

Special Delivery

R' Abraham Aboud shook the hand of the *menahel*, his principal in the *Talmud Torah*. He wished him a happy and kosher Pesah as the principal handed him his wages. Not much, but enough to cover his needs for the upcoming holiday.

And then R' Abraham came home. "I know I put the money here. It must be here somewhere." R' Abraham looked several times, but his pockets were empty. The money was gone. He remembered a man who'd bumped into him on his way home, and realized he'd fallen prey to a pickpocket.

"What will we do? How will we prepare for Pesah?" his wife asked.

"What will we do? We will put our faith in Hashem and He will not forget us."

Some people talk about faith, others act upon it. R' Abraham was among the latter, and he immediately sat down at the small wooden table and took out pen and paper.

"*Ribono Shel Olam*," he wrote, "You know, of course, what has happened to me, that all my money is gone, and we need so much to honor the upcoming holiday of Pesah. Here, then, is a list of all that we need for the holiday. I don't want to turn to others for charity, so I turn only to You. You will know how to send me what I need, and I know You will not forget me." With that, R' Abraham signed his name, walked onto the roof of his house, and flung his "shopping list" to the winds.

The next day, R' Abraham's wife opened the door to find a porter setting down two large boxes. Before the astonished Rabbanit had a chance to question him, he'd turned on his heels and disappeared.

R' Abraham's wife cautiously opened the boxes and saw all the items for the holiday that her husband had listed the day before. She stared, bewildered. Her husband must have either borrowed the money or set aside his qualms and asked for charity. But who had been so generous? And why, if he'd somehow managed to get *sedakah* funds for this, had he indulged in the unheard-of luxury of hiring a porter?

When her husband returned home, he was as puzzled and bewildered as she was. "I never sent a porter; I didn't do any shopping; and I have no idea where this is from."

But the name on the boxes was theirs, and so, it appeared, was all this merchandise. The family thanked Hashem for the unexpected bounty and enjoyed a beautiful holiday.

A few weeks after Pesah, Senor Silvera, a prominent philanthropist, invited R' Abraham to his home for a chat. "So, did you get everything I sent for the holiday?"

R' Abraham stared, shocked. "Then it was you who sent the food? But how did you know that I needed help?"

For an answer, Senor Silvera pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket. He showed R' Abraham the "shopping list" he'd cast away weeks before. "You sent this to Hashem, and He sent it on to my window. We do not live near each other, and yet it landed on my windowsill, where I saw it. I realized that Hashem had willed that I was the one who would merit helping you. I followed your list, and told the porter not to answer any questions."

R' Abraham said, "Then it appears that I owe you my deepest thanks, as well as the money for the goods."

Senor Silver laughed. "Heaven forbid, don't even think about it. You don't owe me a single coin. I have simply done what Heaven wanted me to do, and I am just glad that I was chosen to be Hashem's messenger and your personal shopper!" (Stories of Spirit and Faith)

SPECIAL PESAH SECTION



Pesah Laws and Customs

a) ***Siyum Bechorot*** - All adult first born males must fast on the day of Pesah Eve to commemorate the fact that no Jew died when the Egyptian first-born were killed on Pesah night. Being that it is a lenient fast, they are permitted to participate in the meal of a *misvah*, such as *siyum*, which means completion of a book or tractate of Torah. The first-born must attend personally in order to be able to eat that day. This year, since *ereb Pesah* is on Shabbat, the fast & *siyum* will take place on Thurs., March 25.

b) **Searching for *hamess*** - *Bedikat Hamess* - after weeks of cleaning for Pesah, we complete our preparations by checking for *hamess* in all our possessions, including homes, stores and cars. This year we begin searching on Thursday night, March 25, at **7:45 p.m.** We may not eat dinner or do work before we finish the *Bedikah*, and we must make the blessing "*Al Bi'ur Hamess*" beforehand. We use a single-wick candle or flashlight to search for *hamess*, and it is a custom to place ten pieces of bread around the house before the search - to retrieve during the search. Afterwards, we nullify all leaven that may have been missed by saying "*Kal Hamira*" (found in the Haggadah).

