

# The PESACH Handbook

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# PESACH

## A Time for Telling

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

**P**esach — *Peh Sach* — The mouth speaks. Exodus from Egyptian bondage is an occasion for the mouth of the Jew to speak, to tell himself and his children about the miracles that characterized that liberation.

This concept is indicated in the above-mentioned kabbalistic interpretation of the name of this holiday as a combination of two words describing human speech. It also comes across in the use of four separate expressions of redemption in G-d's promise to free His people. These four expressions — "I shall take you out", "I shall rescue you," "I shall redeem you" and "I shall take you to me for a people" — are recalled in our Pesach Seder service of saying praise of G-d over four cups of wine.

Each cup, say our Sages, corresponds to one of those four expressions. This tempts us to make an attempt at seeing how each of the four parts of the Pesach Seder, which are climaxed by the drinking of wine, corresponds to one of the expressions.

We drink the first cup after reciting the holiday *kid-dush*, in which our mouths offer praise to G-d for choosing us from amongst all the nations, thereby necessitating "taking us out" from the physical and spiritual enslavement of Egypt. After mentioning this privilege of being a chosen people we also offer thanks for His "elevating us above all languages". In addition to indicating the higher spiritual level we have been granted there is a subtle hint that there is no power in human language to adequately describe our blessings. This does not absolve us, however, from making our best effort to give expression to our feelings. And so we continue with the second part of the Seder, which is the Haggadah, and its magnificent account of how G-d fulfilled His promise of "I shall rescue you". There was certainly no shortage of means at the disposal of the Creator to rescue our ancestors from Egyptian bondage. In His Divine wisdom He chose to do it in the most dramatic fashion, with plagues and miracles that would make an everlast-

ing impression on our people and the world. This part of the Seder, climaxed by the drinking of the second cup, is the quintessential expression of *Peh-Sach* because of the elaborate platform it provides for expressing our recognition of G-d's control of nature and human affairs.

The third expression of redemption, "I shall redeem you," corresponds to the third part of the Seder, the *birkat hamazon* (grace after meals) in which we praise G-d for providing us with nourishment. Redemption for our people was not a transition from servitude to freedom but rather a transfer from a human master to a Divine One. Just as the servant is aware that he is totally dependent on his master for his sustenance, so do we express our appreciation of our total dependence on G-d in our blessing after the lavish Seder meal.

The fourth and conclusive part of the Seder is the recital of the Hallel, which corresponds to the fourth expression of redemption, "I shall take you to me for a people." The ultimate purpose of the Exodus was the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai when we became, as promised by G-d, "His beloved treasure... a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation." It was then that we realized that becoming servants of G-d meant not only dependence but also exalted privilege. Hallel therefore begins with the words "Give praise you servants of G-d", for there can be no greater honor than such a status.

Since Pesach is such a time for telling, Ohr Somayach has undertaken the preparation of this Pesach handbook. Its purpose is to give Jews throughout the English-speaking world an opportunity to benefit from the wealth of material on Pesach that has influenced the lives of so many thousands of our students during the past four decades.

May your use of this material at your Seder, in your synagogue or in your classroom add to the understanding and appreciation of this very special holiday. May you have a happy and kosher Pesach.

# PESACH Q&A

1. What is the holiday of Pesach called in the Torah?
  2. Why did our ancestors carry dough when they left Egypt?
  3. Where is there a hint in the Torah to the four cups of wine we drink at the Seder?
  4. What do we do on Pesach Eve to remember the Korban Pesach?
  5. What do these numbers represent – 10, 50 / 40, 200 / 50, 250?
  6. How many mornings on Pesach do we say the entire Hallel?
  7. How do we refer to Pesach in our *kiddush* and in our *tefillot*?
  8. What are the three prohibitions regarding *chametz*?
  9. When is the eating of matza obligatory according to the Torah?
  10. What was the date of the crossing of Yam Suf?
  11. How many days of Chol Hamo'ed are there in Eretz Israel and elsewhere?
  12. Is there any limit to what may be done during Chol Hamo'ed?
  13. How many times do we wash our hands during the Seder?
  14. What cannot be done after eating the *afikomen*?
  15. Why do we recline when drinking wine and eating matza?
  16. What unusual thing do we do to stimulate children to ask questions?
  17. What is the meaning of *datzach, adash, beachav*?
  18. Who are the four sons alluded to in the Torah as requiring us to inform them regarding Pesach?
  19. What is the meaning of *Dayenu* that we sing?
  20. What is the Torah term on which the word Haggadah is based?
1. *Chag Hamatzot* (The Festival of *Matzot*).
  2. They left in such a hurry that there was no time for the dough to rise.
  3. The four expressions of redemption found in *Shemot* / Exodus 6:6-7.
  4. Place a shankbone or other piece of meat on the seder plate.
  5. The number of plagues with which the Egyptians were smitten in Egypt and at the Sea according to three different Sages.
  6. One morning in Eretz Israel and two everywhere else.
  7. *Zman Cheiruteinu* (The Season of Our Freedom).
  8. To eat, to benefit from and to possess.
  9. On the first night of the holiday at the Seder.
  10. The seventh day of Pesach – the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the month of Nissan.
  11. In Eretz Israel 5 days and elsewhere only 4.
  12. Definitely! Study the laws or consult a rabbi.
  13. Twice - once before dipping *karpas* into salt water and once before eating matza. (A third time is *mayim achronim* before saying *birkat hamazon* – grace after meals.)
  14. We cannot eat nor drink wine.
  15. In order to express our sense of nobility as free men.
  16. We dip a vegetable in salt water before saying the Haggadah.
  17. These are acronyms formed by the first letters of the ten plagues.
  18. The wise son, the wicked one, the simple one and the one who does not know how to ask.
  19. "It would have sufficed for us" – a reference to all the stages of benevolence which G-d granted us.
  20. "*Vehegadeta levinecha* – And you shall relate to your child" (*Shemot* 13:8).

## The Pesach Handbook

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General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman Compiled by: Rabbi Richard Jacobs Concept: Yehuda Goldman Design: Eliezer Shapiro

# The MATZA Message

*"The Matza that we eat is for what reason? Because the dough of our forefathers did not have time to become leavened before the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them." (Haggadah)*

**By  
Rabbi  
Mendel  
Weinbach**

**T**he Exodus from Egypt was so sudden that "they could not tarry" and therefore "baked the dough which they had brought forth from Egypt into unleavened cakes." (*Shemot* 12:39)

This raises a major question. How was it possible for our ancestors to carry the dough for so long without it becoming forbidden chametz, a leavening that transpires if dough is left unattended for eighteen minutes?

### Perfect Timing

The variety of solutions proposed range from the dough being miraculously baked by an extraordinarily blazing sun (*Targum Yonatan ben Uziel*), to the dough being steadily kneaded by the Jews carrying it on their shoulders (*Ohr Hachayim*), to the distance being covered in miraculously short time as they were "carried on eagles' wings" (*Ramban*).

A particularly interesting approach is that of the great nineteenth century commentator Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim, whose analysis of another Midrash led him to the conclusion that the miracle was that G-d, Divine Author of Nature, simply repealed the natural law which dictates that unattended dough must become chametz!

