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A Publication of Chabad Lubavitch of Rochester

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# Invest in Futures!

Back in 1717, King Frederick ordered every child in Prussia to go to school. People thought he was quite the maverick. France didn't follow suit for another hundred years, while England and the U.S.A. waited for their mandatory universal education laws until the end of the 19th century. But Frederick was still behind by 3,020 years.

That's when the Torah commanded the Jewish people to teach their children and become a literate nation.

From ancient times, the Jews were the only nation where education and literacy was the norm rather than the privilege of an elite. Sixteen and a half centuries before Frederick, just before the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, a High Priest named Joshua ben Gamla

ordered every Jewish community to establish schools for underprivileged children, supported by a communal tax. And so it was that the Jews managed to stay an educated, literate class in the darkest of times.

As would be expected, Jewish educational methods were far ahead of anything the rest of the world had seen. The Mishnah and the Talmud demanded critical-thinking skills. The practice of studying in pairs and learning out loud taught the art of dialogue. A good student was one who asked good questions and "made his teacher wiser."

Then something bizarre occurred: As the walls of the ghetto fell, Jews began to opt for the relatively neophyte educational institutions of the host society. For many, Jewish education become a wayside operation, after regular school hours, taught by those who couldn't get a job elsewhere.

Recently, however, that trend has dramatically reversed. Jewish day schools are popping up everywhere today like mushrooms and Jews are pulling their kids out of public school to enroll in them. Here are some weighty factors:



1. A child is more than a data processor. And life demands more than knowledge and marketable skills. Parents want their kids to have some spiritual and ethical basis to their lives - something that public schools are prevented from providing in many countries by law. Jewish traditions are the basis of ethics in our society and they are rich in spiritual inspiration.

2. In a confusing world, Jewish identity provides solid ground to grow from. Identifying as a member of the most resilient nation in history with roots 4,000 years deep, a child is imbued with confidence and pride to face the world and make a difference.

3. We have a long tradition of teaching people to think for themselves and yet be firmly grounded in tradition. And as Jews, we can't think of anything more valuable in life than ensuring our children will receive the best and strive for the best. That's why Jewish day school students on average score much higher in all subjects than the general population.

4. Parents who enroll their children in a Jewish school find their lives enriched as they become part of a vibrant, growing community. They learn, they make friends and they grow.

5. We've had a rude awakening. We've seen first-hand that without Jewish education there can be no Jewish people. Enrollment in a day school, including at the secondary level, turns out to be a major factor in whether a Jew will marry a Jewish spouse.

Passover, the Holiday of the child's Four Questions, is a fitting time for us all to resolve to strengthen Jewish education for all our children!

Wishing you a Kosher and Happy Pesach - This year in Jerusalem with Moshiach!

*Chabad Lubavitch of Rochester*

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## WHY CELEBRATE PASSOVER IN EXILE?

Based on the works of the Rebbe  
by Yossy Goldman

We will soon be celebrating Passover, the Festival of Freedom, and yet, since the original Exodus and liberation, we have again lost our freedom. The Babylonians destroyed our First Temple, the Romans the Second, and we became a wandering people for millennia.

Even today, as powerfully impressive as the Western Wall may be, it is only a remnant of the glorious Holy Temple that is yet to be rebuilt.

So why do we continue to celebrate the anniversary of our liberation when that very freedom was subsequently lost?

The answer was given back in the 16th century by the holy Rabbi Judah Lowe. Known as the Maharal, he was a mystic, halachist, philosopher, and chief rabbi of Prague.

The Maharal writes that the Exodus forever changed the inner identity of the Jew. Leaving Egypt set us free, not only physically, but we became forever spiritually and psychologically free. Not only did G-d take us out of Egypt, He also took slavery out of our internal system.

The Exodus was not just a one-off historical event, or a fantastic, dramatic story that we retell every year at our Passover Seders. No. The Exodus was a spiritual revolution which changed the mentality, the mindset, the psyche, and the very nature of a Jew forever. Freedom became wired into our national DNA. We are, by definition, a free people, and nothing and no one can ever change that.

And so, the Season of our Liberation is indeed worthy of eternal remembrance.

The Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, of righteous memory, spiritual leader of Russian Jewry in the 1920's, fought the Communists tooth and nail. They were

hellbent on eradicating Jewish practice in Russia, but with unwavering commitment the Rebbe and his chassidim kept Jewish schools, shuls and mikvahs going clandestinely. Many paid with their lives, including both my wife's grandfathers.

The Rebbe himself was arrested and sentenced to death, but even in prison he remained resolute. Miraculously, his sentence was commuted to 10 years of exile in Kostroma, a few hundred miles from Moscow.

Yet the Rebbe came out  
and addressed the crowd  
- knowing full well that  
every word he said would  
be reported to the  
Communist authorities

Leningrad, 1927. The Rebbe was on the train about to go into exile. Many hundreds of chassidim came to the train station to bid him farewell. The place was packed with uniformed officers, members of the secret police, and Jewish informants. Yet the Rebbe came out and addressed the crowd. Knowing full well that every word he said would be reported to the Communist authorities, he said:

*"May G-d be with us as He was with our ancestors; may He not forsake us nor abandon us..." Only our bodies went into exile, but not our souls... We must proclaim openly before all that with regard to any matter of our faith - Torah, mitzvahs and Jewish custom - it is not subject to the opinion of others, nor can any oppressive force be used against it...*

*...This is our request to the Holy One, may He not forsake us nor abandon us. G-d should give us true strength to be unintimidated by physical pain,*



*and on the contrary to accept it with joy, so that every punishment we receive for supporting a cheder (Jewish school), for learning Torah, for performing mitzvahs, shall increase our fortitude in the holy work of strengthening Judaism.*

*We must remember that imprisonment and hard labor are only temporary things, whereas Torah, mitzvahs and the Jewish people are eternal...*

How powerful! What courage, defiance, and unbelievable faith.

What was the Rebbe's bottom-line message? Only our bodies can go into exile, but not our souls. The neshama does not go into galut. They may imprison and enslave our bodies, but the soul of a Jew is always free.

Miraculously, after only 10 days in exile the Rebbe was released and permitted to leave Russia. He spent time in Riga and in Poland before arriving in the United States in 1940, where he re-established the center of Chabad until his passing in 1950.

The Rebbe was not only echoing the words of the Maharal; he was living proof.

Which brings me to April 1943, the very last Pesach Seder in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Brave, defiant Jewish fighters courageously fought back against the

mighty Nazi war machine from the rooftops, while down below, in the cellars, a Pesach Seder was taking place. They found a white tablecloth to cover the table, and candles. They even managed to bake matzah in the ghetto! Marror they had enough of; there was no shortage of bitterness there.

Can you imagine the child asking the *Mah Nishtanah* that night?! Some of the Jews at that Seder in Warsaw survived the war. Most did not. But the faith, the courage, the defiance, and the sense of inner freedom to even attempt to hold a Seder in those circumstances is awe-inspiring.

Or how about the Jews who risked their lives to bake matzah in the concentration camps? I knew one of them personally - Reb Yankel Friedman. He joined the holy Klausenberger Rebbe in the dangerous secret mission to bake matzahs inside the camps.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam, lost his wife and 11 children in the Holocaust. He survived and ended up in New York, where he rebuilt his family, and

his community. Later he moved to Israel and the Laniado Hospital in Netanya is just one of many institutions he built. He was a giant of spirit and inspired many thousands with his indomitable faith under fire.

And that innate freedom of the Jew is likewise embodied in the story of Pini Nahmani. On Thursday, April 2, 1970, an Israeli fighter jet was shot down over Syria. The pilot, 26-year-old Pini Nahmani, was imprisoned in the Al Mazza jail in Damascus. He was later freed as part of a prisoner exchange between the two countries.

Pini wrote about his time in prison. With Passover approaching, he and his two fellow Israelis inmates prepared for a Seder. They scrubbed the floor and painted a Seder plate on a piece of cardboard. They had two Haggadahs and some matzah from the chief rabbi of Zurich.

Boaz Eitan, the youngest, asked the Mah Nishtanah, the Four Questions. They ate matzah and they sang. They sang all their

favorite Passover songs; the songs of their youth. They sang so loudly that the prison guards warned them to tone it down or they would be sent to solitary confinement. But they ignored the guards. They felt free and they kept singing.

Pini later wrote that his most memorable and inspirational Seder was the one he celebrated in that Damascus prison.

Stripped of everything, including their dignity, he and his fellow Israelis were determined to remain free men and faithful Jews, despite the torture and the terror. And they did. Miraculously, they lived to tell the tale.

As the Maharal taught, ever since the Exodus, every Jew possesses that innate, unbreakable sense of freedom. This Passover, may we tap into it and let it liberate us from the drudgery and mediocrity to achieve true, inner freedom.

## THE CRY OF A CHILD

When Rabbi DovBer was a young man, he lived in the same house as his father, Rabbi Schneur Zalman. Rabbi DovBer and his family lived on the ground floor, and Rabbi Schneur Zalman lived on the second floor.

One night, while Rabbi DovBer was deeply engrossed in his studies, his youngest child fell out of his cradle. Rabbi DovBer heard nothing. But Rabbi Schneur Zalman, who was also immersed in study in his room on the second floor, heard the infant's cries. He came downstairs, lifted the infant from the floor, soothed his tears, replaced him in the cradle, and rocked him to sleep. Rabbi DovBer remained oblivious throughout it all.

Later, Rabbi Schneur Zalman admonished his son: "No matter how lofty your involvements, you must never fail to hear the cry of a child."

Says the Rebbe: "Today, so many Jewish children of all ages, have 'fallen out of the cradle' of their heritage. Their souls cry out to us, and we must have the sensitivity to hear their cries and to respond. We must do everything in our power to sooth these desperate souls and restore them to their cradle."

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# RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF TERROR

Australian terror attack revealed a new dimension in Texas Chabad emissary's life and work

For nearly three decades, Manya Lazaroff has been doing what all of her fellow Chabad rebbetzins, have been doing proudly and consistently - firing up the Jewish spark in every soul.

This past Chanukah, that mission was tested when her 20-year-old son, Leibel, was shot by terrorists at the Bondi Beach Menorah Lighting in Sydney.

Together with her husband, Rabbi Yossi Lazaroff, Manya co-directs the Rohr Chabad Jewish Center at Texas A&M University in College Station, one of the largest university campuses in the United States. With more than 70,000 students - and only a few hundred Jewish ones - College Station is both geographically and culturally isolated. The nearest major Jewish communities are hours away. Here, Jewish life is unexpected, but at Chabad, it's bustling day and night.

Torah classes are packed throughout the week, along with guys' nights and girls' nights, and BBQs. At Kosher Cooking Club on Thursdays, you'll find students braiding challah, singing, and absorbing what it feels like to prepare for Shabbat. On Friday nights close to a hundred students gather around the table for the traditional meal. On Shabbat mornings, prayer, study, meals, and conversations stretch long into the afternoon. The goal, Manya explains, is not uniform outcomes, but encouraging Jewish students to take pride and ownership of their Judaism by taking action, one mitzvah at a time.

"Every student's journey looks different," she says. "Every pivotal moment is unique. For one student, it means telling people they're Jewish. For another, putting on tefillin. For another, building a Jewish home. The privilege is being part of that journey."

On a campus where Jewish students are a small minority, Manya and Rabbi Yossi - who have been there for 19 years - empower them to see themselves as ambassadors. "They keep their eyes out looking for the other Jewish students on campus," Manya proudly explains. "And when they find them, they invite them into our community. They see it more like a close-knit family, and that's exactly how we want it."

The nine Lazaroff children have been raised around this unusual family. Far away from the nearest typical Jewish

community, these kids grew up with friends aged 18 to their early 20s. They come along to help out at events and sit at Shabbat tables side by side with the students.

This does not come without particular difficulties: At these tables, the children are exposed to the type of conversations that college students typically have, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. Very early on, Manya and her husband saw the unique challenges their children faced growing up in such an environment, nurturing them through it until it became a strength. It took attentive focus and open conversations and ultimately led to a special closeness within the family, and the children gained a deeper understanding of the world around them.

"When you raise children in this environment," Manya says, "they know who they are. They know why they're here. It builds resilience."

That resilience would soon come in handy in a way the Lazaroffs never imagined.

During the predawn hours of Sunday, Dec. 14, the morning before Chanukah, Manya and Rabbi Yossi were asleep when their phones began ringing nonstop. They woke up to dozens of missed calls and messages from students and friends trying to reach them from around the world.

Their son, Leibel, was in Sydney, Australia, where he was working as an assistant to Rabbi Eli Schlanger at Chabad of Bondi. He had helped organize a massive public Chanukah celebration at Bondi Beach.

A niece arrived at their door and told them there had been a terror attack at the event, when two terrorists opened fire on the unsuspecting attendees. Fifteen were killed and forty injured.

At first, all they knew was that Leibel had been shot. Rabbi Schlanger too - and it didn't look good. It took several phone calls and a lot of help from locals in Australia until they finally located their son.

"Deep inside, I knew he was alive, I knew he would be OK," says Manya. "I had been learning and teaching Shaar Habitachon - a classic work all about trust in G-d. Those lessons were now being put into practice at the most real level. Now I knew that I had to focus on the logistics and leave the rest up to G-d. We were in His hands."

The Lazaroffs soon learned that Leibel had been through

A niece arrived at their door and told them there had been a terror attack at the Menorah Lighting.  
Two terrorists had opened fire...  
Fifteen were killed and forty injured.  
Their son, Leibel, had been shot.

prayed in his merit.

“That’s why I’m alive,” he told his mother.