c) **Burning the *hamess*** - It is a *misvah* to burn any leftover *hamess* by **11:27 a.m.** on Friday morning, March 26. Make sure the *hamess* is completely burned (use cooking oil or other flammable liquids for a better flame, but BE CAREFUL!) and then throw the ashes away.

e) **Reminder** - The days of *Omer* begin on the second day of Pesah, and no haircuts are allowed for 34 days; make sure to take all haircuts before Pesah, by Friday, March 26.

f) **The Seder** - On Saturday and Sunday evening we reach the climax of all our preparations by celebrating the Seder. The emphasis is on the children, making sure they all understand and appreciate the Exodus from Egypt. All questions and discussions dealing with our freedom should be encouraged. Follow the Haggadah regarding the four cups of wine, the *matzah shemurah*, the *maror*, etc.

g) **The first days** - Sunday and Monday, March 28 & 29, are the first two days of Pesah. All work is, of course, forbidden; only cooking and carrying, when necessary, are permitted. The holiday should be enjoyed as a day of thankfulness to Hashem. On the first day before *musaf*, we begin the prayer for dew (*morid hatal*) in place of the prayer for rain. Please make special note of it, because if one forgets, he must repeat the entire *amidah*.

h) **Candlelighting** - Remember to light candles Saturday night and Sunday night, March 27 & 28, and Friday night and Saturday night April 2 & 3. The candlelighting blessing for the holiday candles is "*Lehadlik ner shel yom tob*."

i) **Hol Hamo'ed** - The next four days are *Hol Hamo'ed* - the intermediate days of the holiday, Tuesday, March 30 through Friday, April 2. No *tefillin* are worn on those days, and special prayers are said, including *musaf* and half-*hallel*, and the Torah is read every day. *Ya'aleh Veyabo* is said all eight days in the *amidah* and *bircat hamazon*. Many forms of work are prohibited on those days, so please consult before you make your plans to work.

k) **The last days** - Beginning Friday evening, April 2, Shabbat April 3 and Sunday April 4, are the last two days of Pesah. The same laws apply as for the first two days. The seventh day of Pesah was the day that the Jews miraculously crossed the sea and were finally safe from their enemies. To commemorate this, we have a special reading early in the morning, followed by first *minyan*. This will be on Shabbat morning, April 3, at **4:15 a.m.** and *minyan* at **5:37 a.m.** 2nd *minyan* will be as usual at **8:15 a.m.**

l) **Holiday ends** - The holiday is over on Sunday night, April 4, at **8:03 p.m.** Until that time, all Pesah laws are in effect. You may use your *hamess* at **9:03 p.m.** Make sure to buy *hamess* only from stores owned by gentiles, or from stores that had their *hamess* sold properly.

SHABBAT MEALS ON EREB PESAH

Since *Ereb Pesah* falls out on Shabbat and there is a *misvah* to eat bread for the Shabbat meals, we suggest the following procedure, so as not to have problems with the Pesah utensils and *hamess*.

One should change over the kitchen to Pesah utensils before Shabbat, and the food should be cooked in Pesah pots and be kosher for Pesah. Make *Kiddush* and then eat non-crumby bread (Syrian bread is preferred) on a disposable tablecloth, using disposable plates. After everyone eats their bread, gather all leftover crumbs from the table, sweep up all crumbs from the floor and flush them down the toilet. Throw out the plates and tablecloth. After eating the bread, **MAKE SURE TO WASH HANDS & MOUTH IN THE BATHROOM SINK.** Then reset the table and serve the meal on Pesah dishes.

On Shabbat morning, follow the same procedure, **BUT THE BREAD MUST BE EATEN BY 10:16 am**

We will have early *minyanim* at **5:48 and 7:00 am** to enable the men to come home for this early meal. **There will be no other minyanim for Shahrut on this day.**

We dispose of the leftover bread by flushing it down the toilet. One should try to figure out in advance how much bread each person needs, so that there should not be any leftover *hamess*. **THE BREAD MUST BE DISPOSED OF BY 11:27 am** and the *Bitul* (Nullification) must be recited by that time. After that, bread is *MUKSEH* and cannot be moved by a Jew.

