stop-the-spread without crediting Jerry.

A friend of mine celebrates Pesach and Pesach Sheini. It isn't that he's so religious- he's just a neat freak! :)

I never knew why the NY Auto Show is always held on Pesach. Finally, it occurred to me- it's because of the car company Nissan. :)

I love the Pesach Seder. You start off by telling stories about slavery and Yitsiyat Mitsrayim. By the time you're done, you've had too much to drink, you're singing about a goat, and you're asking each other who knows what 13 is. :)

Rabbeinu Tom, Dick, and Harry are having a Seder. Tom does the first part, quickly and smoothly. Dick does the next part, clearly and harmoniously. Harry does the next part, and is taking a long, long time to finish. Finally, Dick gets impatient, and complains that he is growing old waiting for Harry to finish, "Harry, ani k'ben shiv'im shanah." Harry was so engrossed by what he was reading that he didn't hear what Dick said, and asked Tom to repeat it, "Tom, mah hu omer?" :)

Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, and several other rabbis had a Seder in B'nei Brak. They spent the entire night going over the Exodus from Egypt. Finally, morning arrived and their students came and said to them: "You let Rabbi Carlebach lead the whole Seder?" :)

This year, the CDC says that, when shopping for Pesach, you should stay 6 feet from other people. In countries that use the metric system, they say that you should be 2 meters apart. According to Halacha, the proper distance is 4 amot. :)

In the Haggadah, it talks about the manna. Manna was this white, flaky food that came out of who-knows-where. It could taste like anything you want- cheese, meat, ice cream,... Today, we call it Tofu. :)

It took me a while, but I finally found an open Passover program. Everything is thoroughly cleaned to the highest standards, you can stay for 2 weeks, they serve 3 meals a day, and it's right by the airport. The program is called Quarantine. :)

True story, one time when I was young boy, I came up with the greatest place to hide the Afikomen. Nobody came close to finding it- I hid it with the Chametz. :)

Hello. My name is Eliyahu HaNavi and I'm an alcoholic. :)



“AND YOU SHALL TELL YOUR CHILDREN”
INSPIRATION FROM OUR PARENTS & GRANDPARENTS

ZEIDE MOSHE RUBIN - PESACH TIDBITS

SECOND SEDER WAS BETTER THAN THE FIRST

My grandfather Reb Moshe Rubin liked to tell this story at the second Seder or on the second day of Passover:

Reb Shmuel of Karov was a poor but pious Chassid of the Chozeh of Lublin. One year, as Passover was approaching, a wealthy Chassid, let's name him Reb Hirsch, came to his Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin, asking for a blessing for an important matter. The Rebbe, known as the Chozeh, agreed to bless him, on the condition that the wealthy Reb Hirsch arrange for a delivery of Passover goods to the poor Reb Shmuel and his family.

Reb Hirsch (or whatever name it was) lost no time in doing just that. He went out and purchased everything a family might need for the holiday, from food to clothing or dishware, all of the best quality and sent the wagon off to Karov. Shmuel's family was delighted with the holiday surprise. Now the children had shoes and dresses for the holiday, there was ample foods, they had wine and Matzah and everything their heart desired.

That Passover Reb Shmuel's family sat down to the first seder in Karov, like never before. They sang and they shared stories, their hearts and stomachs were full, and the Seder was the richest and finest they ever had. But their poor stomachs were not used to all that rich food, and the next morning they all felt sick, especially Reb Shmuel. He couldn't even get out of bed to go to synagogue for the holiday.

Late on the second night, Shmuel's wife tried to get him to come sit with the children. After all, it was the second Passover night and they needed to have a Seder. Shmuel couldn't move, his head was heavy from the fine wines and his stomach rumbling from all the foods he ate the night before. But his wife insisted, the children were waiting, and it was an

obligation, so he dragged himself to the table, and led the most basic Seder of his life, just the bare essentials, all over in under an hour, just to fulfill the Mitzvah.

After the holiday, Reb Shmuel was distraught. True, his first Seder was magnificent but his second Seder was a disaster, hardly befitting the Chassid that he was. He hurried off to see his Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin. As soon as he crossed the Chozeh's threshold, his Rebbe told him: "Your second Seder was better than the first!"

What!? How could this be? The first Seder was so meaningful and memorable, chock-full of stories and songs, and positive festive atmosphere; while his second Seder was a rush job, done only out of a sense of obligation with almost no spirit or feeling... The Chozeh explained: No question you felt better about the first Seder. You and your family must have enjoyed that much more. But the Mitzvot are not only about what we get out of it, but how we serve G-d. And in terms of serving G-d, the second Seder you did for no other reason than out of a sense of obligation. You did it only for G-d! And that's why I liked your second Seder better.

One year, when she was little, our daughter Bluma had a rough time adjusting to Matzah. She didn't like the taste of it, wasn't interested in it, and that was that. But Matzah, especially at the Seders is a very important Mitzvah! So on the first afternoon of Pesach, before the Second Seder, I sat down with her alone in the library upstairs, and told her the story of Shmuel of Karov and the Chozeh of Lublin which my grandfather R' Moshe Rubin would share every year at the Second Seder.

The message? It's not always about what we like or what we feel like doing. Even if we don't feel like it, there's a sense of obligation, a sense of duty. The amazing thing is that Bluma got it! I didn't realize it at first, but she was eager to share with the students almost a week later on the 7th Night of Pesach. Bluma got up on a chair and she shared the

story with everyone, in her own words, very sweetly. I didn't think she would want to share the whole background about her challenge with Matzah, but she insisted that I did. She was proud of her personal Matzah transition and how she learned it from the story. And it was a nice lesson for all!

HOLD ON!

Once the Rebbe Rashab (the 5th Rebbe of Chabad) and his son R' Yosef Yitzchak (later to become the 6th Rebbe of Chabad) visited an art museum. They saw a painting of the Jews crossing the Sea after the Exodus from Egypt which depicted the children fearfully clinging to the robes of their parents as the sea split around them. R' Yosef Yitzchak asked his father, "But doesn't the verse say that the Jews crossed the sea with outstretched arms, joyous and

proud? Why the fear?"

His father replied, "You are right, that's how we understand the verse. But the artist saw it differently, and we can learn something from that, too. Children clinging to their elders, and parents holding onto their children teaches us the importance of generations staying connected. Children must hold onto their parents, and parents should hold onto their children."

EL-BNAY = ALBANY!

One of the traditional songs at the end of the Seder has two words that repeat in the chorus: El-Bnay! Zeide Moshe would twist them to pronounce it as Albany! The children would delight in that, and to

add in local flavor would also squeeze in the nearby cities of Troy, Schenectady and Saratoga Springs as substitutes for the subsequent words in the song.

