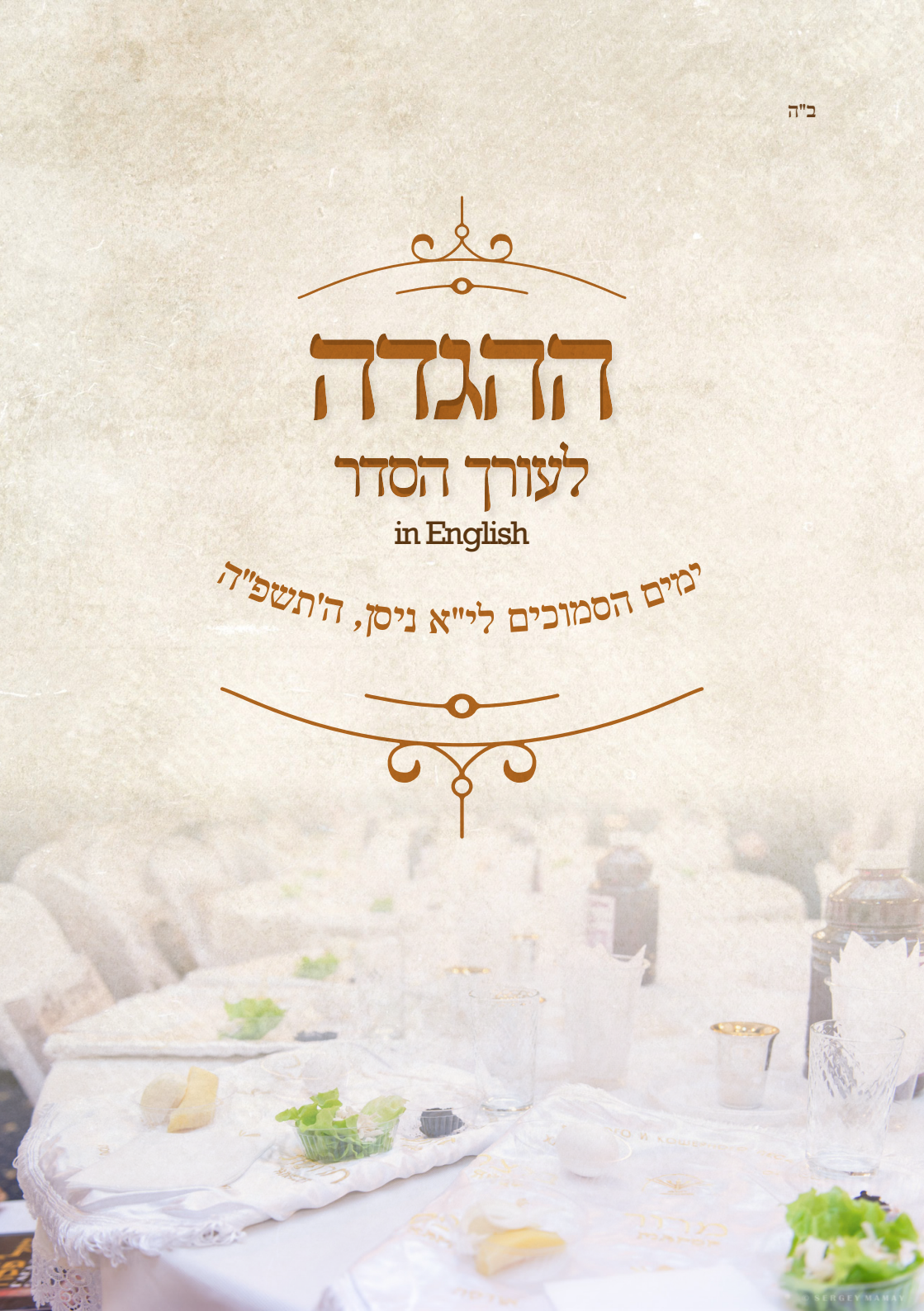
ב"ה

הגדה

לעורך הסדר

in English

ימים הסמוכים לי"א ניסן, ה'תשפ"ה



B”H

To my fellow Shluchim, Anash, Bochurim, and Seder Leaders,

We find ourselves in an extraordinary time—what Chazal described as “malchuyos misgaros zu b’zu”. Our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisrael are enduring great hardship. Many have been displaced from their homes and communities, finding themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, physically and spiritually unsettled.

This reality presents us with both a challenge and a calling. Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh isn’t just a slogan—it’s a directive. Now more than ever, we are needed.

The Rebbe constantly emphasized the power of a public Seder—not only for the immediate impact, but for what it sets in motion afterward. In a yechidus with the Chief Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael (27 Adar 5746), the Rebbe said:

“A Jew is a natural businessman... I’m already thinking about the ‘gain’ after Pesach: that through a public Seder, where new faces attend and connections are formed with parents and children—you can follow up, continuing to draw them into Torah and mitzvos.”

The Seder is a powerful night on the calendar, a night which can reorient our fellow Jews with a sense of purpose and clarity. It reorients the Jew toward who he is and what he’s here for. But this requires preparation on our part—especially those of us entrusted with leading public Seders. We’re not just running a program—we are creating an atmosphere where every Jew feels part of the story, part of the Jewish nation, and part of Dor HaGeulah.

To assist with this, I've compiled this booklet with short insights, stories, and explanations, arranged in the order of the Haggadah. Many of them I've used over the years at our Seder in Odessa. I hope you'll find them helpful in your shlichus as well.

I've also included a section outlining the Rebbe's seder minhagim—particularly useful for those leading a Seder while also participating personally, amidst all the responsibilities of the evening.

Thank you to everyone who has shared material with me in past years. Please continue to do so—your contributions continue to enrich this collection.

May we be zocheh to the ultimate Seder, in Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh, with the true and complete Geulah, when we will eat "min hazevachim umin hapesachim," with Moshiach Tzidkeinu.

With heartfelt brachos for a Chag Kosher V'Sameach—and true cheirus pnimis,

Rabbi Avraham Wolff

Odessa, Ukraine

- P.S.

To enhance the Seder experience, I've marked many sections in the booklet with one of three themes, so you can tailor your Seder to the crowd—or mix and match as needed:

- "The Deeper Meaning": Kabbalistic and Chassidic insights that reveal the soul of the Haggadah in a way that speaks to all.

- "Stories of the Seder": Chassidic stories and anecdotes that bring the Seder to life.

- "And You Shall Tell Your Child": Focused on the mitzvah of vehigadta l'vincha—ideas and tools for engaging all ages and transmitting our heritage to the next generation.

Choose the path that speaks to you and your crowd—and let it elevate the entire night.

במקום הקדמה

The name “Haggadah” is unique—it’s not the usual kind of title we see in Jewish literature. Why not call it a Siddur for the Seder, or maybe a Megillah, like the story of Purim?

The word Haggadah comes from the verse, “And you shall tell your child”, which commands us to recount the story of the Exodus. As the Rambam writes, “It is a mitzvah to tell of the miracles and wonders that happened to our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan,” and he adds, “Even if the child doesn’t ask, the parent is still obligated to teach.”

Our Sages, in designing the Seder night, crafted it as an educational experience that could speak to every generation. Thousands of years later, we still sit at the table and feel moved by it.

It begins with the Four Questions. The Sages understood that a sermon wouldn’t work on a child. But if something strange happens at the table and makes the child curious—now they’re listening. When a question is asked, the answer sticks.

That’s why we do unusual things at the Seder—to spark that curiosity. A child who asks is ready to learn—and that’s the moment real teaching begins.

Another powerful lesson comes from the story of the Four Sons. The Haggadah reminds us that not all children are the same—and each one needs a different response.

The message is clear: every child is unique. And meaningful education requires meeting each one where they are.

+Another custom that teaches this is the tradition of hiding the afikoman. Let's be honest—kids are drawn to mischief. When you tell a child "don't touch," it only makes them more interested.

Our Sages didn't try to fight this instinct—they used it. By letting kids "steal" the afikoman, they stayed engaged until the end of the Seder.