REMEMBER!!

- 1. Wash hands and mouth after *hamess*.**
- 2. Flush leftover crumbs down toilet.**
- 3. Stop eating *hamess* by 10:16 AM**
- 4. Dispose & nullify *hamess* by 11:27 AM**

Sounds Familiar?

In *Yehezkel* 46:9, we find the following instructions on how the nation of Israel was to approach the *Bet Hamikdash*, the Holy Temple: "But when the people of the land shall come before Hashem on the holidays, he who enters in by the way of the north gate to bow down shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he who enters by the way of the south gate shall go out by the way of the north gate; he shall not return by the way of the gate by which he came in, but shall go out straight ahead."

Rav Yaakov Emden explains why these instructions were needed. Hashem did not want the people to see any gate twice on a visit to the *Bet Hamikdash*. If a person would enter and exit from the same place, he might become too familiar with his surroundings. He might start acting in the *Bet Hamikdash* like he does in his own home. Clearly, the *Bet Hamikdash*, as the holiest location known to us on earth, deserves a level of reverence and respect far beyond that displayed when one is in his own home. Yet, if the person became too accustomed to the *Bet Hamikdash*, he may come to disrespect the Holy Temple. To ensure that this would not happen, Hashem desired that people exit and enter the *Bet Hamikdash* from different places, so that the people would be constantly reminded of where they were, and act accordingly.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz writes that greatest enemy to feelings of holiness is familiarity. The dangers of familiarity manifest themselves in different ways. On one hand, at a time when a person strives to accomplish more and reach new heights, familiarity comes along and extinguishes that burning fire. A person becomes accustomed to a certain situation, to a certain status. Change is perceived as something that can cause discomfort, and discomfort is to be avoided. On the other hand, people may recognize the inherent holiness of a certain situation. but because they spend so much time in that situation, the uniqueness fades leading to a backsliding in spiritual stature. Familiarity causes people to not only be complacent, but to regress as well.

On Pesah, we have a *misvah* to tell over the chain of events culminating with our exodus from Egypt. We tell over this story using questions and answers, to the degree that even if a person has no one who can ask, he should do both the asking and the answering himself. Why is there such a stress on using this method? Rav Shmuelevitz writes that the *misvah* is to tell the story as if it was the first time we were telling it, and as if the listener had never heard the story before. Obviously, this is extremely difficult. We are all familiar with the story, the listeners usually are as well, and this is especially true if the same person is doing all the talking!

Yes, we all are familiar with the story. It may not appear to be so special to us anymore. That dangerous state of familiarity has crept in and made what could be a tremendously uplifting experience into just another lengthy holiday meal. In order to counteract that familiarity, we ask questions and provide answers. We provoke conversation and thought. We stimulate our audience and ourselves by engaging in a string of questions that should inspire us to delve deeply into this story that we all know so well. By inviting this spirit of freshness and originality into the narrative of the Seder, we eliminate the dangers posed by familiarity and we enable ourselves to properly fulfill our obligation to tell the story of our departure from Egypt.

The holiday of Pesah is indeed special. It's like a birthday party of sorts, when we celebrate the birth of our nation. We can infuse this party with a degree of holiness but only if we appreciate what the party is all about. Our Sages gave us a mechanism to enable us to reach this degree of appreciation. It's called a question. And it's up to us to provide the answers. (Rabbi Yehudah Prero)

lip service to G-d by flippantly saying, “Well, I guess we have to accept the good with the bad,” but deep down, they are resentful and are consumed with sorrow and self-pity.