Despite this fascinating divergence of approaches all are united in viewing the eating of matza on Pesach as a reminder of the speed with which Jews were liberated from Egypt. Why is this factor so crucial?

We can easily understand the other features of the Seder. The bitter herbs of *maror* recall the bitterness of our bondage. The four cups of wine and the reclining are expressions of freedom from that bondage. But why is it so significant to highlight the speed with which this liberation was effected?

A charming incident, which took place in Jerusalem a number of decades ago, may help us unravel this mystery of the matza.

All the guests gathered around the wedding canopy excitedly waiting the big moment. The officiating rabbi, a sage renowned both for his Torah knowledge and practical wisdom, had concluded the opening blessings over a cup of wine and it was now the chatan's turn to put a ring on

the kallah's extended finger and say the "magic words" that would make them man and wife. This particular chatan was a bit more nervous than other grooms and he let the ring fall from his hand. As he bent down to pick it up, the father of the bride, who was apparently not very pleased with the match, muttered something about this perhaps being a Heavenly sign that the wedding should not take place. The rabbi quickly defused a potentially explosive situation by declaring: "Yes, it is indeed a sign from Heaven."

As the chatan, kallah and their parents and witnesses looked at him in bewilderment the rabbi continued: "It is a sign from Heaven that when he first took out the ring the time had not yet come for the marriage to begin. Now the time has finally come!"

The experience of Jews in Egypt was a preparation for their future role as the holy nation that would receive the Torah. Exile in a foreign land and the sufferings of back-breaking labor were the bricks that built the "forging furnace" of a nation that would learn to abhor the moral corruption which had been imposed on them in Egypt and be enabled to become a "light unto the nations."

But if you stay too long in the forging furnace you can be destroyed. Our Sages tell us that there are fifty levels of spiritual corruption, and our ancestors, in their physical and spiritual bondage, had already reached the forty-ninth level. One moment longer in Egypt and they would have sunk to that fiftieth level from which there is no redemption.

Here then is the "catch 22" situation of our ancestors in Egypt awaiting liberation. One moment too early and they lack the finishing touches of the forging furnace. One moment too late and they are beyond redemption.

Only the Divine Creator of time was capable of the perfect timing that was needed. Just as the climactic plague of the death of the firstborn took place exactly at midnight for reasons known only to G-d, the Exodus began at exactly the moment that we too can understand as being perfectly chosen as not too early and not too late.

So when we eat our matza we are reliving that experience of perfect timing that is

*continued on page five*



so vital for us to remember in so many aspects of our national and individual lives. How often have Jews in their long exile felt a sense of impatience for the ultimate redemption for which the Exodus from Egypt was but a preview? The eating of matza on Pesach reminded them that there is a Divine plan in the length of our exile and that when Heaven determines that we have learned all that was necessary from our suffering our redemption will not be a moment late in coming.

How often has the individual Jew reached the brink of despair as he waited for his personal salvation in terms of a mate, of children, of good health, of financial and physical security? Matza reminded him too that the *Mitzrayim* (the Hebrew name for Egypt which literally translated means “straits”) constrictions in his life have their purpose and there is a perfect Divine schedule for when his own Exodus will arrive.

Now let us see what other lessons there are in the eating of matza beyond the issue of perfect timing.

### Matza as Symbol of Physical Protection

According to the aforementioned approaches that the dough taken out from Egypt was miraculously saved from becoming chametz, we discern two different lessons from this Heavenly intervention in the leavening process. Whether it was the lightning speed of traveling “on eagles’ wings” or the blazing sun serving as a baker, we are witnesses to the Divine support provided for the Jew who puts trust in G-d.

The Torah stresses that our ancestors left Egypt in such a hurry that they took along no provisions other than the unbaked dough. This willingness to “follow Me into the wilderness, into an uncultivated land” earned us G-d’s eternal love because it expressed our limitless trust in His providence.

The great Chassidic leader Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev thus explains the contrast between the name we use in referring to the holiday and the one that appears in the Torah. We call it “Pesach” but the Torah calls it “*Chag Hamatzot*”. This is but another expression of the romantic relationship between G-d and His beloved people, which is the theme of the sacred and beautiful “*Shir Hashirim*” (Song of Songs of King Solomon) that many Jews recite at the conclusion of the Seder.

“Pesach” means “pass over” and recalls the miraculous loving-kindness of G-d as he passed over the Jewish homes in Egypt as He slaughtered the firstborn in the Egyptian homes. We call the holiday “Pesach” to express our appreciation of G-d “passing over” our homes, just as the *tefillin* we wear on our heads and arms contain the Torah chapter that proclaims that there is only one G-d.

That one G-d, in Whose *tefillin* is the Torah phrase that proclaims “who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the world”, praises our plunge into the wilderness with nothing more than the raw material for matza because we were so confident that G-d would provide — and refers to the holiday as *Chag Hamatzot*.

The first vindication of that faith came with the miracle that prevented the dough from becoming chametz. This was certainly a good omen for all succeeding generations that trust in G-d will be rewarded with miraculous results even if they

sometimes wear the veil of natural events.

If this approach has been a lesson in the *physical* protection represented by matza the approach of the Malbim offers a *spiritual* perspective as well.

### Matza as Symbol of Spiritual Protection

What was the significance of G-d repealing the chemical law of fermentation at the time of the Exodus so that the dough of the fleeing Jews would not become leavened before being baked into matza?

The answer can be found in the special prayer that the Talmudic sage Rabbi Alexandria was accustomed to saying when he completed his regular daily prayers. “Sovereign of the Universe” he would begin his appeal, “it is clear to You that it is our desire to do Your will, but we are prevented from doing so by the leavening agent in the dough.”

The *yetzer hara*, man’s evil instinct, is thus referred to as the catalyst for chametz. Some commentaries focus on the single letter difference between the Hebrew words for matza and chametz to explain why one represents good and the other evil. Others simply point to the difference in their physical forms. Matza is simple and flat while chametz is inflated. All of human sin is rooted in either passion or pride, both of which are symbolized by the inflated bread, which mirrors satisfied appetites and blown-up egos.

On the eve of the Exodus Jews were treated to an unparalleled spiritual experience, which all of us get at least a tiny taste of when we sit at the Seder table and attempt to relive that experience. But what was going to keep them on a high spiritual level for the next seven weeks till they reached Sinai and received the Torah? Were they condemned to exchange the chains of the physical bondage for the evil instinct that would ferment their souls?

G-d provided the answer to these doubts by demonstrating that He can momentarily suspend the power of the leavening agent to turn the dough into chametz. In similar fashion our ancestors were assured that the leavening agent within them would also have no power to serve as a catalyst for corruption.

This was a dramatic, tangible expression of that famous Divine guarantee of spiritual security: “Make for Me an opening like the eye of a needle and I will make for you an opening like a great hall.”

Matza thus reminds us that as difficult as it may seem to overcome the natural forces of passion and pride represented by chametz, we must always remember that the Creator of those forces can suspend their power over us. All that is required is the first step taken by us to open a needle’s eye measure of desire to improve. In Egypt it was the courage of Jews to take the local deity and offer it as a sacrifice to Heaven that provided that first step which led to such great spiritual heights that reached their climax at Sinai. For Jews in every generation the eating of matza should serve as a reminder that we must not hesitate to take a little step in coming closer to G-d, because we can be confident that He will turn it into a giant step for us, our people and all of mankind.