Before surgery, he had understood the stakes clearly. “Either I wake up,” he said, “or I don’t.” When he did finally wake up, he said, he felt not only gratitude but purpose.

Back at Texas A&M, Chanukah at Chabad continued.

A visitor later described walking into the Chabad center that Sunday afternoon expecting heaviness, grief, and silence. Instead, he found music, movement, and preparation for the campus menorah lighting. Students - and even Leibel’s siblings - were asking how they could help others.

On campus that night, hundreds gathered to light the menorah. One of Manya’s sons looked out at the crowd and thought: This is who we are.

“We don’t pretend it doesn’t hurt,” she says. “But we also don’t shrink.”

Leibel’s time in Sydney was meant to last longer, until September 2026. He had fully dedicated himself to his role - studying Torah, teaching, organizing, cooking, shopping for Shabbat, delivering soup to the elderly. He had found a place where all his gifts were needed.

That chapter ended abruptly, as he finally returned home to Texas to continue his recovery, seven weeks after the attack. The sense of an uncompleted mission is real. But Manya sees his work continuing in a different form.

“He knows why he was there,” she says. “And he knows that this is also part of it. We’re not going to be worse for the wear,” she says. “We’re going to be more united. Stronger. That doesn’t happen on its own - it takes work. But we’re stubborn.”

Since October 7, and especially since the Bondi attack, Manya has watched Jewish students on her campus grow louder, prouder, more visible.

“The common response to threats and intimidation is to hide and retreat,” she says. “This time, it’s the opposite.”

Her message is direct. “Fear is immobilizing. It makes our light smaller. And that’s exactly what darkness wants.” The Jewish response, she says, is not to obsess over every act of hatred but to add light. That’s what the Rebbe taught us. Darkness isn’t chased away by fighting it - it’s diminished by light.”

For Manya, Lazaroff that idea is no longer theoretical. It has been tested, lived, and chosen again and again. And it continues to shine.



a life - saving surgery. He had been shot multiple times while saving an injured police officer, and was in critical condition.

Within hours, the Lazaroffs were on their way to Australia, leaving their younger children - aged four, two, and one - with their older children and daughters - in - law. The journey from College Station to Sydney took nearly two days.

Somewhere along the way, in an airport, they lit the Chanukah menorah. An Israeli waiter joined them. The Lazaroffs told him about their son, and he spoke about his parents’ experience with persecution when they were expelled from Iraq. Together, they shared hope and faith. The Lazaroffs’ instinct to keep spreading the light of Chanukah was not shaken.

Before boarding her flight, Manya wrote a message that would later circulate widely: “...The trauma is real, the feelings so heavy and yet - we can NOT allow the darkness to become internal.”

This was darkness against light, she explained. An existential struggle. We could not allow the darkness to have power over us, to define our narrative. It was time to shine as ambassadors of light. She realized in that moment, that she was being asked to live what she had spent decades teaching.

“For years, we have taught these ideas - about challenges, about faith. And suddenly, I had to step into them,” she says. “My role as a Chabad emissary gave me the tools to handle this insanity.”

When they arrived in Sydney, Leibel was still unconscious. He would eventually undergo eleven surgeries.

But he was never alone. Fellow Chabad emissaries, Jewish community members, students - people he had known for only weeks - filled his hospital room in shifts. They brought holy books and a menorah. They prayed by his bedside. Nurses watched in amazement as strangers treated one another like family.

When Leibel woke from his medically induced coma, he began to understand what had been happening beyond the hospital walls. He also learned that thousands of people around the world had wrapped tefillin, lit menorahs, and





The Matzah Bakery. Original lithograph by Michael Muchnik

## Passover Guide 5786 - 2026

### What Is Pesach - Passover?

On Pesach we celebrate the liberation of the Jewish People - not just our physical liberation from Egyptian slavery, but also our spiritual freedom from the 'abominations of Egypt'. The civilization of ancient Egypt was steeped in idolatry and immorality. Beyond that, however, the name 'Egypt' - '*Mitzrayim*', in Hebrew - implies 'limitations', or narrow straits. In a very real sense, freedom from the 'abominations of Egypt' is freedom from narrowness of mind, freedom from a constricted heart.

The Torah laws concerning Pesach, besides being G-dly commandments, are to help us experience this spirit of freedom. This guide, though concise, covers some practical details, the significance of the Seder, basic Pesach laws plus useful tips and profound insights to enhance your Passover experience.

### Preparing The Home

*What Is Chametz?* Unique to Pesach is the eating of Matzah (Please Note: Matzah used all year round is not for Pesach use. Only Matzah baked especially for Pesach may be used on Pesach), and the stringent prohibition of eating or possessing Chametz. Chametz is a general term for all food and drink made from wheat, barley, rye, oats, spelt or their derivatives, which is forbidden on Pesach because it is leavened. Even a food that contains only a small trace of Chametz is prohibited and must be removed from our homes.

*Getting Rid of Chametz:* Obvious Chametz - both food and utensils used throughout the year (and not koshered for Pesach) - should be stored in closets or rooms that are not easily accessible (locked or taped shut). It should be sold to a non-Jew by filling out the sale form on page 3.

Clean the entire house thoroughly to remove all crumbs and small pieces of food. Also check for Chametz in the car and office (desks and drawers, etc.) clothes, pockets (especially the children's), pocketbooks, and attaché cases. Vacuum cleaner bags should be discarded or cleaned.

### Kitchen Koshering

To prepare the kitchen for Pesach, we must kosher it from Chametz that has been cooked in it.

*Dishes and Utensils:* Have special sets of dishes, silverware, pots, pans and other utensils for Pesach use only. (If necessary, certain 'year-round' utensils may be used provided they are koshered for Pesach. To do so, consult a Rabbi.)

*Stove:* Thoroughly clean and scour every part of the stove. Heat the oven to the highest temperature possible for 1-2 hours. Heat the grates and the iron parts of the stove until they glow red-hot. It is suggested that the oven and stovetop should be covered afterwards with aluminum foil.

*Microwave Ovens:* Clean the oven thoroughly. Fill a clean container (that was not used for 24 hours) with water. Turn on the microwave and let it steam heavily. Turn it off and wipe out the inside. To use the microwave during Pesach, use a flat piece of styrofoam or any other thick object, as a separation between the bottom of the oven and the cooking dish. When cooking, the food should be covered from all sides.

*Sink:* Meticulously clean the sink. For 24 hours before koshering it, do not pour hot water from Chametz pots into the sink. Afterwards, boil water in a clean pot (that was not used for 24 hours), and pour water 3 times onto every part of the sink, including the drain stopper. Afterwards, line the sink.

*Refrigerator, Freezer, Cupboards, Closets, Tables and Counters:* Thoroughly clean and scrub to remove any crumbs and residue. Afterwards, cover with a heavy covering those surfaces that come into contact with hot food or utensils.

*Tablecloths and Napkins:* Launder without starch.

### Shopping For Pesach

While shopping for Pesach we must be careful that the

foods we buy are not only kosher but are also kosher-for-Pesach - that is, Chametz-free.

*Starting From 'Scratch':* All fresh fruits and vegetables as well as all kosher cuts of meat and kosher fish are kosher for Pesach - provided they have been prepared in accordance with Jewish law and have not come into contact with Chametz or Chametz utensils.

The prevailing Ashkenazic custom is that we do not eat on Pesach rice, millet, corn, mustard, legumes, (beans, etc.), or their derivatives.

*Commercially Prepared Products:* Nowadays, there are many Kosher-for-Pesach packaged foods available. However, care must be used to purchase only those packaged foods that have reliable Rabbinical supervision which is valid for Pesach.

Obviously, all leavened foods made from wheat, barley, rye, oats or spelt are actual Chametz and are prohibited on Pesach. Examples are bread, cake, cereal, spaghetti, beer and whiskey.

Check The Medicine Cabinet! Many medicines, sprays and cosmetics contain Chametz. Consult a competent Rabbi as to which ones may be used on Pesach. The same applies to pet food.

## Pesach Calendar

On the evening before Pesach, make a formal search of the home for Chametz while holding a lit candle. It is customary to distribute ten small individually wrapped pieces of Chametz throughout the home before the search.

*The Blessing:* Recite the following blessing before the search: *Boruch AtoH Ado-noi Elo-hei-nu Melech Ha-olom Asher Kidishanu Bemitzvo-tov Vetzi-vanu Al Bi-ur Chametz.* Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by His commandments, and has commanded us to remove the leaven.

*The Search:* Afterwards, hold the lit candle and search for Chametz in every room, as well as any other areas of the home that may have Chametz, such as the basement, attic, garage, or car.

When the search is completed, recite the following: 'All leaven or anything leavened which is in my possession, which I have neither seen nor removed, and about which I am unaware, shall be considered naught and ownerless as the dust of the earth.'

Then take all the Chametz that was found in the search, cover it securely and place it in a conspicuous spot - this Chametz will be burned on Friday morning. Food intended to be sold or eaten later should similarly be carefully put aside. The search should also be conducted in one's place of business.

*Erev Pesach - Burning The Chametz:* On the morning of Erev Pesach, (Passover Eve), Chametz may be eaten only

in the early hours of the morning (see calendar for exact time). Burn the Chametz that was found during the previous evening's search, or that was left over from breakfast and not included with the Chametz that was sold to the non-Jew. See calendar for the latest time to burn the Chametz.

After the Chametz is thrown into the fire, recite the following: 'All leaven or anything leavened which is in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have observed it or not, whether I have removed it or not shall be completely considered naught and ownerless as the dust of the earth.'

Only Kosher for Pesach foods may be eaten. However, we do not eat Matzah until the Seder.

*The Intermediate Days:* In between the first two and last two days of Pesach, go ahead and function relatively normally. The only exception is, like your mother keeps telling you, you shouldn't work too hard. But keep the wine flowing; it's a custom to drink a glass of wine every day of Pesach.

*Last But Not Least:* On the last day of Pesach Yizkor memorial prayers are recited during services. Following the custom of the Baal Shem Tov, Pesach concludes with the 'Feast of Moshiah' - a festive meal complete with Matzah and, yes, four cups of wine. It begins before sunset and is designed to offer us a 'glimpse' into the Messianic age. Nightfall marks the conclusion of Pesach. Wait a while to give the Rabbi enough time to buy back your Chametz and then eat Chametz to your heart's content!

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# Matzah: Food of Faith

## Your Guide to Enjoying Shmurah Matzah

The traditional Passover matzah has no sugar, salt, yeast, or eggs, yet surprisingly, it packs all the essential Divine ingredients we all need. The following are hand-selected tasty gems on the significance of eating matzah on Passover. Enjoy!

**"Why do we eat matzah? Because our ancestors' dough had no time to rise when G-D revealed himself and redeemed them for Egypt."**

*-The Passover Haggadah*

### MATZAH

The thin matzah is definitely the eldest of all Jewish foods. The Jews left Egypt in such a rush they did not wait for their bread dough to rise.

The Haggadah calls the matzah "poor man's bread," as the matzah has no yeast, sugar, eggs, oil, or even salt.

Spiritually, the matzah is humbled by witnessing G-d's extraordinary blessings, so it doesn't rise with any ego.

### HUMBLE BREAD

Humility is not weakness; it empowers us. Humility is an awareness that we have limitations, but our G-d doesn't. This humility empowered Moses to face Pharaoh and David to face Goliath. True humility manifests in a newfound strength from knowing that an infinite G-d is performing wonders through you.

### EDIBLE FAITH

Matzah becomes an edible expression of faith when eaten with a blessing at the Passover seder. Its power lies in the Divine spark embedded in the commandment to eat matzah on Passover. By physically digesting the matzah, we internalize holiness and experience true freedom—an impact that goes beyond merely seeing, reading, or meditating on the Exodus.

### HEALING BREAD

Matzah is celebrated as the bread of faith and humility—intentionally made thin and unrisen to symbolize the absence of ego. The matzah inspires a faith that not only heals but also prevents illness.

### TOXIN-FREE

Like the Passover offering, Jewish law requires us to eat the afikoman on a full stomach as an enjoyable dessert. This law tells us that your hunger and need for G-dliness have brought you this far, but ultimately, your Divine service should go beyond your hunger and needs. Savor this more selfless and heightened Afikoman service like a dessert that stays with you long after the meal ends.

### PIECE IT TOGETHER

We begin telling the Passover story by first breaking the matzah. This demonstrates how our brokenness is only a beginning chapter in our tale of complete redemption. In the end, it's your brokenness that makes you whole.

### IMPOSSIBLE BREAD

"This is the bread of affliction" that our ancestors ate when they thought redemption was impossible. But it happened, and now it will happen for you.

(ADAPTED FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE REBBE)



### WHAT IS SHEMURAH MATZAH?

It only takes eighteen minutes for wet flour to become leavened or chametz. So, Shmurah Matzah, or guarded matzah, is made from verified wheat that's "guarded" from moisture during the entire process, from harvest to final product. Hand-made Shmurah Matzah is produced and baked quickly in increments of less than eighteen minutes from when the water comes in contact with the flour. The human touch infuses the process with the intended purpose of being baked for a mitzvah.

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## Journey To The Center Of The Seder

The Seder may appear like a drawn-out series of rituals, repeated year after year. But when it is experienced, we tap into the liberation energy that is present and break free from our personal bondage. Experiencing the Seder is like ascending a spiral staircase - we pass over the same points, but each year we reach a higher level.

To enhance your Seder, we describe the Seder Plate and highlight the 15 Seder steps, dividing them into “Body,” “Soul” and “Personal Application”. “Body” describes what we do at each step and how; “Soul” explores its deeper meaning; and “Personal Application” suggests an example of its effect on our daily lives.