The takeaway? Even traits that are hardwired in us can be redirected for good. As parents and educators, our role is to recognize our children's nature and help them channel it in positive ways.

At the end of the Seder, the child gives back the afikoman in exchange for a prize. Some see this as bribery—but our tradition sees it differently. Rambam writes that when teaching children, one should offer small rewards—"Come learn Torah and I'll give you some nuts." As the child matures, so do the motivations.

It's the same idea behind the upsherin (first haircut), where we put honey on the letters and toss candies to make Torah sweet. Even adults are moved by reward—whether it's a paycheck, recognition, or a sense of purpose. We don't expect children to act altruistically—we help them grow into it.

So much of the Seder revolves around the number four—four cups, four questions, four sons. And from these, we learn four foundational principles in education:

1. Spark curiosity to create meaningful learning.

2. Recognize and respond to each child's unique needs.

3. Channel natural traits and tendencies for good.

4. Use positive motivation to instill values.

These lessons aren't just for children. They're for us, too. Let's stay curious, tune into ourselves and others, use our strengths for good—and remember to celebrate our progress along the way.

פתיחת ליל הסדר

The Deeper Meaning: Leaving Egypt Today

Good Yom Tov, everyone!

I'm really glad to see all of us here tonight—men, women, and kids—gathered together to celebrate one of the most meaningful nights in the Jewish calendar: the Seder.

Passover is the first holiday ever given to the Jewish people, and in many ways, it's the most foundational. It's not just a commemoration of the past—it's a cornerstone of what it means to be Jewish. This holiday connects us deeply to our history, to the Jewish story, and to the eternal values that have shaped us for thousands of years.

The Exodus from Egypt is central in Judaism. Not only do we celebrate it on Passover, but the Torah actually tells us to remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life. The rabbis take it even further: In every generation—and really, every single day—a person should see themselves as if they personally left Egypt. That's why we bring it up daily in the Shema, morning and night.

So what's the big deal about leaving Egypt? Why such an emphasis on an event that happened over 3,000 years ago? Why are we told to imagine it happening to us?

Chassidic thought gives us a powerful perspective: The story of the Exodus is really the story of the human journey—why our soul is here, and what it's meant to accomplish. Leaving

Egypt isn't something that happened once upon a time. It's something we're meant to do every day.

"Mitzrayim" — the Hebrew word for Egypt — shares the same root as meitzar, which means "narrowness" or "limitation." Every one of us has our own personal Mitzrayim—things that hold us back, that block us from being our true selves.

Those blocks can be habits, negative thought patterns, distractions, pressures from the people around us—anything that tries to box us in or push us in a direction that doesn't match who we really are.

Jewish thought teaches that every person has different levels to their soul. The deepest layer is called the yechidah—the part of us that's completely pure and one with something higher.

The spiritual meaning of the Exodus is that moment when that deep part of us—the yechidah—comes alive and connects with the rest of who we are. That's what real freedom looks like.

Put simply, when we're stuck in Mitzrayim, we're not able to fully express the goodness we each have inside. It's like being trapped in a shell, with our inner spark struggling to shine through. The Exodus is about cracking that shell open and letting the light out.

Even the structure of the Seder reflects this spiritual journey. The Seder plate is built on a deep inner structure, where each item represents a different spiritual quality.

Take matzah, for example. It's called the bread of faith—a food that bridges our simple inner faith with our rational un-

derstanding. It's plain, basic, without frills—symbolizing humility and simplicity, two qualities that help us connect with our truest selves.

The real goal of the Seder isn't just to relive the past—it's to bring that spiritual light into our everyday lives. When we say, "In every generation, a person must see themselves as if they left Egypt," it means we're meant to feel that freedom in our own lives—here and now.

The biggest responsibility we have in life is to leave our Egypt—to break through the limits that hold us back. To be who we truly are: a Jew with a Jewish soul, filled with love for G-d and a deep yearning for connection through the Torah and its commandments.

Passover—the Festival of Freedom—gives us the strength to break through not just during the holiday, but throughout the year.

That's why we're all here tonight—to celebrate not just freedom from slavery thousands of years ago, but our personal journey from limitation to liberation. I want to wish all of us that tonight should truly be a night of freedom. May we each break through the barriers around us and experience real liberation—inside and out.

Stories of the Seder: American Immigrants and the Jewish People

Good Yom Tov, everyone!

I'm really glad to see all of us here tonight—men, women, and

kids—gathered together to celebrate one of the most meaningful nights in the Jewish calendar: the Seder.

Tonight's Hebrew date is the 14th of Nissan, leading into the 15th. (If it's the second Seder, then it's the 15th into the 16th.)

I want to share with you a fascinating piece from a speech given by David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, to a United Nations committee. It was during Passover, in the year 1947.

In his testimony before the UN Special Committee on Palestine, Ben Gurion said:

"About 300 years ago, a ship called the Mayflower set sail for the New World. On board were Englishmen who were tired of the government and society back home. They wanted to build something new from scratch. They landed in America, and they became the first settlers of what would become this country.

"This was a major event in the history of England and America. That's why every American child learns about it at home and in school.

"But let me ask you: Is there a single Englishman who can tell you the exact day and time the Mayflower set sail? How many Americans know? What does the average American—child or adult—actually know about it? How many people were on that ship? What were their names? What did they wear? What did they eat? What was their route? What challenges did they face? Where exactly did they land?

"Now compare that," Ben Gurion continued, "to something that happened over 3,300 years ago—long before the May-

flower. The Jewish people left Egypt. And every Jewish child, whether in America, Soviet Russia, Yemen, or Germany, knows:

"Our ancestors left Egypt at dawn on the 15th of Nissan. What did they wear? 'Their belts were fastened and staffs in hand.' What did they eat? Matzah. Seven days later, they arrived at the Red Sea.

"They know the route they traveled, what happened during 40 years in the desert—they ate manna and quail, drank water from Miriam's well, and entered the Land of Israel through the Jordan River near Jericho. They even know the names of all the tribes and their families from the Torah itself.

"To this very day, Jews around the world eat that same matzah for seven days, starting on the 15th of Nissan. And they tell the story of the Exodus—and of all the hardships we've endured ever since. And we always end with two lines:

'This year, we are still slaves; next year, may we be free.'

'This year, we are still in exile; next year, may we be in Jerusalem.'"

"And that," Ben Gurion said, "is the nature of the Jewish people."

And here we are tonight, just like he described—millions of Jewish families across the globe, sitting down to a Seder, eating matzah, telling the same story. Why? Because tonight is the Seder. Like Ben Gurion said: That's what it means to be Jewish.

And just to clarify—unlike those Englishmen or Americans Ben Gurion mentioned, I actually do know some of the May-

flower facts. It set sail on September 6, 1620, from Plymouth, England. On board were 102 passengers—19 women and 33 children among them.

Now, I'll be honest—I have no clue what they ate on that ship. But I can almost guarantee this: whatever it was, they didn't have the delicious matzah we have here on our tables tonight!

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And You Shall Tell Your Child: "A Message of Love Across" Generations

Good Yom Tov!

This holiday has five names, each reflecting a different theme:

Chag HaMatzot – "The Festival of Matzot," the name used in the Torah, recalling the matzah the Jews ate when they left Egypt.

Pesach – "Passover," named for the moment G-d passed over the homes of the Israelites during the plague of the firstborn.

Chag HaCherut – "The Festival of Freedom," because we were freed from slavery. We say in the holiday prayers: "the time of our freedom."

Chag HaAviv – "The Spring Festival," since it always falls in the spring.

Chag HaGeulah – "The Festival of Redemption," because Jewish tradition teaches that just as we were redeemed in the month of Nissan, we will be redeemed again in this month.

In different Jewish communities around the world, the holiday has picked up other names too:

Iraqi Jews, for example, refer to Passover as “Shitakha,” a version of the Aramaic phrase “Hashata hacha”—“This year we are here,” found in “Hei Lachma Anya”.