RABBI SHLOMO GALPERIN

MAKING MATZAH, PASSOVER PREPARATIONS & SEDER MEMORIES IN TASHKENT RUSSIA

At the second Seder 5775 (2015), after we ate the Matzah, Raizy's father Rabbi Shlomo Galperin shared this memory of the Passovers of his youth in Tashkent Russia:

My grandmother Bubbe Reiza didn't exercise her authority much, but when she did, she was really in charge, like a general. I saw this in the Passover preparations. When I was very young my father was in jail for his Jewish observance, and my mother worked long double-shifts at a vinyl records factory to earn a living for our family. Today you can have a small gadget with earphones and have all the music you want, but in those days music came on large vinyl records that were played on a patefon. The factory had strong smells and toxic chemical fumes from the vinyl and it was hard on my mother. So, my grandmother played an important role in raising me as a young child. She could not hear well and I was her guide going to the market or store. Later on in life I was responsible to go to the pharmacy to dispense her medicine on time and give her eye drops twice each day.

I remember how my mother would go to the market to buy chicken (sometimes a turkey) for the Passover holiday, and the main criteria was if it had enough fat to make Schmaltz, because there wasn't any Kosher certified oil in Russia to cook with. Then this had to be brought to the Shochet (ritual slaughterer) which was usually my job. The soaking, salting and koshering took place in our home. Very often I had the "honor" to hold the chicken while my mother would cut it open (to investigate the insides). If something looked questionable, my mother would usually immediately send to the Rabbi of the city

with a question if it is Kosher.

Sometime after Purim families went out and got large sacks of wheat kernels. I remember how our dining room was cleaned very well, it took a few days. The table was cleaned thoroughly, then covered in thick brown paper (we had no plastics back then, nor any silver foil) and then with a tablecloth that was freshly washed by hand (years later we got a wash machine), dried under the sun and ironed, and another tablecloth on top of that. My siblings and my cousins all sat around, carefully sorting and sifting the kernels to make sure there was no extraneous material (of which there were plenty pebbles, wooden chips, feathers etc) and my grandmother supervised us. If any of us slacked off or got lazy in the inspection, she would let us have it. Only when it was fully inspected was it brought to be milled into flour.

The local Kosher butcher built a discreet Matzah bakery in his home and different families that could be trusted would come to bake their Matzah there. Later when they emigrated to Israel, this family built a large commercial Matzah bakery in Kfar Chabad, but back then it was a small informal operation in their home in Tashkent. My mother was the best Matzah roller. She had her way to very quickly roll it out super thin, and very consistent and those larger thinner Matzot were set aside for my grandparents. There was a rolling-pin with handles that was filled with nails (with the heads yanked off) to make the holes (baked as bumps) in the Matzah. Once for three days when I was 16 years old, I worked to put the Matzot in and out of the fiery red hot small wood and coal-fired brick oven, but that was no easy job.

The heat from the oven was overwhelming from the front, and from behind the fans were blasting to cool it off.

I'm not sure why, but we didn't use lettuce (maybe it was not popular then in Uzbekistan) as part of the Maror bitter herb at home, the way it is used today together with the horseradish. All we used back then was horseradish grated in a hand operated grinder. We always hand-grated it and somehow that creates a more potent result than a food processor does. I remember everyone forming, packing together golf-ball or snow-ball sized horseradish balls and eating them to fulfill the Seder obligation. The faces would turn red, we would cry and sneeze and clean out our sinuses, that's I remember eating the bitter herb. It was a little taste of the feeling of the slavery in Egypt. Two weeks before Passover the kitchen and some years the whole house was painted. They used a lime or chalk dissolved in water as the paint. Real paint was very expensive and there was limited availability of it in the stores. The lime or chalk paint wasn't really paint but it gave the house a fresh feel. Even after it dried if you leaned or touched slightly you were covered with a white residue, but make no mistake: a freshly painted kitchen signaled that there was to be no more "Chomets" in the house, as Passover approached we could only eat bread in the hallway.

We made our own homemade wine stored in big bottles, to have for the Seder and to use for Shabbat and holiday Kiddush through the year, or however long it lasted. We also prepared large quantities of beets, potatoes, onions and carrots. My mother would go to the market and choose the best and freshest fish, usually carp, pike and bass, and I had to carry these live fish, kicking and flailing all the way home. At home it was cleaned and cut up and prepared for the holiday.

For the Seder we brought out our best dishes (that were packed away in the basement right after

Pesach) and the table was set very nicely. We didn't have silver candlesticks as many have today, but we had copper ones, which was the best precious metal we could afford. So much work and preparation went into making the Matzah, the food all from scratch as we had no available prepared or processed Kosher foods, cleaning the home etc, but the sentiment I remember the most from the Seder was that "we are doing this right, the way a Jew ought to do it".

And Rabbi Galperin shared a few more Passover memories from his childhood in Tashkent Russia, on the 8th Day of Passover 5775 (2015):

Pesach was a holiday that required a lot of expenses and the poverty then was very real. My parents, as any other Lubavitch Hasidic family would sit down and make a budget of how many rubles they needed for Pesach. The salaries were barely enough to live on, never mind to celebrate an 8-day holiday. Most of the people borrowed money from acquaintances, then paid back over time.

One year, it was getting closer to Passover and there wasn't enough money for the expenses. My father was trying to arrange to borrow money in time for the holiday. As the holiday approached and the time for shopping came, my mother asked my father how that was coming along. My father explained that he was lucky enough to borrow a sizeable amount of money for the holiday, but a newcomer came to town, a Jewish family who knew no one locally, and didn't have money for the holiday. So he lent him the money he borrowed, and now needed to borrow anew. Thankfully, he was able to borrow again from someone else, and we had enough for Passover. But what left an impression on me was that my mother accepted that from my father, she didn't question or argue against him generously helping out a newcomer, before worrying about their own Passover. It was a given that another Jew in need came first.

Everyone had responsibilities, had to help out, there

was an endless list what to do. Before Passover my mother gave me the job of cracking open a very big bag of walnuts and filberts. I don't remember having a nutcracker, the first time I saw a nutcracker was in America. I had a hammer and I cracked each nut, and put the nuts without the shells into a pail. One year while I was doing this my friend Lipa stopped by to borrow something. He asked me why I was cracking so many nuts. "After all, you don't need that many nuts for Charoses!" By the way we actually used to prepare the mixture of nuts and apples in a mortar with pestle. I told him my mother told me to do it, so that's why I am doing it. So Lipa asked my mother. My mother explained that she had in her home an extra Passover stringency to crack all the nuts needed to be used on the holiday before Passover began. My friend Lipa heard this, and then earnestly and naturally, said: "Oh, I was looking for an extra stringency to take up this year, I will begin to do this as well!" He said this with all sincerity and not one drop of sarcasm. Our resources were limited, but we were all eager to make extra efforts to sanctify the holiday to bring in to our daily life in some special way.