### The Seder Plate

The Seder Plate (Ka'arah) includes most of the ingredients that go into the making of the Seder. Its three matzahs and the six other items are arranged in a formation dictated by their mystical significance and relationship vis-a-vis each other.

Here's how you set it up:

On top of a large plate, tray or cloth place three whole matzahs, one on top of the other. It's best to use round, hand-baked shmurah matzah. Cover the matzahs with a cloth or tray. On top, position the following six items as pictured above right:

1) “Zera” - a roasted chicken bone with most of the meat removed. This will represent the Passover offering. It will not be eaten.

2) “Beitzah” - a hard-boiled egg, representing the festival offering.

3) “Maror” - grated horseradish (just the horseradish -- not the red stuff that has vinegar and beets added) and/or romaine lettuce, for use as the “bitter herbs” (step #9).

4) “Charoset” - a paste made of apples, pears, nuts and wine. We'll be dipping the bitter herbs in this (steps 9 and 10).

5) “Karpas” - a bit of vegetable, such an onion or potato (used in step #3).

6) “Chazeret” - more bitter herbs, for use in the matzah-maror sandwich (step #10).

We'll also need a wine cup or goblet for each participant, and plenty of wine or grape juice (four cups each). And a dish of salt water (in which to dip the Karpas).

Matzah is unleavened bread. It's made from flour (from one of the “five types of grain” - wheat, barley, oats, rye or spelt) and water only - absolutely nothing else - that are swiftly combined, kneaded and baked before the dough has a chance to ferment and begin to rise. It looks something like a large, round flat cracker. It tastes simply delicious.

Matzah may be flat, but it has many faces: it is the “bread of affliction” and the “bread of poverty” which our forefathers ate as slaves in Egypt. It's the “bread of proclamation” over which we tell the story of the Exodus. It's the “bread of humility” that represents our self-abnegating commitment to G-d, and the “bread of faith” that embodies our simple faith, trust and devotion to Him. It's the “bread of healing” with which we imbibe spiritual wholeness and wellness into our beings.

Shemurah matzah (“guarded matzah”) is made from grain that is guarded from the time it was harvested lest it come in contact with even the merest hint of water or moisture. It is baked by hand, with the specific intention and awareness that it will be used as a vehicle of G-dly connection - to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah on seder night. (No machine can do that, can it?)

## 1. KADESH - SANCTIFICATION

**BODY:** It's been a busy week, or a busy year. The first step tonight is to forget the noise and leave it behind. Tonight we enter a timeless space, where we experience the Seder together with our great-grandparents and Moses. How do we begin? With a full cup of red wine. A cup filled with generations of rejoicing and tears and celebration and wisdom, and of doing just what we will do tonight.



Fill a cup with wine (or grape juice). That's cup #1. You can have someone else fill your cup. Then return the favor. This way, we are all like nobility, whose cups are filled by someone else. Make sure your cup holds at least 86 mil. (a little more than three ounces).

Everyone stands and says Kiddush together. The rest of the year, one person says Kiddush for everyone at the table. Tonight, each man, woman and child recites every word together.

Drink. And get ready for some serious relaxing. Recline on a cushion to your left side. Remember the ancient times, when we used to recline on our couches while sampling

grapes? That's what we are dramatizing by reclining now. Tonight we are free.

**SOUL:** Every journey begins with a separation. You've got to leave somewhere to get somewhere else. In this way, separation is the first step to freedom. By ignoring the negative voice of Pharaoh's mockery that says, "Who are you to begin such a journey?", we're ready to leave Egypt behind.

Separation is the first meaning of the word kadesh – to transcend the mundane world. Once you've set yourself free from those things that hold you down, you can achieve the second meaning of the word kadesh – to return and sanctify it. Spiritual freedom is achieved through sanctifying the material world, using its elements as physical expressions of a higher purpose. The first two steps of the Seder, Kadesh (to separate/sanctify) and Urchatz (purify), describe what we set out to accomplish through this night: to rise above the restraints of our world in order to elevate it.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION: Bondage Mentality:** Look, I'm a down-to-earth kind of person. I'm trying to manage real life. I can't get into this spirituality stuff. Let's just get to the Matzah. **Freedom Mentality:** I can master my world by staying above it. I come to the Seder to get that strength.

*Kadesh - Time to split!*

## 2. URCHATZ - PURIFICATION

**BODY:** Fill a cup with water. You could leave the table to go to the kitchen or you could bring a basin and towel to the table. (What? We just sat down and now we have to get up and leave? Well, that's a fairly standard Jewish migration pattern.)



Pour the water over your right hand three times, then over your left hand three times. That's how the Kohanim (priests) washed when they entered the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Dry your hands.

Throughout the year we wash this way for bread and we would say a blessing at this point, but not now. When we wash the second time before eating the Matzah, we'll say it then.

**SOUL:** Our hands are the instruments that allow the mind to interact with its environment. Our hands reflect our mental state, and act according to our emotions: love, fear, compassion, the urge to win, to be appreciated, to express ourselves, to dominate. But too often the aspects of our

psyche sit compartmentalized, detached from one another. The mind sees one way, the heart feels another, and our interface with the world is disoriented.

Water symbolizes wisdom. Flowing downward from on-high, everything in its stream is affected by its pure and simple essence. We pour water over our hands so that our heart and emotions may be touched by wisdom, and from there shape our interaction with the world.

A wise rabbi asked, "Wouldn't it make more sense to wash first and then say Kiddush? To first purify, so you can then sanctify?" Then he answered, "First you need to get out of the pit, and then to clean up your act. That's why G-d first took us out of Egypt and only then had us purify ourselves for 49 days in the wilderness to prepare us for the revelations at Mount Sinai."

**PERSONAL APPLICATION: Bondage Mentality:** Just react. Let your instinct be your guide. **Freedom Mentality:** Count to 10. Let your mind and heart talk things over with one another.

*Urchatz - It's a clean scene!*

## 3. KARPAS - THE APPETIZER

**BODY:** Take a small piece of vegetable (onion, potato, parsley). The rest of the year, we would be getting to the meal now. But we're doing things differently tonight, principally to spark questions from the small children. If



they ask, "Hey mom and dad! Aren't we supposed to eat real food now? Why the funny green stuff?" - you know you're doing things right.

How do you answer them? "We are doing this so that you will ask questions. You can't learn if you don't ask questions. And the first thing to learn is that not all questions

have immediate answers.” This is one of the most distinctive elements of Jewish education: more than we teach our children how to answer, we teach them how to ask - and how to be patient in their search for answers.

Dip it into saltwater. These are our tears, and the tears of all our people beginning with the tears of our labor in Egypt. Look at the Hebrew word Karpas and read it backwards, *Samach Perekh*. That refers to the backbreaking labor (*Perekh*) of the 600,000 Jewish slaves (Samach = 60 x 10,000). Say the blessing that is said over the vegetable, and munch it down. Munch well. You’re not going to get much more for a while.

*SOUL:* In order to liberate ourselves from Egypt, we need to taste its harshness again, because this harshness prepares us for freedom. This labor gives us the humble spirit to accept wisdom.

About the Seder and the Child: On the night that we left Egypt, we were like a newly hatched chick, breaking out of our shell to discover life and the light of day. It was with

those fresh eyes that we were able to experience wonder, to travel forth with faith and innocence and trust. So tonight, again, we enter the mind and heart of a child.

The child is the most important participant at the Seder. In fact, the entire Seder with all its customs revolves around the child. The Mitzvah of the Haggadah is “to tell the story to your child.” The child asks, we respond.

But more than the child learns from us, we learn from the child. We awaken the mystical child within us, the place that is still innocent and fresh and able to grow, to be amazed, to sense awe. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch once said, “If you want to know what it is like to see with the eyes of a prophet, to experience the Divine Spirit resting upon you, look at life the way you did as a child.”

*PERSONAL APPLICATION:* Bondage Mentality: I owe, I owe, so off to work I go. Freedom Mentality: My work helps me appreciate the higher things in life.

*Karpas - For bitter, or worse?*

#### 4. YACHATZ - BREAKING THE MATZAH

*BODY:* Remove the middle Matzah. We need the top Matzah to remain whole because we’ll make a blessing on it later on. (Blessings are said on whole things.) Break it in two different-sized pieces. Put the smaller piece back between the two complete Matzos.



The piece you put back is the “poor man’s bread” over which the tale of our slavery is recounted. Poor people only eat a small portion of their bread - saving the rest in case there is no more tomorrow.

Wrap the remaining (larger) piece in a cloth. Hide the package until the end of the Seder when it will be eaten as the Afikoman, or dessert. In many homes, the children hide the Afikoman and the adults have to find it at the end of the meal. In others, the adults hide it and the children find it. Either way, it keeps the kids awake and in suspense until the end of the Seder.

Some Sephardic Jews have the tradition of tying the Afikoman under the arms of the children, who carry it like that all night, just like when we left Egypt.

*SOUL:* Why is so much broken in this world? Why did the Creator make a world where hearts break, lives shatter, beauty crumbles?

Because a whole vessel can only contain its measure, while a broken one can hold the Infinite. Matzah is called the poor man’s bread. He is low and broken. And it is this being broken that allows him to open his soul and escape his Egypt. As long as we feel perfectly whole, there is no room left for us to grow. When we realize that we are just a fragment – that we need the others around us, that so much of ourselves is missing – then miracles begin.

*PERSONAL APPLICATION:* Bondage Mentality: I know who I am. Look at what I have achieved! Freedom Mentality: There is so much that I am lacking. I have only started to grow.

*Yachatz - Flat broke... got any bread?*

#### 5. MAGGID - THE HAGGADAH

This is it, folks. This is why it’s called a Haggadah. Now we get to the meat & potatoes your *SOUL:* is longing for. (As for the other meat & potatoes, you can probably smell them in the kitchen. Hold on, we’ll get there soon.)



*BODY:* Fill your cup with wine (or grape juice). That’s cup #2.

There are “four sons” at the Seder table, as described in the Haggadah. The second cup corresponds to the second

child - the “wicked” child. This is the cup the story is told over. The “wicked” child is the one who needs this story most, and the one who can really appreciate it. Children ask the Four Questions. Of course, they can always ask more. No children at your Seder? Let an adult ask. There’s just you? You be the child, and G-d will be the Father. While you’re at it, ask Him a few other difficult questions for us all.

Continue recounting the Passover story in the Haggadah. Hey, you’re not limited to the Haggadah! That was written so that everybody would have something to say. But now

is the chance to get creative. In addition to the Haggadah text, tell every story you know about the Exodus. Examine the Haggadah and get into its deeper meaning. Keep it real - make it profound.

Basic rules of telling the story: 1. Get the children involved. 2. Start with Abraham and Sarah and work your way through the Egyptian scene until we receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. 3. Tell it in the first person, in the now. Instead of, "Long ago, the ancient Hebrews. . ." say, "When we were slaves in Egypt, the perverse system crushed our sense of self." Everything that happened in Egypt parallels something within. We are truly living it now. We are simply examining our own lives in the dress of ancient Egypt. 4. It's all about miracles. Moses and his signs and wonders. The ten plagues. The splitting of the sea. These miracles happened so that we would look at the events of our lives and recognize that they too are miracles. Tell it like it is. We are a people born of miracles, who endured this long by abrogating natural law. The very fact that we are here now telling this same story to our children in an unbroken chain of thousands of years is beyond human comprehension.

We say a blessing and drink the second cup of wine at the end of this step.

*SOUL:* The Exodus is not simply an event that happened to us. It is an event that we became. It is who we are. It is the life of each one of us, occurring again and again, in our wrestling match with the world, in our struggle with our own selves. We embody freedom in a constant mode of escape. Perhaps that is why Jews have always been rebels of society.

The experience of leaving Egypt left such an indelible mark on our souls that we never stop doing it. A Jew who stops leaving Egypt ceases to allow his soul to breathe. The story brings our essential self into the open, and to come face-to-face with who we really are.

*PERSONAL APPLICATION:* Bondage Mentality: I'm free already. I live in a land of freedom. Who needs more freedom than that? Freedom Mentality: My body is free because my soul is free.

*Maggid - Tell the Story!*

## 6. ROCHTZOH - WASHING FOR MATZAH

*BODY:* Fill a cup with water. Again? Yes, again. It's been a long time since the last washing. (And it's good to get up and stretch a little.) Pour the water over your right hand three times, then over your left hand three times. Say the blessing: "Blessed... concerning the washing of the hands." Dry your hands.



*SOUL:* As long as we live in the world, freedom remains elusive. While moving forward, we are free. Stop, and we are fettered again.

That is why freedom is something that you cannot buy or steal. Never can you put freedom in your purse and say, "Freedom is mine forever!"

Spiritual freedom is like a marriage between our finite selves and the Infinite, providing the power to transcend

the material world while working inside of it. It is a marriage of heaven and earth, spirit and matter, soul and body. And like marriage, it is kept alive through constant renewal.

Our release from slavery was only the first step of our Exodus. We were granted eternal freedom – the power to perpetually transcend Egypt.

That's the order of the Seder tonight: Kadesh, Urchatz – Transcend and Purify. Over and over. Rise higher, then draw that into deeds. Rise higher again, draw even more. Never stop rising. Never stop applying.

*PERSONAL APPLICATION:* Bondage Mentality: Pass-over? Been there, done that! Freedom Mentality: Each year at the Seder, I discover new things that I just never saw before.

*Rochtzoh - Free your mind and the rest will follow!*

## 7. MOTZI - THANK G-D FOR BREAD

*BODY:* Grab all three Matzos - the top one, the broken middle one and the bottom one - and pick them up. Say the blessing: "Blessed... Who brings bread out of the earth."