# 14 Sedarim to Egypt

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

## *The Mists of Time...*

When we think about the vista of Jewish history it seems like an impossibly large canvas for us to relate to. It seems so remote. The events seem so distant from us. But we *can* relate to Jewish history in a way which makes it very real.

We *can* connect to our heritage without feeling that it's obscured by the mists of time.

*How?*

*Watch!*

Take the average Seder. At a typical Seder there will be three generations at the table: A grandfather, a father and a son.

Let's say that the average generation gap is 30 years. So a typical Seder represents a span of 60 years of Jewish history.

But really if you think about it, there are really not three generations at the table, but seven. Because the grandfather

sitting at our table was possibly a grandson at *his* grandfather's Seder.

And similarly, our grandson will probably be a grandfather at his grandson's Seder.

*So our Seder could contain in it as much as  $7 \times 30 = 210$  years!*

If you divide 210 years into the time elapsed since the first Seder (approx. 3,300 years ago) you come out with the following calculation:

$$3,300 \div 210 \sim 14.$$

In other words, we just shrank the vast expanse of 3,300 years of history into just over 14 *Sedarim*. That's all that separates us from the experience of leaving Egypt — as little as 14 *sedarim*!

*"And you shall tell your son on that day..."*

The whole of Judaism is founded on 14 fathers *passing-over* the truth of the Exodus to 14 sons, witnessed by those 7 generations which each seder spans. Tradition is only 14 Seders long.

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# Shelf Life

## What's So Bad About Bread?

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

The refrigerator had stood in its place for many months but now Pesach was approaching and it would have to be moved

As its small wheels grudgingly struggled through months of sticky under-fridge grunge a white object came into view. It was as stiff as a board but devoid of even a hint of mold — a flawless monolithic slice of white bread greeted the first light of day it had seen in many a month.

I marveled at our chemical society that manages to immortalize the transient with no less skill than an Egyptian embalmer.

Time and food don't get on well together.

The Torah (*Shemot 12:17*) tells us to guard the *matzot* from becoming chametz. Rashi comments that the word *matzot* can be read as *mitzvot*, meaning that just as we should guard the *matzot* from tardiness, similarly we should not delay our performance of *mitzvot*. When an opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah arises, we should do it immediately.

This Rashi is perplexing. Rashi is the *parshan* par excellence. He tells us the literal meaning of the Torah. It's not his style to deliver homilies.

In addition, the comparison is difficult to comprehend. There's an enormous gulf between not doing a mitzvah in a timely fashion and between chametz. For delaying a mitzvah one receives no punishment that we know of whereas the punishment for eating chametz is *karet* — spiritual excision and premature death.

Quite a difference!

The basis of all atheism is the perception that the world has always been here and always will be here. It's an easy mistake to make. Time seems immutable. We divide time into minutes and seconds, but that's only for our convenience. To the untutored eye time is a megalithic existence with no beginning or end. Time just is.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The very first word in the Torah — *Bereshet* — comes to contradict that presumption. *Bereshet*, "In the beginning..." G-d created 'beginning'. Time itself is a creation.

In Hebrew the word for time is *zman*. The same root appears in the word *hazmana*, which the Talmud uses to mean "preparation." Time's greatest lie is that each mo-

ment seems to be prepared from the moment that precedes it, that each moment obliges the one that follows.

Look into a flame flickering and moving.

All we really see when we look at the flame is the combustion of that split-second, for as soon as it shines, that particular flame is burned and gone forever. The flame you see in the next second is a different flame, and the moment after that there is yet another flame ... and another ...and another...

We know that each nanosecond of a burning fire is a separate event; yet the flame gives every appearance of being continuous.

The Midrash describes how G-d made Himself known to Avraham. Avraham was like a traveler who sees a great building ablaze with light and remarks that such a building must have an owner. Avraham looked at the creation and saw that this world must also have an owner.

In Hebrew the expression "ablaze with light" could also mean "ablaze with fire." In other words, Avraham saw that this world was like a burning flame, that every single second was a discrete existence. He saw that the seeming continuity and immutability of Time was a lie.

It was this perception that made Avraham worthy to be shown the reality behind the lie, and the Creator of time appeared to Avraham.

The truth of this world is that God remakes the world every single second. Every moment is like a flame that blazes and is then replaced with another.

Matza has only two ingredients: Flour and water. Bread has a third ingredient: Time.

The addition of time to matza turns it into chametz. A mitzvah is an expression of the will of G-d. Doing a mitzvah in a tardy fashion places it into the domain of time. And there can be no greater lie than that.

Pesach is the birthday of the Jewish People. Our mission and the mission of the Torah is to proclaim that G-d creates reality every single second. Time has no independent existence of its own.

Therefore, during Pesach, right at the beginning of our mission in this world, we avoid the food that embodies time — bread — and eat matza, the spiritual food that is above time.

# The Four Sons & Devolution

*The four sons of the Haggadah as a model for all of Jewish history*

*From "The Ohr Somayach Haggadah"*

*Transcribed from the Lectures of Rabbi Uziel Milevsky, zatzal*

**A**s any student of Jewish history knows, the Egyptian exile marked only the beginning of Israel's three thousand year odyssey through a never-ending gauntlet of persecution and torture at the hands of one nation after the next. An oft-repeated question, therefore, is why does the commemoration of the Exodus occupy such a central position in the Jewish calendar? Since the Jewish People have been cast from one exile to the next, why is Passover still referred to as "the time of our freedom?" What kind of freedom is this?

The answer is that the miracles of the Exodus, which culminated on Passover, comprise the prototype of the Jewish People's ultimate Redemption. In a sense, the miracles that took place in Egypt set a historical precedent that will sooner or later repeat itself. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt there was no practical indication that Israel would ever be redeemed. Perhaps exile would become an integral component of the Jewish psyche for all eternity. With the miracles of Passover it became clear to all the inhabitants of the earth that the Jewish People were not destined for a permanent state of exile. Our identity is thus characterized by a state of redemption.

Yet more often than not, the Jewish historical cycle has consisted not of a transition from exile to freedom, but rather from exile to exile. This movement of our People from one culture to another has too often proven fatal to large segments of the Jewish Nation, which bears the scars to this very day, as we see from the recurring cycle of Jewish Exile.

## **THE JEWISH DRIVE TO EXCEL**

Typically, when Jews make their entrance into a nation they tend immediately to feel a tremendous drive to "fit in" and excel in those very same pursuits that the host society considers their own unique specialty. If the locals take pride in their superior business skills then the first-generation Jewish immigrants strive to become superb businessmen; if the locals take pride in their scientific achievements then the Jews strive to become superb scientists. The Jews' innate ambition to excel stems from Israel's destiny to become a "light unto the nations." This enormous spiritual potential cannot be suppressed — if it is not channeled towards spiritual endeavors, it manifests itself on the corporeal plane as a consuming ambition to excel in every field of worldly endeavor. Soon, the all-consuming yearning to excel can be



come so overwhelming that the Jew may be willing to sacrifice anything — including his heritage — in order to attain his goal. In a matter of a few generations the Jew does indeed excel, but this time, to his detriment, he becomes so well-adjusted to his new culture that he totally assimilates and essentially fades away as a Jew.