The following story illustrates this idea: A man once came to a certain Hassidic Rebbe and said to him, “The Sages say that one must accept the bad in the same manner that one accepts the good. This would seem to imply that a person must feel the same degree of happiness upon hearing bad tidings as when he hears good tidings. Who can ever reach this level? How can the Torah demand such a reaction from us? It is humanly impossible!”

The Rebbe said, “I don’t have an answer for you. However, I know who can help you. Go to Reb Zusha of Anapoli. He’ll provide an answer to your question.”

So the man went to find Reb Zusha of Anapoli. He found him living in indescribably wretched conditions and writhing in pain from the symptoms of a severe illness. The man approached Reb Zusha’s sickbed and whispered to him, “I have been told that you can answer my question.”

Reb Zusha opened his eyes and said, “What is your question, my son?”

The man repeated the question he had asked the Rebbe, “How can G-d expect us to feel the same degree of happiness upon hearing bad tidings as we feel when hearing good tidings? It seems like a totally unreasonable demand.”

Reb Zusha thought for a long time and then answered, “I’m sorry, my son, but I am not qualified to answer your question, for I’ve never had a bad day in my life. Nothing but good things have happened to me throughout my life. I have been extremely fortunate. I think you should ask someone who has endured a measure of suffering during his life.”

This story gives us a better idea of what it means to “accept the bad in the same manner as the good.” A person who has attained this high spiritual level does not perceive “bad” things as being bad. His attitude is that since G-d determines every event in the world, nothing can be termed “bad;” even painful experiences are ultimately for one’s own good.

The *Talmud* teaches that Hillel was such a person. Hillel was able to accept everything. His attitude was, “Who am I to judge if something is good or bad? Since G-d has decreed that it should happen to me, it must ultimately be for my own good!”

It is for this reason that Hillel ate the matzah together with the *maror* despite their being opposites. From Hillel’s perspective, there was absolutely no difference between the positive associations connected with matzah and the negative associations connected with *maror* – since both the Exodus and the exile were decreed by G-d, both must ultimately be good. Indeed, Hillel believed that the greatest manifestation of this principle takes place on the night of Pesah, when the Torah commands us to make a synthesis of good and bad by eating both matzah and bitter herbs. He believed that in order to attain a truly unified perception of good and bad, it would not only be necessary to eat these two foods in the same meal, but also to eat them simultaneously. Only by savoring the tastes of these two opposite concepts blending in one’s mouth can one hope to truly internalize the idea that “bad” is just a different form of “good,” and thereby fulfill the Sages’ instruction, “A person must accept the bad in the same manner as he accepts the good.” This is the deeper significance of *Korech*, “Hillel’s sandwich.” (The *Ohr Somayach Haggadah*)

תזכו לשנים רבות!!

Happy Holiday!

Who Knows Four?

Despite the late hour and exhaustion (not to mention wine), many a Jewish mind has wondered long and hard during a Pesah Seder about all the Haggadah’s “fours.” Four questions, four sons, four expressions of redemption, four cups. There’s clearly a numerical theme here.

While some may superficially dismiss the Haggadah as a mere compendium of random verses and songs, it is in truth a subtle and wondrous educational tool, with profound Jewish ideas layered through its seemingly simple text. The Rabbis who formulated its core, already extant in pre-*Talmudic* times, wanted it to serve as a tool for planting important concepts in the hearts and minds of its readers – especially its younger ones, toward whom the Seder, our tradition teaches, is aimed. And so the authors of the Haggadah employed an array of pedagogical methods, including songs, riddles and puzzles, as a means of conveying deeper understanding. And they left us clues, too.

When it comes to the ubiquitous “fours,” we might begin by pondering the essential fact that Pesah is when the Jewish people’s identity is solemnly perpetuated; the Seder, the ritual instrument through which each Jewish generation inculcates our collective history and essence to the next. Which is likely a large part of the reason so many Jewish parents who are alienated from virtually every other Jewish observance still feel compelled to have at least some sort of Seder, to read a Haggadah, or even – if they have strayed too far from their heritage to comfortably confront the original – to compose their own. (I once joked before an audience that a “Vegetarian Haggadah” would likely appear any year now, and someone in attendance later showed me precisely such a book – though it lacked the “Paschal Turnip” I had imagined.)