Every Jewish family has some kind of blackened small piece of meat on their Seder plate. This reminds us of the Paschal Lamb, the Korban Pesach, which we no longer observe without the Temple, but it reminds us of it. Many use a shankbone, the Chabad custom is to use chicken necks that are broiled and blackened. The idea is to remember the Paschal Lamb, while at the same time realizing that we do not have it nowadays and this is not a proper substitute. So yes, it is a form of meat, but chicken necks are in no way a stand in for the lamb. It is not eaten at the Seder, or at any time on Passover. Nowadays, we just throw them out. But back at home, we could not throw out meat, even such a small piece of meat like a few small chicken necks. So after the Seder nights my mother

would put the chicken necks from the Seder plate into a beet soup to add flavor. Of course, we would not eat the chicken necks, because the tradition was not to eat them from the Seder plate, but at least they added some flavor to something.

My parents and grandparents were both very strict about Passover and also very understanding of others. Before the holiday my grandfather would take a spool of thread and wind it around the silverware that he and my grandmother would use, to make them distinct. Also their dishes were distinct, they used the older dishes that were cracked at the edges. No one else used those cracked dishes or marked silverware, only they did. In the non-Gebrochts tradition they were extremely careful about making their Matzah wet, even in the smallest way.

But we had all kinds of guests at our Seder. The table was small, but it was very full. There were people who did not have family, or those whose children no longer celebrated the holiday. Most of these people didn't have the same traditions as my family, so they put Matzah in their soup and ate Matzah with other dishes my mother and grandmother served. And regardless of how strict and careful my grandfather was with his own plate, he never said a word about anything the guests did.

I'm not much of a singer, sometimes that skips a generation, but my grandfather Shmuel sang a lot on Shabbos and especially by our family Seders. I remember him singing Chassidic melodies throughout the Haggadah, and in between the steps of the Seder and also during the meal. Being the youngest and the first one to ask the "Four Questions" was uplifting for me. After I asked the questions, my siblings would follow, then my father and even my grandparents.

My memories of Passover was that the room was shining, it was simply full of light and very luminous.

THE MISSING CHAMETZ PIECES

During WWII Holocaust years, many from the Eastern regions fled deep into Soviet Russia to get away from the Nazi onslaught penetrating deeper into Russia cities and towns. Locals in the deeper parts of Russia (home to today's "-Stan" countries) saw economic opportunity to take advantage of the refugees and divided and subdivided their apartments to rent to more and more refugee families. Often due to the extreme poverty and limited available resources whole extended families lived in one room and subsisted on meager rations. Berel Gansburg was one of those Chassidim who fled to Russia's southeast with his family. They all lived in one room, more like the size of a large closet, and had little to eat, but thankfully they were saved from a much worse fate at murderous Nazi hands back in their hometown, where many of their relatives perished in a horrible gruesome manner.

It was the night before Passover and as is the Jewish custom to search for any traces of leaven, they took ten tiny pieces of bread (more than that they could not set aside) to hide for the pre-Passover Chametz search. There wasn't much room to hide anything, it was but one room and they had few possessions, so the search shouldn't have take long, but they relished the traditional ceremony. At the end of the search, the father checked and rechecked and was alarmed to find that they were missing two pieces! They should had ten pieces but they only found eight!

Oy – what to do!? Two missing pieces from the original ten pieces set out to find means they have two unaccounted for pieces of Chametz in their possession! On Passover Jewish law not only prohibits eating Chametz but even mere ownership of Chametz is forbidden. What to do? His heart was throbbing, his mind was racing – it was unthinkable that he should own even the smallest amount of Chametz on Pesach. Greatly disturbed and troubled,

Reb Berel rushed out to ask Rav Mendel Dubravsky for guidance and a Halachic ruling. Even though their communities were disrupted and uprooted by the war's turmoil, there was still some semblance of order and Rav Dubravsky who settled in the same area is the one he asked Halachic questions.

This Rav Mendel Dubravsky was of very short physical stature, he was emaciated due to the hunger, but he was a respected towering figure in that he was learned, sharp and wise, not only in the four sections of the Code of Jewish Law, but also in the "fifth section" which is commonly referred to as the necessary laws of common sense. The Rav thought intensely about the situation, he sized up the matter and he told Reb Berel to go home and quickly bring back all the children. A few minutes later the children were lined up in front of the Rabbi, in height order, oldest to youngest. The Rabbi looked each one in the eye, and then looking at the youngest, then maybe a child of 5 or 6 years old, asked gently, "Was it tasty?" The child began to cry, nodding in her tears, yes yes she said, it was so tasty. In those years of deprivation and hunger, the tiniest morsel of even stale bread was as sweet as candy, and she couldn't help herself and evidently ate those two missing pieces during the search.

The Rabbi joyously reassured them that all was well, and they had nothing to worry about. They should go home and enjoy the happiest Passover possible under the circumstances, without any fear or worry of Chametz ownership.

—

A few notes about this story:

(1) It's one of those classic rabbinical school stories demonstrating the need to understand the circumstances and not only the law. And the G-d-given Torah helps guide the Rabbi to arrive at the right conclusion.

(2) There are various Halachic legal mechanisms in place to deal with lost Chametz, especially of such a minuscule size. In fact, right after the search and again after the Chametz burning we make a special declaration nullifying all Chametz we have not found and therefore not responsible for it. Reb Berel's concern for those two pieces belies a sincerity and conviction that goes far beyond the letter of the law, regardless of the incredibly challenging circumstances.

(3) According to most Halachic authorities there is no legal requirement to put out those ten pieces to be burned after the search. One can fulfill their

obligation of the search even without hiding the ten pieces or without finding anything. And if they did insist on having something to burn on the morning after the search, perhaps they could have put out 3 pieces instead of the customary ten. After all, the ten pieces is only a custom and is not required by Jewish law. This was a time of hunger, and a few extra morsels could have been eaten, as that youngest child did. But to a Chassid like Berel, such calculations of leniency were unthinkable. One must not deviate from even a custom! And think of the educational impact such dedication to our traditions imparts to our children...

RABBI YISROEL RUBIN

A GLIMPSE INSIDE “THE MARBEH - L’SAPER ALBANY HAGGADAH”

From the book’s introduction:

The Albany Haggadah

It may seem rather pretentious for an unembellished ‘hinterland’ Haggadah to mimic the prominent Amsterdam, Istanbul, Sarajevo and Venice classic Passover editions.

But history is on our side. The famous illustrated Haggadahs go back to the Middle Ages, but this Haggadah relives the Bnai Brak Seder 2,000 years ago. Exotic Haggadahs feature intricate designs, but this Haggadah prefers to highlight the minute details of Talmudic discussion at that famous event.

This Haggadah lacks colorful bird and flower motif borders; its value is not peripheral, but intrinsic. Instead of pretty paintings, it draws biographical sketches portraying the lives of the venerable sages. The Albany Haggadah has no gold leaf on expensive vellum, but it contains treasured Torah gems. It lacks pastoral scenery, but compensates with a panoramic view of the greatest Talmudic masters.