Who remains in exile? Only the descendants of those Jews who have resisted the temptation of assimilating and have remained faithful to the Torah. This is the only guarantee of Jewish survival. Those who embraced Torah still have Jewish descendants today; those who shunned it in the past are no longer a part of Israel.

Let us now analyze the inner workings of each cycle of exile. What type of person immigrates to a new country from the previous locale of exile? As has been explained above, it is a person who adhered to his traditions, since it stands to reason that all those who discarded their heritage assimilated completely and disappeared from the Jewish map.

### THE GENERATION OF THE *CHACHAM*

These new immigrants are committed to their heritage. They know what *mitzvot* are, and how to perform most of them; they can pray in Hebrew, and can study Torah. We could safely refer to this first generation of exiles as the generation of the *chacham*, the Wise Son. It is for this reason that the author of the Haggadah mentions the Wise Son first — this “Son” is representative of the first immigrants who enter Israel’s latest exile.

### THE GENERATION OF THE *RASHA*

What happens to the children of the *chacham*, the second generation of the new exile? They are in the greatest danger, for they find themselves walking a tightrope between two very different cultures. It is extremely difficult for them to live in both of these worlds at once. They perceive their parents’ world as old and primitive in comparison to the fast and exciting world in which they have grown up. They are liable to abandon the old ways of their parents and embrace the trappings of the modern world, thinking, “These ancient laws are not for us! ‘What is this

service to you?’ It means nothing to me!” This is the generation of the *rasha*, the Wicked Son. For this reason, the author of the Haggadah lists him as the second son — he represents the second generation of Jews in exile.

### THE GENERATION OF THE SIMPLE SON

What becomes of the third generation? The children of the Wicked Son have nothing to rebel against — their parents have left no stone unturned. For the most part they simply do what their parents tell them. From a religious perspective the most one can expect from them is to ask, “What is this?” They may have faint memories of their grandfather opening up a Jewish book once in a while, or performing some other mitzvah. Out of curiosity they will ask, “What is this? What is the Torah all about?” This third generation of immigrants is defined as the Simple Son. It is for this reason that the author of the Haggadah lists him as the third of the four sons.

### THE LOST GENERATION

If the Simple Son receives a Torah education, he still has a chance. If he does not, then his children will become the generation of the Son Who Does Not Know to Ask. Indeed, what have they to ask? Their father knows next to nothing, their grandfather is the rebel, and they don’t remember their great-grandfather. All they know is that they are Jewish, but they have no inkling of what it means to be a Jew. The Haggadah warns that this fourth generation is the last generation — there is no Fifth Son, for the children of the Son Who Does Not Know to Ask no longer exist from a Jewish perspective. If a Jew knows nothing more than that he is Jewish, his children will not know even that.

Interestingly, people often remark that almost every Jew they know has at least a great-grandfather who was religious. They are correct — it is rare to find a Jew who has been disconnected from his heritage for five generations. This is precisely what the Haggadah teaches.

# RABBI BEREL WEIN *Speaks on* Pesach Cleaning

**N**ow that Purim, with all its joys, hangovers and calories, is out of the way, the Jewish world bravely confronts the great holiday of Pesach and its myriad preparatory requirements.

One of the time-honored rituals in Jewish households is the pre-Pesach housecleaning frenzy that overwhelms the family, especially the female part thereof.

The eradication of chametz from the house is only the pious front that is put forward to rationalize the otherwise irrational drive to put everything in the house in its proper place, shiny, spotless and dusted. Every useful item that is needed for daily efficiency in the home, and especially in my study, can no longer be found because it has been placed “where it belongs.”

Of course, over the course of time as the year progresses, usually by Shavuot, these items so necessary for comfortable living are no longer “where they belong” but rather “where I can find them.”

But that is for another column that I may write some day.

My task in the ritual of Pesach cleaning is mainly relegated to explaining why the ruthless cleaning going on before my eyes and the movement of my tapes, papers and books to “where they belong” is not really necessary, in strict halachic terms. I know that this is a lost cause as far as I am concerned, since Jewish women from time immemorial have not trusted the “leniency” of Halacha when it comes to pre-Pesach housecleaning. But at least I go through the motions of attempting to mitigate the household whirlwind that always accompanies the advent of the great holiday of freedom and redemption.

However, my real task before Pesach is to dust, spray with a protective spray and place in order — “where they belong” — my books. Since I have acquired a sizable library of books over the years, this is no small task.

I am a procrastinator when it comes to executing household chores. Nevertheless, I have a great sense of anticipation when it comes to the pre-Pesach cleaning of my books and placing them in correct order on my library’s shelves. Books are memories. I remember the

circumstances and places where I purchased most of my books. I can identify which are the books of my youth and spring and which are the ones I bought in my later years.

I see the books that I purchased out of my saved coins when I was in the yeshiva (I never smoked because I needed that cigarette money for books), and I am flooded by the serene and joyous memories of those golden years of intensive Torah study and the camaraderie of friends that yeshiva life engendered.

I remember that this is the book that I used when studying with this particular holy teacher and, even though he is now long since gone, he is still alive to me as I again open and look into that book.

I carefully dust the two books that I have from my grandfather’s library and remember the piece of sugar that he put in my mouth when, as a child, I correctly interpreted the words of Rashi for him. That sweetness has never departed from me. It has nurtured me on many a dark and disappointing day in my life.

The world correctly identified the Jewish people as being the “People of the Book.” It is “the book” that has preserved us as a people and revitalized Jewish life in all places and times.

For “the book” — the Bible, the Talmud, the love of learning, the intellectual stimulus and the respect for scholarship and scholars — is the collective memory of the Jewish people. In telling us what was, the book also informs us as to what is now and what will yet be.

One cannot approach Pesach without the gift of memory. For Pesach is all memory. And therefore the household cleaning that precedes it is also part of the necessary process of memory. It may be chided, but never scoffed at. Pesach and its memories are why we are here, and why we have the right to be here.

It is paradoxical that getting rid of the chametz allows the memories suppressed by our everyday preoccupations to flood back into our minds and hearts.

So, let us get on cheerfully with our Pesach cleaning. One never knows what one will find while cleaning the house for Pesach.

# Pesach Cleaning Primer

BY RABBI MORDECHAI BECHER

*Rabbi Becher was a Senior Lecturer in the Ohr Somayach Main Campus in Jerusalem for many years. He is now a Senior Lecturer for Gateways Organization and the author of the best-selling "Gateway to Judaism."*

The following instructions are by no means a complete halachic guide for Pesach. A Rabbi should be consulted for any questions and doubts that arise, and refer to the many books available that present the *halachot* in detail. The following instructions are based on classes given by Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *shlita*.

1. All places or articles into which chametz (leavened grain products, eg. bread, crackers, cake) is usually brought during the year must be cleansed and checked for chametz before the evening preceding the Seder. The search for chametz (details of which can be found in the Haggadah) is started at nightfall on the evening preceding the Seder.

2. Any article or place which is not used on Pesach, which is closed up and sold, does not need to be checked for chametz.

