



The Chabad Online Weekly Magazine

a project of www.Chabad.org

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Passover 5764 (2004)

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He took us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity, from deep darkness to great light, and from bondage to redemption

(The Haggadah)

Daily Thought

The Inside Story of Passover

In each one of us there is an Egypt and a Pharaoh and a Moses and freedom in a Promised Land. And every point in time is an opportunity for another Exodus.

Egypt is a place that chains you to who you are, constraining you from growth and change. And Pharaoh is that voice inside that mocks your gambit to escape, saying, "How could you attempt being today something you were not yesterday? Aren't you good enough just as you are? Don't you know who you are?"

Moses is the liberator, the infinite force deep within, an impetuous and all-powerful drive to break out from any bondage, to always transcend, to connect with that which has no bounds

But Freedom and the Promised Land are not static elements that lie in wait. They are your own achievements which you may create at any moment, in any thing that you do, simply by breaking free from whoever you were the day before. Last Passover you may not have yet begun to light a candle. Or some other mitzvah still waits for you to fulfill its full potential. This year, defy Pharaoh and light up your world. With unbounded light.

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Comment

Matzah after Midnight

by Yanki Tauber

When you were a child, you were blessed with faith. The world was good, people were good, and being good yourself was simply a matter of following the the dos and don'ts of life which G-d had told your Mom and Dad.

Then you grew up, met some of the bad guys, and found that following the rules doesn't always pan out the way you imagined it would. Morality muddled into an amalgam of maybes, ifs and usuallys. Faith alone wasn't enough anymore: you also needed intellect, sensitivity, feeling, will and desire to navigate this thing called life.

When you first married, you were blessed with faith. Your husband/wife was the most good-hearted, intelligent, beautiful, talented, caring and loving person in the universe. Your love for each other would get you through anything. Then your marriage aged, acquiring wrinkles, an irregular heartbeat and bouts of dementia. Love alone just wasn't enough anymore: you also needed intellect, sensitivity, feeling, will and desire to maintain the relationship.

You begin in faith, and move on to experience. But there is also a third stage: a stage in which the faith reemerges. A stage in which you discover that your spouse really is the greatest, most wonderful person in the universe. A stage in which you discover that the world is good, that people are good, that the G-d-given dos and don'ts are the formula for a meaningful life. No, it's not as simple and straightforward as your youthful faith saw it. But this mature, complex, thoughtful, willed and inspired faith has something that youthful faith didn't have: it has a density, a texture, a taste. A richness.

You've returned to that original faith, that same faith which shone so bright and hard because it wasn't saddled with knowledge and experience. Now, however, your faith co-exists with -- indeed feeds upon -- your knowledge and experience. The roots of your faith reach deeper than them, its crown towers higher than them, but it also leans against them and is fortified by them.

Matzah is the most basic icon of the festival of Passover. The biblical name for Passover is "The Festival of Matzahs." For eight days, this flat, "unleavened bread" dis-



places all leavened forms of the staff of life. And on Passover eve, the three seder matzahs, enthroned on their special plate at the head of the table, take center stage in the seder rituals.

But there's no small amount of confusion surrounding the significance of the matzah. The sages of the Talmud and the Kabbalah give it different -- even conflicting -- names: "The Bread of Affliction," "The Bread of Poverty," "The Bread of Humility," "The Bread of Instruction," "The Bread of Faith," "The Bread of Healing."

And then there's the matter of timing: Just when was the matzah born? At the beginning of the seder we announce, "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt..." But later in the evening, we recite: "This matzah that we eat, for what reason [do we eat it]? Because the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened before the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to them and redeemed them."

Thus we have pre-Exodus matzah and post-Exodus matzah. Or, as they're referred to in the teachings of Chassidism, pre-midnight matzah and post-midnight matzah.

For matzah, the bread of faith, has two faces. It is the faith of "poverty" which thrives in pristine souls free of the tangles of intellect and the burdens of experience. And then, when it emerges from the other side of the night, it is a faith enriched by the very elements that stifled it in its years of exile.

Based on the teaching of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, adapted by Yanki Tauber



Story

Barrels on a Riverbank

From the Chassidic Masters

Editor's note: One of the central figures in the history of Chassidism was the famed "Seer of Lublin," Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Horowitz (1745-1815), who presided over the spread of Chassidism in Poland and Galicia; many of the great Chassidic masters of the time were his disciples. This story, however, is not about the "Seer" but about his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Kopel of Likova; in fact, it happened many years before the Seer's birth.

Reb Kopel earned a living by purchasing barrels of vodka and beer from the local distillers and selling his wares to the taverns in and around his native village of Likova. It was not an easy life, with the heavy taxes exerted by the government and the hostile environment facing a Jew in 17th-century Europe. Yet his faith and optimism never faltered.

Each year, on the morning before Passover, Reb Kopel would sell his chametz to one of his gentile neighbors. Chametz is "leaven" -- a category that must famously include bread but also all food or drink made with fermented grain. The Torah commands the Jew that absolutely "no leaven shall be found in your possession" for the duration of the Passover festival, in commemoration of the leaven-free Exodus from Egypt. In the weeks before the festival, the Jewish home is emptied and scrubbed clean of chametz; on the night before Passover, a solemn candle-lit search is conducted for every last breadcrumb hiding between the floorboards. By the next morning, all remaining household chametz is eaten, burned or otherwise disposed of.

What about someone like Reb Kopel who deals in leavened foods and has a warehouse full of chametz? For such cases (and for anyone who has chametz they don't want to dispose of) the rabbis instituted the practice of selling one's chametz to a non-Jew. Reb Kopel's neighbors were familiar with the annual ritual. The Jewish liquor dealer would draw up a legally-binding contract with one of them, in which he sells all the contents of his warehouse for a sum equal to their true value. Only a small part of the sum actually changed hands; the balance was written up as an I.O.U. from the purchaser to the seller. After Passover, Reb Kopel would be back, this time to buy back the chametz and return the I.O.U. The purchaser got a tip for his trouble -- usually in the form of a generous sampling of the merchandise that had been legally his for eight days and a few hours.

One year, someone in Likova came up with a novel idea: what if they all refused to buy the Jew's vodka? In that case he would have to get rid of it. Why suffice with a bottle or two when they could have it all?

When Reb Kopel knocked on a neighbor's door on the morning of Passover eve, Ivan politely declined to conduct the familiar transaction. Puzzled, he tried another cottage further down the road.

It did not take long for him to realize the trap that his gentile neighbors had laid for him. The deadline for getting rid of chametz -- an hour before midday -- was quickly approaching. There was no time to travel to the next village to find a non-Jewish purchaser.

Reb Kopel did not hesitate for a minute. Quickly he emptied the wooden shack behind his house that served as his warehouse. Loading his barrels of chametz on his wagon, he headed down to the river. As his neighbors watched gleefully from a distance, he set them on the river bank. In a loud voice he announced: "I hereby renounce any claim I have on this property! I proclaim these barrels ownerless, free for the talking for all!" He then rode back home to prepare for the festival.

That night, Reb Kopel sat to the Seder with a joyous heart. When he recited from his Haggadah, "Why do we eat this unleavened bread? Because the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened before G-d revealed Himself to them and redeemed them", he savored the taste of each word in his mouth. All his capital had been invested in those barrels of vodka and beer; indeed, much of it had been bought on credit. He was now penniless, and the future held only the prospect of many years of crushing debt. But his heart was as light and bright as a songbird. He had not a drop of chametz in his possession! For once in his life, he had been given the opportunity to truly demonstrate his love and loyalty to G-d. He had removed all leaven from his possession, as G-d had commanded him. Of course, he had fulfilled many mitzvot in his lifetime, but never at such a cost -- none as precious -- as this one!