I am very grateful that this Torah study developed in Albany, and I thank my students and friends who worked hard to help Torah flourish in our community.

With best wishes for a Happy and Kosher Passover,
Erev Rosh Chodesh Nissan, 5760/2000

Rabbi Yisroel Rubin

Albany, New York

A glimpse into the book’s discussion:

Just as we begin to relate the Passover story, the Haggadah introduces us to yet another story:

“It happened that Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Joshua, and Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria, and Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarphon were reclining in Bnai Brak, and were telling the story of the Exodus all that night, until

their students came and said: Masters! The time has come to read the Shema!”

It is an impressive episode, but also intimidating. Such a scholarly all-night Seder is a hard act to follow, as many of us, stomachs grumbling, eagerly look to end the reading and begin the eating.

We marvel at the stamina of these scholars who survived the world’s longest Seder, but beyond their names, the Haggadah offers precious little information about their actual conversation.

We have no transcript of their discourse, but research into the sages’ biography, genealogy and lifestyles provides clues to the issues on the table that night.

These sages’ Talmudic record shows them to be major Halachic disputants. Imagine the interpersonal dynamics of opposite schools of thought at the same Seder, reverberating with debate that allowed no one to doze off, as the Talmudic crossfire raged until dawn. Obviously, they didn’t just chant Chad Gadya or sing Dayenu to pass the time. High on their agenda were numerous Halachic Seder issues on which they differed, i.e. the Afikoman deadline, Haggadah text, the required number of wine cups, etc.

Illustrated Haggadahs usually portray these sages as benign and complacent elders smiling to each other, but that may be the calm before the storm. As we eavesdrop, we can hear confrontation and argument. Their sharp exchanges pierce the night and their brilliance illuminates the darkness, leading to dawn. Reviewing the Exodus schedule of events will help us appreciate the controversy in Bnai Brak. Pharaoh urged Moses to leave at midnight, right after Egypt’s firstborn died. But the Jews refused to steal away as thieves in darkness and stayed until morning to leave triumphantly in the daylight.

The issue here is: Did the Redemption occur at midnight, or the next morning? Consequently, must we complete our Seder by midnight, or may it continue until dawn?

Rabbis Eliezer and Elazar b. Azaria conclude the Seder observances by midnight. But Rabbis Joshua and Akiva continue the Seder until dawn, when Israel actually left Egypt.

One way to understand this argument runs deeper than the Passover story itself and is reflected in other disputes these Rabbis have throughout the Talmud. Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eliezer often argue from the differing vantage points of human vs. heavenly perspective.

Rabbi Eliezer regularly debates Rabbi Joshua in the Mishna. Regarding Passover, they disagree on the defining moment of the Exodus, certainly a relevant issue to discuss at this Seder, as mentioned earlier.

Rabbi Eliezer reckons the Redemption from the Divine perspective, when G-d smote the Egyptian firstborn (hence the midnight Afikoman deadline). But Rabbi Joshua defines the Exodus by the human experience, when the people actually left Egypt (thus extending the Seder until dawn).

These differing perspectives are a consistent theme in Rabbi Eliezer vs. Rabbi Joshua's debates throughout the Talmud. In contrast to the secluded and idealistic Rabbi Eliezer whose loftiness reached the heavens, the popular and down-to-earth Rabbi Joshua had both his feet firmly on the ground.

This difference is also reflected in the famous "Tannur" debate about the oven made of parts in tractate Bava Metziah, where Rabbi Eliezer asks

Heaven to intercede, and support his point of view, while Rabbi Joshua boldly responds: "Once the Torah was given to people, Heaven can't decide Halacha."

Both sides of this argument were represented at the Bnai Brak Seder, so it seems inconsistent that all the sages actively participated in the Seder all night, past midnight, contrary to their stated opinions.

This problem convinced the Mishkenos Yaakov Responsa that Rabbis Eliezer and Elazar b. Azaria had, de facto, retracted their positions, and no longer insisted on ending the Seder by midnight.

But did these sages really change their mind?

Perhaps Rabbi Elazar b. Azaria (known to shy away from protest (Shabbos 52)) may have conceded as a gesture to their host Rabbi Akiva, as Bnai Brak was under his jurisdiction. But this is certainly not characteristic of the uncompromising Rabbi Eliezer, who resisted peer pressure and majority opinion in the Tannur episode, following principle and conviction to his dying day.

The Shulchan Aruch Code of Jewish Law resolves most Talmudic arguments, but this issue continues unabated. Maimonides allows the Seder to continue until dawn, but the Rama sets an Afikoman midnight deadline. As a result, recent rabbinic responsa grapple with the practical question, whether a person who couldn't eat Matzah earlier is halachically permitted, or obligated, to eat Matza after midnight. Today, some customs obey the Afikoman deadline only on the first night of Passover. On the second night, however, the Haggadah and the meal run leisurely, and the Afikoman is eaten whenever they desire.



MENDEL'S MESSAGES

THE REBBE'S "BIG PROJECT" SHMURAH MATZAH

A Yeshiva friend of mine shared this story with me: A wealthy man from a non-Chabad Chassidic community was an admirer of the Rebbe's work. Once he had opportunity to see the Rebbe, sometime close to Passover, and offered a large amount of money to support "a big project". The Rebbe told him that this time of year Chabadniks in Israel go around to neighbors, co-workers, people on the street, fellow Israelis of all backgrounds and levels of religious observance and share with them Shmurah Matzah for the Pesach Seder. This can be quite a costly endeavor on a large scale.

The man wasn't thrilled. He was thinking more of a new big building or center. Not Matzahs that are here today and eaten tomorrow. He wanted to establish something, make an impression, an impact. This multitude of personal Matzah interactions was not his vision of a big project. But the Rebbe insisted, saying: "If you are asking me what I think is a big project, I consider this to be a big project."

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I think this short conversation is very telling about the Rebbe for several reasons:

1) Yes, buildings are important. They are expensive, they are needed, they can be a great facility for good. But they are only a shell. To the Rebbe: personal interactions, one Jew to another, heart to heart, is a big project. True, you might not be able to put your name on it in big bold lettering, but it is about relationships and connections. Even those Chabad Houses with beautiful buildings are more about the people interactions than the building itself.

2) The Rebbe believed in the infinite value of each and every Mitzvah. Even fleeting Mitzvot, even Mitzvot done in isolation, disconnected from anything else. From a Chassidic perspective, Mitzvot mean spiritual connection, not just commandment. One-time Mitzvot have great value in the Rebbe's view,

whether they lead to further observance or not.