And so the role we adults play on Pesah night, vis a vis the younger Jews with whom we share the experience, is a very specific one. We are teachers, to be sure, but it is not information per se that we are communicating, but something more: identity.

At the Seder we seek to instill in our children the realization that they are not mere individuals but rather part of a people, members of a nation unconstrained by geographical boundaries but linked by history and destiny. We seek to impress them with the fact that they are links in a shimmering, ethereal chain stretching back to the Jewish nation’s birth, to when it was divinely redeemed from mundane slavery in Egypt and entered a sublime servitude of a very different sort – to G-d – at Sinai.

So, on Pesah, as we celebrate the birth of the Jewish nation and plant the seed of Jewish identity in the minds of smaller Jews, we are in a sense ourselves “birthing” - giving life to the Jewish future. And, while it may be the father who traditionally leads the Seder, he is acting not as teacher but rather in something more akin to a maternal role, as a spiritual nurturer of the children present.

Jewish identity, indeed, is dependent on mothers. According to *halachah*, or Jewish religious tradition, while a Jew’s tribal genealogy follows the paternal line, whether a child is a member of the Jewish people or not depends entirely on the status of his or her mother.

It’s only speculation, but might the recurrent numerical theme in our exquisite Haggadah, employed each year to instill Jewish identity, be reminding us of that? After all, the book has its own number-decoder built right in, toward its end, where

most good books' keys and indexes are found. It's a little hazy once it's reached, after four cups of wine, but it's unmistakably there: "*Echad Mi Yodea*" or "Who Knows One?" – the song that provides Jewish associations with numbers.

"Who knows four?" If you don't, you can look it up. (Rabbi Avi Shafran)

Free At Last

Many families gather together for the Pesah Seder. They eat the matzah and the bitter herbs, drink the four cups, and recite the Haggadah. The house is free of all *hamess*. In our prayers we refer to Pesah as "the festival of liberation." These are wonderful *misvot*. But, what do we take from Pesah into our daily lives?

It should be obvious that Pesah is more than a kind of Independence Day celebration. Who prepares for an Independence Day two weeks in advance, making the house *hamess*-free to a degree of operating-room sterility, replacing all dishes and cookware, and having a sharply restricted diet for eight days?

The deeper significance of Pesah occurred to me when a recovering drug addict told me that when his father began reciting the Haggadah at the Seder, and said, "*Abadim hayinu* (we were slaves)," he interrupted him. "Abba," he said, "can you truthfully say that you were a slave? Your ancestors were slaves, but you don't know what it means to be a slave. I can tell you what it is like to be a slave. All the years that I was on drugs, I had no freedom. I had to do whatever my addiction demanded. I did things that I never thought I was capable of doing, but I had no choice, no free will. I was the worst kind of slave."

This is a precious insight. Slavery is not limited to a despotic Pharaoh or a slave owner. A person can lose his freedom and be a slave to himself, to his habits and negative character traits. A person who cannot break free from cigarettes is a slave, as is someone who cannot break free from gambling, from excess food, from the Internet, and even from the office.

A person whose self-concept is dependent on what others think of him, or whose behavior is totally determined by what he thinks others want him to be, he, too, has no freedom. He is not free to do what he thinks is right and proper, but what others think is right and proper. Anytime one loses control of any aspect of one's behavior, one is a slave.

The entire Haggadah is essentially a text on breaking free from all forms of enslavement, internal as well as external.

This understanding of Pesah and the Exodus explains why we have an entire week of celebrating independence. For political independence, one day of parades, picnics, and fireworks suffices. For the realization of obtaining true personal freedom, an entire week of contemplation is necessary...

The centerpiece of Pesah is, of course, the matzah. The Zohar refers to matzah as "the bread of faith." Presumably, this is because the Israelites left Egypt in such great haste that they could not take along any provisions, and took only the unleavened dough with them. With trust in G-d they headed into the barren desert where no food was available. The matzah, therefore, represents the Israelites' faith and trust in G-d.