3. Chametz that has been rendered inedible (even to an animal) by being soaked in a foul-tasting liquid such as detergent, "Draino", bleach or ammonia is not considered chametz.

4. There is no obligation to check and destroy chametz

that is less than the size of an olive (approx. 30 grams) and is so dirty that a person would not eat it.

5. Surfaces, closets and cracks where it is possible that chametz has entered should be washed, ensuring that detergent enters all cracks and crevices.

6. Kashering for Pesach is done in the same way as during the year

7. It is customary to also cover any surfaces that have been kashered and that will be used for food, or for utensils on Pesach; e.g. tables, countertops, cabinets and stovetops, with plastic, linoleum or aluminum foil.

8. Any chametz that will not be consumed or destroyed before Pesach must be sold to a Gentile before the time of prohibition of chametz (the time of the prohibition is printed in Jewish calendars and newspapers) for all of Pesach. The transaction should be performed by a Rabbi, since the laws are complex and a contract is necessary. The chametz that has been sold must be stored away until after Pesach.

## Short PESACH Q&A

**Q:** Why is Moses' name not mentioned in the Haggadah?

**A:** To answer this question, let's look at the very first Pesach Seder in history.

After a full year in the desert, the Jewish People celebrated the Pesach festival. They offered the Paschal lamb and ate *matza* and *maror*. But when it came time to tell the Pesach story, whom did they tell it to? To whom did they relate the plagues and miracles, the Strong Hand and Outstretched Arm? Everybody was there! Everyone saw it with his own eyes!

Only one person had children who did not personally experience the going out of Egypt - Moses! Moses' two sons were in Midian during the Exodus. Moses, therefore, was the first person in history to relate the Pesach story to children who didn't know it first-hand.

As we know, "Moses was the most humble person on the face of the earth." Would you be surprised, then, if the world's humblest person omitted his name from the story, and instead he attributed all the credit to G-d? This would then become a precedent for future generations.

**Looking for a remarkable essay which reveals the secret of the structure of the Haggadah, a puzzle which has challenged generations of scholars?**

Malbim's Introduction to the Haggadah available at <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/802>

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# The Laws of the Pesach Seder - "Unleavened"

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## A bare-bones guide to conducting the Seder

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BY RABBI MORDECHAI BECHER

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- The seder table should already be set before night-fall, with the seder plate, *matzot*, cups etc.
- The seder plate should contain, starting from top left (NE) going clockwise: an egg lightly roasted, a piece of meat (chicken also OK), *charoset* (usually made of grated apple, ground walnuts, cinnamon, red wine and dates), *chazeret* (a vegetable), *karpas* (potato, parsley etc.) and in the middle *maror* (the bitter herb - horseradish or romaine lettuce). A bowl of salt water should be placed on the table but not on the plate.
- Three whole *matzot shmura* should be placed under or in front of the plate. They should be covered and separated from each other by a napkin or cloth. *Matzot shmura* are *matzot* that were made for the sake of the mitzvah and from wheat that was protected from moisture from the time of its harvest. They are the *matzot* that one should use for the commandments of the Seder.
- Seats should be equipped with cushions so that the participants can lean on their left sides while eating and reciting the Haggadah (except for eating of the *maror*) to imitate freemen and nobility.
- Everyone should have a cup that holds at least 86 cc. and there should be enough wine to fill four cups for each person at the Seder. Red wine is preferable but white wine may also be used. Children and pregnant women, or people who for health reasons cannot drink wine, may fulfill the obligation with grape juice (preferably, with a little wine mixed in). The cups should be filled to the brim for each of the four cups of wine.
- *Kiddush* is recited by the person conducting the Seder while holding the cup in his right hand. The participants should listen to his words, keep in mind that they are fulfilling their obligation through his recitation, and say *amen* when he finishes each blessing. Everyone then drinks the majority of their cup while leaning to their left. (Try to finish the drink in two gulps.)
- Everyone then washes their hands. Water is poured from a cup, twice on the right hand and twice on the left, no blessing is recited.
- The *karpas* (celery, parsley, boiled potato) is then dipped in the salt water and eaten, after reciting the blessing "*borei pri ha'adama*" as printed in the Haggadah.
- The middle matza is broken into two. The larger part is set aside for the *Afikoman* which is eaten later, and the smaller part is kept with the other two *matzot*. It is customary for small children to "steal" the *Afikoman* and hide it. After the meal the father "buys" it back with offers of gifts (preferably something of a Jewish theme).
- The *matzot* are uncovered and lifted up and the person conducting the Seder recites with everyone else, "*Ha lachma anya.*" The second cup of wine is filled, the seder plate is removed (to arouse children's curiosity) and the Haggadah begins. The youngest present, and often all the children, now ask the four questions, "*Mah nishtanah.*" The rest of the Haggadah is read, sung and explained. It is the obligation of the parents to explain the Haggadah to their children and to each other. Indeed every



person is obligated to delve into, and explain and relate the story of the Exodus to others and to themselves to the best of their ability.

- When “*Vehi she’amdah*” is recited the cups of wine should be raised. When the plagues are recounted we tip a little wine out of the cups, and afterwards fill them to the brim. Likewise, when the *Hallel* is begun (“*Lefikach*”), the cup should be raised, and when the blessing is reached, everyone (or just the leader with others responding *amen*) says the blessing over wine and the second cup is drunk, also while leaning.
- Wash hands as before, but this time a blessing is recited (“*al netilat yadaim*”). One should not speak from the time the hands are washed until after the matza is eaten.
- The leader holds all three *matzot*, and recites the blessing over bread (“*hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz*”). He then drops the bottom matza and recites the blessing over eating matza (“*al achilat matza*”). He then distributes a small piece of each of the top two *matzot* to the participants (who supplement their portion from other *matza shmura* on the table.) Everyone now eats, while leaning on the left side. One should eat about 2/3 of a square machine-made matza, or a little less than half of a round hand-made matza. Try to eat this amount within about 3 minutes.
- The blessing (“*al achilat maror*”) is then recited on the *maror* (grated, raw horseradish or romaine lettuce). The *maror* is dipped into the *charoset*, then shaken off and eaten (not leaning). One should eat about 27cc. of *maror*, (about two leaves of romaine lettuce). Be sure to clean and check the lettuce carefully before the Seder to ensure that there are no insects on the leaves.
- A sandwich is made, using a little from the bottom matza (add from the table’s supply if necessary) and *maror*. One should eat about the same amount of *maror* as before (no. 14; a little less is OK) and about half the amount of matza as before (no. 13). No blessing is recited but the paragraph “*zecher lemikdash keHillel*” is recited beforehand.
- The meal is now eaten. Many people have a custom to eat boiled eggs dipped in salt water. One should take care not to overeat at the meal, as one must leave room for two more cups of wine, and the matza of the *Afikoman*. Roasted meat should not be served at the meal, so as not to appear as though we are bringing the Paschal sacrifice outside the Temple. The meal should be eaten while leaning, and one should discuss the Haggadah during the meal as well.
- At the end of the meal the *Afikoman* is eaten while leaning. No blessing is made. One should eat the same amount of matza as in no. 13, although if this is difficult, one may eat half that amount. Nothing should be eaten or drunk after the *Afikoman* except for water.
- “Elijah’s” cup is filled and the third cups are filled at this time. The Grace After Meals is recited while holding the cup of wine (until “*al yechasrenu*” is said). Don’t forget to insert the appropriate prayer for Pesach (“*ya’aleh veyavoh*”). After the Grace (*Birkat Hamazon*) the cup of wine is lifted, the blessing over wine is said, and the majority of the cup is drunk, while leaning. The fourth and final cup is filled, the door is opened, and “*Shfoch chamatcha*” is said.
- The door is closed and the rest of *Hallel* is sung or recited. At the end of *Hallel*, the participants say the blessing over wine, and drink the last cup. Then the blessing after wine is recited.
- The concluding prayer is recited, “Next Year in Jerusalem” is sung, and the Seder is concluded with the singing of the traditional songs (*echad mi yodea, chad gadya, adir hu, etc.*).