3) To paraphrase, A Mitzvah in hand is better than two in the bush. True, the Rebbe was a visionary, and on many things was ahead of the curve and beyond his time. But the Rebbe was also pragmatic, with tremendous emphasis on the here and now, on seizing the moment. If this conversation took place just before Passover, this Matzah project was priority, it was the opportunity at hand, the Rebbe was eager to make the most of it, rather than defer to some later concept or development.

4) And the Rebbe was really into handmade Shmurah Matzah.

What's so special about Shmurah Matzah?

The boxed machine-made Matzah you see in the stores are Kosher for Passover, no question about that. But there's preference that Shmurah Matzah be eaten, especially for the Seder Nights. Shmurah literally means "watched" and it is a Halachic term that means the flour used in these Matzot was carefully supervised from the time of harvest all throughout the milling process to ensure it remained dry without any contact with water until the time it was mixed with water and baked into Matzot. Some select boxes of machine-made Matzot use Shmurah (watched) flour, but all the round, handbaked Matzot are made with Shmurah flour.

Chassidic thought emphasizes that Matzah is "Bread of Faith". The Seder Night is a spiritual opportunity to digest faith, we are literally chewing and absorbing faith. This makes Matzah more than just one-night's Mitzvah, it has lasting spiritual effect all year. If that's the case, this faith must be "watched", guarded and protected for its purity and holiness.

Interestingly, in the Rebbe's last published Maamar (Chassidic discourse) titled "V'Ata Tetzaveh" he explains that the role of a Rebbe and of Jewish leaders throughout history going back to Moses, is

to nurture and nourish their internal built-in faith, to fortify and develop their core connection. It's a deep concept and a whole different conversation about identity and expression, personalization and connection, but in terms of relating it back to Matzah - the absorbable and digestible "bread of faith" - it seems very fitting that a deeply personal and highly intentional form of it like Shmurah Matzah would be a Rebbe's mission.

One more thing about Shmurah and especially hand-baked Shmurah: This Matzah was harvested, milled

and baked for the sake of the Mitzvah. It was done with intent, by people, it was prepared with meaning. Regular Matzah is made by machine, with Kosher ordinary flour that came from some random factory. Handmade Shmurah is different. Every step of this process was done with focus and intent, for the sake of the Mitzvah, for the sake of the Seder night, with much personal investment and meaning leading up to the Matzah on your table at the Seder.

Perhaps this is behind the Rebbe's push for Shmurah Matzah...

THIS IS THE MATZAH OF OUR FOREFATHERS ...

Everyone knows that Shmurah Matzah is expensive. We're not talking about the boxed square Matzah at the supermarket. We're talking the round, handmade kind. (see this post for more about Shmurah Matzah and why its important to us) Since we go through a lot of it at Shabbos House, we have to make sure we're getting a good deal. For years now we've been ordering from a well-known and reputable wholesaler in Brooklyn who sells many varieties of Shmurah Matzah in large quantities to Chabad Houses across the United States and probably beyond. My father of Capital Chabad Centers has been ordering from him for many years, so when we started at Shabbos House in 1997 we started to do the same. Capital Chabad is the parent organization of Shabbos House and the umbrella for Chabad center in Northeastern NY State.

As Pesach started to approach this year, we checked his updated price sheet in the email, it only went up pennies from last year so we called the office and put in an order. The woman on the phone looked up our past orders and saw that it was under my father's Capital Chabad account. Since we pay separately, to avoid confusion, I asked her to put it under Shabbos House and told her which Matzah and what quantities

we wanted. She said she would email us an invoice to confirm and the order would be ready for pickup in Brooklyn that day. (They also ship but we had to be in Brooklyn anyways, so we could save that way).

I was out shopping when we got the invoice, and harried with a bunch of things. Raizy was home preparing for the trip. We both got the email with the invoice, and whoa! The prices were much higher than the price sheet we were originally quoted! I fired off an angry email right away, Raizy wrote back more politely, and then we called later to find out why there was such a price discrepancy. We emailed her the price sheet we were sent, and asked why this order would be a couple of hundred dollars extra?? What is going on here!?

When the woman at the Matzah company office saw the price sheet she figured it out right away. Originally we were part of the Capital Chabad account. This has been a standing account for decades with this wholesaler. They had a long annual relationship from the company's earliest beginnings and therefore had a much better pricing arrangement. When I switched to open a new account under Shabbos House, the computer put it down as a brand new account without the history and much better pricing deals that Capital

Chabad had for years...

So, we got the better price on the Matzah. And also an important Passover and life lesson:

Sometimes, especially in these times of accelerated progress, we think we know better and we want to start off on our own and do our own thing. The past feels ancient and irrelevant. And nowadays past is much more recent. even the 90's seem ancient. You see this a lot with parents and children. Kids often don't want to be hampered or tethered to their parents, and are eager to break away, start anew, be their own person (except when they can't afford to pay the rent).

But this story reminds us that we don't arrive here to this world all on our own. We have much to be grateful and appreciative to those who have come before us, who have paved the way, worked hard and invested so much, and enabled us to reach where we are today. Sometimes, the more we are connected and rooted to our past, the better off we are in the present and in the future. This is true of Judaism, of course, but it's also often (in most cases) true of families, too. And it's true of wholesale Shmurah Matzah prices.

This gives new meaning to the Haggadah text: "This is the Matzah of (that) our forefathers...."

THE CHAMETZ BLESSING IN BERGEN BELSEN

This crisply handwritten "Chametz on Passover Prayer" from Bergen Belsen Passover 1944 was on display at the Ghetto Fighters Museum in Tel-Aviv.

It was written or at least dictated by Rabbi Aharon Bernard Davids, leader of the Dutch community of Rotterdam in Holland, and perhaps also by Rabbi Simon Dasberg of Gronigen Holland, for their communities who had been interned first in the Westerbork Holland transit camp and then sent to Bergen Belsen concentration camp.

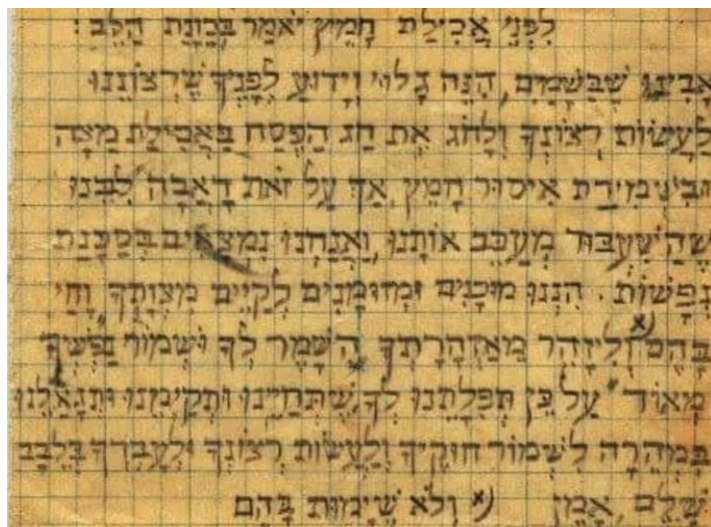
It translates to something like this:

Before eating Chametz say the following with intent & devotion:

Our Father in Heaven! It is known to You that we desire to fulfill Your will and observe the Passover holiday by eating Matzah and safeguarding against Chametz. But our hearts are pained at the captivity which prevents us, and we find ourselves in danger of our lives. We are hereby ready to fulfill Your commandments "And you shall live by them (the commandments)" and not die by them, and to observe the caution of "guard yourself and watch your soul/life very much." Therefore our prayer to

You is that You keep us alive, and sustain us, and redeem us speedily, so that we may observe Your laws and fulfill Your will and serve You with a full heart. Amen!