Rabbi Zvi Elimelech of Dinov (*Bnei Yissaschar*) provides an additional insight. The prohibition of *hamess* on Pesah is much harsher than that of other forbidden foods. For example, if a piece of non-kosher meat falls into a pot of kosher food, and the volume of the kosher food is at least 60 times that of the non-kosher meat, the food may be eaten. However, if a tiny crumb of *hamess* falls into a huge vat of food

on Pesah, even if the volume is infinitely great — a million to one — the entire vat of food is prohibited. The tiniest crumb of *hamess* cannot be considered negligible.

Bnei Yissaschar explains the difference between *hamess* and matzah. Matzah is never allowed to be left without someone working it. From the time the flour and water are combined, the dough is kneaded, promptly rolled out, perforated, and baked. Nothing happens to the matzah that is not the direct effect of someone handling it. Not so with *hamess*, where the ingredients are mixed and then set aside for a period of time to rise. The latter process is spontaneous, occurring without anyone's doing anything to make it rise.

Matzah and *hamess*, therefore, represent two perspectives. *Hamess* represents the idea that things can happen by themselves, while matzah symbolizes that nothing happens unless someone makes it happen. There is no spontaneity.

The Torah did not wish to deprive us of bread all year, but when we celebrate our independence and our free will, the matzah reminds us that there is no spontaneity in the world. Everything is at all times under the direct providence of God. Except for the choice in behavior, of moral and ethical acts that God assigned to man, there is not even the tiniest occurrence that is spontaneous. The *Baal Shem Tov* was very emphatic about this, saying that if someone digs into sand, each of the millions of grains of sand falls into the place where G-d wills it to be. Not even the placement of a grain of sand is without design.

Matzah, therefore, symbolizes that everything in the world, great and small, is under the direction of G-d. That is why the *Zohar* refers to matzah as "the bread of faith."

In the order of the Seder, we eat the matzah before the *maror* (bitter herbs). Inasmuch as the *maror* symbolizes the enslavement, would it not be proper that the *maror* precede the matzah, which represents the liberation? Herein lies an important concept. The Israelites had become so inured to being slaves that they did not recognize the bitterness of the condition. It was only after they had a taste of freedom that they realized how bitter it was to be a slave.

This can be applied directly to addiction. During the addiction, one is unaware of the brutality of his condition. It is only after one breaks free of the bonds of the addiction that he can understand how dreadful this condition had been.

But addiction is not the only time this phenomenon occurs. A person may be living a lifestyle in which he believes himself to be happy, and only when he is enlightened does he realize how mistaken he had been to think that he was truly happy... In retrospect they see that a life without a higher goal, a life devoid of spirituality, is beneath the dignity of man...(Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

Taking the Bad With the Good

Why did Hillel hold that in the days of the Temple, matzah should be eaten together with *maror*? Matzah is clearly a symbol of the Exodus, of leaving Egypt, while *maror* is a symbol of exile. Since these two foods represent opposite things, why did Hillel deem it fit to eat them in the same mouthful?

The *Mishnah* in *Berachot* (9:5) says, "A person must accept the bad in the same manner as he accepts the good." Life is indeed far from perfect. Job's wife, after losing all her children and possessions, said to her husband, "You still keep your integrity? Blaspheme G-d and die!" (Job 2:9). Job's response was, "Should we accept only good from G-d and not accept evil?" (2:10). Job's wife expressed the attitude felt by the large majority of mankind – when everything is going well, enjoy

and praise G-d, but when things start to get tough, start bickering and question G-d. Job was one of the few individuals on earth who recognized that we must be willing to accept both sides of life, the good as well as the bad. He ultimately rose to a level of spiritual purity where he was able to accept hardships with love. This is a level that very few people reach. It requires that one realize that since G-d controls the entire world, even unfortunate events that occur to us must be for our ultimate benefit. Many people pay