The eight days of Passover passed for Reb Kopel in a state of ecstatic joy. Then the festival was over, and it was time to return to the real world. With thoughtful steps he headed to his warehouse to look through his papers and try to devise some plan to start his business anew. Clustered in the doorway he found a group of extremely disappointed goyim.

"Hey, Kopel!" one of them called, "I thought you were supposed to get rid of your vodka. What's the point of announcing that it's 'free for the taking for all' if you put those watchdogs there to guard it!"

They all began speaking at once, so it took a while for Kopel to learn the details. For the entire duration of the festival, night and day round the clock, the barrels and casks on the riverbank were ringed by a pack of ferocious dogs who allowed no one to approach. Reb Kopel rode to the riverbank. There the barrels stood, untouched.

But he made no move to load them on his wagon. "If I take them back," he said to himself, "how will I ever know that I had indeed fully and sincerely relinquished my ownership over them before Passover? How could I ever be sure that I had truly fulfilled the mitzvah of removing chametz from my possession? No! I won't give up my mitzvah, or even allow the slightest shadow of a doubt to fall over it!"

One by one, he rolled the barrels down the riverbank until they stood at the very brink of the water. He pulled out the stops in their spigots and waited every last drop of vodka and beer had merged with the river. Only then did he head back home.

Told by Rabbi Y.S. Zevin's in Sippurei Chassidim; translation/adaptation by Yanki Tauber; editor@chabadonline.com

Idea of the Week

Nineteen Flavors of Freedom

A Passover Anthology

compiled by Yanki Tauber

Brittle as matzah, sensual as wine; salty as sweat, bitter as tears, sweet as memory, joyous as a summer harvest, sublime as the infinitude of the soul. These are the tastes of freedom, sampled here in nineteen Passover insights, essays, stories and recollections.

Bon Appétit!

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A small sampling of these articles are presented in the following pages, for the full anthology, go to <http://www.chabad.org/magazine/article.asp?AID=117155>



My Plastic Pharaoh

by Tzvi Freeman

So here I am, scrubbing out the crumbs from my ergonomic keyboard, faxing in my Deed of Chametz Sale and downloading a new Haggadah. In other words, it's almost Passover 5760 already. I'll soon be sitting at the Seder table with family and friends and the same question as with every one of these holidays is going to come up: What are we celebrating? What are we all here for?

My kids tell me that's no question: We're here to celebrate our freedom. That's what the holiday is called, "The Festival of Our Freedom." We were slaves in Egypt, now we are free. So let's get to the meal and celebrate.

I'm glad they feel so free. As for me, I'm still a slave and Pharaoh, king of Egypt, never died. I labor for him all week long. He tricked me into it: First, he let me have all these nice things I really wanted for nothing. Later he started demanding money for them. When, one time, I didn't pay all the money, he demanded even more money. So I have to keep working real hard to give him all the money he demands.

I carry a picture of Pharaoh in his present incarnation in my wallet. It has his very intimidating new name engraved on it. He's called "Master Card."

But my kids don't go for that. They say that in the it says Pharaoh let us go free. Well, I know the Haggadah a little better than them. The fact is, the Haggadah, like every other piece of Torah, is full of puzzles and seeming contradictions, there just so you'll ask questions. If you read any piece of Torah, especially the Haggadah, and you don't have any questions, you obviously aren't reading right.

(That's why the "Son Who Doesn't Know How to Ask Questions" gets put at the very end of the table. Not the Wicked Son. Not the Simple Son. The "Unquestioning Son." Not just because unquestioning is very unJewish, but also because it means you're plain not paying attention to what's going on.)

To get to the point: We just finished making Kiddush, in which we call this "The Festival of Our Freedom." What do we say next? "This is the Poor Man's Bread...Now we are slaves, next year we will be free men."

Now is that a contradiction or is that a contradiction? Are we free or are we slaves?

So my kids tell me that we're celebrating that once we were slaves and then we got free and so we're celebrating. The fact that we all got into a mess and became slaves again, well, too bad. We can still commemorate the past. As long as the dinner is good.

Let me tell you something: I'm not into commemorating the past. If I'm going through all this trouble in the year 5760, 3,312 years later to clean my house for Passover and make a big Seder, it's got to have more significance than commemorating something that cancelled itself out with history anyway.

The problem of being a slave with all these contradictions, coupled with the stress of cleaning for Passover, really bothered me. So I went to see a psychotherapist. The psychotherapist listened, took notes and then told me that MasterCard is not Pharaoh. I am Pharaoh. More specifically, my unreasonable demands upon myself is the Pharaoh.

I told him my only real demand upon myself is that I should not be a slave. He said I shouldn't use that word, "should." The word "should" means I'm making an unreasonable demand upon myself. That causes stress. Stress, in his Haggadah, is slavery. Apparently, the Hebrews in Egypt were really stressed out. Building pyramids was nothing. It's the stress that did them in.

"So," I asked, "What should I do? I don't want to be a slave."

He told me I shouldn't do anything. Wanting is ok. I can want to not be a slave. Shoulding is bad. It's unreasonable to should.

Now I was really confused. I had always understood that "I should" was my liberator and "I want" was the one that got me in all this trouble to begin with. But the hour was up and there I was in the office showing my picture of Pharaoh to the psychotherapist's secretary.

"In summary," I thought, "I shouldn't say should." I needed to make another appointment with the shrink to ask whether I should or should not say that I shouldn't say should. But, at these professional rates, I didn't think my little Pharaoh would let me.

At any rate, I decided, I don't need a shrink to achieve liberation. After all, liberation is a form of enlightenment. When is the last time you met a spiritually enlightened psychotherapist? What I needed was a guru. An elevated, transcendent soul who is essentially liberated and could pull me out of all this muck and mire.

So I sat down and keyboarded out a letter, explaining everything, to the Guadalajara Rebbe. Then I fired it off to enlightenment@guadalajara.guru. I stayed online awaiting

my reply. In the meantime, I electronically paid the bills I was incurring by staying online so long in order to get a swift reply. My little Pharaoh came in useful again.

Then it came. Verbatim, as follows:

"We are all prisoners. The act of existence is our crime. The universe is our prison. Our bodies and our personage is our cell. The keys to liberation are held tight in the fists of our own egos."

Then a little note: "see Tanya, chapter 47. Also read Bringing Heaven Down to Earth by Tzvi Freeman."

I meditated, I sipped licorice tea, I meditated some more, and I got it. MasterCard is not Pharaoh. "I want" is not Pharaoh. Neither is "I should". It's not the want or the should, it's the "I."

I looked in Tanya, the classic Chassidic work by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, chapter 47. There he says that when G-d gave us the Torah, He gave us Infinity. We connect to Him with the Torah and we are free because we are then infinite and unbounded as He is. And he writes, "...and so there is nothing stopping anybody except for his own will, for if a person does not want..."

Again, the same idea. We are all free. But our egos clutch tightly the keys.

How do I get my ego to let go of the keys?

For philosophy you can go to an enlightened tzaddik somewhere in Mexico. For practical, real-time liberation, I need The Rebbe. The Lubavitcher Rebbe.

This is the practical advice of the Rebbe, in a talk one Passover:

"Make a part of your life an act that takes you beyond your bounds, helping people that are not part of your family or circle of friends, doing something that does not fit within your own self-definition. Invite someone to your seder who you're not so comfortable with. At first, it may not feel so good. But you have set yourself free."

So, again this year, I come to my seder. I leave my own little world of my own puny self and I walk through the door into something infinite, timeless and eternal, because it is bound with an infinite, timeless and eternal G-d. I am no longer part of me. I am part of us and part of His Torah and therefore part of Him.