# Stealing for the Next Generation

## *Exploring the meaning of stealing the Afikoman*

by Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky

**T**here is a beautiful custom that takes place every Passover at the Seder. After kiddush the father breaks the middle matza of the three *matzot* placed before him and hides it away till the end of the Seder. It is the afikomen, the final food eaten at the Seder. Afikomen is apparently related to the Greek word for “dessert,” and it’s a real pleasure to watch the happy contented faces of the Seder participants munching away at still another piece of matza. Some people observe it’s even tastier this year than usual. They are eating the cardboard box.

But as all the youngsters know, before you can reach that exciting conclusion to the Seder, you first have to get the afikomen. The children, as you know, are encouraged to steal the afikomen and hold it hostage, refusing to return it until you promise to buy them the gift of their dreams.

Now, far be it from me to be the grinch that stole Passover, but does it make sense to encourage our children to steal, blackmail and extort money from us? Granted, once they get married they’ll be doing it on a regular basis, but do we need to instill it in them as a value at a religious ceremony?

There are those who suggest it’s just a harmless game designed to maintain the children’s interest in the Seder so they don’t drift off. In that case, there should be something there for the average adult as well. But as far as the children are concerned, why

not do what we always do? Tell them if they sit quietly they’ll get a prize. Offer them a chance to answer questions about what we read.

But thievery and extortion? Isn’t that taking educational aids a little too far? Although perhaps seeing what’s going on in the American school system, this might be a good way to prepare them. But I digress.

The truth is, I think there’s a tremendous lesson to learn from the custom of stealing the afikomen. Let’s take a quick look at the Seder. The kiddush is followed by a series of unusual activities. We dip a vegetable in salt water, we uncover the *matzot*, we re-cover the *matzot*, we remove the Seder plate, we refill the wine cups. Busy as beavers, we are. Finally we get down to business and one of the children recites “Ma Nishtana - the Four Questions.” When the child finishes, he is returned to his seat at the table where, while plotting his afikomen caper, he throws things at his brother and annoys his sister.

Did anyone notice that while we were careful to make sure the child asks the four questions, no one seems to care if he gets any answers?

If you return to the original source of the customs that precede the reading of “Ma Nishtana,” you find that they all have the same theme: To inspire the children to ask. The child sees the wine cup being refilled, and he thinks: “Hey! We don’t make kiddush twice!” He sees the Seder plate being removed and thinks: “Is the Seder over already?” This inspires a

child's curiosity until he wants to say: "Hey guys, why is this night different from all other nights?"

Unfortunately what happens most of the time is that we cover the *matzot*, uncover the *matzot*, remove the seder plate, fill the cups, and when the child's curiosity is stimulated he can count on receiving the same answer: "How in the world do I know why we're doing all these things? That's how your grandfather did it!"

A friend of mine once offered a case of beer to whoever gave the best answer to the following question: "Why?" Of course, most people gave answers like "because" or "why not?" But the case of beer went to the person with the best answer: "Because that's how they did it in Europe."

It's sad that people can have a Passover Seder every year and never stop to think of all the "whys."

How do we make this night special from all other nights? Parents have a commandment one night a year to tell their children what's really important to them — why we are Jews, the traditions and beliefs of our ancestors, the meaning and miracle of Jewish survival. And the kids have a commandment to listen. Imagine! One night a year the kids have a mitzvah to ask us questions and actually have to listen to our answers. What an opportunity! But do we take advantage of it? Or do we give our children the same

tired Seder performance that we did last year?

With all the preparations for Passover, all the cleaning and shopping and cooking — shouldn't we spend some time preparing our Seder? Thinking about what I want to tell my children? Maybe we should buy some of the excellent classical commentaries on the Haggadah, most of which are now available in English, and study them. See if there is a fresh approach to the Seder that we want to share with our children. Something that will be meaningful and relevant for our our children.

That, I believe, is the reason for the custom of stealing the afikomen. Our children just asked four questions; they deserve answers. Maybe they realize the only way they can get our attention is by stealing it. Maybe the wise men who instituted the custom wanted to remind us that we aren't going to finish the Seder without the children. "Mom, Dad, remember me? I want some answers. And if I have to blackmail you to remember that you have a kid, I'm prepared to do it."

We all struggle to make the Passover Seder meaningful for our guests and for ourselves. But be careful to remember that the next generation is sitting at your Seder table.

*Have A Happy and a Kosher Passover.*

## more Short PESACH Q&A

**Q:** *I recently read a book that claimed that the Israelites did not cross the Red Sea, as is commonly believed, but rather crossed the Sea of Reeds. "Red Sea," according to the author, is a mistranslation. This was news to me. My English translation of the Bible refers to the Red Sea, while the Hebrew refers to "yam suf." I remember from Hebrew School that "yam" means "sea." What does "suf" mean? Did the Israelites cross the Red Sea, the Sea of Reeds, or some other sea?*

**A:** "Soof" means "reeds." The Jews crossed the "Yam Soof" which means the "Sea of Reeds."

**A:** There are several views in our commentaries as to what the *Yam Suf* is. It may have been the Gulf of Suez, which branches up from what is today called the Red Sea. Others identify it with the large delta at the mouth of the Nile in the North of Egypt; interestingly, in ancient Egyptian, the swampy Delta districts were called "sufi."

Sources:

- "The Living Torah" by Rabbi A. Kaplan, Exodus 10:19, 13:18
- The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition, Exodus 13:18

*Is Chad Gadya just a children's song or is it something much, much more?*

# KID STUFF

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

**T**he Seder is over. You are about to settle back into your chair, when suddenly you are roused from your wine-induced reverie by everyone launching into the traditional rendering of *Chad Gadya*.

“What are we doing singing nursery rhymes at a time like this?” you think to yourself. “Here we all are energetically belting out a song that everyone sings, and no one has the slightest idea of what it’s got to do with Pesach! Is *Chad Gadya* no more than what ‘I know an old lady who swallowed a fly’ would have sounded like if Burl Ives had been Jewish? Is it no more than a harmless ditty to amuse the children? Or does *Chad Gadya* have a secret meaning, a hidden depth of allusion beneath the surface?”

Let’s look at the surface a second. *Chad Gadya* has ten stanzas.

It goes like this:

One kid. One kid. That daddy bought for two zuzim.