Jews from the Caucasus call the holiday “Nisanu,” derived from the Hebrew month of Nissan, pronounced with a Persian flavor. In English, of course, we know it as Passover.

But here’s the question: if the Torah itself calls it “Chag HaMatzot,” why do we all refer to it as “Pesach”?

The answer holds a powerful message: We call it “Pesach” to remember what G-d did for us—how He skipped over our homes during the final plague.

But the Torah—G-d’s words—calls it “Chag HaMatzot,” to highlight what we did for Him—how we left Egypt in a rush, with total trust, even before the dough had time to rise.

It’s really beautiful: each side names the holiday after the other’s gesture. We remember what G-d did for us. G-d remembers what we did for Him.

Because, at the core of every relationship, including our relationship with G-d, is love and appreciation—recognizing and honoring what the other has done. Whether it’s between spouses, parents and children, or close friends, this is what deep relationships are built on.

At the heart of the Seder is the mitzvah of “V’higadeta l’vincha”—“And you shall tell your child on that day: It is because of what G-d did for me when I left Egypt” (Exodus 13:8).

This commandment isn't just about teaching a history lesson. It's about passing on the love, the connection between G-d and the Jewish people.

It's fascinating—every Jewish community added its own color, its own flavor. Iraqi Jews with "Shitakha," the Caucasian Jews with "Nisanu"—each expressing the same love in their own way, in their own language.

And this mitzvah—"And you shall tell your child"—doesn't end with the Seder night. It's a lifelong calling: to teach our children what it means to be Jewish, to share with them the joy of Jewish observance, and to give them a living connection with our tradition.

The Seder is just the most powerful and concentrated moment of that responsibility—but it continues every day, in every moment of Jewish education.

This is the meaning of the line: "In every generation, a person must see themselves as if they personally left Egypt." Through this mitzvah—"V'higadeta l'vincha"—we don't just retell an ancient story. We make it part of our identity and pass it on to our children as their story too.

This is the transmission of love, from one generation to the next, in its most powerful form.

בני חורין

Passover is a celebration of royalty. On this night, each of us is meant to feel like a king or queen.

One way we bring that feeling to life is through reclining. Back in the day, royalty and nobles didn't sit straight at the table—they lounged. Slaves sat upright; free people reclined.

That's why we drink all four cups of wine while leaning. We eat the matzah leaning. The sandwich (korech)—leaning. Even the afikoman at the end of the meal is eaten leaning. It's all about reminding ourselves: we're not slaves anymore. We're celebrating like royalty.

Another way we mark the occasion—something done in Jewish homes all over the world—is by pulling out the best we've got. The nice dishes come out. The silver. The fancy clothes. Everything about the night is meant to say: this is not just another dinner. It's a royal celebration.

Stories of the Seder: The Thieves of Lubavitch

The Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, once told a story about his grandfather—the Rebbe Maharash.

On Seder night, they would set out every piece of silver and gold they had in the house. And they had a lot.

After opening the door for Elijah, they would leave the door open... and keep it open for the rest of the night.

Now, two of the town's wagon drivers, Shaul and Shlomo,

were known thieves.

But they had standards. “We don’t steal on Pesach,” they would say. “And not on Shabbos or holidays either.”

So what did they do instead? They used the holiday to scout. They’d make their rounds and see what might be “worth doing” once Chol HaMoed rolled around.

Humorous Tales: Free People

They say that back in the early years of the State of Israel, one of Israel’s prime ministers met with the president of the United States.

The U.S. president asked, “How many people do you govern?”

The prime minister answered, “Five million.”

The president laughed. “That’s it? And you think your job is hard? I’m president of 250 million!”

The prime minister smiled and said, “Yes, but I’m the prime minister of five million prime ministers.”

So my friends, tonight I’m leading a Seder with 180 kings and queens.

It’s not an easy job—so do me a favor and help me out with a little quiet!

ניקיונות מן החמץ

This royal night—the night of kings and queens—comes after days and days of cleaning.

Between selling the chametz, checking for chametz, burning it, and finally nullifying it—there shouldn't be a single crumb left in the house.

And now that it's all gone—we can finally celebrate the holiday the way it's meant to be.

Stories of the Seder: Vodka at the Seder

During the time of the Russian czars, there was a strict law banning the sale and consumption of alcohol.

One year, as Passover began, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev turned to his assistant and said, "Get me some vodka. I want to make a l'chaim."

The assistant was shocked. "Rebbe! It's Passover!" But the Rebbe insisted: "Please do as I say—get me vodka."

Left with no choice, the assistant went to a nearby Jewish home and asked to borrow some vodka. The family was confused. "Vodka? On Pesach? Why?" When they heard it was the Rebbe who asked, they were regretful but firm: "Sorry, we don't have a single drop of chametz in the house."

The same thing happened at every Jewish home he tried—no one had any vodka.

Finally, the Rebbe told his assistant to try the homes of non-

Jews. At the first house, the gentile homeowner claimed he had nothing because of the government ban—but after the promise of a generous payment, he miraculously produced plenty.

The assistant returned with the news, and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak stood up at the Seder table and declared:

"Master of the Universe! Look at Your incredible people! The czar—armed with soldiers, police, fines, and prisons—banned alcohol, and yet you can still find it everywhere for just a few rubles.

But You—without an army, police force, or penalties—simply told us in Your Torah that chametz is forbidden on Passover. And now, no matter how much money you offer, you can't find a drop of it in a Jewish home."

Humorous Tales: Who's the Bigger Villain?

Haman and Pharaoh are sitting together in hell, comparing notes.

Haman turns to Pharaoh and says, "I don't get it. I only got one day—Purim. Why did you give them a whole eight-day holiday?"

Pharaoh smirks and replies, "Yeah, but at least I made them clean for a whole month first."

Humorous Tales: A Man's Help

A husband walks into the kitchen in the middle of the hectic pre-Passover cleaning and says to his wife, "How can I help get ready for Pesach?"

His wife smiles and says, "Go study Torah at the synagogue. That would be the biggest help."

Two hours later, he walks back in the door.

His wife asks, “You’re back already?”

He sighs, “How much help can one guy give? I’m exhausted.”

סידור המצות בקערה

We begin the Seder by arranging the Seder plate. In front of each person are three matzahs:

The top matzah represents the Kohen (priest), the middle matzah represents the Levi, and the bottom matzah represents the Yisrael.

The matzahs are placed in the Seder plate from bottom to top: first, the "Yisrael" matzah on the bottom, then the "Levi" matzah in the middle, and finally, the "Kohen" matzah on top.

By doing this, we symbolically gather the entire Jewish people around our holiday table. Because, even with all our efforts, we still didn't manage to bring every Jew in town to the Seder—so we've made room for them. Whether they are a Kohen, Levi or Yisrael, they are represented.

The Rebbe's Custom:

Before arranging the Seder plate, the Rebbe would quietly read from the Haggadah the section written by the Alter Rebbe about how to set up the Seder plate—from the words "One arranges a plate on the table with three matzahs" until the end of that paragraph.

He would stand while setting up the plate. Before performing each step, he would read the relevant instruction from the text, then do the action.

Throughout the entire Seder, the Rebbe kept his cup on the right side of the Seder plate.

Any item that was eaten during the Seder was taken directly from the plate itself.

The Rebbe used a white, square cloth for the matzahs. He would fold it once in half, and then again into quarters,

creating three pockets—one for each of the three matzahs.

The Hidden Within the Revealed: The Three Matzahs in Yosef's Donkey Delivery

After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he sent them back to tell their father that he was alive. The Torah tells us: "To his father, he sent the following: ten donkeys carrying the best of Egypt, and ten female donkeys carrying grain, bread, and food for the journey." The Talmud teaches that "the best of Egypt" meant aged wine—"wine that elders appreciate."

But beyond the simple meaning of the story, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev saw deeper spiritual symbolism.

In Jewish thought, Egypt is often compared to donkeys. The prophet Yechezkel says about the Egyptians: "Their flesh is like the flesh of donkeys." So when Yosef sends donkeys carrying "the best of Egypt," he's not just sending supplies—he's symbolically transforming Egypt. He's lifting up the sparks of goodness hidden inside a place of darkness.