And to prove it, I say, "Let all those who are needy come and join our seder. No matter who."

I have broken free. This year, we should all break free. Not just at the seder, but for every moment of our lives. Forever. This year in Jerusalem.

The Pilfering of Infinity

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

And they embittered their lives with hard labor, with mortar and bricks and in all manner of work in the field; all the work to which they subjected them was crushing labor.

Exodus 1:14

The phrase "crushing labor" (avodat perech) appears repeatedly in the Torah's account of the Egyptian galut (exile and enslavement), in the text of the Haggadah, and in the symbolism of the seder observances.

What is crushing labor? Maimonides defines it as "work that has no limit and no purpose." Work -- even most difficult work -- that has a defined end-point and a defined objective is not as demoralizing as endless, futile work. The Egyptians, whose aim in enslaving the Jewish people was to break their spirit, refused to impart any schedule, logic, efficiency or utility to their work. They worked them at the most irrational hours, gave to each of them the task most ill-suited to his or her abilities, and repeatedly destroyed what they had built only to order them to rebuild it again and again.

Pharaoh had whip-wielding taskmasters to enforce his work edict. Today, our world has progressed to the point that millions voluntarily subject themselves to work that has no limit and no purpose: work that spills over from its official work-hours to invade every moment and thought of the day; work that is dictated not by the capabilities and resources of the worker but by status and vogue; work that is not a means to an end but a "career" -- a self-perpetuating enterprise that becomes its own aim and objective.

(Therein lies the deeper significance of Pharaoh's decree, "Every son that is born you shall cast into the Nile." The Nile, which irrigated the fields of rain-parched Egypt, was the mainstay of its economy and therefore its most venerated god. Throwing one's child into the Nile, in the spiritual sense, means to immerse him in a culture which defies the career -- which worships the earthly vehicles of material sustenance as an end in itself.)

Endless Lives

By nature, the physical self is finite and pragmatic. So

what drives it to, and sustains it in, such infinite labor? What can be the source of its perseverance in pursuit of the ever-receding goal of material success?

Such boundless commitment and energy can only have one source: the spark of G-dliness that is the essence of the human soul. Only the soul, which draws upon the infinity of its divine source, can exhibit such vigor; only the soul, whose commitment to its Creator is an end unto itself, not contingent upon envisionable goals and calculable objectives, can be the driving force behind work that has "no limit and no purpose."

The soul of man is thus subjected to a galut within a galut: not only is it prevented from expressing its true self, but it is forced to express itself in ways that are contrary to its true desires. Not only is it constrained by a material self and world -- it also suffers the usurpation of its quintessential powers to drive the material self's mundane labors. Not only is the soul's capacity for infinite and objectiveless commitment inhibited and repressed -- it is distorted into an endless quest for material gain.

The Discipline of Freedom

The road out of Egypt passes through Sinai.

The Torah regulates our involvement with the material world. It instructs that we may -- and should -- work, create, and do business six days a week, but that on the seventh day, not only must all work cease, but we should assume a state of mind in which "all your work is done." On a daily basis, it tells us to set aside inviolable islands in time devoted to Torah study and prayer. And at all times, a multitude of Torah laws define the permissible and the forbidden in business and pleasure.

The Torah also enjoins us to "eat of the toil of your hands" -- to invest only our marginal faculties in the business of earning a living, leaving our choicest talents free to pursue more spiritual goals. And it insists that all material pursuits should be but a means to an end, but a vessel to receive G-d's blessings and a tool to aid us in our life's work of bringing sanctity and G-dliness into our world.

In so restricting our physical lives, the Torah liberates our souls. By limiting the extent and the nature of our material involvements, Torah extricates our capacity for infinite commitment from its material exile, freeing it to follow its natural course: to serve G-d in a manner of "no limit and no purpose" in the positive sense -- in a manner that transcends the parameters of self, self-gain and our very conception of achievement.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; adapted by Yanki Tauber.



The Fifth Question

by Yanki Tauber

Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh... "Why is this night different from all other nights?" our children ask us at the Passover Seder. Because, we answer, we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and G-d set us free.

Free? Are you free?

Can a person with a mortgage be free? Can a person with a mother-in-law be free? Can a person with a job be free? Can a person without a job be free?

Freedom! Is there anything more desired yet more elusive? Is there a need more basic to our souls, yet so beyond our reach? How, indeed, do we achieve freedom from the demands, cares and burdens of daily living?

But look at your child. Observe her at play, immersed in a book, asleep and smiling at her dreams. Assured that father and mother will feed him, protect him and worry about all that needs worrying about, the child is free. Free to revel in her inner self, free to grow and develop, open to the joys and possibilities of life.

This is why Passover, the festival of freedom, is so much the festival of the child. For it is the child who evokes in us the realization that we, too, are children of G-d, and are thus inherently and eternally free. It is the child who opens our eyes to the ultimate significance of Passover: that in taking us out of Egypt to make us His chosen people, G-d has liberated us of all enslavement and subjugation for all time.

The child is the most important participant at the Passover Seder. The entire Seder is constructed around the goal to mystify the child, to stimulate his curiosity, to compel him to ask: Why is this night different from all other nights?

The child asks, and we answer. But there is another dialogue taking place -- a dialogue in which we ask, and the child explains.

Take a good look at your child this Passover. Pay her close attention -- enter her mind, view reality from her perspective. For how else might we taste freedom?

By Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com, based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Current

A Fifth Son

by Yeruchem Eilfort

When one thinks of Passover, images of the traditional Passover meal, the Seder, immediately enter the mind. A seder is truly the time of togetherness for the Jewish family. Together, we recount the miraculous birth of the Jewish people. We revisit G-d's redeeming His people from the depths of despair and His transforming a nation of slaves into the beneficiaries of the Sinai experience and the recipients of His Torah.

The seder is more than just another retelling of the early history of the Jews. It is a vibrant learning experience in which all of the senses are utilized. This enables us to literally "digest" the message of Judaism. Most of us are fortunate to have fond memories of past seders.

In the course of the seder we discuss the "Four Sons" and the questions they pose, from the "Wise Son" who wants to know all of the particulars of Passover observances, to the "Wicked Son" who challenges and mocks them. There is a "Simple Son" who simply asks "What's this?" There is even a son whose only form of participation is simply being there. With everything happening around him, not a single question occupies his mind.

Modern society has had an impact upon the Jewish people: today we have yet another son. The son who does not even attend a seder.

Yes, it is true. There are many Jews out there who are not going to attend a seder this Passover. They can be put into three basic categories: 1) They have no place to attend. 2) They do not care to attend. 3) They do not know of Passover or its seder.

Just as there are answers for the Four Sons, there must be answers for this fifth son as well.

For those who have nowhere to attend, we must aggressively advertise the invitation found within the Haggadah, "All those who are hungry, let them come and eat! Whoever is in need, let him come and partake of the Passover!"

For those who do not care to attend, we must positively reinforce their Jewish identity and expose them to the beau-



ty of Torah observance, in general, and of the seder in particular. Most importantly, we must communicate with them in a language they can understand and identify with.

Those who do not know that it is Passover or that there is such a thing as a seder are perhaps the most worrisome of the groups. Most likely, they do not have the fond memories of Passovers past. They are, in fact, in danger of losing their Jewish identity altogether, G-d forbid. As Jews, we are all responsible for the welfare of one another. We must therefore endeavor to introduce these people to their great inheritance, the Torah, the grandeur of their Judaism. If we should happen to see a person drowning, we would dive in to save him/her without thinking twice. We must, without delay, "pull out all of the stops" to rescue those who need us most!