This blessing, "Who brings bread out of the earth," may seem ordinary, even odd. But think about it: The earth upon which we tread germinates all the nutrients a human being needs to survive - it is the substance that powers our thoughts, creativity, music, art, philosophy, meditation, and prayer.

*SOUL:* We feel an affinity with foods we eat: we too are a miracle out of the earth. We share a common journey with bread. The bread begins as a seed buried beneath the ground. And then, a miracle occurs: as it decomposes and loses its original form, it comes alive, begins to sprout and grow. As Spring arrives, it pushes its way above the earth to find the sun, and then bears fruit for the world.

We too begin buried in Egypt, our identity all but lost. But that furnace of oppression becomes for us a firing kiln, a baker's oven, and the womb from whence we are born as a nation in the Spring. In our liberation, we bring our fruits of freedom to the world.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Bondage Mentality: I'm stuck here under the ground. Life is rotten. Freedom Mentality: My challenges in life help me discover the strength

of my soul.

*Motzi - You eat what you are!*

## 8. MATZAH - BLESSING & EATING

**BODY:** Carefully release the bottom Matzah. Recite the blessing on the top Matzah and the broken middle matzo: "Blessed...and commanded us concerning eating Matzah." Hold it! Didn't we just say a blessing on the Matzah bread? That blessing was for giving us what to eat. Now we bless G-d for connecting us to Him through the Mitzvah of eating Matzah.



Break off a piece from each of these two Matzos for yourself and for each of those sitting at your table. Pass them around. Everybody eats at least two thirds of a Matzah (one ounce from each Matzah - to do this, they will need to help themselves to an auxiliary reserve of Matzah.) Hey, it's a Mitzvah after all! Lean to the left while you munch.

**SOUL:** Since the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, Matzah is the only opportunity we have to actually eat a Mitzvah. That's right, the Matzah you are eating is pure G-dliness.

The Zohar calls Matzah, "Bread of Faith" and "Bread of Healing. "Faith?"

Well, actually, that's a rather feeble translation. "Emunah" is a word in Hebrew, and it means a lot more than "I believe." Faith can often be something people claim when they don't care to think too much. Emunah is when you

go beyond thinking to a place your mind could have never brought you.

Emunah means touching the place where your soul and essence of the Infinite Light are One. It's a place that nothing can describe. Where there are no words. No doubts, no uncertainty, no confusion, nothing but a magnificent Oneness before which nothing else exists and the challenges of life withdraw.

Eating Matzah is a way of tapping into that reservoir. Your physical body digests the Emunah of your soul, everything is integrated back into One, and your body and soul are whole and harmonious.

How on earth can a mixture of water and wheat baked in an oven contain such a spiritual cure? Welcome to Judaism, where there is no dichotomy of spirit and matter, **SOUL:** and **BODY:**. Where the spiritual transforms into the physical, and material objects become spiritual in a perpetual chemistry of exchange. Where the body is healed through empowering the soul, and the soul is nourished with the rituals of the body. (After all, we live in the world of One G-d.)

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Bondage Mentality: Sure, I'll eat a little Matzah because that's the tradition. Freedom Mentality: I can't get enough of this stuff! Feed me Matzah! Feed my soul!

*Matzah - Soul Food!*

## 9. MAROR - THE BITTER HERBS

**BODY:** Grab some of that bitter herb (horseradish, romaine lettuce or both). Take enough to make the size of an olive if you were to crunch it into a ball (one ounce). Dip the bitter herb in the Charoset. Shake off any excess.



It's a careful balance: you want bitter herbs, but you want to sweeten the bitterness. But it still has to be bitter herbs - not a sumptuous Charoset hors d'oeuvres.

Say the blessing: "Blessed... and bonded with us through the eating of bitter herbs." Eat the bitter herbs without reclining. (Don't worry if it doesn't taste that great - it's not supposed to.)

**SOUL:** We can never get used to Egypt. We never belonged there. We can never say, "They are the masters and we are the slaves and that's the way it is." It must remain

something we remain bitter about, something that is unjust and needs to change.

If we get used to Egypt, it is very hard to leave. In fact, many Jews said, "Egypt is our land. How can we leave it?" And they stayed and died there.

As for the rest of us, when Moses came and told us we were going to leave, we believed him. It was our bitterness that had preserved our faith. This is the sweetness we apply to the bitter herb: bitterness alone, without any direction, is self-destructive. Add some life and optimism to it, and it becomes the springboard to freedom.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Bondage Mentality: Look, this is what I'm used to. I can't change. Freedom Mentality: I don't belong to my habits.

*Maror - Perception or possibility?*

## 10. KORECH - THE SANDWICH

**BODY:** Break the bottom Matzah into two pieces. If you've followed the instructions until now, the bottom

Matzah should still be whole. Take an ounce of the bitter herbs (horseradish, romaine lettuce or both) and dip it into the Charoset. Shake off any excess.

Now you know what the second pile of bitter herbs on the Seder plate is for. Place the bitter herbs in between your two pieces of Matzah. Say the words: "This is what Hillel did when the Holy Temple stood. He wrapped some Pesach lamb, some Matzah and bitter herbs and ate them together." Hillel understood the words of the Torah about the Pesach lamb, "with Matzah and bitter herbs you shall eat it," in their literal sense. And so he invented the sandwich. (Or should we call it a Hillel?) Lean to the left while you eat.



**SOUL:** The world, when viewed from within Egypt, looks to be a mass of fragments. It's a "Passoverly Challenged" perspective. Plain materialism.

Mitzvahs appear to be a mishmash of dos and don'ts; the Jewish people are a collection of irreconcilable individuals;

daily life is a cacophony of hassles and just, well, stuff.

Once we escape materialism's gravitational pull, we look back and see a whole new perspective. Mitzvahs are multiple expressions of a single spiritual path; Jews are multiple faces to a single soul; elements of today's journey harmonize together as a delicate symphonic melody.

After we make ourselves into a temple for the Divine, then the bitter, the sweet and the tasteless responsibilities of life wrap together in a single package.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Bondage Mentality: I have to take care of career, family, health, hobbies, handball, friendships, parents, taxes, the house, the car, the cat... Freedom Mentality: I am a conductor and the world is my orchestra to play a symphony for its Creator.

*Korech - All together now...*

## 11. SHULCHAN ORECH - THE FEAST

**BODY:** Time to really eat. You know how to do this, right? Oh, don't forget the tradition of eating the boiled egg on your Seder plate, dipped in some saltwater. Most do this at the very beginning of the meal. A boiled egg is a sign of mourning and symbolizes the cycle of life. On every festive occasion, we mournfully remember the destruction of our Temple and Jerusalem. Note: The chicken neck is not eaten at the Seder.



**SOUL:** This step, along with Korech before it, marks the re-entry we mentioned at the beginning (in Kadesh). We've escaped Egypt and reached a higher vision. But freedom consists of more than escape. Complete freedom is when you can turn around and liberate all the elements of your

world from their pure material state, and make them transcendent as well.

That's what we do when we eat every day – we take foods grown from the earth, say a blessing over them and bring them into our journey as human beings. And when it's a Jewish holiday or Shabbat, we elevate them further, into the realm of pure spirituality. As for tonight, this meal is going to be truly Divine.

So don't imagine we're just feasting. We're reaching a higher state. And it's a great way to do it.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Bondage Mentality: I am a slave to food. I live to eat. Freedom Mentality: I am a food liberator. I eat to live.

*Shulchan Orech - Feed your head!*

## 12. TZOFUN - OUT OF HIDING

**BODY:** Grab that last bite. Be sure you've eaten enough, because the only thing to pass our lips after this step of the Seder tonight is another two cups of wine (Oy!). Retrieve that hidden Matzah. If you can't find it, you may have to enter into negotiations with your kids to get it back. Eat another two-thirds of a Matzah. Lean to your left.



With the first Matzah, we fulfilled the Mitzvah to eat Matzah. This one is also in place of the Pesach lamb, which is meant to be eaten on a full stomach.

**SOUL:** There is the body, there is the soul, and then there is the essence. If the soul is light, then that essence is its generator. The Kabbalah teaches that this essence remains elusive. It is called "Tzofun," meaning hidden, concealed, locked away and out of reach. It is unlikely to experience it.

We dance around the essence-core, like a spacecraft in

orbit, unable to land. We can be inspired, we can meditate, we can pray, but to touch this inner core – the essence of our soul – takes a power from beyond.

On Passover night, we have that power. But only after all the proper steps: destroying our internal chametz, preparing our homes for liberation, the previous eleven steps of the Seder. Then, when we are satiated with all we can handle, connecting every facet of ourselves to the Divine, that's when the power comes to us. Whether we sense it or not, tasteless as it may seem, the Matzah we eat now – the Matzah of Tzofun – reaches deep into our essence and transforms our very being.

Those things you find inspiring and nice may take you a step forward. But to effect a real change, you need to do something totally beyond your personal bounds.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** Bondage Mentality: Seeing is believing. Freedom Mentality: Believing is seeing.

*Tzofun - Now find the power!*

### 13. BAIRACH - GRACE AFTER MEAL

**BODY:** If you're still awake now, you know it's getting late. Adults are falling asleep. Kids are having a great time taking advantage of that. But it's not over. There are songs and wine, and Elijah the Prophet is on his way...



Fill your cup with wine (or grape juice). That's cup #3. Say the Grace After Meals as printed in your Haggadah. Say a blessing on the wine and drink it all down. Lean to your left.

**SOUL:** The theme of the Grace After Meals is confidence.

Confidence in a Higher Force that is with us in our daily lives. Why did miracles happen in Egypt? Because we believed they would. Those who didn't believe in miracles saw only plagues. To see a miracle, you need an open heart and mind, open enough to receive the Infinite. That is the opening we make when we thank G-d for the miracle of our food.

#### **PERSONAL APPLICATION:**

**Bondage Mentality:** I thank G-d for giving me what I need. **Freedom Mentality:** I thank G-d for letting me know what He "needs" from me.

*Berach - A new opening...*

### 14. HALLEL - SONGS OF PRAISE

**BODY:** Now fill your cup with wine (or grape juice). That's cup #4. Yes, you can handle it.



The kids open the front door to welcome Elijah the Prophet. Recite the prayer, "Pour out Your wrath..." from the Haggadah. Watch Elijah enter. (Can't see him? Maybe you've had too much wine.)

Tonight is called "Leil Shimurim" - a night of protection - when we are secured by G-d's gentle hand. We open our front door in the middle of the night with confidence and trust that no harm will befall us. On that very first Passover in Egypt, we were redeemed in the merit of our trust that He would redeem us. Tonight we are liberated again, and again we demonstrate our trust. It's all there, in your Haggadah. Sing whatever Psalms you know a song for.

At the end, say a blessing and drink the fourth and final cup of wine whilst leaning to you left (after four cups of wine the leaning comes naturally!).

**SOUL:** The ancient rabbis clued us in on a key principle in the cosmic function: whatever G-d tells us to do, He does Himself. Of course, there's a difference. We do it in our little human world, while He does it on a grand cosmic plane. He told us to open our door on the night of Passover. So, tonight, He opens every door and every gateway of the spiritual cosmos to all of the Jewish people. To each one of us, regardless of what we have been doing the rest of the year, tonight is our chance to reach the highest of spiritual levels.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** **Bondage Mentality:** Since it's Passover, I'll make a little change. **Freedom Mentality:** Since Passover, I totally changed.

*Hallel - Lechaim!*

### 15. NIRTZAH - ACCEPTANCE

**BODY:** This last step of the Seder is easy: expect a miracle. (This is His job now.) Look up from your wine. The table's a delicious mess. Uncle Irving is snoring in his Haggadah, serenaded by the first chirping of dawn. As you carry the little ones to their beds, the sound of Matzah crunching beneath your feet, you wonder, "Who will carry me to bed?"



Was it the best Seder that could have been? Look, it had its highlights. A few times, the kids got a little over-excited. And the horseradish and chicken soup didn't mix too well. Grandpa told some great stories, but we heard them last year. We all had fun with the songs. We told the tale again, with new embellishments, just like we have for 3,329 years. We did what we are supposed to, in our own human way.

And now, let the Creator do what He has promised to do: a rerun. Starring us, in the Ultimate Redemption. With lots

of miracles. But this time, forever.

**SOUL:** If G-d wanted us to be perfect, why did He create such imperfect beings? Because what He wants of us is our very humanity. Sometimes we do good. Sometimes we fall. But we keep on struggling, and eventually make some real change in order to create a perfect world. And then, once we have done all we can, like a kind parent helping with the homework, He makes sure to touch up our work and make it shine.

For thousands of years we have been leaving Egypt. For thousands of years we have been doing our human job of transforming the darkness of His world into light. And now it is His turn to banish darkness forever, to make our work shine.

**PERSONAL APPLICATION:** **Bondage Mentality:** Yaaa-wwwn! Well, there goes another Passover night under the belt. **Freedom Mentality:** I'm done with Pharaoh; I'm through with Egypt. Take me to Jerusalem!