There's a fascinating wordplay here. In Talmudic Aramaic, the word "chamra" can mean either donkey or wine. Even in Psalms, wine is called "chemer" (75:9). That's no coincidence.

According to Kabbalah, before our world was created, there was a spiritual reality known as the "World of Chaos," which shattered. The "donkeys" represent the leftover waste from that world, while the "wine" represents the holy sparks buried within it. When the donkeys carry the wine, it's a symbol of holiness overcoming impurity.

And the fact that it's aged wine? That matters too. In Kabbalah, the "World of Chaos" came before our current world—so the sparks it left behind are, in a sense, older and deeper.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak saw all this as a hint to the Exodus from Egypt: that we would one day be redeemed and leave with all the hidden holiness Egypt had to offer—just as it says in the Torah, "They emptied out Egypt."

He also adds a deeper layer to understanding the verse:

The "best of Egypt"—the aged wine—hints to the four cups of wine we drink at the Seder, which correspond to the four expressions of redemption in the Torah.

And what about the three words "grain, bread, and food"? According to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, they hint at the three matzahs on the Seder plate.

The word "mazon" (food) has the same numerical value as "Chesed Kel" (Divine kindness), which corresponds to the top matzah, symbolizing the Kohen and the attribute of kindness.

"Lechem" (bread) is related to "milchamah" (war), hinting at the middle matzah—the Levi—which, in Kabbalah, represents strength and discipline. Interestingly, the Hebrew word Levi shares its numerical value with Elokim, the Divine name associated with judgment.

And "bar" (grain) equals 206 —the combination of kindness and strength—hinting at the bottom matzah, Yisrael, which represents harmony between the two.

Even the word Yisrael itself is a blend of two ideas: "Shir" (song), connected to the Levites, and "E-l" (G-d), associated with love and kindness.

So in what looks like a simple delivery of food and wine, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak uncovers a map of redemption, the structure of the Seder night, and a vision for healing the world.

Stories of the Seder: Matzah from the Rebbe for Rabbi Aryeh Levin

Each year before Pesach, the Rebbe would send a shmura matzah to three distinguished individuals in Jerusalem.

The person entrusted with delivering the matzos was Rabbi Ezriel Zelig Slonim, of blessed memory, who would travel to the Rebbe each year from just before Purim until shortly before Pesach.

In 1969 (5729), the Rebbe gave Rabbi Slonim just two matzos during his yechidus (private audience). Surprised, Rabbi Slonim mentioned that he usually received three. At first, the Rebbe said nothing. But when Rabbi Slonim gently brought it up again, the Rebbe handed him a third matzah.

When he arrived in Jerusalem and prepared to deliver the matzos, the reason for the initial change became clear: on 9 Nissan that year, Rabbi Aryeh Levin—one of the three recipients—passed away. It was no oversight.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Continuing the Chain

After the Holocaust, some rabbis suggested that public Seders should include an empty chair to commemorate the

six million Jews who were murdered.

In response, the Rebbe offered a different approach: instead of leaving an empty chair, we should fill it—with a Jew who has nowhere to go for the Seder, or who doesn't know how to conduct one.

This reflects the deeper meaning of the mitzvah "V'higadeta l'vincha"—to pass down the story of the Exodus. Judaism isn't just about remembering the past; it's about creating a living, vibrant future.

An empty chair represents loss—a passive memory. Inviting someone new to the Seder represents life, continuity, and taking action. The Rebbe taught us that the best way to honor those we've lost is by bringing more Jewish life into the world.

"And you shall tell your child" is more than a command to teach—it's a call to action: to reach those who don't even know what to ask, to bring to the table those who have no family, and to keep alive the Jewish chain that others tried to break.

When one more Jew experiences the Seder, learns its meaning, and passes it on—that is our greatest response to those who tried to destroy us.

סידור הקערה

Let's now go over the items on the Seder plate:

1. First, we place the Zeroa—a roasted chicken neck, symbolizing the Passover offering. It goes on the top right of the plate.

The Rebbe's custom:

He would use just one small piece of chicken bone and carefully remove almost all the meat from it.

2. Next comes the Beitzah—a hard-boiled egg that represents the Korban Chagigah (the festival offering). This is placed on the top left of the plate, opposite the Zeroa.

There's another explanation for the egg: it symbolizes the Jewish people. The more you boil an egg, the harder it gets. So too with the Jewish people—when they're put under pressure, they become stronger and more resilient.

The Rebbe's custom:

He would place the egg whole—with the shell still on—even if it was difficult to make it stand properly. (Once, when the egg wouldn't stay upright, the Rebbe gently cracked the shell to steady it.)

The Deeper Meaning: The Wheel Turns

The egg on the Seder plate is round, and traditionally mourners eat eggs as a symbol of the "galgal hachozer ba'olam"—the ever-turning wheel of life. On Pesach, this symbolizes the shift from sorrow to celebration: our ancestors were once enslaved and broken, but were redeemed and brought to free-

dom.

Just as the wheel once turned in our favor during the Exodus, we pray that it turns again in our time—that our long exile will finally give way to redemption.

Especially since, as our sages say, "In the month of Nissan we were redeemed, and in Nissan we will be redeemed." When Pesach comes and the Redemption has not yet arrived, it's fitting to remember the mourning over the Beis HaMikdash that still hasn't been rebuilt.

Stories of the Seder: The Cook in Brunoy

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Gurevitch, head mashpia of the Chabad yeshiva in Migdal HaEmek, shared a story from his time as a Yeshivah student in the Brunoy yeshiva in France.

Every morning, the yeshiva cook would serve the students the same breakfast: salad and a hard-boiled egg. Eventually, the boys got tired of the routine and asked if he could make soft-boiled eggs instead—to dip their bread into.

The cook promised to try, but each morning—salad and hard-boiled eggs again. The students kept asking, he kept promising—and the cycle repeated. One morning, after more pressure from the bochurim, the cook finally lost his patience.

"What more can I do for you?" he shouted. "I already wake up at 4 a.m., put the eggs on the stove, and cook them until you finish your prayers—and I still don't understand why they keep coming out hard!"

3. For the Maror, placed in the center of the Seder plate (forming a triangle with the Zeroa and Beitzah), we use a piece of romaine lettuce with a bit of horseradish. The lettuce should be dry. And of course, Jews don't really need an explanation to understand what the bitterness represents...

The Rebbe's custom:

He would take four heaping spoonfuls of ground horseradish, shape it into a large ball (a generously sized kezayis), and squeeze it by hand until the juice ran onto the floor. He would also add a piece of unground horseradish and wrap the whole mixture in two large or three small romaine leaves.

4. For the Charoset, which we place beneath the Zeroa, we use a mixture of chopped apples, pears, and nuts—a reminder of the mortar our ancestors used while building the cities of Pithom and Raamses in Egypt.

Later in the Seder, we'll add wine to the Charoset and dip the Maror into it before eating.

The Rebbe's custom:

He wouldn't use a separate dish for the Charoset. Instead, he would place the dry mixture directly on the white matzah cover.

The Deeper Meaning: Sweet Slavery?

The maror, symbolizing the bitterness of slavery, is understandably sharp and pungent. But the charoset, which reminds us of the mortar used by our ancestors in Egypt, is made of sweet fruits and wine. Why does a symbol of hard

labor taste so sweet?

The Talmud (Berachos 5a) teaches: “Three precious gifts were given to the Jewish people, and all of them were granted through suffering—Torah, the Land of Israel, and the World to Come.”

The suffering in Egypt was not just pain for pain’s sake—it was the crucible that forged the Jewish people and prepared them to receive the Torah and become a nation with a mission. That’s the deeper meaning behind the sweetness of the charoset: sometimes, the hardest struggles lead to the greatest spiritual growth.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 1:28) comments on the verse “They embittered their lives” by citing a folk saying: “The one who angers you ends up helping you.” In other words, even pain can become a source of growth and blessing.