And then these Jews gathered around Rabbi Davids in Bergen-Belsen and ate their meager ration of bread on the night of Passover.



This is something to think about when we are midway through Passover, in midst of all the freedom and plenty that America has to offer. This prayer and its

background story offers us perspective. How we can think after a few days of a wonderful holiday that “we’re sick of Matzah”.

Special thanks to my brother Rabbi Efraim Rubin, a scholar, researcher and translator in Brooklyn NY for finding the image of this prayer and its background story and sharing it with me.

NISSAN ROGUE AND THE FOUR SONS

One year, my brother-in-law and sister-in-law drove in from Ohio to celebrate the Passover holiday with us. They rented a car for the trip, a Nissan Rogue. I’ve seen these cars before, they are quite common, but now that it was close up in my driveway it made me think for a second: Why would Nissan use a name like that? Look up rogue, it means undisciplined, unruly, wild... why name a nice car for such negatives?

There’s another side to unruly and wild. It can have the positive connotation of being adventurous and full of spunk, curious and energetic, off-the-beaten-track. Nissan wants to tap into that side of our personality, and appeal to those urges and

interests that they feel this car can represent.

This is a timely thought for Passover as we read once again about the wicked son. We’ve discussed many times (we’ve never let a Seder go by without it) the Rebbe’s unconventional interpretation and positive twist on the wicked son, who gets a very bad rap in the Haggadah.

The Nissan Rogue in our driveway this Passover gave me another insight: The wicked son has a wild side, which can be harnessed and utilized in positive ways. Like the car, he could represent a sense of adventure, excitement, unbridled energy that even the wise son doesn’t have.

SEDER SONG SYMBOLISM

Years ago we did a Torah-Tuesday class on this, exploring the meaning and messages in the traditional songs of the Passover Seder. Many of those songs, especially Chad-Gadya and Who Knows One?, while not part of the Chabad Haggadah liturgy, are beloved end-of-Seder singing traditions to families and communities celebrating Passover all over the world.

But what do these post-Seder songs have to do with Passover? Most of them have nothing to do with Passover and say little or nothing about the holiday? How did they become traditional at the end of the Seder? What’s the connection?

Here’s a theory. All of these songs are pattern songs. They follow certain rhythms or chains, or are based on number sequences or follow alphabetical initials. But what does that have to do with Passover? Why is

this especially relevant at the Seder?

That’s the thing. “Passover Seder” is an oxymoron. Pass-over means out of order, beyond order. And the Hebrew word Seder means order. So in a sense, the Passover Seder means “The Order of Out of Order” or the step-by-step of the quantum leap, or something like that. It feels contradictory but Judaism (especially Chassidic thought) thrives on balances and synthesized paradoxes such as these.

Yes, Passover is about a huge leap, but as Armstrong said on the moon: “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”. Passover Seder mixes the giant leaps and small steps. Either alone won’t do it. While Passover celebrates Exodus with earth-shattering and sea-splitting miracles, it’s also the one holiday a year that we literally sing the TOC – Table of Contents, “Kadesh, Urchatz, Karpas, Yachatz” at the

start of the Haggadah. When else do you ever sing a table of contents? Never! But Passover Seder reminds us that with all the leaps and miracles, it is a step-by-step process of personal redemption.

This might be where those Passover songs like Chad Gadya and Who Knows One and Adir-Hu come

in. They remind us the importance of patterns and sequences and step-by-step, line-by-line, stanza by stanza. Don't get too carried away with the four cups and reclining to forget that redemption is at once both wild and out of the box as well as one step at a time.

Q. WHY IS GEBROKTS OK ON THE 8TH DAY OF PESACH?

A. Some people, mostly Chassidim (not only Chabad) and descendants of Chassidim, observe an additional Passover restriction of Gebrochts – not making Matzah wet. It comes from a remote concern that perhaps some of the Matzah wasn't fully baked and some of that unbaked flour if wet may rise a bit. This may seem far-fetched to most, but its a way of showing extreme concern for even the slightest trace of Chametz. This means no Matzah-balls, no Matzah-brei, no Matzah-Pizza. Take a look at any big city Jewish newspaper and look closely at the ads for Passover getaways. You'll notice that they will usually indicate on the ad whether they keep Gebrochts or not. This is much more broadly observed than you might think.

But on the 8th day of Passover this restriction is lifted, and there's a go-ahead on all the above. Why? If there's a slight concern that unbaked Matzah would come in contact with water, and cause trouble, why is it less likely on the 8th day?

First of all, let's make it clear that Gebrochts is not Chametz. It's perfectly Kosher for Passover. It's only an additional custom, accepted by some and not all, and certainly not a law, that restricts Gebrochts. And there's a fascinating mystical reason from the Rebbe on why the 8th day is different.

Chametz is totally forbidden on Passover. We can't eat or drink it, we can't derive any benefit from it, we can't even own it. But the irony is that 7 weeks later – Chametz Bread is a central obligatory element of the Shavuot Holiday offering in the Temple. It goes from sin to mitzvah in 7 weeks.

Beginning on the 2nd night of Passover, we begin a count-up toward the giving of the Torah at Sinai on Shavuot. We count 49 days in total, exactly seven weeks. Each week has seven days, which correspond to seven emotional attributes of personal character that we are supposed to refine each day leading up to the Receiving of the Torah. $7 \times 7 = 49$, because each of the attributes is comprised of each other, and there's that much self-introspection and personal spiritual growth that has to get done.

The 8th day of Passover is the end of the first week, and the start of the second. Having completed one week – is a sign that some progress has been made in our dealing with Chametz and what it represents. So while Chametz remains totally forbidden for one more day, Gebrochts (which is a remote concern for the slightest trace of Chametz) is no longer an issue. Often Matzah represents simple humility while Chametz represents puffed-up ego and arrogance. Passover celebrates absolute humility and surrender, with faith in G-d. But a healthy ego has its place, too. Eating Gebrochts on the 8th day demonstrates the process necessary in order to incorporate "Chametz" in our service of G-d. First it has to be totally forbidden and off the table. Only then can we slowly and gradually refine and elevate the Chametz within ourselves to the level that it can be incorporated as key ingredient in our service of G-d.