*Nirtzah - Discover your miracle!*

## FORM FOR SELLING YOUR CHAMETZ

*We include, as a public service, a legal form for the Sale of Chametz. Besides not eating Chametz (leavened foods such as bread, cakes, cookies, pasta, beer, whiskey, etc.) on Pesach, we are also forbidden to possess Chametz. In order to avoid this prohibition we lock up any Chametz (this includes "Chametz-dik" utensils) and empower a rabbi (through power of attorney) to sell it to a non-Jew before Pesach. This is a legal binding sale that is recognized by the courts. After Pesach the rabbi then buys the Chametz back from the non-Jew and we are thus able to use it again. Fill out the form below, sign it and mail it to us and we will take care of the Sale of Chametz for you.*

KNOW YE that I, the undersigned, fully empower and permit Rabbi Nechemia Vogel to act in my place and stead, and in my behalf to sell all Chametz possessed by me (knowingly or unknowingly) as defined by the Torah and Rabbinic Law (e.g., Chametz, possible Chametz, and all kinds of Chametz mixtures.) Also Chametz that tends to harden and to adhere to inside surfaces of pans, pots or cooking and usable utensils. And to lease all places wherein the Chametz owned by me may be found, especially in the premises located at:

\_\_\_\_\_ and elsewhere. Rabbi Nechemia Vogel has the full right to sell and to lease by transactions as he deems fit and proper and for such time which he believes necessary in accordance with all detailed terms and detailed forms as explained in the general authorization contract which have been given this year to Rabbi Nechemia Vogel full power and authority to appoint a substitute in his stead with full power to sell and to lease as provided therein. The above given power is in conformity with all Torah, Rabbinical regulations and laws, and also in accordance with laws of the State of New York and of the United States. And to this I hereby affix my signature on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of March in the year of 5786/2026.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

*To avoid having Chametz in your possession during Passover, please cut & fill out this form and mail it to: CHABAD, 1037 Winton Road. South, Rochester, N.Y. 14618, Attn: Rabbi Nechemia Vogel, and we will take care of it as a public service. You can also sell your chametz online, by visiting [www.chabadrochester.com/chametz](http://www.chabadrochester.com/chametz)*

*Mail early, so that it reaches us NO LATER than Tuesday, March 31. Responsibility cannot be accepted for forms returned later.*

## The Pesach Calendar 5786 - 2026

Times shown are for the Rochester Area

**March 31:** Formal search for chametz after 8:06 p.m.

**April 1:** Stop Eating Chametz before 11:02 a.m.

Burn left-over Chametz before 12:01 p.m.

Light candles and say blessings # 1 & 3 at 7:19 p.m.  
Start the Seder. Eat at least 1 oz. of Matzah within 4 minutes after 8:21 p.m.

**April 2:** Light Yom Tov candles from a pre-existing flame\* and say blessings # 1 & 3 after 8:21 p.m.

Start the Seder. Eat the Matzah again

**April 3:** Light Shabbos candles from a pre-existing flame\* and say blessings # 2 at 7:21 p.m.  
Start the Seder. Eat the Matzah again

**April 4:** Shabbos ends at 8:24 p.m.

**April 7:** Light Yom Tov candles and say blessing # 1 at 7:26 p.m.

**April 8:** Light Yom Tov candles from a pre-existing flame\* and say blessing # 1 after 8:29 p.m.

**April 9:** Yizkor, Pesach ends at 8:30 p.m.

Wait one hour before eating your chametz to allow time for the Rabbi to buy it back for you.

\*A pre-existing flame is a flame burning continuously since the onset of the festival, such as a pilot light, gas or candle flame.

### BLESSINGS FOR CANDLE LIGHTING:

**1** Bo-ruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu  
Me-lech Ho-olom A-sher Ki-de-sho-nu  
Be-mitz-vo-sov Vi-tzi-vo-nu  
Le-had-lik Ner Shel Yom-Tov.

**2** Bo-ruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu  
Me-lech Ho-olom A-sher Ki-de-sho-nu  
Be-mitz-vo-sov Vi-tzi-vo-nu  
Le-had-lik Ner Shel Shabbos Kodesh.

**3** Bo-ruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu  
Me-lech Ho-olom She-heh-che-yoh-nu  
Vi-kiye-mo-nu Ve-he-ge-o-nu  
Lizman Hazeh.

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## Chanukah 2025 by the Numbers

Chabad of Rochester

 <b>14</b> Public Menorah Lightings	 <b>157</b> Menorah Kits Distributed
 <b>1,780</b> Latkes	 <b>1,110</b> Donuts
 <b>1,200+</b> Attendees at Chanukah Parties	 <b>200,000+</b> People Exposed to Public Menorahs

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# 'Across the Ages' - Chabad of Pittsford & The Wisdom Circle



# The Secret of Getting Free

by Shifra Hendrie

*"The hurrieder I go, the behinder I get." - Anonymous*

So Much To Do - So Little Time... A couple of decades ago, who could have imagined the world we take for granted today? With such instantaneous access to information and communication, we can do lots of things at once. Obviously, this means we can accomplish much more in less time. And this, in turn, leaves us with much more satisfaction and fulfillment, as well as more time to enjoy it. Right?

These technological miracles have made possible what was never even imaginable before. But, at the same time, they have created an intense pressure to have more, do more and be more.

It used to be that we would compare ourselves to the Joneses who lived down the block. The pressure of keeping up with the Joneses was stressful enough. Now we probably don't even have the time to get to know our neighbors the Joneses, but we are aware of the Smiths, who built that big, beautiful house a few blocks away. And we notice the expensive cars and flashy careers, and all the other stuff we associate with "the good life."

"You can have it all!" they scream out at you, "and if you don't, there's something wrong with your life. Just buy this \_\_\_\_\_ [gadget, car, self - help book, etc.] and you'll feel the way you long to feel!" "Just start this \_\_\_\_\_ [business, diet, workout regimen], and your life will start being what it should be!"

Bombarded from every direction, we can hardly help but respond. We try harder, run faster and work longer, racing at breakneck speed like mad hamsters on a wheel.

No one expects to keep running forever. We all intend to stop - just as soon as we get where we're going. When we're satisfied with where we are.

The unfortunate paradox is: the faster you run and the more you do, the less satisfied you will probably be.

Here's the secret: There's nowhere to get. It doesn't work that way. Life doesn't stand still and let us take shots at it until we hit the bull's-eye and win the prize. Life is a moving target.

We live in unique times - times when we actually can accomplish far more, in quantity and quality, than ever before. This is a wonderful thing.

So where are we going wrong?

We have begun to believe that because we can accomplish, we must. That if something desirable exists, and we don't have it, we aren't fulfilled. That if there's some standard out there, and we don't meet it, we've failed. So, first



we have to accomplish it all, have it all, "make it," and then we can relax, kick back, and start to be ourselves.

Within this paradigm, instead of providing us with freedom, our increased opportunities are turning us into slaves.

You can work on having the right body, but even if you do manage to succeed in dieting and exercising yourself to perfection - an unlikely prospect for most of us - you will inevitably age and lose the perfection you tried so hard to create.

You can work on making the right amount of money, and you may or may not succeed. There's absolutely nothing wrong with money, in and of itself, if used in the right ways. But interestingly, some of the people who enjoy the most money and "success" - celebrities - often have the least enduring satisfaction in life, as evidenced by their heavy drug use and high divorce rates.

Or, you can work on finding the perfect love - the kind you read about in novels and see on film. The problem is that in real life, people aren't always slick, polished, adoring, witty and immortal. They get angry, complain, bore us, and get disillusioned with us, too.

Between their liberation from slavery in Egypt and their

entrance into the Promised Land, there was a forty-year period where the Jewish people wandered through the desert. Those forty years provided a necessary transition between slavery and freedom, between exile and redemption.

In the desert, there was nothing to eat. So, G-d provided a special food, manna, that fell from Heaven each day. The people in the desert didn't have to do anything to make the manna appear. All they had to do was go out to collect it.

And no matter how much or how little a person picked up, when he got home, he always had exactly the right amount of manna for that day. No more and no less.

The manna was miraculous. And, unlike many miracles, its miraculous nature was too obvious to mistake. Because it was impossible to collect too much or too little, it was glaringly obvious to everyone that their survival was directly in the hands of Heaven.

True, each person had to do his part - to go out and collect his manna for the day - but that was it.

We all want to be free. Free from debt. Free from worry. Free from fat. Free from stress. But true freedom doesn't come from outside myself. If I am depending on that something to make me free, I'm already a slave.

True freedom comes from the inside, from a deep and powerful connection to who you truly are and why you're here. From that place, connected to the source, you can create things you never thought possible. You can generate miracles in your own life and in the lives of others.

When you're a slave, you are dependent on other people and outside circumstances for your wellbeing, for your very survival. You're full of needs. Without having those needs met, you simply can't be who you truly are. And since it's impossible to "have it all," you remain a slave.

When you're free, you may still want things. And you can certainly strive to make things happen, but as an expression of who you authentically are.

Like the Jews in the desert, you will still have to go out to the field each day to collect your portion of manna. But you can do it peacefully, happily, confidently, trustingly. Not like a slave, but as someone who's free.

The key to freedom is to know that you are here on earth as a soul in a body. To know that you are here for a reason, with a mission, one that can be carried out by you alone. And last, but certainly not least, to know that G-d is lovingly supervising every moment of your life, providing you with the precise circumstances - both gifts and challenges - that will help you fulfill that mission.

If you start from this premise, then nothing can ever be wrong. Regardless of what your life looks like today, it's simply the perfect starting point for your soul's self-expression. It's an opportunity to create joy, power, love, connection, peace, trust, intimacy, generosity, or whatever it is that you crave when you're authentically you.

And when you live life from that place of freedom, miracles inevitably happen.

## **Why No Archeological Evidence of Passover?**

by Aron Moss

### *Question*

Why is there no archaeological evidence for the Israelite slavery and Exodus from Egypt? If over two million Jews miraculously escaped after centuries of being slaves, wouldn't they have left a trace of evidence?

### *Answer*

You are right. Whenever my family has spent even a few days in a place, there is lasting evidence of our presence. So there should be plenty of archeological evidence for our time in Egypt. And there is.

I even have an artifact that I can show you, which is clear evidence of the Israelite slavery in Egypt. But first, let's look at the archeological discoveries (which are obviously subject to debate and much speculation).

Paintings of Semitic-looking slaves have been uncovered, like the Ibscha relief, showing bearded Semites arriving in Egypt, and the Rekhmire tomb from the 15th century BCE, depicting Semitic slaves building bricks out of mud. Jewish names such as Menachem, Asher and Shifra appear in an ancient list of slaves known as the

Brooklyn Papyrus. So yes, there is evidence that Israelites were slaves in Egypt.

As for the Exodus, the biblical tale of plagues that eventually broke Egypt and allowed the Israelites to leave with great wealth is backed up by evidence too. The Ipuwer Papyrus, written in the 13th century BCE, records a series of plagues visiting Egypt, including blood, disease and darkness.

There are many other such discoveries, which you can find with a simple web search. They may or may not be convincing to you, and we may even learn more about these things and discover that they are not connected to the Exodus. But nothing compares with evidence that you can see with your own eyes. So let me show you an original artifact of the Exodus. When you see this, you can never doubt the veracity of our story.

The evidence is you.

You are an Israelite. As a child, you sat at the Seder and heard the story of the Exodus firsthand from your grandparents, who heard it from theirs, as it was told every year in an unbroken chain all the way back to ourances-



## Solutions With a Soul

by Eli Block

The greatest champions of moral progress always seem to possess silken tongues. They make their case with perfectly chosen words, and can mold public opinion by the sheer power of their eloquence. But the first defender of human freedom, the first to denounce the subjugation of an entire nation, had “sealed lips.”

As a child in the court of Pharaoh, Moses often reached for Pharaoh’s crown. Concerned that this behavior spoke to a dangerous ambition, Pharaoh’s advisors conceived of a test of the child’s intentions. A bowl of glowing coals was placed next to a bowl filled with gold. If Moses reached for the gold it would confirm the boy’s appreciation for power and fame, if he chose the coal, he was just another child. Moses started for the gold, but an angel redirected his hand to the coal. He promptly placed it in his mouth, burning his tongue and imparting him with a lifelong speech impediment.

Eighty years later, Moses stood before a blazing bush and received G-d’s command to take His people from the Egyptian slavery. Though the scars on his tongue had faded, they remained on his mind.

“I beseech You, O L-rd. I have never been a man of words, neither in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue.”

This is an impasse. G-d has searched His nation and found one man whose moral caliber, humility, and love qualifies him to bring G-d’s message of freedom to the world. But he is incapable of the most elementary tenet of representation - speech.

The idea of inclusion is familiar enough: every human being has incalculable worth; differences in ability are superimposed upon our innate humanity. So, it is incumbent

tors who left Egypt.

Every year we start the Seder by saying, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” It didn’t happen to someone else, it happened to us. This is our family story. We look at the matzah and say, “This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in Egypt.”

Let’s stop for a moment and marvel at this. We are telling our family’s story to our children as we received

upon us to afford everyone the opportunity to exercise their unique iteration of qualities. The obstacles ordained by nature are to be circumvented to allow that expression.

But the call to inclusion is more poignant than ramps and education. It asks that our solutions be infused with sensitivity and respect. A practical salve can be made that lacks the imagination of another’s dignity. We are charged to cater to the person, with his particular reality in mind. The environment is malleable, the circumstances can be altered - not the individual. If a ramp to the bimah is unavailable for some reason, bring the ceremony to him - we serve people, not limited architecture.

Could G-d have miraculously altered Moses’s tongue, alleviating him of his handicap and granting him the confidence to speak before Pharaoh? Of course. But Moses did not ask to be the recipient of a miracle.

It is worth recalling what inspired G-d to choose Moses as His people’s leader. A lamb under his care had strayed, and Moses went in search of his lost charge. This uncompromising attention to the individual is what earned him G-d’s affections. Moses was the leader with that evasive quality - awareness of everyone’s varied realities.

Moses did not seek a miracle, a distraction from his true predicament. He dug his heels into the reality he occupied, and presented himself to G-d. I am heavy of mouth and tongue. Perhaps, he speaks on behalf of every man or woman who possesses a disability. “These are facts; we have everything to give - if society can learn to move past nature’s constraints and facilitate our abilities.”