The sweetness of the charoset teaches that even the most bitter experiences can be part of a redemptive process. This isn’t just wishful thinking—it’s a deep expression of faith that suffering can have purpose and meaning.

As Yosef told his brothers (Bereishis 50:20), “You intended to harm me, but G-d intended it for good.” The suffering of Egypt, too, was revealed in the end to be part of a divine plan.

This lesson is deeply personal. Many of us face struggles that feel bitter in the moment—but with time, they may lead to sweetness and spiritual growth. The charoset reminds us: redemption is often born from hardship.

5. For Karpas, we use a small piece of onion (or potato—whichever your family prefers) and place it beneath the egg

on the Seder plate.

The Rebbe's custom:

Sometimes he would use a halved onion with the peel still on; other times a whole onion in its peel.

6. For the Chazeret (used later for Korech), we again use romaine lettuce with horseradish. It's placed beneath the maror, forming a triangle between the charoset and the karpas.

The Rebbe's custom:

He would prepare the chazeret the same way as the maror—a large ball of horseradish wrapped in lettuce. For maror, he would use the maror from the center of the plate; for korech, he would use the chazeret.

Our Seder plate is now ready—we're ready to begin the Seder itself.

סימני הסדר

The Seder night is filled with many mitzvos and customs. That's likely why it's called "Leil HaSeder"—the "Night of Order." To help us navigate all its parts, the Sages organized it step by step into fifteen clearly defined stages. These stages are called the Simanim of the Seder, the "signposts" of the night, and they guide us throughout the Haggadah.

Here's a quick summary of the fifteen Seder steps:

Kadesh – Recite Kiddush and drink the first cup of wine.

Urchatz – Wash hands without a blessing before eating the vegetable.

Karpas – Say the blessing "Borei pri ha'adamah" and eat a vegetable.

Yachatz – Break the middle matzah and set aside the larger half for the afikoman.

Maggid – Tell the story of the Exodus from the Haggadah.

Rachtzah – Wash hands again, this time with a blessing, before eating matzah.

Motzi – Blessing on bread (hamotzi) over the matzah.

Matzah – Recite the special mitzvah blessing and eat the matzah.

Maror – Bless and eat the bitter herbs.

Korech – Eat a sandwich of matzah and maror with charoset.

Shulchan Orech – Enjoy the Yom Tov meal.

Tzafun – Eat the afikoman.

Barech – Say Birkat HaMazon (Grace After Meals).

Hallel – Sing the verses of praise from Psalms.

Nirtzah – Conclude the Seder with songs and a prayer for the complete Redemption.

The Rebbe's custom:

He would recite all the simanim exactly as they appear in the Haggadah.

The Deeper Meaning: The Four Expressions of Redemption

The Sages instituted drinking four cups of wine at the Seder to correspond with the four expressions of redemption that G-d used when promising to take the Jewish people out of Egypt:

"I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt"

"I will rescue you from their bondage"

"I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments"

"I will take you to Myself as a people"

The fifth cup, which we pour for Eliyahu Hanavi at the end of the meal, represents the future redemption we still await.

But why did G-d use four different expressions to describe the redemption? Isn't one promise enough?

Each phrase marks a distinct stage in the Exodus—not a repetition, but a deepening of the experience of freedom. Each expression adds a new layer of liberation, broadening the meaning of redemption.

Let's break them down:

והוצאתי —"I will bring you out": Freedom from the harshest physical labor, even though the Jews still technically remained under Egyptian rule. (The Talmud says that the actual hard labor stopped on Rosh Hashanah, months before the Exodus on the 15th of Nissan.)

והצלתי—"I will rescue you": Political liberation—freedom from Egyptian authority and oppression.

וגאלתי—"I will redeem you: The moment at the Splitting of the Sea, when the Jews were considered truly free. A freed slave isn't fully liberated until he no longer fears his former master—true redemption only happens when the oppressor is no longer a threat.

ולקחתי—"I will take you": The giving of the Torah at Sinai, when the Jews became a nation chosen by G-d. As the verse says, "I will take you to be My people, and I will be your G-d."

There's even a hint to this structure in the Torah's layout: the first three expressions appear in one verse (Exodus 6:6), while the fourth appears in the next verse (6:7)—highlighting that "I will take you" is on a whole new level.

In Kabbalah and Chassidus, these four expressions also represent four levels in a Jew's relationship with G-d, hinted at in the verse: "Turn from evil, do good, seek peace and pursue it."

"I will **bring** you out" – corresponds to "turn from evil"—leav-

ing behind the spiritual darkness of Egypt. The word "burden" also hints at heaviness and spiritual blockage. Holiness brings lightness and life; impurity brings heaviness and dullness.

"I will **rescue** you" – aligns with "do good"—the active observance of mitzvos, which protect the soul like a spiritual shelter.

"I will **redeem** you" – refers to learning revealed Torah, engaging the mind and understanding. As the Sages say: "Only someone who studies Torah is truly free."

"I will **take** you" – represents learning the inner dimension of Torah, which brings about a complete bond with G-d. Any verse that uses the phrase "to Me," the Sages say, implies something eternal.

Stories of the Seder: Why Wine?

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa once told the following story: "I was once in the city of Danzig. One Friday night, I found myself in a local wine house. A Jewish man walked in and asked for some wine. There were two attendants working there—one a Jew, the other a non-Jew. When they went down to the cellar to get the wine, I noticed something strange.

"The Jewish attendant held the candle, and the non-Jew actually brought up the wine. Because of this, not only did the Jew desecrate Shabbat by carrying the candle, but the wine also became non-kosher—yayin nesech. I thought to myself: if only they had switched roles—the Jew carried the wine and the non-Jew held the candle—everything would've been fine!

"That's when I understood what the Torah means when it calls the Jewish people a 'stubborn and twisted generation.' Sometimes, the right path is right in front of us, yet we insist on doing it the wrong way."

This story sheds light on a classic question: Why did the Sages specifically institute four cups of wine at the Seder to represent the four expressions of redemption? Why not something else—like four pieces of fruit or cups of juice?

Take a simple example—eating nuts. The first nut is enjoyable. The second? A little less so. By the third or fourth, the pleasure fades. Too much of a good thing becomes... not so good.

But wine is different. As the verse says, "Wine gladdens the heart of man." The more you drink (in moderation, of course), the more the joy builds. Each cup increases the celebration.

Like in Rabbi Simcha Bunim's story, we always have a choice—do we take the path that increases holiness, or the one that distances us from it? On Seder night, wine is the right choice. It lifts us higher with each cup.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: The Four Cups and the Four Matriarchs

In addition to the explanation that the four cups of wine correspond to the four expressions of redemption, the Shaloh offers a deeper interpretation—each cup represents one of the four Matriarchs.

The first cup is linked to Sarah, who, along with Avraham,

brought many people closer to G-d. On this cup we make Kiddush and declare: "Who has chosen us from among all nations." It teaches us about opening our hearts and homes to others with love and warmth.

The second cup corresponds to Rivkah, who reached great spiritual heights even though she came from a family of idol-worshipers. This cup is where we read about the struggle between Lavan (Rivkah's brother) and Yaakov. It teaches us about staying strong in the face of a challenging environment and choosing the right path, even when it's difficult.

The third cup is connected to Rachel. It is poured after the meal, and we say Birkat HaMazon over it. This cup reminds us of responsibility and care for others—just like Yosef, Rachel's son, who sustained his family and all of Egypt during the famine. It echoes Rachel's own selfless act in giving her sister the wedding signs.

The fourth cup represents Leah, the first person in the Torah to express thanks to G-d. After giving birth to Yehudah, she said, "This time I will thank Hashem." We complete Hallel over this cup—it reminds us to be grateful and recognize the blessings in our lives.

So when our children ask, "Why is this night different?"—our answer isn't just about the Exodus. It's also about passing down the values of the righteous women who built our nation. As the Sages said, "In the merit of righteous women, our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt."