One kid. One kid.

And came the cat and ate the kid that daddy bought for two zuzim. One kid. One kid.

And came the dog and bit the cat that ate the kid etc.

And came the stick and hit the dog etc.

And came the fire and burned the stick etc.

And came the water and doused the fire etc.

And came the ox and drank the water etc.

And came the slaughterer and killed the ox etc.

And came the angel of death and killed the slaughterer etc.

And came The Holy One Blessed be He and killed the angel of death that killed the slaughterer that killed the ox that drank the water that doused the fire that hit the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that daddy bought for two zuzim. One kid. One kid.

*The ten stanzas of Chad Gadya correspond to the ten kingdoms that will rule from before the beginning of time until the end of the world.*

They are:

- G-d alone before the creation.
- The Babylon of Nimrod

- Egypt
- Yisrael until the destruction of the First Temple
- The Babylon of Nebuchadnezar
- Persia and Media
- Greece and Macedonia
- Rome
- Mashiach
- G-d alone

*“One kid. One kid. That daddy bought for two zuzim.  
One kid. One kid”*

Before the beginning of all things, G-d reigned alone. His is the first Kingdom. Avraham Avinu is the *gadya* that ‘Daddy’ (G-d) ‘bought’ for two zuzim. When you buy something it implies that the money you give is equal the acquisition that you receive. Avraham Avinu is weighed against the two gold zuzim of heaven and earth — the entire creation — because it was Avraham who first recognized his Creator. Avraham thus became both the foundation of creation and its purpose. That man should recognize his Creator.

*“And came the cat and ate the kid that  
daddy bought for two zuzim. One kid. One kid.”*

Then came *the cat* — the *shunra*. The second kingdom is Babylon. Nimrod’s capital where he built the tower of Babylon was in the “Valley of Shinar”. The motivation for that tower came from a *‘soneh ra’* — ‘an evil hater’, Nimrod, who hated G-d and his representative on this world, Avraham Avinu. Nimrod came and ‘ate’ the *gadya* — Avraham Avinu. He threw him into the consuming fire of a fiery furnace. When Avraham miraculously emerged, he emerged as a new creation.

*“And came the dog and bit the cat that ate the kid etc.”*

*“As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool to his folly.”* There can be no greater example of a fool returning to his folly than Pharaoh, King of Egypt. Despite all the plagues of Egypt, Pharaoh repeated his mistake over and over again. The *calba* — the dog — is the symbol of the third



kingdom, the kingdom of Egypt, which 'bit' the cat of Babylon. It overshadowed and outshone the kingdom of Babylon, even though there was never a direct military confrontation. Thus it only 'bit' but didn't 'eat'.

*"And came the stick and hit the dog etc."*

The stick is the staff of G-d that Moshe used to 'hit' the Egyptians. This was the staff that turned into a snake and ate all the staffs of the Egyptian sorcerers. This was the staff that was raised over the Nile and turned it to blood, and it was this staff that vanquished the might of Pharaoh. The staff symbolizes the fourth kingdom — the kingdom of Yisrael. Yisrael achieved tranquility with the building of the first *Beit Hamikdash*, when the staff — the scepter — of Yehuda held sway. Then came the fire...

*"And came the fire and burned the stick etc."*

When the Jewish People turned aside from the Torah and began to sin, a *fire* was dispatched out of Heaven. A lion of fire appeared to blaze through the *Parochet* — the curtain that divided the Holy from the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This lion of fire, in terrestrial form, took the shape of the Babylonian kingdom of Nebuchadnezar, which 'burned the staff' of Yisrael. Nebuchadnezar became the instrument of Heavenly justice to punish The Jewish People. Nebuchadnezar razed Zion. The Temple was burned to the ground and Yisrael was lead into slavery. But fire can be doused by water...

*"And came the water and doused the fire etc."*

The sixth kingdom is that of Persia and Media, whose fortunes swelled like the *waters* of the sea, extinguishing the might of Babylon. "Their voices will roar like the sea," said the prophet Yirmiyahu, describing the torrent that was to be Media.

*"And came the ox and drank the water etc."*

Taurus the *bull* is the astrological force appointed by G-d to steer the fortunes of Greece. In Jewish thought, Greece is associated with spiritual darkness. "And the earth was empty and void and *darkness* on the face of the deep." (Gen. 1:2) The Greeks tried to darken the eyes of the Jewish People, claiming that they had forfeited their unique connection to G-d as a result of the incident of the golden *calf*. They said "Write upon the horn of a *bull* that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel. This *bull* of Macedonian Greece came and licked up the *water* that was Media.

*"And came the slaughterer and killed the ox etc."*

The *bull* of Macedonia met its demise at the hands of the *slaughterer* of Rome. No other nation is stained so red with blood as Rome. Ruled by the warlike planet Mars, the kingdom of Romulus is the spiritual descendent of Esav, who was born covered in a mantle of red hair. Rome stands for the power of the material world. It encapsulates everything physical and 'this-worldly'. We are still under the sway of Rome in the guise of its current cultural heirs.

*"And came the angel of death and killed the slaughterer etc."*

Immediately prior to the coming of Mashiach, there will be a tremendous confusion in the world. Everything will seem to have gone haywire. The natural order will be turned on its head. Age will bow to youth. Ugliness will be trumpeted as beauty, and what is beautiful will be disparaged as unattractive. Barbarism will be lauded as culture, and culture will be dismissed as worthless. The hunger of consumerism and the lust for material wealth will grow more and more, and it will find less and less to satisfy its voracity. Eventually Esav/Rome/Materialism will grow so rapacious that it will become its own *angel of death*. It will literally consume itself and regurgitate itself back out. But from this decay, the line of David will sprout, like a plant that springs forth from no more than dirt and earth. There will be three wars of confusion, and then the penultimate kingdom will rule — the kingdom of Mashiach.

*"And came The Holy One Blessed be He and killed the angel of death that killed the slaughterer that killed the ox that drank the water that doused the fire that hit the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that daddy bought for two zuzim. One kid. One kid."*

In the final chapter of world history, G-d will remove the pall of spiritual poison from the world completely. He will take the 'negative drive' — alias, *the angel of death* — and slaughter it. Then G-d will wipe the tear from every face, and He will return the Kingship to Himself. The circle will be complete. And then joy and simcha will reign as a mother rejoices over her children.

*Chad Gadya*. Just an innocuous nursery rhyme to send you off to sleep at the end of the Seder. Just a little nursery rhyme... which just happens to encapsulate *the whole panorama of world history from before the beginning of time..*

# 4 Four More Questions

*Exploring the connection between the number 4 and Pesach*

BY RABBI NOTA SCHILLER

**F**or significant numbers of non-traditional Jews, the Pesach Seder is their last connection to ritual. Jews who build no succah, who don't know when Shavuot is, faithfully assemble year after year to eat matza and tell about the going out of Egypt.

Mrs. S., an eighty-year-old woman from Ann Arbor, Michigan told me that one year at her Pesach Seder she had forgotten the "shank bone" that traditionally goes on the symbolic Seder Plate, and her grandson went over to her refrigerator, took out a pork chop, and placed it on the Seder Plate.