So, what did G-d do? “I will be with your mouth, and I will instruct you what you shall say.” The classic 13th century commentator, Nachmanides, explains it like this. G-d promised to craft a message for Moses with words that he could articulate. He recognized Moses’ potential, saw his limitation, and adapted His own divine script to equip Moses with words he was comfortable with. G-d alters the circumstance, not the individual.

In our quest to include every member of our communities, we would do well to pay attention to this ancient example of accommodation. If we can learn to change our surroundings in accord with those who are constrained by unrelenting forces, we may empower the redeemer of a nation - we may discover our next great moral advocate.

it from our parents, together with props and a themed menu, as it has been done for three millennia. Our ancestors ate matzah when they left Egypt, and the next year they ate it again with their children. And we haven’t stopped doing that for 3338 years.

You are more than a walking piece of archeology. You are a living, breathing symbol of the everlasting. G-d took us out of Egypt and He will redeem us again.

# FINDING THE OFF SWITCH

## Four Shabbat “Dividends”

Any good composer or painter knows that as important as it is to be immersed in the sound of the symphony he or she is working on, or to be engrossed in the images he or she is setting down on canvas, it is equally important to step away from one’s creative work and to observe with clarity and renewed objectivity just what it is that has been created. Shabbat brings with it an opportunity to step away and better see life, not as a series of compartmentalized actions, but as a unified whole. Here are a few ways the tenets of Shabbat can help you in your life.

BY:  
PETER  
HIMMELMAN

*Peter Himmelman is a Grammy- and Emmy-nominated singer-songwriter, visual artist, and best-selling author, with more than 20 acclaimed recordings to his name. He is the founder of Big Muse, a creativity consultancy that helps organizations unlock the creative potential of their people, with clients including The Wharton School, 3M, McDonald’s, Adobe, and Gap. His newest book is *Suspended by No String*.*

### IMPROVE CREATIVE THINKING

It’s an axiom, of physics that two things cannot occupy the same space. And just as this applies to things, it also applies to ideas. To be at our creative best we need to make an empty space through the cessation of our creative endeavors. Only by stopping our constant output can new inspirations take hold.

### SLOW DOWN LIFE’S HECTIC PACE

As we learn to breathe more slowly in the practice of meditation, adopting the rhythms of Shabbat-time into our lives has the same beneficial tendency. To many people the world feels chaotic, out of control. Too often it seems, we are guided by demands and situations, rather than by our own volition. Shabbat is the bedrock in time that cannot be moved aside for anything other than life-threatening situations.

### IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS

When I got my first recording contract in 1986, I decided I would work to protect my most valuable resource. It wasn’t artistic control over what songs to record, or the power to decide what my record jackets would look like —my most valuable resource was my time. I made it known that I would not perform on Shabbat no matter what the reason. It wasn’t as if my convictions weren’t tested. There were slots on *The Tonight Show* that I turned down, opportunities to be the opening act for top artists like Sting, that I waived away —all because these prospects, while good for my career, would have violated my observance of Shabbat, and as a consequence my understanding of time as something precious, something that belonged to me (and later, to my family) alone. Shabbat is time away from iPhones and computers and errands and shopping and every conceivable distraction. We humans hunger to be heard, to be seen, and to be known, but we suffer from a paucity of attention-giving and attention-getting. Just as it’s impossible to make music without an instrument, it is impossible to create thriving relationships without making space and time for them to flourish.

### GAIN A MORE MATURE LIFE PERSPECTIVE

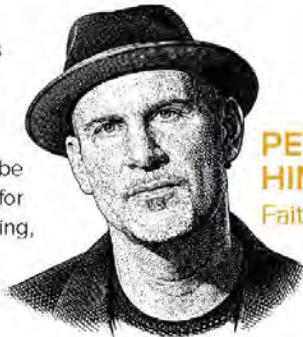
As children we couldn’t help but be burdened by our unfulfilled desires. We wanted the things we wanted —immediately. Waiting for any length of time just wouldn’t do. Our immature minds were not yet sophisticated enough to realize that staving off a momentary pleasure for a longer-term gain would, in the end, bring us far more pleasure. Shabbat is about honing our sense of gratitude. Most of us work to make a living and strive to achieve the things we desire, but we also need to feel as if we’ve come home again, come back to some midpoint. By regularly postponing our manic ascent up an assumed ladder of success, we come to see life from a broader, richer perspective. By first finding, and then being brave enough to use the “off-switch,” we gain the sweet, and all too rare sense, of having finally arrived at our destination.

# ROCKING SHABBAT

**“Six Days a Week Shall you Rock and Roll, but on the Seventh You, Your Band, and Your Sound Engineers, Shall Rest.”**



“There were slots on The Tonight Show that I turned down, opportunities to be the opening act for top artists like Sting, that I waived away all because these prospects, while good for my career, would have violated my observance of Shabbat.”



**PETER HIMMELMAN:**  
Faith over Fame

British musician Alex Clare burst onto the pop music scene with his debut album in 2011, and was offered a chance to tour with megastar Adele. But the tour would



**ALEX CLARE:**  
Topping the Shabbat Charts

have required him to travel and perform on Jewish holidays, and Clare is Shabbat observant, so he declined the opportunity, but then lost his record label representation. Soon after Clare found himself as his sole management for his hit single “Too Close” that appeared in a Microsoft commercial in 2012. Clare quickly became a global breakout hit, reaching the Top 10 on the Billboard Hot 100.

**OMER ADAM:**  
Spotlight on Shabbat



In a world driven by noise, speed, and constant connectivity, Israeli rock star Omer Adam made a quiet but

powerful decision. Adam chose to turn inward and began keeping Shabbat.

The personal decision went public, when Adam was scheduled to perform at Eurovision but declined because the rehearsals would be on Shabbat, ahead of the Saturday night finale.

Now, each week, the Israeli pop icon who dominates Israeli charts with multiple platinum albums, and record-breaking sold-out stadium shows, does something profoundly holy: he turns off his phone, parks his car, unplugs from technology, and steps into Shabbat. No screens. No stage. Just candles, prayer, family, food, and the ancient rhythm of Jewish time.

# THE WRESTLING SOUL - A JOURNEY INTO YOUR INNER PSYCHE

From The Book of Tanya by Chaya Shuchat

*“He redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that came upon me because of the many who were with me.”*  
(Psalms 55:19)

People who work in customer service or any profession that involves a lot of interaction with the public are trained to stay polite and unflappable in the face of belligerence and provocation. The term for this in social psychology is “emotional labor,” the work we do to manage our emotions when interacting with other people. People who work in health care, in particular, need to train themselves to express compassion for people who are suffering and in pain.

In the course of our workday, there can be times when we are not feeling particularly calm or compassionate, and the emotional labor becomes more difficult. There are two ways to handle this: One is called “surface acting,” when you put a smile on your face or say the right words but don’t feel them inside; the other is “deep acting,” when you actually invoke compassion within yourself for that person’s suffering.

Which one do you think is more difficult? You might think that digging deep inside yourself to feel compassion for a stranger is more demanding. But research shows that it’s the reverse. It turns out that as human beings, we’re not very good at faking emotions. It becomes stressful and anxiety-producing when we’re forced to do it for long periods of time.

In Chassidic terminology, there’s a term that sounds almost synonymous: *avodah shebaleiv*, or labor of the heart. This refers mostly to our service of G-d through prayer, but actually, this labor takes place throughout the day in



many different settings. It’s the work we do to integrate the physical side and spiritual side of our personality. Just as in our work life, we can do “superficial labor” - basically, training ourselves to say the right thing and do the right thing even when our heart isn’t in it. It’s certainly better than nothing, and it’s better than flying off the handle or indulging our whims all day. But putting

on a show and suppressing our true emotions is stressful and not sustainable in the long term. What’s healthier is to do the “deep labor,” to really invoke in ourselves a feeling and passion for what we’re doing.

## WHO’S FIGHTING THE BATTLE?

It’s important to emphasize that our daily battle is not between the body and soul. Taking care of our body is a mitzvah and sacred obligation. Our body is given to us as a gift from G-d, and it’s up to us to treat it with care to keep it functioning optimally. The desire of the body is to live and to be healthy and well. Your body doesn’t want to stuff its face with ice-cream, lie in bed all day or fly into rages. It doesn’t want drugs or alcohol or cigarettes. It wants clean living, and when it doesn’t get what it needs, it lets us know with uncomfortable physical symptoms and sensations.

So if our body doesn’t want any of those things, then who does?

Enter the animal soul.

The animal soul is the seat of our drives, desires and passions. It’s an entire personality unto itself, sort of an alt-personality to the G-dly soul. Under normal circumstances,

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these two personalities are battling inside of us constantly. They're like two armies battling for control over a city. When one goes up, the other goes down. But having a constant conflict inside of us is exhausting and draining; it saps us of energy that we could devote to more constructive things.

Chassidus teaches us that while the battle may be unavoidable, there's a way to fight this battle peacefully.

How so? Isn't that a contradiction in terms?

This concept is elaborated on in a series of Chassidic discourses titled *Padah B'Shalom*, from the verse in Psalms, "He redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that came upon me." This verse refers to the ongoing battle between the animal soul and the G-dly soul, which plays out over many different fronts over the course of our day and the course of our life.

What does it mean to be "redeemed in peace" from a battle? Being "redeemed" implies that the enemy is still around but he's no longer your enemy; he is no longer fighting you, and, in fact, has become your friend.

The word for battle used in the verse is *krav*, which refers to a brawl or wrestle. The word *krav* is related to *kiruv*, meaning closeness, as in the Israeli term for martial arts, *krav maga*. The very term is an oxymoron. On the one hand, when you're at war with someone you're as far apart from each other as you can get. You can fight a battle from a distance, carpet-bombing them or throwing arrows at them. But the height of the battle is when you are physi-

cally entangled in hand-to-hand combat.

### THE NATURE OF THE ANIMAL SOUL

Since the animal soul and the G-dly soul occupy the same body, they're always in a closely fought battle with each other. There are some general principles to keep in mind regarding the nature of the animal soul:

1. The animal soul is SELFISH. Self-centeredness is the single most important organizing principle for the animal soul. Its primary consideration is "What's in it for me?"

Now, the animal soul can be made to understand that pro-social behavior is good for society as a whole. I'll be nice to you so that you'll be nice to me. But it's very transactional. It has no sense of being altruistic and doing good for its own sake. The animal soul can never really be talked out of its basic self-centeredness, and this nar-

cissism will tend to pop up again and again at the most inconvenient times.

2. The animal soul is INTELLIGENT. This is an important point to keep in mind. It's not stupid. It's not irrational. It can be very clever and deliberate in pursuing its desires. And because of its intelligence, we can easily become tripped up and confused. Our animal soul is great at rationalizing and coming up with truly brilliant reasoning to explain why what it wants is correct and ideal.

3. The animal soul is ENERGETIC. Now, maybe you think laziness comes from the animal soul. Each of us has an animal soul that's unique with a different blend of personality traits. But as a general rule, while the animal soul can

Your body doesn't want to stuff its face with ice-cream, lie in bed all day or fly into rages. It wants clean living. So if our body doesn't want any of those things, then who does?  
Enter the animal soul.

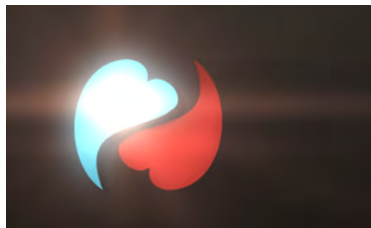


be lazy to do things it's not interested in, it has tremendous drive when pursuing something it wants. Part of our battle is to learn how to channel this passion and drive into good things.

Is the animal soul evil? Not necessarily. We are all tempted by different things and drawn towards different things, but most of us don't consciously desire to be evil or destructive. The animal soul is just extremely self-centered and acts only in its self-interest. And unchecked, extreme self-interest can lead to terrible evil.

### WHAT DOES THE G-DLY SOUL WANT?

Now what about the G-dly soul? What does it want? The G-dly soul is a part of G-d. That's about it. Its chief desire is to be close to G-d. Whatever brings you closer to G-d, it wants, and whatever takes you further away from G-d, it doesn't want. Your G-dly soul and my G-dly soul and everyone's G-dly soul are all one. We all want the same thing, and we all want things to be good for one another. On the level of the G-dly soul, there is no conflict. We all get along and support each other perfectly.



Since the G-dly soul only desires closeness to G-d, it isn't exactly thrilled about living in this world. It's extremely reluctant to tear itself away from the Divine splendence of the higher spiritual worlds to take up residence in a physical world in a physical body. In fact, living in a physical body is a very painful experience for the soul. It's cut off from everything it knows, loves and craves. It's in exile, so to speak.

But the G-dly soul knowingly and willingly makes this journey because this ultimately is what G-d wants. G-d wants a home in this world. G-d wants us to take the place that's furthest from Him - the most distant, with the least awareness, and make it G-dly.

### THE G-DLY SOUL GETS A PARTNER

So, the G-dly soul gets its assignment, and is sent down to earth and designated a partner. Basically, the G-dly soul is told, Hello, meet your animal soul who will be your assistant in this mission. But it will be up to you to figure out how to get your animal soul to work with you.

And the G-dly soul needs the animal soul. The G-dly soul is absolutely dependent on the animal soul because without it, none of the processes we need to keep life going in the physical world can be carried out.

A soul on its way down from heaven to earth met a soul on its return journey, from earth back to heaven.

"How is it down there on earth?" he yelled out.