Let us aggressively seek out the Fifth Son, wherever or whoever she or he might be. Every lost Jew we bring back into the family may be compared to the discovery of a lost treasure of incalculable value.

It is not enough to just set an extra place at the seder table. Not any more. We must fill the extra place with a warm body. We can then fill that warm body with the warmth that is Judaism.

Based on a call issued by by the Lubavitcher Rebbe shortly before Passover of 1957

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Question

The Silent Cup

What is Elijah's Cup All About?

by Israel Rubin

Rich with symbolism, Passover overflows with meaning and significance. But while the whole seder hums with talk and activity, the "Cup of Elijah" stands alone by itself, without any apparent function. We pay individual tribute with a blessing over each of the other our cups, but not a word about this one. The wine poured into this cup remains untouched to the end -- we pour it right back into the bottle after the seder is over. Is this fifth cup like the proverbial fifth wheel, an unneeded appendage tagging along?

Of course, there's a bit of drama around this cup. When opening the door for Elijah, the children gather round to watch the quivering liquid ripple, hoping to detect some sign of its sampling by the visiting prophet. But surely there's more meaning to this cup than a child's imagination?

Let's not play pretend with someone as serious and holy as the prophet Elijah. It is quite thoughtful of some people to offer Elijah a drink while visiting, but thank you, he doesn't need sips to keep him going. This cup has real purpose and meaning. Let us learn more about Elijah's historic role in Judaism, and we'll realize that this special cup is here even more for our own sake than for his, to inspire us and to give our seder focus and direction.

The Halachic Background

Originally, the issue appears in the Talmud as a question as to whether an optional pleasure drink is permitted after the mandatory four cups. Only Rabbi Tarfon's minority opinion suggests a specific fifth cup for each participant as part of the seder routine. Centuries later, the Code of Jewish Law mentions the custom of placing a fifth cup on the table, calling it "Elijah's Cup."

So while the original obligatory four cups remain nameless (it's just "the first cup," "the second cup," etc.) Jewish tradition has given this cup a most prestigious name after one of the greatest prophets. How ironic that the namesake of this silent and passive cup is none other than the fiery, bold and outspoken Elijah!

According to an explanation by the Gaon of Vilna, "Elijah" refers to the Prophet Elijah as the final arbiter who will eventually, in the future, resolve all "taiku"--stalemates--in the Talmud. In this regard, the Fifth Cup remains



in limbo, awaiting Elijah's decision on the debate between Rabbi Tarfon versus the other rabbis whether we must drink four or five cups on Passover eve.

But why must we wait for Elijah to make this decision? Isn't the issue resolved simply by following the established principle that the majority rules, while Rabbi Tarfon is only a singular opinion? And why do we involve Elijah only here, and not also in the other halachic dispute that concerns our seder ritual -- that of Hillel vs. the Rabbis, whether the Paschal offering is eaten with the Matza as a Korech sandwich, or separately?

Expressions of Redemption

The commentaries relate the four cups to the "Four Expressions of Redemption" in G-d's promise to Moses (Exodus 6:2-8): "I will take you out," "I will deliver you," "I will redeem you," and "I will acquire you." These are not merely four synonyms, for each represents a distinct stage and level of Redemption. "I will take you out" refers to physical exit from the land of Egypt. "I will deliver you from their bondage" means delivery from servitude and "I will redeem you" is the Divine guarantee that we remain a free people. "I will acquire you as My nation" to be your G-d's chosen at Mount Sinai -- the goal of the Exodus.

In addition to these four expressions, the Torah also uses a fifth expression of Redemption: "I will bring you into the land." Until two thousand years ago, the seder may have indeed featured a fifth cup, when this fifth expression was fulfilled and the Jewish people actually lived in the Promised Land.

But after being exiled from our homeland, languishing in alien countries all around the world, our situation no longer corresponds to the fifth expression; hence no fifth cup.

Even over the last fifty years, when, thank G-d, we have Israel, we know that the complete redemption has still not come. Israel has proven to be a safe haven for Jews from all over the world, and we surely have much to be proud of Israel's miraculous victories and amazing achievements; yet we're still constantly threatened from within and without, challenged by dubious processes, treaties and schemes by our enemies and detractors. Israel is indeed a place of Divine blessings and protection, but it has yet to achieve the true peace and lofty ideals of the Messianic age.

So no fifth cup is drunk on Passover eve nowadays. Yet this special cup remained symbolically on the seder table, expressing our prayers and hopes to be gathered again to the Land of Israel. What may once have been an optional custom has developed over time into standard observance, reinforced by generations of Jewish yearning for the Redemption.

Elijah's Cup demonstrates that "Redemption" is not an abstract concept, an old wives' tale, a wishful fantasy, or a vague notion. Our belief in Moshiach and the Redemption is real and relevant, being a pillar of the Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith. Elijah's Cup takes the mystical concept of Redemption and Moshiach out of the closet, and places the issue right on the table for all to see and realize.

Presently, this cup is unfortunately beyond our reach; we cannot actually drink it. But we are all ready and waiting. We are on standby, eagerly anticipating Elijah's long awaited heralding of the Redemption. Unlike the other cups that come and go, this special cup represents our staying power and perseverance.

Moshiach Now

This follows Maimonides' teaching that belief in Moshiach shouldn't just be passive. It is not enough to merely sit back and wait. Moshiach should be on our daily agenda. We must actively demand and look forward to Moshiach's coming. Indeed, the Redemption process is accelerated by our prayers, actions and yearning.

Elijah's cup is not there just to grace our table. It is not served merely as an honorary toast to a great prophet. It is rather here to give our whole seder a new focus and direction.

There is a common misconception that the seder is all over after eating the Afikoman. Once they've closed the door on Elijah, some people tend to doze off or clear away the table, assuming that the rest is just winding down with optional chants.

On the contrary! At this point the seder rises to a crescendo, as it approaches the grand finale of the future

Redemption. It is here that the context changes course from the past, and turns the corner to the future. Judaism sees the Exodus from Egypt as the beginning of a process to be completed by our redemption through Moshiach.

The seder doesn't just look back to the past, to the Pharaohs and the pyramids; we also look forward to our redemption in the future. As much as we relive the Exodus from Egypt through Moses, let us not lose sight of our ultimate goal, our own redemption now from exile through Moshiach, speedily in our days.

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Essay

The Geometry of Freedom

by Shlomo Yaffe

History tells us of many revolutions that began with sublime ideals and visions of liberty, only to be followed by deep disappointment and even greater tyranny and oppression.

The French revolution began in a magnificent blaze of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" and rapidly evolved into the Reign of Terror and the horrors of the Napoleonic Wars that so devastated Europe. In the end, the French exchanged bondage of neglect under the Bourbon Monarchs for bondage of abuse under the revolution. True freedom remained as elusive as ever.

The Russian people had suffered under the autocratic rule of the Romanov Kings for centuries. When they rose up in revolution in 1917, they and the world were filled with hope for a life of freedom and a new, more just and equitable society. This hope was slaughtered in the cellars and torture chambers of the Soviet secret police and frozen in the slave camps of the Gulag. The slavery to the Romanovs was paradise compared to the bondage, absolute lack of freedom, and the slaughter of millions in the new soviet state.

Attaining freedom is not merely about leaving a yoke of bondage behind; it is about a clear vision of a new paradigm for a better world. Otherwise, the revolution will be a true revolution -- it will revolve a full 360 degrees and the same ingrained patterns will reassert themselves, and sometimes even worse. A true revolution needs to be one of 180 degrees -- a whole new direction.