And that's why those who keep Gebrochts can enjoy Matzah-balls and Matzah-brei, and all other forms of wet Matzah on the 8th day of Passover!

THE BELT, THE SANDAL & THE STICK

One year at a Shabbat lunch, we held up a belt, a sandal and a big wooden stick and asked students if they knew what they were about. A few guessed that it had something to do with Egypt but weren't sure what.

Yes, these three objects are from the Passover story. The verse tells us how the Paschal Lamb was to be eaten that last night in Egypt before the Exodus: "Eat it with your loins girded (that means a belt around your waist) while wearing shoes and with your walking stick in your hand". (12:11)

The message is that we should eat it with one foot out the door, in great haste, with road-readiness, the Jews had to be ready to leave Egypt at any minute. For most big meals like Thanksgiving dinner people might loosen their belts, kick off their shoes and put away their outdoor walking gear. But the Paschal Lamb was different, the Jews had to eat it while on the ready. The actual Exodus didn't happen until the next morning, but they were told to eat that lamb ready to go.

What's the significance of these 3 objects, what do they teach us today?

In a 1986 Passover Letter, which was the year of my (Mendel's) Bar-Mitzvah, the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the belt, shoes and staff represent 3 types of preparedness – and the verse teaches us that eagerness, alacrity and urgency are required for all three.

BELT equals personal preparedness. Putting on that belt ties up the loose ends of long robes and cloaks. The Urban Dictionary says it means get ready for action. Dictionary.com says it means: prepare yourself for something requiring readiness, strength, or endurance. The FreeDictionary calls this mental preparedness to do something difficult. The Rebbe says that of the 3 objects, the belt is about preparing ourselves.

SHOES, especially the ancient sandal, are meant for

the outdoors. This goes beyond personal preparation to preparing oneself for interaction with others and the world around us. As soon as we step outside of our homes, we hit foreign turf, putting on our shoes – physically, and spiritually, is preparing for that.

THE STAFF OR WALKING STICK aren't for a walk around the block. The staff or walking stick is for a long trek or big hike. Most people don't need a walking stick if they are going from Dutch Tower to the Dining Hall or from a house in Great Neck to a corner store on Middle Neck Road. This walking stick represents preparedness for the long-term, vision and foresight & reach far down the road. Something far off, in the distance.

(In his letter the Rebbe actually explains the message of the walking stick to be preparedness for current seemingly out-of-reach spiritual opportunities, but in the context of college-age students I adapted to be long-term future, which many students may consider to be out of their reasonable reach right now).

Let's see if you guys got this. Which of the three is about interaction with the outside world? (Shoes) Which is about personal preparedness? (the belt) and which is about long-term preparedness? (the staff). Ok great you got it.

Here's an important life message from this Passover verse (read this week in Parshat Bo):

Its college and a lot of us are taking it a little easy, taking life in stride, worrying about one day at a time. YOLO, they say, and there will be plenty of time in the future to get things figured out. There's some truth to that. No need to rush growing up. Life ain't so easy after college, might as well enjoy it now.

But the Passover story teaches us we need to be ready. Yeh, you can play the party by ear, figure out summer plans later, take life as it comes, but with core values and our Judaism we can't just wing it. Now is the time to start figuring that out. We can't wait for marriage

to figure out who we are deep inside. You are messing around if you don't know that now before you date. That's playing around with someone else's heart. So the belt tells us – be ready. Buckle up. Get your act together. Know who you are. Be the best you can be. The message of the Shoes is – be ready for the world out there. Don't get caught unawares. You can't stay comfy in your little bubble and feel good about that. Know what it will feel like when you leave your comfort zone, be ready to take on that challenge. This is true of all types of external transitions. Think of culture shocks, religious challenges, maybe its leaving years of yeshiva and strong Jewish community to attend college for the first time, or maybe its meeting and dealing with people who are very different than yourself, or what it might be like to wake up at 7am every morning for work after 4 years of never taking a morning class. etc etc. Put your shoes on now, even while inside. That way you'll be ready when you are thrust outside. Putting on shoes is about going outside of ourselves and interacting with others. The last thing is the staff. The long-term

preparedness for the big trek, the long hike. This one is the biggest surprise. How do we ready ourselves for the long-term? or for things that are way beyond our reach? Should we? What happened to let's cross that bridge when we get there? And hey, I'm too young to think long-term. There's no need to think or plan details now. Life plays too many tricks for us to have it all figured out. There's a Yiddish expression: Man plans and G-d laughs. So its not so easy to have a long-term plan.

But we can and should have a long-term vision. When we make choices now at age 18 or 20, we ought to keep in mind what difference these choices will make in 5 or 10 years. Its frivolous and immature and irresponsible to think that “all that happens in college stays in college.” The choices we make today influence and form the person we become tomorrow. The Belt tells us to get it together.

The Shoes tell us to be prepared for going outside.

The Staff says, the future is closer than you might think. Our choices today form who we will become tomorrow.

THE EVER-GIVEN SHIP STUCK IN THE SUEZ CANAL

A very large container ship called “The Ever-Given” (run by Evergreen Lines) turned sideways in the Suez Canal connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. The ship became grounded between the two sides of the canal so that it could no longer move, effectively blocking the entire shipping lane. Hundreds of huge ships loaded with cargo were waiting behind it, literally affecting commerce in Europe!

This happened in the days leading up to Passover 5781/2021, and was widely circulating on social-media, so there has to be a lesson in this. As the Baal Shem Tov taught to learn lessons from all things we see and hear!

Many online captioned this picture with “splitting the sea” but there's another Passover angle as well. This bottleneck in a strait fits one of the Alter Rebbe's

interpretation of contemporary personal Egypt's & the urgent need for continued Exodus. One of the ways Alter Rebbe sees continued everyday personal Egyptian Exodus Passover relevance is called “Meitzar HaGaron” the spiritual bottleneck at the narrows of the neck, which can, in a figurative sense, close in or block the critical passageway between mind and heart. We need to open that channel so the connection between heart and mind can flow freely!





HAGGADAH TWEETS @SHABBOSHUSE

HAGGADAH TWEETS - @SHABBOSHOUSE

This is an older collection, dating back to when tweets were limited to 140 characters before Twitter's Exodus to the 280 limit. Interested in more recent Passover tweets? Look up @shabboshouse with hashtags #Passover, #Seder and/or #Haggadah

Pesach Seder is oxymoron: Order of Passing Over. Order of Out of Order. Spiritual transcendence is indeed a step by step process.

“Kadesh, Urchatz...” Sing Table of Contents? This shows that personal Exodus is a step-by-step process, we joyously celebrate each one.

Kiddush & Havdalah Combo when holidays fall on Sat Nite. The order of the combo is complex, a 9-way Talmudic argument. Order matters.