"It's wonderful down there! You can get strings for tzitzis for only two kopecks!"

"Two kopecks for tzitzis strings? Such a priceless mitzvah for such a cheap price? I can't wait!"

"Aaaaah," said the seasoned soul to the novice. "Wait till you see what you have to do to earn those two kopecks!"

The G-dly soul is excited to get down into the world where it can perform physical mitzvos like tying tzitzit strings on the edges of its garments. But the G-dly soul knows nothing about shearing or spinning or weaving wool to make those strings. It has no idea how to go about earning two kopecks to pay for tzitzis strings. It's completely dependent on the animal soul to navigate this world. The animal soul is like the personal assistant or chauffeur of the G-dly soul.

But the animal soul is not a perfect employee. It's quirky. It has its own desires and agenda. Sometimes it shows up for work, and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it understands its mission, and sometimes it doesn't. This is what the G-dly soul has to deal with, day in, day out. It has a critical mission to fulfill that can only be done with the help of its assistant, the animal soul, who can be quite unruly and unreliable. And the G-dly soul cannot fire or get rid of its animal soul. (Quite a frustration and a headache for the G-dly soul!) But if the two souls are locked in battle all day, nothing gets done and a lot of energy gets wasted. That's why Chassidus puts so much emphasis on teaching us how to fight this battle peacefully.

### THE HEART OF THE BATTLE

So, let's get into the heart of the battle.

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, a big part

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of our service of G-d was offering up sacrifices on the altar. After the Temple was destroyed, prayer took the place of animal sacrifices. We are offering up the animal inside of us. Our emotional labor, our service of the heart, is to channel the drives and passions of the animal soul to G-d, to work with it and get it to work with us. Like a farmer harnessing an ox to plow his field, the G-dly soul can accomplish more through working with the animal soul than it could ever achieve on its own.

The main battlefield in the struggle between the animal and G-dly soul is during prayer. Does the G-dly soul want to pray? Does it ever! The G-dly soul loves to pray. It would like nothing more than to spend all day praying and being close to G-d. Does the animal soul want to pray? Decidedly not! It gets bored and distracted. It doesn't see the point. So the challenge for the G-dly soul is to get the animal soul interested - to get it to reflect on G-dliness in terms it can understand. The G-dly soul tells the animal soul that we need to pray to G-d for health, food and shelter. This is how the G-dly soul engages with the animal soul, to explain to it on its own terms how it is dependent on G-d.

Another option for the G-dly soul is to short-circuit the animal soul altogether and meditate on G-dliness so intensely that the animal soul gets blotted out entirely. This approach has its uses, but it's not completely satisfactory because the animal soul tends to pop right back up again after prayer. It's a temporary measure at best. You can pray with a lot of intensity and passion, and then a minute later, you're thinking about lunch. It's not that your prayer was not sincere. It's just that in fighting the battle, you weren't completely victorious. You are a work in progress.

After prayer is when the real work of perfecting and refining the world begins. The G-dly soul wants the inspiration of prayer to last all day. The animal soul wants to get back to its business of eating, drinking, work, and daily affairs. During prayer, the G-dly soul is in the driver's seat, but during the rest of the day, the animal soul is in the driver's seat with the G-dly soul desperately trying to steer the animal soul in the right direction, trying to make sure that all the body's functions are carried out for the sake of Heaven. And so the battle goes on, day by day, with all its ups and downs.

#### THE G-DLY SOUL'S SECRET WEAPON

Generally speaking, within any given person the animal soul and G-dly soul are well matched in temperament, intelligence, energy level, etc. With such a balance of power, control of the body tends to fluctuate between the animal and G-dly souls. The G-dly soul has thoughts and feelings;

the animal soul has thoughts and feelings. The G-dly soul has passions and desires; the animal soul has passions and desires. Sometimes, we feel excited and passionate about G-d; other times we feel passionate about baseball or the stock market or chocolate-chip cookies.

But the G-dly soul has a secret weapon. There is one power the G-dly soul possesses that has no counterpart in the animal soul. This is called the Yechidah, the essence of the soul, which never comes down into the body but remains connected to G-d, its source.

Under normal conditions, the Yechidah does not make an appearance. The real work of engaging with the animal soul is relegated to the lower soul powers: Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah. Only under conditions of dire emergency does the Yechidah kick in. When the G-dly soul is at an ebb, when it senses that it's about to lose the battle to the animal soul, G-d forbid, the Yechidah roars to life. It's our Jewish survival instinct, the part of us that, come what may, cannot and will not be separated from G-d. When our Yechidah is activated, then it's checkmate for the animal soul. Its desires and passions fall by the wayside, and the person's entire focus is solely on spiritual survival.

**But the G-dly soul has a secret weapon.  
There is one power the G-dly soul  
possesses that has no counterpart  
in the animal soul.**

But a knockout punch of the animal soul by the G-dly soul isn't really the goal. The ideal is to remake the animal soul in the image of the Divine soul. Over time, through intense and persistent emotional labor, whether through Torah, prayer or good deeds, the animal soul

gradually becomes transformed. It no longer has the same tastes and desires that it had before. It's like a child outgrowing his taste for candy or games as he matures. A more mature animal soul has desires that are naturally more in sync with the G-dly soul. Most of the day, it may seem like the animal soul is in charge. We're not doing anything that looks manifestly G-dly. Our challenge and goal is to make our everyday activities more G-dly, and let the Divine soul shine through in everything we do. That's the true peaceful resolution of the battle - when the animal soul and Divine soul function together as a unit.

We experience this truce between the animal soul and the G-dly soul once every week on Shabbat, when we take a temporary break from our workday toil to spend the day immersed in prayer and spirituality. At the same time, the animal soul gets to savor the day of rest as well, as it's a mitzvah to enjoy extra delicacies on Shabbat. The weekly day of rest is a foretaste of the World to Come, when this harmony between the animal soul and the G-dly soul will reach full fruition and become permanent.

*Editor's Note: For more on the teachings in the Book of Tanya go to [chabadrochester.com/tanya](http://chabadrochester.com/tanya)*



## Shabbat Lays Claim To Greenland

by Sofya Sara Esther Tamarkin

Our journey to board a cruise ship to Greenland started in Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, which welcomed us with such strong winds that it was hard to keep both feet on the ground.

Together with another couple, my husband and I had traveled from Philadelphia to this cold and exotic destination. We had a few hours before we were set to board the ship, so we made our way to the Chabad House in Iceland's capital, directed by Rabbi Avraham and Mushky Feldman.

The small Jewish community in Iceland welcomed the Feldmans in 2018, and in the short time since, thousands of tourists and locals have benefited from Jewish public celebrations, kosher catering, and Torah classes.

The four of us were greeted with hot tea and a warm welcome. We had a few hours to spare, and my friend Anna and I decided to join Mushky's weekly Torah class for women. Sitting with a group of women from very different walks of life, who had ended up in this remote place for an encounter with Chassidic, timeless wisdom, was incredibly inspiring - a memorable and warm start to our ten-day journey into the cold waters of Greenland.

The cruise began. I had done my research and emailed many departments to confirm in writing that kosher food would be available for us on the cruise, so when the chef came out to ask if we had any special dietary needs, we were frustrated to say the least.

The ship was sailing away from the shores of Iceland, with Chabad catering options getting further away by the minute. It was clear that we were going to be eating lots of

fruits and vegetables for the next ten days.

Little did we know that this dietary emergency would become the gateway to a spiritual transformation.

The story really begins years earlier. During the pandemic, my maternal aunt passed away from Covid. I was then taking many online Torah classes. Soon after, I received a gift in the mail: pop-up flowers with a note of condolences and genuine words of love and support from one of the fellow students in that class. Interestingly, she did not sign her name but instead ended her message with two words: "Soul Sister." I remember being touched to tears and immediately placed the flowers near my siddur so I could stand next to them in prayer every morning.

Now, five years later, with that same prayerbook on board the ship, we stood in the cafeteria near an apologetic chef who was willing to cook kosher but had no idea how. As we politely explained that kosher food cannot be easily prepared without a thorough understanding of Jewish laws and certain supplies, another visibly observant couple approached and joined the conversation. Since kosher food couldn't miraculously appear on the board of the ship, there was no point in arguing.

The next day, I went to a small gym on the boat. There were two more women there exercising on treadmills. I was on a machine on the left, and the other woman who had been promised kosher food was on the last treadmill on the right. With one woman in between us, I did not feel comfortable having private conversations about kosher food solutions, and so after I was done exercising, I walked up to her machine to strike up a conversation.

I was immediately greeted with a warm southern smile, as Kim adamantly reassured me that my name sounded familiar. Since our last names were mentioned over and over again when the chef and his crew tried to locate kosher meals, Kim had been trying to figure out where she could have met me before. We began to list possible ideas, including online classes. Finally, we discovered that we had taken the same life coaching class for years and heard each other's names during the sessions as participants shared their perspectives. As we continued to chat, Kim asked which ideas I connected to the most, and I shared that it wasn't the information that made the most impact but the kindness of a fellow participant who found my address and sent me a gift of support during a very challenging time.

Kim opened her phone and pointed to my home address. I still didn't understand what she was saying.

"It was me who sent you those flowers."

I froze in astonishment. How could this possibly happen?

The other woman on the treadmill - who introduced herself as Karen - witnessed our statistically improbable

encounter and was as completely blown away as I was. To add to this miraculous afternoon, she turned out to be Israeli.

Karen shared this miraculous encounter with other passengers. There were about 160 passengers on board, and surprisingly, about a quarter of them were Jewish.

This meeting infused me with a sense of purpose - there was clearly a Master Plan at play here. I felt compelled to align with that Higher Purpose.

Sailing through the wilderness of Greenland with breathtaking scenery all around us as Shabbat approached, fellow passengers who were impressed by our story of Divine Providence approached Kim and I to inquire about lighting Shabbat candles.

Calculating the correct time for lighting candles had required lots of research and input from rabbis who understood the complexity that arises in a part of the world where the sun rarely sets. Now, our dramatic reunion had catapulted us into the position to share Shabbat with our fellow passengers. People gathered around as we lit as many candles as we could gather. We said a prayer together, and my husband, Sasha, made Kiddush. Miraculously, there were bottles of kosher wine on board. How and why they got there is a mystery.

We then settled in for a Friday evening of sharing stories of our shared heritage. Other passengers joined in. We were one big Jewish family who had come together on this holy day. One of the passengers, a medical doctor, shared his thoughts: "A couple dozen Jews on a small expedition ship in the Arctic Circle gathering to say prayers, light candles, and break bread on a Friday night, led by an energetic woman who brought smiles and stories, were able to transform a small corner of the dining room and remind everyone that we're all connected and tasked with bringing G-d's light to the world. It's what we're called to do."

That Shabbat laid a foundation of lifelong friendships. Throughout the week, travelers shared ideas about spirituality, faith, and connection to the Creator. With the majestic Arctic sun behind huge, magnificent icebergs floating nearby, spiritual ideas felt real and viable.

During our stop in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, many visited a local store and bought tea light candles to use that coming Friday night. By the time we were ready for our second Shabbat on board, we felt an undeniable connection. As old friends, we gathered in the cafeteria to welcome our holy day.

Earlier, my husband had asked the Guest Services to

make an announcement: "Jewish passengers are invited to welcome Shabbat and hear Kiddush in the cafeteria at ..." It was also printed in the daily program brochure. It felt like a taste of living in Messianic times to have everyone enthusiastically helping us welcome Shabbat.

Another passenger, also named Karen, whose husband hadn't participated in any Jewish observances in over fifty years, shared her experience: "I don't know how we found each other, but we felt honored and welcomed by sharing Shabbat. It's a testament to having an open heart and mind and the valuable experiences that await."

Kim, my forever profound "soul sister," reflects on our re-connection, "Life is an adventure of growth. Every day we need to wake up with a thought of awe and curiosity, asking, 'What does G-d have ahead for me today?' " We stay in touch

almost every day.

Every week I send "Shabbat Shalom" messages to the incredible people I met on that ship.

Our trip to Greenland taught me a few very important lessons. First, never underestimate a small act of kindness. The ripple effect of Kim's action created infinite consequences. Second, nothing is too difficult for the Creator of the World, and the most statistically impossible events can become reality. And finally, together with other fellow passengers, we have witnessed that spirituality and connection can be found in every corner of the world. There is no place void of potential, and it is always up to us to reveal it, one moment at a time.

Together with other fellow passengers, we have witnessed that spirituality and connection can be found in every corner of the world. There is no place void of potential, and it is always up to us to reveal it, one moment at a time.



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# Environment & Identity

by Tzvi Freeman

A house full of Torah books redefines our environment. A container is defined by what it contains. Take a carton of milk, for example. If it's empty, you'll say, "Pass the carton." But if it contains even a little milk, you'll say, "Pass the milk." So too, your home is defined by the most important things inside it. And some of the most important items in your home (aside from those who live there, of course) are the Torah books lining the shelves and scattered about.

Just one of those books, the Rebbe said, is enough to redefine your entire environment. Your home is transformed from just another house to a shining source of wisdom.

It's also an identity thing: the books we buy and place in our homes are one of the ways that establish who we are - for ourselves, and for those who visit our homes. So fill your home with Torah books, and create a Torah environment and identity for you and your family.

Lay a Trap for Yourself - There's another obvious advantage to filling your home with Torah books: You or your kids might just pick one up and read a little of it. And then maybe even start asking some questions. Beware: this behavior may prove habit-forming.

Life in Books - Great authors put their mind, their personality, their very self, into their book. By the same token, say the sages, when G-d authored the Torah, He put His essence and being into it. That's why we treat Torah books with such respect: we kiss them if they fall to the ground, we are careful to always place them right side up, and we never use them for anything other than reading and study. In other words, we treat them like very special people.