Humorous Tales: Why Are You Drinking

A Chassid known for his drinking once came to Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa and complained: "Rebbe, I have two

grown daughters, and I don't have a penny to marry them off!"

The Rebbe asked him, "Tell me, why do people say 'drunk like Lot' and not 'drunk like Noach'? After all, Noach was the original drunk!"

He answered his own question: "Noach drank? Fine—he got drunk. But Lot? He had two unmarried daughters. So why was he drinking?"

קדש

On every Shabbat and holiday, we recite Kiddush over a cup of wine to mark the holiness of the day and to distinguish it from the weekdays. Kiddush is meant to help us reflect on the deeper meaning of the holiday and appreciate the kindness of G-d for bringing us to this moment.

On the Seder night, we begin with the first step—Kadesh—and immediately afterward, we fulfill the second mitzvah: drinking the first of the Four Cups that the Sages established for this night.

Let's all pour the first cup of wine now.

According to Jewish law, red wine is ideal. On Pesach, red wine carries added symbolism—it reminds us of the blood of the Pesach offering and the blood of circumcision, the two mitzvot through which our ancestors merited redemption. It also evokes the blood of the Jewish people that was spilled throughout our time in Egypt.

If someone has difficulty drinking only red wine, they may mix in a bit of red wine with white. If even that is not possible, white wine alone is fine. And if someone cannot drink wine at all, grape juice may be used—ideally with a bit of wine added.

I'll now recite the Kiddush aloud. You're welcome to follow along quietly or read it yourself.

After the blessings, everyone should respond "Amen," and then we lean to the left and drink the first cup—reclining, as a sign of freedom.

When Pesach falls on Shabbat, we begin Kiddush with "Yom HaShishi." On a weekday, we begin with "Savri Maranan."

On Motzei Shabbat, Kiddush includes Havdalah and follows the order: Yayin (wine), Kiddush, Ner (candle), Havdalah, and Zman (Shehechiyanu)—abbreviated as YAKNEHAZ.

Now let's read the Kiddush and drink the first cup while reclining.

The Rebbe's Customs:

The Rebbe would pour the Kiddush wine himself, in multiple small pours until the wine overflowed the rim of the cup and spilled into the saucer. He would then take the cup in his right hand, pass it to his left, and then return it to his right, holding it with upright fingers along the sides of the cup—just as during a regular Kiddush.

After Kiddush, the Rebbe would recline and drink the entire cup. While reciting Kiddush, he held the cup on the palm of his hand. But during drinking, he held it by the side.

Stories of the Seder: When There's No Money for Wine

One Erev Pesach, a Jewish man came to visit Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik of Brisk. His face was downcast, and his eyes lowered.

"Rebbe," he asked quietly, "is it permitted to use milk for the Four Cups?"

Rabbi Yosef looked at him gently. "Are you ill?" he asked.

"No, Rebbe," the man replied honestly. "But wine is expensive this year, and I just don't have the money... and the holiday is

almost here."

Rabbi Yosef paused for a moment, then reached for his wallet. He took out fifty rubles and handed it to the man. "Here," he said simply, "buy everything you need for the holiday."

The man thanked him emotionally and left.

When the door closed, the Rebbetzin turned to Rabbi Yosef in surprise. "Yosef," she said, "a good bottle of wine costs ten rubles at most. Why did you give him fifty?"

Rabbi Yosef gave a faint smile. "If he's asking about using milk for the Four Cups, he must not have any meat or fish at home either—because you can't mix meat and milk!"

Humorous Tales: The Price of Wine

Once, Rabbi Meir of Lublin was traveling to raise funds for his yeshiva, Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin. He spent Shabbos in a small town and stayed at a local inn.

After Shabbos, the innkeeper brought him the bill, and the rabbi noticed it was unusually high—including a bottle of wine he never drank.

Rabbi Meir smiled and said, "I won't argue with you about the bottle you added on your own. I didn't drink from it, so who knows—maybe it really was fine wine. But the bottle I did drink—I know for sure it was terrible. So why did you overcharge for that one?"

ורחץ

Before eating the karpas, we pause to wash our hands. This washing is a halachic requirement, since we're about to eat a food that has been dipped in liquid.

We take a cup of water and pour three times over the right hand and then three times over the left—just as we do before eating bread. We don't recite a blessing for this washing, but we also don't speak afterward until we eat the karpas (onion or potato dipped in salt water).

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe would go to the kitchen himself to wash his hands and would remain silent until after making the borei pri ha'adamah blessing and eating the karpas. This may also explain why the Rebbe would say the words "Urchatz" and "Karpas" together when announcing each step of the Seder—to avoid separating the washing from the eating.

The Deeper Meaning: Do Good and Turn from Evil

Urchatz represents more than just a physical act. Spiritually, it symbolizes removing spiritual impurity. It reflects the idea of "sur meira"—turning away from negativity, cleansing ourselves of bad habits, and distancing from harmful behavior.

The previous step—Kadesh—represents the opposite movement: "aseh tov"—pursuing the good. To sanctify ourselves means to add light and do positive things.

Both of these directions are essential: we must both sanctify ourselves and cleanse ourselves. Normally, the order is "turn from evil and do good"—first we deal with the negative, and

only afterward do we bring in the positive.

It's like someone who wants to decorate their home—you don't bring in fine furniture before dusting the room. First clean, then beautify.

But Pesach teaches us a different message: Sometimes you don't have to wait until everything is perfect before you start doing good. Don't wait until you're fully "clean" to begin growing spiritually. Begin with the good—and the negativity will start to fade on its own.

That's why tonight, we started with Kadesh—adding light and holiness. Only now do we move on to Urchatz—removing the negative. First we bring in the good, and then we deal with what needs to be washed away.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Capturing a Child's Attention

Dipping the karpas in salt water is something we don't normally do the rest of the year. The reason for this custom is to spark curiosity in the children—to get them to ask questions. After all, one of the main goals of the Seder is to fulfill the mitzvah of "v'higadeta l'vincha"—"you shall tell your child"—by actively engaging them in the story of the Exodus.

That's why the Sages introduced several changes and unusual actions on Seder night, all designed to get the kids asking questions:

A. Giving out roasted grains or nuts to children before the holiday begins, following the custom of Rabbi Akiva (Pesachim 109a): "He would distribute roasted seeds and nuts to chil-

dren on Erev Pesach so they wouldn't fall asleep and would stay engaged enough to ask questions."

B. Dipping a vegetable (karpas) in salt water before the meal—something we don't do on other nights.

C. Removing the Seder plate with the matzot after reciting Ha Lachma Anya—as if clearing away the food before we've eaten anything! It's a strange move that naturally gets children asking.

D. Pouring the second cup before the meal even begins, which is very unusual compared to our typical practice year-round.

All of these customs serve one clear goal: to fulfill what the Rambam writes in Hilchot Chametz u'Matzah (Chapter 7): "According to the understanding of the child, so shall the father teach him." In other words, we don't just lecture—we engage their minds in ways they can relate to.

Let's go ahead and wash our hands now and continue with the Seder as usual.

כרפס

For karpas, we take a small piece of onion or potato—less than a kezayis. A small amount is enough to spark curiosity in the children, and since it's such a small quantity, we don't say the after-blessing (borei nefashos) afterward.

We dip the karpas into salt water and recite the blessing borei pri ha'adamah. When saying this blessing, it's a good idea to also have in mind the maror that we'll eat later.

After eating the karpas, it is removed from the Seder plate. From this point on, only five items remain on the plate.

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe would take the onion from the Seder plate and hollow out the inner part. He would add salt to the dish of salt water three more times. Then, he would dip the inside of the onion three times into the salt water—and only then recite the bracha.

Stories of the Seder: Everyone Has a Chance

My grandfather, Rabbi Itamar Beckerman a"h, who in his youth was a Chossid of Alexander in pre-war Poland, told me something when I was a child. He said that the second Rebbe of the Alexander dynasty, Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak Danziger, would say: "The karpas, the simple vegetable we place on the Seder table, carries a powerful message: Everyone has a chance."