We see this theme articulated throughout the Passover story. At the burning bush, G-d tells Moses to instruct Pharaoh "Shalach ami vey'avduni" -- "Let my people go, that they may serve Me." Just letting the people go is not going to accomplish anything in the long run, if they're not going to something -- to something that's the alternative, indeed the antithesis, to Egypt. Most significantly, the encounter at the burning bush takes place at Mt Sinai where the Jews would be given the Torah -- a truly revolutionary document that would, through the agency of the Jewish people, transform and empower all of humanity.

During the wanderings of the Children of Israel through the desert, we find that every time there were those who shirked their duty, they raised the cry "Let us go back to Egypt." Did they want to suffer again as slaves? Surely not. I think that what the Torah is telling us is that abandoning the new vision and mission leads back to Egypt. Perhaps a new Egypt, but a slavery just the same.



All that is true of nations and world history is true of what the Talmud calls the "small world" of each individual person. Passover is not a commemoration. Passover is reliving and experiencing the liberating power of G-dliness in our lives.

The Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, means "constraints." We suffer under the constraints of the habits we maintain simply because we had them yesterday. We are slaves to ingrained pathways of our lives and our world, because we are too busy dusting the covers of our Book of Life to read its pages.

On Passover, and especially at the seder, we put all else aside to concentrate on receiving the power of freedom that flows from G-d to each one of us. But for this experience to have a lasting effect, we need to remember that not only do we have to leave the old habits ("let my people go"), we need a vision and program of the new ("that they may serve Me"). Otherwise, we end up not far from where we started from.

The Hebrew term vey'avduni -- "that they may serve Me" -- actually means "That they may transform themselves through Me." When we look to the Torah -- the receiving of which is the sole purpose of the Exodus -- we discover that the freedom to realize the potential of every aspect of our being lies within its Mitzvot. Every area of life stands ready to yield purpose, meaning and fulfillment if we are willing to dare to be truly free. "Truly free" is not freedom from the bondage of whichever pharaoh, king or czar happens to be oppressing us at the moment, but freedom from the bondage of all self-imposed limits on our capacity to truly realize our G-dly potential.

Rabbi Shlomo Yaffe is the spiritual leader of Congregation Agudas Achim of West Hartford, Connecticut

PARSHAH

Passover Readings

On the **FIRST DAY OF PASSOVER** we read from the book of Exodus (12:21-51) of the bringing of the **Passover Offering** in Egypt, the Plague of the Firstborn at the stroke of **midnight**, and how "On this very day, G-d took the Children of Israel **out of Egypt**."

The reading for the **SECOND DAY OF PASSOVER**, Leviticus 22:26-23:44, includes: a list of the moadim -- the "**appointed times**" on the Jewish calendar for festive celebration of our bond with G-d; the mitzvah to **Count the Omer** (the 49-day "countdown" to the festival of Shavuot which begins on the 2nd night of Passover); and the obligation to journey to the Holy Temple to "to **see and be seen** before the **face of G-d**" on the three annual **pilgrimage festivals** -- Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot.

The readings for the four **INTERMEDIATE DAYS OF PASSOVER** include:

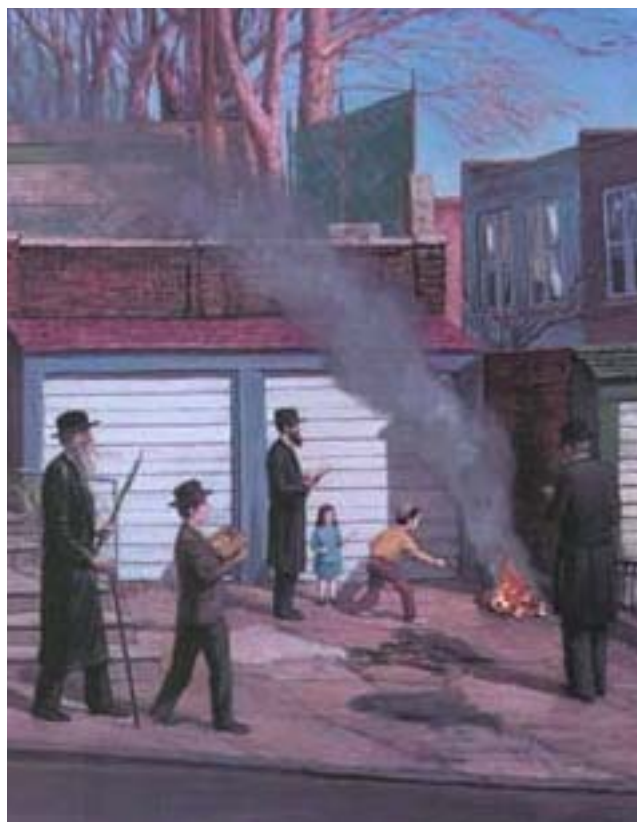
1) Instructions to commemorate the Exodus by sanctifying the firstborn, **avoiding leaven** and **eating matzah** on Passover, telling one's children the **story** of the Exodus, and donning **tefillin** (Exodus 13:1-16).

2) A portion from the Parshah of **Mishpatim** which includes the laws of the festivals (Exodus 22:24-23:19).

3) A section describing Moses' receiving of the **Second Tablets** and G-d's revelation to him of His **Thirteen Attributes of Mercy**, which likewise concludes with the laws of the festivals (Exodus 34:1-26); when one of the "intermediate days" of Passover is **Shabbat**, this is the reading read on that day, and it begins 12 verses earlier, with 33:12).

4) The story and laws of the "**Second Passover**" (Numbers 9:1-14).

On the **SEVENTH DAY OF PASSOVER** we read how on this day the **sea split** for the Children of Israel and drowned



the **pursuing Egyptians**, and the "**Song at the Sea**" sung by the people upon their deliverance (Exodus 13:27-15:26; full summary with commentary here).

On the **EIGHTH DAY OF PASSOVER** we read Deuteronomy 15:19-16:17. Like the reading for the second day, it catalogs the annual cycle of festivals, their special observances, and the offerings brought on these occasions to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The Eighth Day's special connection with the **Future Redemption** is reflected in the Haftorah (reading from the Prophets) for this day (**Isaiah 10:32-12:6**).

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem M. Schneerson*

Hillel's Paradox

Man is a lonely creature. No other inhabitant of G-d's world harbors a sense of individuality as pronounced and as determined as that cultivated by the human being; no other creature perceives itself as apart and distinct of its fellows as we do.

Yet we are also the most social of creatures, weaving intricate webs of familial and communal relations in our quest for validation and acceptance by others. Never content to merely be ourselves, we group by profession, class, nationality and other providers of a self-definition that transcends the personal.

If we are aware of a contradiction between our individual and communal identities, this does not lessen our need and striving for both. For while we are convinced that we are what we make of ourselves, we also know that alone, we are less than what we are and can be. In the words of the great sage Hillel, "If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I?" (Ethics of the Fathers 1:14).

The Passover Offering

Hillel's paradox confronts us in countless guises every day of our lives. In Hillel's own life, it took the form of a question of Torah law that was instrumental in his ascension (in the year 32 bce) to the leadership of his people: Should the Passover offering be brought when the 14th of Nissan falls on Shabbat?

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the primary vehicle of man's service of his Creator were the *korbanot* (animal and meal offerings) offered on its altar to G-d. The *korbanot* fall under two general categories:

a) Individual offerings (*korbanot yachid*) brought by private citizens, such as the generosity offering brought as a donation, the thanksgiving offering brought to express one's gratitude to G-d for a personal salvation, or the sin offering brought to atone for a transgression.

b) Communal offerings (*korbanot tzibbur*), such as the daily morning and afternoon offerings brought by the people of Israel as a whole from a fund to which every Jew contributed an annual half-shekel.