How do you Karpas at the Seder? Chabad uses raw onion or boiled potato, others use parsley or celery. But saltwater is the same for all!

Why Break the Matzah? Poor man's bread. We're only half of what we should be. Symbolizes more to come, its hidden within.

Why break the MIDDLE Matzah? It's important for the broken aspects of our lives to be surrounded with support.

Larger half hidden for Afikoman. We all have much more within, all we see is tip of iceberg. Goal of Seder is to seek out that depth.

Some Haggadahs say “This is LIKE the poor man's bread” it's a replica, or TBT. Not Chabad's version where reliving Exodus is current.

Invite declaration post-Kiddush w/ Seder underway? It's inviting us to relive Exodus even if beset with exile, challenges & limitations.

Chabad puts dipping Q 1st in MahNishtana? Custom b4 biblical law!? Don't underestimate customs, they leave lasting impression on kids.

Taboo all year, we double-dip at the Seder. 1st in saltwater 2nd time in Charoset. Different veggies. So it isn't really double-dipping.

Charoset is on Seder plate not 4 taste but 4 texture. Its moist crunch reminds us of mortar, & that dry needs moist to be able to stick.

In Chabad lingo, “Lachluchis” (moisture) = informal warmth of stories, songs, inspiration, the intangibles that make concrete things stick.

What makes this night different.. NIGHT also refers to exile & life's darkness. What makes today's challenges different?

Why is Chabad's custom for adults to repeat the 4 questions? Active listening validates the questioner, plus we're all kids at heart!

L'SAPER is Hebrew for RETELL (the Exodus) & also means to SHINE. Telling the Passover story ought to have a glow & ought to help us grow.

2 Haggadah lessons from 5 Rabbis Passover allnighter in BneiBrak: Remember Exodus even at night & all your life = includes Moshiach.

“I am like a man of 70” our SundayTalmud class learned the background story of why he appeared to be 70 but was actually much younger.

Why does Haggadah preface ONE (One wise, one wicked etc) before each of the 4 Sons? Divine Oneness is present in all of them!

The Haggadah addresses 4 sons individually, because you have to reach each one at their own level, in their own language.

Rebbe's rich explanation for Wise Son's sincere question & strange answer we offer, is so flavorful, it lingers past 140 characters.

MaxwellHouse has "blunt his teeth" to wicked son in Hebrew but not in English. Rebbe says it means take the edge off, take stinger out.

Rebbe's perspective values wicked son's participation, his passion & interest. That's one reason Rebbe says he's seated near wise son.

Tam (simple son) also means wholesome & sincere. Gets short simple answer bcuz he's in it 100%, so even smallest word is inspiration.

Rebbe: "son who doesn't know to ask" isn't thumbsucking baby. He's sophisticated & educated, but doesn't CARE to ask. KNOW in biblical sense.

Chidah & Alkabetz also understand "son who doesn't know to ask" to be an adult, but bashful & lacking the confidence to speak up.

Rebbe always spoke of 5th son who doesn't show up. We must reach & seek out & welcome this 5th son, he's part of the family, too!

Humble beginnings is key to Haggadah. Part of Jewish narrative: our ancestors were idolaters. It inspires gratitude, continued aspirations.

And THIS stood by us, says the Haggadah. What's THIS? G-d's promise, the eternal bond & covenant with our people.

Haggadah introduces Lavan story "Go out & learn". Some learning is best at school of hard knocks in real world out of comfort zone.

Haggadah says: "In every generation they rise up against us" we got comfortable for a little while, but sadly, it is still true. Read the news.

We went down to Egypt "forced by the Word" destiny forces our hand, plots our life journeys, often the descent leads to a greater ascent.

"Forced by the word" @reuvainleigh: this Haggadah passage shows how we're trapped & limited by language (it also brings forth redemption)

Not everyone sees it this way today, but the Haggadah (& Jewish history) says population growth is a positive, it's a great blessing!

The Hebrew "Metzuyan!" is found on test papers & report cards, it means outstanding! In the Haggadah it means Jews proudly stood out.

Our suffering, toil & oppression. Haggadah translates these 3 as marital matters, raising children & stress. All remain relevant today.

Haggadah makes a point that G-d took us out of Egypt, not a messenger. We, too, ought to be personally invested, dedicated & involved.

That big Haggadah stretch of Rabbis arguing over plague numbers? Not a numbers game, it signifies effect, impact & reach.

Dayenu is one of those songs that most Jewish communities across the spectrum use the same tune. Maybe gratitude transcends all lines.

If G-d brought us to Sinai but no Torah? Dayenu!? Unifying experience of gathering at the mountain with one heart was worth it alone.

Rabban Gamliel boils down Passover Seder to 3 essential things: Paschal Lamb, Matzah & Bitter Herb.

Think of Rabban Gamliel's 3 as: The Simple or Basic (Matzah), The Rich (Paschal Lamb), The Challenging (Maror).

Hillel's original sandwich trio: Matzah, Paschal Lamb & Bitter Herb. Today we eat them (aside for the lamb) both separately & together.

Our parallel effort to G-d's Passover leap? Jump over obstacles, skip over challenges, ignore distractions, take a spiritual plunge.

1/3: Why do we eat Matzah? Everyone knows: it baked on their backs! Hey, but weren't they earlier told to eat Matzah with Paschal Lamb?

2/3: Alter Rebbe asks this question in the first Maamar I learned in a classroom, in 1986. Ironically over fudge-graham cookies & milk.

3/3: It was of my earliest exposures to how Chassidic thought adds new dimension and rich perspective to familiar biblical texts.

For some strange reason "Bcholdor-as if u left Egypt" is TTTO "Row row your boat" but it fits: each stroke (inward?) propels us forward!

The Matzah breaks in Half, as does the Hallel psalms of praise at the Seder. Half Hallel before the meal, other half afterward.

My grandfather R' Moshe Rubin had a most memorable dynamic & dramatic tune for the blessing over the Seder's 2nd cup after Maggid.

Reclining used to be a sign of comfort & luxury, so we recline at the Seder. Modern lingo: we feel at home, relaxed, not uptight.

Eating Matzah on Passover is like digesting data. Gigabytes of Jewish memory! It's bread of faith, and we're internalizing it.

Think of Passover's Bitter Herb as a grain of sand that irritates an oyster which eventually creates a pearl in response.

Lettuce = bitter herb!? The longer it's left in the ground, the more bitter the white stalks get. It symbolizes gradual suffering.

Tanya 31: Sadness has no energy, but bitterness can be a catalyst. Piquant sharp Maror stimulates & awakens, brings us to our senses.

"Next Year in Jerusalem!" in liturgy 2x a year: end of Yom-Kippur service & Passover Seder; one of hunger, the other of satiation.

Most Haggadahs have a concluding passage. Not Chabad. Passover is open-ended, its spirit & redemptive process continue all year.