Even at this home, however contradictory, some confused semblance of Pesach ritual stubbornly persists. More than with other traditions, some mysterious spiritual energy emanating from Pesach cuts deeper and longer into the collective Jewish conscience. Why?

Another question: The dominant recurring number in the Haggadah is four: We drink four cups of wine, we ask the "Four Questions," we tell of the "Four Sons." What is the connection between Pesach and the number four?

King Solomon says in Proverbs "Listen, my son, to your father's ethic, and do not abandon the law of your mother." Without an investment of focused effort one does not acquire the ethic of one's father. Hence the phrasing, "Listen to the ethic of your father." The "father's ethic" is encountered externally, like a voice. It must be engaged, admitted, and assimilated. Only then to be internalized.

"The law of your mother," on the other hand, is axiomatic. Innate, coming with the territory of being born Jewish, it functions intuitively. Hence the nega-

tive phrasing, "Don't abandon the law of your mother." Every Jew is imbued with this given intuition; to abandon it requires an active rejection. When passive, it lingers at least subliminally.

This "law of your mother" can be described as minimal Jewishness. The Hebrew word "Uma" — nation — is from the same root as "Ima" — mother. Jewishness (apart from conversion) is established by having a Jewish mother, the given of one's being. Whereas "listening to the ethic of one's father" is presented to us as choice, with accountability. It is an act of freewill, at times realized and at times not.

Under the yoke of Egyptian slavery only an elite core of Jews exercised this option, listening to "the ethic of your father." For the rank and file, the vast number of Jews, there remained only some vestiges of Jewish identity — the "law of one's mother," the matriarchal mode.

Yet, this very "minimal Jewishness" was the pivot upon which the salvation would swing. That residual lingering consciousness sufficed to connect to the heritage and redemption. Without this minimum Jewishness the floodgates of total assimilation would have burst open.

Providential guidance determined that history take another course. In Egypt, minimal Jewish identity remained. The precariousness of that identity heightened the urgency for immediate exodus.

Why is the number four a dominant recurring theme in the Haggadah? The number four symbolizes the Matriarchs. Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. This, "the matriarchal four," this "law of our Mothers" is what sustains us in exile.

**Four More Questions...***continued from page eighteen*

Egypt would be a paradigm for all future exiles. Having built up sufficient antibodies to resist the malady of Egyptian exile, the Jewish nation could then survive all future exiles. The covenant guaranteeing Jewish continuity was made with the Patriarchs. Yet, the mechanism by which the pact functions is the matriarchal mode. Wandering through the bleak valleys of dispersion, minimal Jewishness would be the bridge connecting to the next peak of mitzvah performance, to the next moment of "listening to the ethic of your Father."

Returning to our original question: Why does Pesach linger so much longer in the collective unconscious of even so-called secular Jews? Just as a given space has its special combination of topography, minerals and climate, so time has its own unique landscape. When the calendar rolls around to that place in time called Pesach, the mystical minerals of that spiritual

lode can be mined. Returning to the "time-station" called Pesach, G-d reaches out to Israel just as He did that first Pesach. Every Jew feels, senses, a reactualization, a reawakening of the matriarchal root core, of his personal, and our national, identity.

When describing the father's dialogue with the son "who does not know how to ask a question," the Haggadah directs us: "You begin for him." The word "you" here is written in the feminine form. Here too, we see the matriarchal mode as the mechanism for maintaining minimal connection, even for the son who does not know enough to ask. That will bridge to the moment when the father can fulfill the mitzvah of "You shall tell it to your son." Ultimately, there will be that reunion of "Listen my son to the ethic of your father, and do not abandon the Torah of your mother." The mitzvah of the Haggadah is just such a moment of reunion.

## and even more *Short* PESACH Q&A

**Q:** *In the song "Dayenu" we say that if G-d brought us to Mount Sinai and did not give us the Torah it would have been enough. How can that be? Could you explain?*

**A:** Certainly we don't mean that we could envision life without the Torah, or without *any* of the fifteen "Ma'alot" mentioned in the song of Dayenu. What we mean is

that we have reason to be thankful for His bringing us to Mount Sinai; that just *being at Sinai* bestowed upon us great benefit. The incredible unity that we experienced, the cleansing from the effects of the sin of Adam and Eve, and the closeness to G-d that we achieved, were all so precious that they deserve thanksgiving and praise in their own right.

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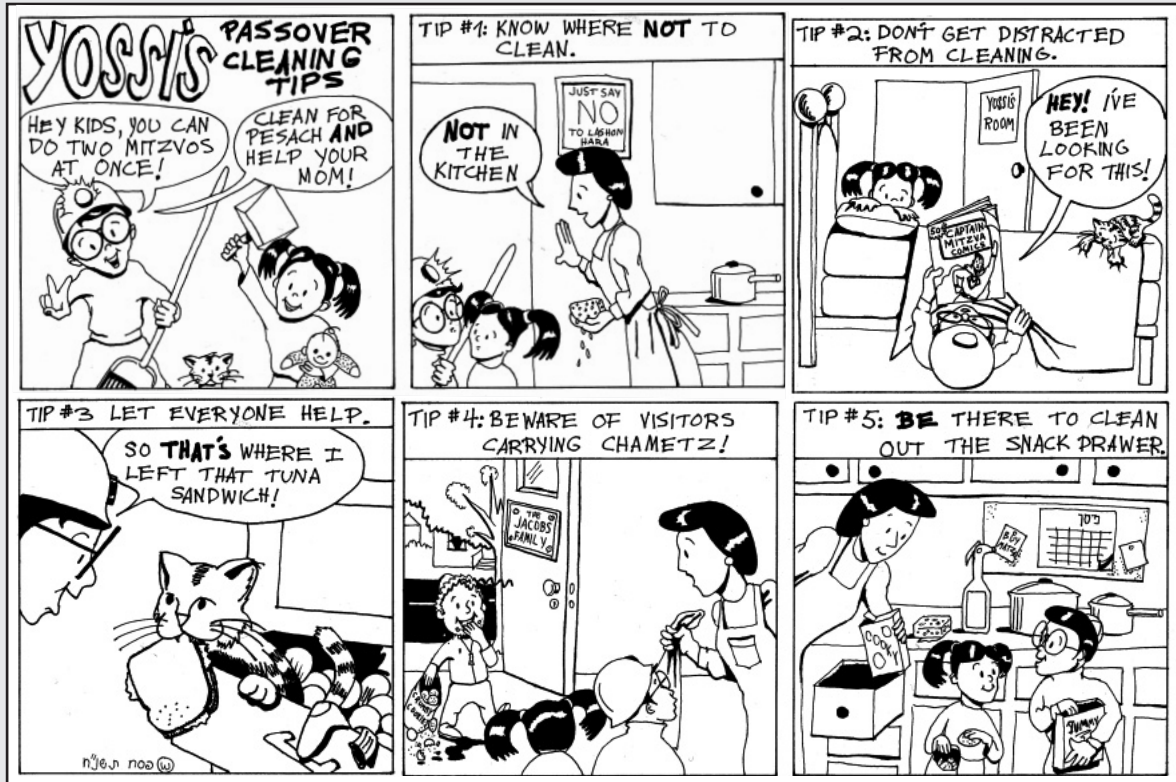
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