While most offerings belong completely to one class or the other, the Passover offering straddles both categories. On the one hand, it possesses certain features (such as the fact that it is purchased with private funds and eaten by those who brought it) which would define it as an individual offering; on the other hand, there are things about it that are characteristic of the communal offering (such as the fact that it is brought en masse by the entire community of the congregation of Israel-- Exodus 12:6).*

When the 14th of Nissan--the day on which the Passover offering is brought--falls on a Shabbat, the question of its categorization becomes crucial. Torah law forbids the bringing of individual offerings on Shabbat, but permits and obligates the bringing of communal offerings. Should the Passover offering be regarded as an individual offering which cannot be brought on Shabbat? or is it a communal offering whose obligation supersedes the prohibition of work on the day of rest?

The Talmud relates that one year when Nissan 14 fell on Shabbat, the leaders of the Sanhedrin (highest court of Torah law) were unable to resolve the question of whether the Passover offering should be brought. Hillel, a scholar newly arrived in the Holy Land from Babylonia, demonstrated that the communal aspect of the Passover offering is its more dominant element, meaning that it should be offered also when its appointed time coincides with Shabbat. In recognition of his superior scholarship, the leaders of the Sanhedrin stepped down and appointed Hillel as their head.

Isaiah and Jeremiah

Echoing Moses' description (in Deuteronomy 4:34) of the Exodus as a time when G-d took a nation from the womb of a nation, the prophet Ezekiel describes the event as the birth of the Jewish people. Before the Exodus, the Jews shared a common ancestry, culture and heritage, but they did not constitute a nation; on that first Passover, the entity Israel was born.

Passover can thus be seen as representing the ascendancy of the communal over the individual--the point at which numerous distinct personalities surrendered to a common mission and identity. Indeed, as Hillel showed, in the Passover offering it is the communal element which dominates and determines the halachic status of the *korban*.

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

continued

So why isn't the Passover offering a full-fledged communal offering like the others? Why is it a hybrid of the individual and the communal, in which both elements find expression and vie for supremacy? Because G-d's purpose in forging many individuals into a single people was not the obliteration of their individuality, but the inclusion of each member's distinct personality within the communal whole. The community of Israel is not just a vehicle for the transcendence of the limitations of individuality and the attainment of goals unachievable by ego-encumbered individuals; it is also the framework within which each individual might optimally develop and realize his or her personal best.

Our relationship with G-d includes both individual offerings, which represent the devotion of our individual resources to G-d, as well as communal offerings, which express the surrender of our individuality to our communal mission. But the Passover offering, which played a formative role in our birth as a people, must belong to both categories.**

As the offering that marks the birth of the nation Israel, the Passover offering must express our commonality as G-d's people; this is indeed its dominant theme. But it must also express the truth that even as we set aside our differences to devote ourselves to a common goal, our individual strengths and vulnerabilities continue to define us as distinct and unique entities. It must express the truth that the paradox of individuality and community is at the heart of who and what we are, and that the tension between these two strivings is a necessary and desirable component of our relationship with G-d.

Even at the very end of days, when the whole of human history culminates in the divinely perfect and harmonious age of Moshiach, this duality will continue to define our identity and nationhood. The ultimate redemption will be a communal redemption, when, as the prophet Jeremiah proclaims, "A great community shall return here; but it will also be the realization of Isaiah's vision of a time when You shall be collected, one by one, O children of Israel."

NOTES

* Indeed, we find the Passover offering alternately described as an individual and a communal offering--cf. Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 6:1; Tosafot, Pesachim 70b, s.v. ha vadai; Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah, introduction to Seder Kodashim; Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Preparation of the Offerings 1:3; and sources cited in Likkutei Sichot, vol. XVIII, p. 105, notes 15 and 19.

** More specifically, the first Passover offering, which was brought by the Jewish people while they were still in Egypt, was predominantly an individual offering, while the later Passover offerings belong more to the communal category. In Egypt, each family slaughtered its offering, and performed all the rituals associated with it, in its own home; thus the blood of the offering was sprinkled on the two side-posts and the upper doorpost of the homes in which it will be eaten (Exodus 12:7). Beginning with the second Passover, observed a year later in the Sinai Desert, all Jews brought their Passover offerings to the Sanctuary to be slaughtered there and have its blood sprinkled upon the Sanctuary's altar. Indeed, the first Passover offering was brought on a weekday (as per the Talmud, Shabbat 87b, the Exodus occurred on a Thursday, meaning that the Passover offering was slaughtered on Wednesday afternoon), while the second Passover offering was actually brought on Shabbat (that year, the 1st of Nissan was a Sunday (Talmud, *ibid.*), meaning that Nissan 14 was Shabbat).

But even the first Passover offering had certain communal characteristics--the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 19:5) describes how all Jews ate from Moses Passover offering, and the above-quoted verse describing it as an offering brought by the entire community of the congregation of Israel speaks of that first Passover offering brought in Egypt. On the other hand, even after it became a predominantly communal offering in the year after the Exodus, the Passover offering retained many of its individualistic elements, such as the fact that it is eaten by each family or family group at their own family seder.

week at a glance

S u n d a y Nissan 6 | March 28

Today's Nasi: **Gad**

During the first 13 days of the month of Nissan, we daily recite the verses (from Numbers ch. 8) describing the offerings made by the "princes" (nesi'im) of the 12 tribes of Israel in honor of the inauguration of the Mishkan (see "On This Date" for Nissan 1.) Following the verses of the day's "nasi," we recite a short prayer in which we say, "if I, Your servant, am from the tribe of ___ whose section of the Nasi I have read today in Your Torah, may all the holy sparks and holy illuminations that are included within the holiness of this tribe shine upon me, to grant me understanding and intelligence in Your Torah and my awe of You, to do Your will all the days of my life...."

Today we read of the gift bought on the 7th of Nissan by Elyasaf ben Reuel, the nasi of the tribe of Gad.

M o n d a y Nissan 7 | March 29

On This Date: **Spies in Jericho(1273 BCE)**

Thirty days after the passing of Moses on Adar 7, Joshua dispatched two scouts -- Caleb and Pinchas -- across the Jordan River to Jericho, to gather intelligence in preparation of the Israelites' battle with the first city in their conquest of the Holy Land. In Jericho, they were assisted and hidden by Rahab, a woman who lived inside the city walls. (Rahab later married Joshua).

Today's Nasi: **Ephraim**

T u e s d a y Nissan 8 | March 30

Today's Nasi: **Menasseh**

W e d n e s d a y Nissan 9 | March 31

Today's Nasi: **Benjamin**

T h u r s d a y Nissan 10 | April 1

On This Date: **Miriam's passing (1274 BCE)**

Miriam, the sister of Moses, passed away at the age of 126 on the 10th of Nissan of the year 2487 from creation (1274 BCE) -- 39 years after the Exodus and exactly one year before the Children of Israel entered the Holy Land. It is in deference to her passing that the "Great Shabbat" (see "On This Date" for the coming Shabbat) is commemorated on the Shabbat before Passover rather than the calendar date of the miracle's occurrence, Nissan 10.

Israelites cross Jordan (1273 BCE)

Three days after the two spies dispatched by Joshua scouted the city of Jericho (see entry for "Nissan 7" above), the children of Israel were ready to enter the land promised by G-d to their ancestors as their eternal heritage. As they approached the Jordan with the Holy Ark carried by the Kohanim (priests) in their lead, the river parted for them, as the waters of the Red Sea had split when their fathers and mothers marched out of Egypt 40 years earlier. (Joshua 4)

Today's Nasi: **Dan**

F r i d a y Nissan 11 | April 12

On This Date: **Lubavitcher Rebbe born (1902)**

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, was born on this date in 1902.