Just like the onion or potato grows buried deep in the ground, sometimes a person can feel completely buried—stuck in

their struggles, feeling hopeless, spiritually or emotionally. It can feel like there's no way out.

But tonight, we look at that simple vegetable—the karpas—placed with honor on the Seder plate. And we remind ourselves: If the karpas can make it to the royal table, so can I. As part of the Jewish people, I, too, can rise above my struggles, change, and take my place at the table of freedom.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Two Dips, One Story

Why do we dip the karpas in salt water?

Over the course of the Seder, we actually dip twice. First, the karpas into salt water. Later, the maror into charoset—just enough to lessen its sharpness, but not so much that it loses its bitterness.

One of the "Mah Nishtanah" questions even mentions this: "Why is it that on other nights we don't dip even once, and tonight we dip twice?"

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explained that these two dippings symbolize the full arc of the Exodus story—how it began and how it ended.

It began with a dip: when the brothers dipped Yosef's coat in blood to deceive their father. That act set off the chain of events that brought us to Egypt.

And it ended with a dip: when Moshe told the people to dip a bundle of hyssop into the blood of the Pesach offering and place it on their doorposts. That act marked the beginning of

our freedom.

The first dip—karpas in salt water—takes something good and makes it taste bitter. It reflects the tragic choice of Yosef's brothers and the descent into exile.

The second dip—maror in charoset—is the opposite: we take something bitter and add sweetness. That's the story of redemption—of turning suffering into freedom and brotherhood.

So with just two small dippings, we have the entire journey—from exile to redemption.

יחץ

We now take the middle matzah—the one that corresponds to Levi—and break it in half.

The smaller half stays on the Seder plate between the other two matzahs. Just make sure it's not too small.

The larger half is wrapped and set aside for the afikoman, which we'll eat at the end of the meal. Based on Kabbalah, some break it into five pieces before wrapping it in a cloth or bag and hiding it.

Why do we do this now? Matzah is called the "bread of affliction," and it's fitting that we tell the story of the Exodus over a broken piece of matzah—not a whole one.

There's also a deeper meaning: the redemption from Egypt was only the beginning. We're still waiting for the full and final redemption—and the hidden half of the matzah symbolizes what's still to come.

Some have the custom that children "steal" the afikoman and return it later in exchange for a prize—mainly to keep them awake and engaged. This is not our custom, so as not to introduce even a playful association with stealing.

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe would split the middle matzah without removing it fully from the cloth it was wrapped in. He would then break the larger half into five pieces, place them in a second cloth similar to the first, and hide them between the pillows.

The Deeper Meaning: What Do We Do With Each Half?

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, the Rebbe's father, explained the deeper meaning of breaking the middle matzah in a beautifully simple way.

The middle matzah represents Moshe Rabbeinu, who came from the tribe of Levi. When the Torah introduces Moshe's birth, it doesn't give his parents' names—it just says, "A man from the house of Levi married a daughter of Levi." The emphasis is on the tribe, not the individuals.

Later in the story, two key phrases appear: "She saw him..." and "She hid him." These mirror the two halves of the matzah—one left visible on the Seder plate, the other hidden as the afikoman.

Pesach is a preparation for receiving the Torah—and the two halves of the matzah reflect two parts of the Torah.

The smaller, visible half represents the revealed part of Torah—the mitzvot and their laws, as discussed in Talmud and Jewish law. These teachings are meant to be spoken aloud and studied openly.

The larger, hidden half stands for the secrets of Torah—its mystical and spiritual depth. This part isn't revealed, because the deepest teachings are not meant for public discussion.

So with the simple act of breaking the matzah, we're reminded of the balance between the revealed and the hidden in our Torah—the parts we study openly and the parts we approach with quiet reverence.

Stories of the Seder: "Thou Shalt Not Steal"

They tell a story about Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz. One year, during his Shabbos Hagadol sermon—the Shabbos right before Passover—he turned to his congregation and said:

"I was recently learning the laws of Pesach in the Rambam, and I came across a serious dilemma.

"The Rambam writes in Hilchos Chametz u'Matzah (Chapter 7) that everyone is obligated to eat matzah on Pesach. He even adds that even a poor person who relies on charity must drink four cups of wine at the Seder.

"But then," the Rebbe continued, "I read the Rambam's Hilchos Gezeilah ve'Geneivah, which state that it's absolutely forbidden to steal—even a single cent.

"So I have a question," said Rabbi Naftali. "What is a poor person supposed to do on Pesach? He's obligated to eat matzah and drink four cups of wine—but he doesn't have money to buy either. And stealing is obviously forbidden. So how is he meant to fulfill both sets of laws?

"I came to one conclusion," he said. "The only people who can resolve this contradiction... are you—the wealthy and the well-off. If you give generously to those in need, the Rambam will work itself out beautifully."

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Who's Truly Great?

In the year 1865, during the Yachatz portion of the Seder in the home of the Tzemach Tzedek, one of the participants

picked up the matzah to compare the two halves—trying to figure out which piece was bigger.

The Rebbe gently remarked, "Something you need to check to see whether or not it's 'great'—isn't really great."

His grandson, the Rebbe Rashab—who was just five years old at the time and present at that Seder—later said: "From that moment on, I developed a deep aversion to anyone whose greatness needs to be measured."

Humorous Tales: Where's the Money

One year, the rabbi came home after a long day looking visibly exhausted. His wife asked him, "What wore you out so much today?"

He answered, "It was a tough job. I spent the day giving speeches to encourage the wealthy to give generously to Maos Chitim (charity for Pesach)."

"And?" she asked. "Did your words bear any fruit?"

"Fifty percent success," he replied. "The poor are ready to receive. Now I just need to convince the rich to give."

"הא לחמא עניא"

Let's uncover the matzos and recite together: Ha Lachma Anya—"This is the bread of affliction." With these words, we symbolically open our homes and hearts to anyone who wishes to join us for the Seder and celebrate the holiday.

Interestingly, this part of the Haggadah is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew like the rest. Why? Because at the time the Haggadah was compiled, most Jews no longer spoke Hebrew—they spoke Aramaic.

Since the point of this paragraph is to invite everyone—especially those who might otherwise be left out—it was written in the language of the people to ensure no Jew would feel excluded.

Following that spirit, we can also read this invitation in the local language, so everyone at the table understands that they are welcome here.

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe wouldn't lift the Seder plate during Hei Lachma Anya. Instead, he would carefully uncover each of the three matzos—raising the cloth slightly over each one so that all three were visible during the declaration.

Stories of the Seder: He Feeds Them All

It was the afternoon before Pesach when Reb Nachum, a well-known baal chessed from the town of Slonim, arrived at the home of the local Rabbi, Rabbi Yehoshua Isaac Shapira—better known as Reb Eizel Charif.

“Rebbe,” Reb Nachum began, clearly troubled, “Netta Hirsch, who used to be a wealthy man, has lost everything. He’s now living in utter poverty. He doesn’t even have matzah or wine for the Seder—and certainly nothing for his family to eat. But he’s too embarrassed to ask for help.”

Reb Eizel was shocked. “You’re only telling me now? The holiday starts in just a few hours!”

“I only found out last night,” said Reb Nachum apologetically. “But how can we help him without exposing his situation?”

The Rabbi paused, then gave an unusual instruction: “Go to Netta Hirsch and tell him that tonight, when people come to wish me a good Yom Tov, he should whisper his blessing in my ear so no one else hears.”

Reb Nachum was confused, but followed the Rabbi’s orders. “If he does as I say,” the Rabbi promised, “his table will be full.”

“But how is whispering going to get him matzah, wine, or food?” asked Reb Nachum.

“No time for questions. Just go,” said the Rabbi firmly.

Reb Nachum hurried to the once-grand home that now concealed Netta Hirsch’s poverty, and relayed the Rabbi’s instructions.

Netta was puzzled. “What’s the point of this whisper?” he asked.

“Just do it,” Reb Nachum replied. “You’ll see.”