Ever consider inviting Moses, King David, and the sages and prophets of the Great Assembly to come live in your house? And maybe Rabbi Akiva, Maimonides and the Baal Shem Tov while you're at it? Watch out - they may take over the place.

It's a Mitzvah - Following the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, we received 613 mitzvahs (divine commandments) through Moses. The last thing Moses told each one of us to do, just before we entered the Land of Canaan, was to write a Torah scroll. Since then, we each have an obliga-

tion to write our own scroll.

In the 13th century, Rabbeinu Asher noted that not everybody did this. He explained that now people fulfilled this mitzvah by buying Torah books, for themselves and others to learn from. Of course, it's better if you can write or buy your own Torah scroll. Still, it's exciting to know that each time you buy a Torah book, you are fulfilling the final mitzvah of the Torah.

Where Do I Start? - Start with the basics. Expand from there.

Here's a starter's guide. All of these are available in translation:

## Basic Books

Chumash: a.k.a. "The Five Books of Moses." G-d dictates, Moses transcribes, and you get to have The Book in your house.

Tehillim: a.k.a. "The Psalms of David." The book your great-grandparents poured their hearts and tears into.

Siddur: a.k.a. "Jewish Prayer Book." It took 120 sages and prophets to compose one way for all Jews to talk to one G-d.

## Additional Classic Volumes

Tanach: a.k.a. "Torah, Prophets and Writings." Every prophecy and divinely inspired writing that the sages determined would be needed for every generation. Known in other circles as "The Bible." (Make sure you get an authentic Jewish translation.)

Talmud: Voluminous compendium of discussion, debates and anecdotes that defined Jewish practice at the outset of the Diaspora. The meat and potatoes of Jewish learning.

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: "Abridged Code of Jewish Law." Highly popular guide to Jewish practice for the everyman, first published in Hungary in 1864 by Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, a recognized authority on Jewish law.

Tanya: The most important work of chassidic teaching, blending and balancing the mystical and practical aspects of classic Jewish thought. Authored by the 18th-century chassidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.



# Confessions of an Outreach Activist

by Mendel Kalmenson

I confess.

The Torah and its observances are what my whole life and soul are about. But it wasn't always so; that took retrospection and careful thought.

There were times I wanted to make a bonfire on Shabbat. And play my guitar on a Jewish holiday.

And to do away with the divider that separates men and women in the synagogue.

There is an image of a fire seared into my consciousness after hearing it described by the Rebbe countless times.

The following is a paraphrased version of his heart-wrenching words:

"A devastating inferno rages outside; a spiritual holocaust that has painfully claimed so many Jewish lives... What Hitler, may his name be blotted out, was not able to achieve, the ravaging fires of assimilation are sadly achieving..."

In each generation, the Jewish nemesis has a different face. In our day it comes disguised as ignorance, which equals apathy and results in intermarriage and assimilation, causing more Jewish loss than any of our enemies have throughout history.

"If you know of someone sleeping in a burning house, the responsibility to save his life is yours, for he is incapable of helping himself..."

"Become firemen," the Rebbe pleaded. "Put an end to these destructive fires!"

So, I'm ready to don the fireman outfit I've abandoned since childhood; where do I begin? How do I put out the fire of indifference and assimilation?

The task seems impossible, for it entails the bridging of two polar-opposite worlds: the secular and the sacred, the modern with the so-called "antiquated."

It challenges me to articulate religious truths to progressive minds that perceive them as dated; to communicate our rich, but ancient heritage to modern hearts.

I must learn new paradigms and frames of reference, it would seem, if I want to share the preciousness of our tradition with those who are unacquainted with their venerable past. I must become a savvy marketing professional, if I want to "package" Judaism properly and have it appeal to the masses.

I must feel the heartbeat of society to know where they're at and where they're going, in order to adjust myself and my message to them.

And it seems logical that I'll have to sacrifice some of the integrity of my message – perhaps to discard some of the many do's and don'ts – in order to make Judaism feasible for a Western clientele and give it contemporary allure.

Which explains my earlier confession: Declining to shake the hand of a woman whom I care to bring closer to Jewish tradition will likely drive her away! Besides, the last thing I want to do is hurt another person's feelings.

The same goes for doing away with the mechitzah (synagogue divider), and arranging a Shabbat sing-along with music around a crackling fire. From a marketing point of view these ideas are brilliant!

For if I don't "learn the talk and do the walk," the Judaism I offer won't be "with it" and the people I share it with won't "dig it."

This leads me to another fire.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was once at a meeting where one of the participants suggested compromising Torah law in order to save Judaism - then under attack by all types of ideologies that targeted Jewish youth. His eloquent and persuasive argument was that "for drinking purposes, water must be pure and clean, but when it comes to putting out a fire, even dirty water will suffice."

This well-meaning Jewish activist clearly admitted that a breach of G d's law resembles "dirty water," but what else could be done - a terrible fire burns!

The people at the meeting were impressed by the logic;

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that is, until the Rebbe countered sharply, "But what happens if one mistakenly tries to put a fire out with kerosene..?"

Of what use are his good intentions? Instead of bringing salvation he has helped destroy.

Sadly, our history contains many examples that confirm this point. Put simply, the time-tested truth is that more is sometimes less. We have to follow the word of G d, although at times we may feel that we have brilliant ideas that will further G d's agenda. We cannot please Him by acting contrary to His wishes.

The same is true with one who chooses to disregard a mitzvah – no matter which one, whether (seemingly) big or small – in order to make Judaism more appealing to the uninitiated.

One final note is in order.

Before figuring out how to preserve, we must identify what we seek to preserve.

Is it a language, a culture, a tradition, a philosophy, a group of customs, a background, a race, a dream, or a gene?

Or is it a religion, a mission, a promise; a covenant between Creator and creation? Is it about an identity or is it about truth?

If the former is of concern, marketing is the name of the game. But if the latter is of primary importance, authenticity is the only solution, for truth compromised is truth no more. It isn't a matter of degrees.

Our nation stands at a historic crossroad. Never has the threat to Jewish continuity been so real. Among American Jews who have gotten married since 2000, nearly six in ten have married out while among Jews who got married before 1970, just 17% have a non-Jewish spouse. Notably, nearly one third of American Jews born after 1980 do not

consider themselves to have a religion.

Jerusalem, we got a problem.

But how is it fixed? How do we hold on to the next generation?

Instead of watering down the Torah until it's hardly recognizable, and translating it into mundane language so that society can "relate" to it, let us raise the bar of society by teaching them the elevated language of the Torah.

Communication may be crucial but not at the expense of the message. If the package itself is impressive the wrapping paper will cease to matter.

In the words of our sages when describing Aaron (one of the first outreach workers): "A lover of every creature, and brings them close to Torah." The words are precise: "Bring them to the Torah"; don't bring the Torah down to them. Through the process of illumination – not elimination – we will get through to the lost children of our generation.

Through bringing Judaism alive, Judaism will live on. Through teaching Judaism with sincerity, passion, authenticity, and joy - it will be embraced. If we invest in advertising, let us see ourselves as walking advertisements for Judaism. It will catch on.

In the long run, this is the only strategy that will work.



*Happy Passover!*

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# Finding Support

by Atara Levine

"I've been doing this for twenty-five years, my dear."

I looked at the doctor in disbelief and then looked down as I tried to blink away my tears.

Her eyes still on the screen, she clicked here and there, taking measurements of my no-longer-viable fetus. As if "my dear" could take the edge off the crushing disappointment of losing yet another pregnancy.

For the last two years, I have been riding a physical and emotional roller-coaster. Up with the tender hopes and prayers of wisps of new life and down the slumps when I lost one dream after the next.

I am blessed with a family, yet I long to fulfill one of my roles as a woman by bringing more children into the world while still in my childbearing years.

But G-d said, "Not now."

A wonderful organization that supports women through this challenge sent me a support package after my second loss. The soul-stirring musical compositions elicited tears when I felt numb and lifted my spirits with their messages of hope and encouragement. As time passed, I slowly recovered, and the songs receded to my mental back-burner, with a deep hope that I would no longer need their comfort.

G-d had other plans for me.

This scenario replayed itself five times! By the fifth, I didn't want to count anymore. I was doing this on repeat but it didn't get easier. There was the crying. The praying. The days when I just wanted to hide out in a cave and wallow.

I started painting as a hobby and found it to be a therapeutic release for when I just needed silence. I found that



spreading the colors on canvas filled me somehow and kept me going when the days were tough.

I hugged and held my youngest daughter with extra softness and passion. I did this often and it was a win-win situation. She got her cuddle and so did I.

Through the heavy darkness of these losses, I also looked out for any sparks of Divine reassurance, and He showed them to me in the most obvious ways.

After one of my miscarriages, I was feeling physically weak and emotionally in need of a pick-me-up. I contacted my husband and "placed an order" for a ready-made salad and nutritious soup. Still, he wouldn't be coming home until many hours later and that could-someone-take-care-of-me feeling persisted.

I didn't have the energy to do any major (or minor) housework, so I looked around for a super small task to complete. On my counter sat an empty vitamin bottle reminding me to place an order from our local health food store. In my hormonal, non-social state, I opted to use their new order-by-text system.

A few hours later, I picked up my phone and noticed a return text confirming my order and something about pitaya. Perhaps I am from the Middle Ages, but I had no idea what pitaya was.

I fell into bed. When I awoke, I went to check my front door to see if my vitamin order had arrived while I dozed. Sure enough, there was a bag on my door, presumably from the health food store.



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But wait. What was inside? A few napkins were tucked into the bag and there was something underneath. I had not shared my “news” with anyone, so where had it come from? How odd. Was this from the health food store or not?

I lifted the napkin to reveal a clear cup with a cover and a purple smoothie inside. Then, I noticed the bottles of vitamins underneath. I reread the text from the health food store: “Special promotion! Order by text and receive a free pitaya cup with your order!”

It was a caress from G-d. “I am here with you.”

Just a few days before my most recent loss, a friend sent me a playlist with a particularly moving song I had heard at a gathering that she knew I wanted to hear again. After playing the song many times, I continued listening to other songs on the same playlist.

One song struck a deep chord. I had been going through a difficult challenge with one of my children and the song contained a message of support. I felt G-d’s embrace through the soothing words.

After listening and absorbing the message of the song, I couldn’t keep it to myself. I texted a friend who was recovering from a miscarriage to share the emotional boost. She was just as taken by the song as I was, and I marveled at the timing orchestrated from Above.

Little did I know that just two days later(!) I would need

the song myself for the same reason as my friend. As I sat in the hallway of the doctor’s office waiting for a car to pick me up, I listened to the song to try to alleviate at least some degree of my crushing disappointment.

It was clear that G-d was speaking to me, and though I was still in pain, this incident lent me a tremendous sense of comfort.

That was not all. Although I wasn’t in the mood to go anywhere, I attended my daughter’s play a few days later, my miscarriage looming like dark shadows around me. What we do for our children, right?

The principal stood up to introduce the program with a short message of inspiration tied to the theme of the performance. My daughter, in the name of keeping me in eager suspense, kept her lips sealed throughout the practices so I had no idea what was coming.

The topic of the talk? “*Kol man d’avid Rachmana l’tav avid.*” Whatever G-d does is (ultimately) for the good.

My mouth hung open as I listened to words clearly intended for me. She posed a question: Why does it say “l’tav avid,” meaning that whatever happens is (literally to/for the good) and not that it is “tov,” simply good? She explained that whatever happens is always leading towards good, although at the time it may not feel that way.

G-d, I hear You. Thank you for shining Your light upon me in the darkness of this challenge.

## What’s So Special About Your Jewish Birthday?

**Be Grateful** - First and foremost, a birthday is a day to feel grateful. It’s a day for parents to be grateful to G-d for the precious gift He granted them. A day for the Jewish nation to be grateful for the addition of a new member of the nation-family. And, of course, it is a day for the birthday celebrant to express gratitude to G-d for the gift of life.

This is the day when you were given the mandate to change the world. The day when G-d entrusted you with the mission to challenge a world that may be hostile to spirituality and transform it into G-d’s private sanctum. And in accomplishing this goal, you, too, were given the ability to achieve incredible spiritual heights - heights unimaginable to the soul before it was dispatched from its lofty heavenly abode to inhabit a physical body.

Celebrating a birthday is thus also a demonstration of confidence. Confidence that you are and will continue to be worthy of G-d’s trust. No matter the obstacles, you will persevere and live up to G-d’s expectations of you.

This day takes on additional significance if you are above the age of bar or bat mitzvah. The word “mitzvah” means commandments, but is also related to the word “*tzaveta*,” which means “connection.” Fulfilling G-d’s commandments is the vehicle through which we connect to G-d. Until bar and bat mitzvah, mitzvot are primarily an educational experience - the commandment element kicking in upon adulthood. That means greater responsibility, but an infinitely greater connection, too. Your birthday is also the anniversary of that momentous occasion. Another reason to be grateful...

**Dejot Vu** - Time is like a spiral. Annually, on the anniversary of any momentous event, we have the ability to tap into the same spiritual energy that originally caused that event (hence the concept of Jewish holidays).

When you were born, G-d invested within you a soul abounding with talents and qualities. Your mazel was shining and at full strength. That same energy is present once again every year on the anniversary of that date. On this day you have the ability to accomplish that which would perhaps be very difficult on another day. Rosh Hashanah is so special because it is the birthday of humankind - it is the day when Adam and Eve were created. Your birthday is your personal Rosh Hashanah - utilize it to its utmost!

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