See www.theRebbe.org for a timeline biography and some of his letters, teachings and writings.

Today's Nasi: **Asher**

LIGHT SHABBAT CANDLES BEFORE SUNSET

www.chabad.org/calendar/candlelighting.asp

S h a b b a t Nissan 12 | April 13

Torah reading: **Tzav (Leviticus 6:1-8:36)**

Haftarah: **Jeremiah 7-9**

Laws & Customs: **Recite from Haggadah; study Passover laws**

The Shabbat before Passover is termed Shabbat HaGadol ("the Great Shabbat") in commemoration of the "great miracle" that happened in Egypt on this day, heralding the Exodus from Egypt five days later (see "On This Date" above). Shabbat HaGadol customs include reading a portion of the Haggadah (from "Avadim hayinu..." to "...al kol avonotainu"), which tells the story of the Exodus; it is also customary that the rabbi of the community delivers a lecture in which he elaborates on the laws of Passover and their significance, in preparation for the festival.

Today's Nasi: **Naphtali**

week at a glance

philosopher and communal leader, known in the Jewish world by the acronym "Rambam" and to the world at large as "Maimonides", was born in Cordova, Spain, on the 14th of Nissan of the year 4895 from creation -- 1135 of the Common Era [more...]

S u n d a y Nissan 13 | April 4

On This Date: Abraham's brit (1714 BCE)

On the 13th of Nissan of the year 2048 from creation (1713 BCE), G-d appeared to Abram, changed his name to Abraham ("father of a multitude of nations") and commanded him to circumcise himself and all members of his household -- and all future descendants at the age of eight days -- so that "My covenant (brit) shall be in your flesh, as an eternal covenant". Abraham was 99 years old at the time, and his son Ishmael, 13 (Isaac, who was born a year later, was the first Jew to be circumcised at eight days).

Haman's decree (357 BCE)

In the 12th year of his reign (357 BCE), King Achashverosh of Persia endorsed Haman's plan "to destroy, kill and annihilate all Jews, from young to old, infants and women, on a single day, on the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar." On Nissan 13 (11 months before the date chosen for the massacre) proclamations of the decree were drafted and dispatched to all 127 countries of the Persian Empire; Mordechai told Esther to go before the king and plead for her people; Esther asked that a three-day fast be proclaimed in which all Jews would repent and pray for the success of her mission (the 3rd day of the fast, Nissan 15, was the 1st day of Passover).

Passing of R. Yosef Caro (1575)

Nissan 13 is the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Yosef Caro (1488-1575), author of the Shulchan Aruch ("Code of Jewish Law").

and Tzemach Tzeddek (1866)

The third Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1789-1866; known as the "Tzemach Tzeddek" after his Halachic work by that name), passed away on Nissan 13.

Laws & Customs: Nasi

After reading the "Nasi" describing the gifts brought by the princes of the 12 Tribes of Israel for the dedication of the Tabernacle during the first 12 days of Nissan [see entry for Nissan 1], today we read the section describing G-d's instructions to Aaron regarding the lighting of the Menorah, which represents the contribution of the "13th tribe" of Levi.

search for chametz tonight

In preparation for the festival of Passover, in which even the possession of any form of leavened food ("chametz") is strictly forbidden, a final search is conducted after nightfall to remove every last crumb of chametz from our homes and property.

M o n d a y Tevet 18 | January 12

On This Date: Maimonides born (1135 BCE)

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, Talmudist, Halachist, physician,

Laws & Customs: Fast of firstborn

Firstborn males are obligated to fast on the 14th of Nissan, in recognition of the fact that during the "Plague of the Firstborn" (which occurred at midnight of Nissan 15) G-d "passed over" the Jewish firstborn when He killed all firstborn Egyptians. The prevailing custom, however, is for the firstborn to exempt themselves from the obligation to fast by participating in a seudat mitzvah (a meal marking the fulfillment of a mitzvah), such as a siyyum (a festive meal celebrating the conclusion of the study of a section of Torah).

eradication of leaven

The Torah (Exodus 12:15, as per Talmud, Pesachim 5a) sets midday of Nissan 14 as the deadline for the destruction and/or removal of all leavened foods ("chametz") from our possession in preparation for the festival of Passover, which begins this evening at nightfall. In practice, Torah law mandates that we desist from eating chametz two hours before midday, and that no leaven remain in our possession an hour before midday (these are not clock hours but "seasonal hours", defined by Jewish law as a 12th part of the time between sunrise and sunset; click here for the correct times for your location). Chametz is disposed of by: a) selling it to a non-Jew; b) burning the chametz found in our search on the previous evening (see entry for Nissan 13); c) "nullifying" the chametz that has not been found by declaring it ownerless. From this point until the end of the festival of Passover, it is forbidden to eat leaven, derive benefit from it in any way, own it or have it in one's possession.

Passover offering

When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the Passover offering was brought there on the afternoon of Nissan 14; today it is commemorated by our recitation of the "Order of the Passover Offering" this afternoon, by the "shankbone" placed on the seder plate this evening, and the afikoman -- a portion of matzah eaten in its stead at the end of the seder meal.

LIGHT FESTIVAL CANDLES BEFORE SUNSET,

SEE WWW.CHABAD.ORG/ARTICLE.ASP?AID=1723, FOR TIMES FOR YOUR AREA; FIRST SEDER TONIGHT (SEE NISSAN 15)

T u e s d a y Tevet 19 | January 13

"Covenant Between the Parts" (1743 BCE)

On the 15th of Nissan of the year 2018 from creation (1743 BCE) G-d forged a special covenant with Abraham in which the destiny of the Jewish people was foretold: the Holy Land was bequeathed to them as their eternal heritage, but first they would have to experience galut -- exile and persecution. "And He said to Abram: 'Know surely that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved to them, and they will afflict them four hundred years... and afterwards they shall come out with great wealth.' And when the sun went down and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace and

week at a glance

continued

a burning torch which passed between those pieces... On that day G-d made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your seed I have given these land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates'" (Genesis 15:13-18).

Abraham battles Four Kings (1738 BCE?)

When Lot was taken captive by the four kings who conquered the "five cities of the plain" (Sodom, Gomorra, Admah, Zevoim and Zoar), Abraham, aided only by a small band of loyal servants, went to battle to rescue his nephew; "the night divided for them, for him and his servants, and they defeated them, pursuing them to Hovah, which is to the left of Demascus... And he recovered all the property; also his kinsman, Lot, and his property were recovered, and also the women and the people" (Genesis 14:15-16).

three angels visit Abraham (1714 BCE)

On the 3rd day following his circumcision at age 99 (see "On This Date" for Nissan 13 above) three angels visited Abraham: Rephael healed him, and Michael informed Abraham and Sarah that, in exactly one year, a son will be born to them. (The third angel, Gabriel, proceeded to Sodom to destroy the wicked city).

Isaac born (1713 BCE)

"G-d remembered Sarah as He had said; and G-d did to Sarah as He had spoken. And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which G-d had spoken to him... Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah declared: 'G-d has made laughter for me, so that all that hear will laugh ('yitzchak') with me'" (Genesis 21:1-6).

Jacob wrestles with Esau's angel (1556 BCE)

"And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Jacob's hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him. And he (the angel) said, 'Let me go, for dawn is breaking,' but he (Jacob) said, 'I will not let you go unless you have blessed me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' and he said, 'Jacob.' And he said, 'Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for you have contended with G-d and with men, and have prevailed'" (Genesis 32:25-29).

The next morning, Jacob confronted Esau in the flesh. Esau, who had come with a band of armed men with the intention to kill his brother, "ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept". Esau invited Jacob to join him in his mountain kingdom of Se'ir, but Jacob replied, "Please, let my lord go on ahead before his servant; and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that goes before me and the children, until I come to my lord to Se'ir" -- a promise yet to be fulfilled (*ibid.*, 33:4-14).

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('yitzchak') with me'" (Genesis 21:1-6).

Links: The Resemblance; Learning to Laugh

Moses at burning bush (1314 BCE)

On the 15th of Nissan of the year 2447 from creation (1314 BCE) -- exactly one year before the Exodus -- Moses was shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, at the foot of Mount Sinai, when G-d appeared to him in a "thornbush that burned with fire, but was not consumed" and instructed him to return to Egypt, come before Pharaoh, and demand in the name of G-d: "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." For seven days and seven nights Moses argued with G-d, pleading that he is the wrong person for the job, before accepting the mission to redeem the people of Israel and bring them to Sinai.

Link: Moses at the Burning Bush

The Exodus (1313 BCE)

At the stroke of midnight of Nissan 15 of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), 210 years after Jacob settled in Egypt and 430 years after the "Covenant Between the Parts" (see above), G-d visited the last of the ten plagues on the Egyptians, killing all their firstborn. Earlier that evening, the Children of Israel conducted the first "seder" of history, eating the roasted meat of the Passover offering with matzot and bitter herbs, and sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice on their doorposts as a sign that G-d will "pass over" their homes when inflicting the plague upon the Egyptians. Pharaoh's resistance to free them was broken, and he virtually chased his former slaves out of the land. Several million souls -- 600,000 adult males, plus the woman and children, and a large "mixed multitude" of non-Hebrews who joined them -- left Egypt on that day, and began the 50-day trek to Sinai and their birth as G-d's chosen people.

Daniel in lions' den (372 BCE)

Daniel was cast into a den of hungry lions by Darius I of Persia for violating a royal edict that no man may pray to any god save the king for 30 days. Miraculously, the lions did not touch him, and he emerged from the den unscathed (Daniel 6:5-29).

Links: Monotheism in Rostov; more on Mesirat Nefesh

Esther appears before Achashverosh (357 BCE)

On the 3rd day of the fast proclaimed by Mordechai at her behest (see "On This Date" for Nissan 13 above), Queen Esther appeared unsummoned before King Achashverosh -- a capital offence. The king, however, extended the royal sceptre to her, signifying his consent that she approach him. Esther requested that Achashverosh attend a private wine party with her and Haman (according to one opinion in the Talmud, her plan was to make Achashverosh jealous of her apparent friendship with Haman so that he would kill them both, thus saving the Jewish people from Haman's decree).

Laws & Customs: The Seder

On the eve of Nissan 15, we conduct a seder ("order") -- a 15-part ritualistic feast that encompasses the observances of the Passover festival: telling our children the story of the Exodus as described and expounded in the Haggadah; eating the matzah (unleavened bread), the bitter herbs dipped in charoset, and the afikoman (an additional portion of matzah eaten as "dessert" in commemoration of the Passover offering); drinking the four cups of wine; and

week at a glance

continued

numerous other symbolic foods and rituals commemorating both our slavery in Egypt and our liberation on this night.

dew

The month of Nissan marks the ends of the "season of rains" in the Holy Land. Beginning with the Mussaf prayer of the 1st day of Passover, we omit the passage in our prayers praising G-d's greatness as a provider of rain (Mashiv haruach umorid hageshem), substituting it with the words Morid hatal ("Who brings down dew").

Festival candles

FESTIVAL CANDLES FOR THE 2ND DAY OF PASSOVER (OUTSIDE OF THE HOLY LAND) SHOULD BE LIT, FROM A PRE-EXISTING FLAME, AFTER NIGHT-FALL --

Begin Omer count tonight

Wednesday Nissan 16 | April 7

On This Date: Manna ends (1273 BCE)

On the 16th of Nissan of the year 2488 from creation (1273 BCE), six days after the Children of Israel entered the Holy Land under the leadership of Joshua, their remaining supply of the miraculous "bread from heaven" (which had sustained them since shortly after their exodus from Egypt 40 years earlier) ran out. (The manna had ceased falling on the previous Adar 7, the day of Moses' passing.) After bringing the "Omer" offering (see "Laws & Customs" below) at the Sanctuary they erected at Gilgal, the people prepared their (unleavened) bread for the first time from the produce of the land.

Haman hanged

At the 2nd wine party she made for King Achashverosh and Haman, Queen Esther revealed her identity to the king and began to plead for her people, pointing to Haman as the evil schemer plotting to destroy them. When Charvonah, a royal servant, mentioned the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordechai, the king ordered that Haman be hanged on them, opening the door for the Jews' salvation from Haman's decree (Esther 7).

Laws & Customs: "Counting of the Omer"

"And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks they shall be; until the morrow of the seventh week, you shall count fifty days..." (Leviticus 23:15)

The "morrow of the Shabbat" referred to in this verse is the 16th of Nissan, the day on which the "Omer Offering" -- which included matzahs baked from the new crop of barley harvested that very day -- was brought in the Holy Temple. (No grain from new harvest was allowed to be eaten before the Omer offering was brought.) Thus 16th of Nissan also commences the 49-day "Counting of the Omer", which retraces our ancestors' seven-week spiritual journey from the Exodus to Sinai. Each evening (the Jewish calendar day begins at nightfall) we recite a special blessing and count the days and weeks that have passed since the Omer. The 50th day is Shavuot, the festival celebrating the

Giving of the Torah at Sinai.

2nd seder

Outside of the Holy Land, where biblical festivals are observed for an extra day, the seder is conducted for a second time on the eve of Nissan 16 (i.e., Thursday night).

Count "2 days to the Omer" tonight

Thursday Nissan 17 | April 8

3rd day Passover - 2 Omer

Laws and Customs: Chol Hamoed

The prohibition against work is not as stringent for the "intermediate days" (chol hamoed) of Passover (this year, Thursday, April 8 through Sunday, April 11) -- work whose avoidance would result in "significant loss" is permitted (except for Shabbat, when all work is forbidden). The "Yaale V'yavo" prayer is included in all prayers and Grace After Meals. Hallel (partial) and Musaf are recited following the Shacharit (morning) prayers. It is the Chabad custom not to put on tefillin during the "intermediate days."

Count "3 days to the Omer" tonight

Friday Nissan 18 | April 9

4th day Passover; 3rd Omer

On This Date: R. Levi Yitzchak Schneerson born (1878)

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944), was born on the 18th of Nissan in the town of Podrovnah (near Gomel) to his parents, Rabbi Baruch Schneur and Rebbetzin Zelda Rachel Schneerson; his great-great grandfather was the 3rd Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch. In 1900 Rabbi Levi Yitzchak married Rebbetzin Chanah Yanovski, whose father, Rabbi Meir Shmlomo, was the rabbi of the Russian city of Nikolaiyev. In 1902, their eldest son, Menachem Mendel, later to be known as The Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lived in Nikolaiyev until 1909, when he was appointed to serve as the Rabbi of Yekatrinoslav (today, Dnepropetrovsk). In 1939 he was arrested by the communist regime for his fearless stance against the Party's efforts to eradicate Jewish learning and practice in the Soviet Union. After more than a year of torture and interrogations in the Stalin's notorious prisons, he was sentenced to exile to the interior of Russia, where he died in 1944.

Count "4 days to the Omer" tonight

LIGHT SHABBAT CANDLES BEFORE SUNSET

www.chabad.org/calendar/candlelighting.asp

Shabbat Tevet 16 | January 10

Torah reading: Exodus 33:12-34:26

Hafarah: Ezekiel 36:1-14 (the "Dry Bones" prophesy)

Count "5 days to the Omer" tonight