That night, after prayers, the townspeople lined up to wish the Rabbi a good Yom Tov. When it was Netta Hirsch’s turn,

the Rabbi told the crowd, “Excuse me, Reb Netta wants to ask me something private.”

Netta leaned in and whispered, “I bless the Rebbe with a kosher and joyous Pesach.”

Suddenly, the Rabbi cried out, “Oh no! It’s all chametz! Complete chametz! Nothing in your house is kosher for Pesach!” Then he quickly added, “Don’t worry, Reb Netta. You live in a community that knows how to help.”

In moments, the community jumped into action. One brought wine, another fish, someone else meat, and another matzah—everyone chipped in.

Soon, Netta’s home was full of food and supplies. He stood in shock at his doorway as the sadness in his home turned to joy.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Why Is Matzah Called ‘Bread of Affliction’?

We begin the Haggadah by saying: “This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt”—with the Seder plate and three matzahs sitting in front of us.

But is it really the same bread? The matzah we’re eating tonight was baked in Jerusalem, Kfar Chabad, Dnipro, or Brooklyn—not in Egypt! Wouldn’t it make more sense to say: “This matzah is like the bread of affliction our ancestors ate”?

The author of the Haggadah is sending us—and our children—a deeper message right at the start. Egypt isn’t just a

physical location, and the Exodus isn't just a historical event. The Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, is rooted in the word meitzar, meaning "narrowness" or "limitation." It represents the internal constraints we all face—habits, fears, limiting beliefs—that hold us back.

That's why the Haggadah says, "In every generation, a person must see themselves as if they personally left Egypt." This isn't just symbolic. When we read Hei Lachma Anya, we're reminding ourselves that we too are experiencing Exodus tonight—not from Pharaoh, but from the things that hold us back.

Humorous Tales: The Customs of Sodom and Gomorrah

When the tzaddik Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev was appointed as the city's rabbi, he made one condition with the town leaders: they shouldn't bother him to attend any communal meetings unless they were planning a completely new regulation.

One day, he was summoned to a council meeting to discuss just that—a new ordinance. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak put aside all his responsibilities and showed up, curious about the nature of this "new" legislation.

As it turned out, the council was proposing a law to restrict poor people from going door to door collecting charity. Instead, they would only be allowed to ask for help in designated areas.

Upon hearing this, the rabbi responded: "I'm surprised at you. Didn't we agree I would only be called in for something truly new?"

"But this is a new regulation!" the leaders insisted.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak smiled wryly: "This isn't new at all. This 'law' already existed in Sodom and Gomorrah..."

Humorous Tales: The Holiness of a Snack

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once joked:

"Many times, as I passed by a shul during davening, people leaned out the windows and called to me, 'Come, Yid! Come grab a kedusha!'

But never once, as I walked past someone's house during dinner, did anyone call out, "Come, Yid! Come get a bite to eat!'"

Sometimes holiness is easier to give away than a sandwich.

"מה נשתנה"

So far tonight, we've made Kiddush, dipped a vegetable in salt water, broken the middle matzah, and invited everyone to join our Seder. Now we move into one of the most important parts of the night: the questions and answers. Why are we all gathered here? What's this night really about?

Before we get to the questions, we add another unusual twist: we move the Seder plate to the side and pour a second cup of wine.

By now, the kids at the table are probably wondering: "Why are we moving the food before we even start eating?" and "Why are we pouring another glass of wine—before the meal even begins?"

It's important to note: These Four Questions are meant to be asked first by the youngest children, and then everyone else at the table joins in, even those without parents present.

(It's also a beautiful idea to have everyone sing Mah Nishtanah together after reading the questions. And don't forget to compliment the kids on a job well done!)

The Rebbe's Custom:

The children in Beis Harav would ask the Four Questions in Yiddish. Right before Mah Nishtanah, the Rebbe would move the Seder plate aside and cover the matzot.

The Deeper Meaning: What's So Different About This Exile?

On a deeper level, the Four Questions aren't just directed at our parents—they're addressed to our Father in Heaven.

When we ask, "Why is this night different?" we're also asking: "Why is this exile so different?" "All other nights" refers to all the exiles our people have endured. "This night"—this current exile—feels different.

The difference? All the earlier exiles had an expiration date. G-d told Avraham exactly how long the Egyptian exile would last. The prophets were told how long we'd be in Babylon—70 years.

But this exile—the one we're in now—has no known end date. It just keeps going. So we cry out: "What has changed? Why is this exile so long and so hard?"

Tonight, we don't just ask questions about the Seder. We also bring this heartfelt question to the table. As we read through the Haggadah, we hope to discover its answer.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Where Do You Really Live?

To keep kids engaged during the Seder, we encourage them to ask the Four Questions—pointing out the unusual customs of the night.

Interestingly, the order of the questions varies. In the Ashkenazi version, we start with matzah (a biblical commandment), then maror (a rabbinic mitzvah), dipping (a custom), and finally reclining. But in the Sephardic and Chabad versions, the

dipping question comes first!

That seems backward. Why would a mere custom be placed before mitzvahs from the Torah? And practically speaking, we recline during kiddush—before any dipping happens!

The Rebbe offers a powerful educational insight: Kids don't learn from what we say—they absorb what we live.

The order of the Four Questions reveals how real education happens. A child doesn't form their worldview from lectures or obligations, but from watching what excites their parents. They pick up what we really care about, what we're passionate about.

When parents fulfill mitzvot because they have to—like eating matzah or maror—the child thinks, "They're doing what they're supposed to." But when they see their parent go the extra mile for a small, non-obligatory custom like dipping the vegetable in salt water, that's when it really makes an impression.

That's why the dipping stands out. It teaches that the deepest impact doesn't come from the things we say we "must" do—it comes from what we love doing. Living our Judaism with sincerity and joy is the most powerful lesson we can teach.

As the child sees us perform even the most minor customs with excitement and meaning, they learn: "This isn't just what my parents do—it's who they are." And that's the kind of message that lasts a lifetime.

Stories of the Seder: Sometimes, You Need to Answer the Questions Yourself

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb shared the following story:

Though I wasn't a Chassid, I lived for a short time in Crown Heights and attended a few farbrengens with the Rebbe. A few years after getting married, I moved to Maryland, where I earned my doctorate in psychology and became a professor. I also gave two Gemara classes each week—one on Shabbat to the general community, and one on Tuesdays to a small group of students.

In my early thirties, I hit a crossroads. Should I continue my career in psychology or switch to full-time Torah study? Where should I send my kids to school? And deeper still—I was struggling with doubts in faith. A Chabad friend suggested I speak with the Rebbe.

In February 1971, I called the Rebbe's office. I spoke in English to the secretary, who translated my concerns into Yiddish for the Rebbe, who was listening on the line.

Suddenly, I heard the Rebbe's voice: "Tell him there's a Jew in Maryland he can speak with. His name is Weinreb." I froze—because I hadn't told them my name.

I identified myself and asked for clarification, and the Rebbe repeated: "Sometimes a person needs to talk to himself."

Even the secretary was stunned. "The Rebbe says sometimes the best advice is to speak with yourself. Isn't your name Weinreb?" I confirmed, and the call ended.

What I understood from this was that the Rebbe was saying: You're not a child. You're a husband, a father, a teacher of

Torah. You're more capable than you think. Trust your inner voice.

From that moment, I became more decisive. Until then, I had a tendency to avoid making big choices. The Rebbe could've told me exactly what to do, but he empowered me to find the answer within myself.

A few months later, I came to Brooklyn and had a moment to thank the Rebbe in person. "My name is Weinreb, from Maryland," I said. The Rebbe gave me a meaningful smile I'll never forget.

Eventually, I left Silver Spring and transitioned from a career in psychology to becoming a community rabbi. I later became Vice President of the Orthodox Union. And since that moment in 1971, every time I've faced a tough decision, I pause, I learn, I reflect—and I listen for the voice inside.

So maybe tonight, as we read the Haggadah, we can each take a moment to reflect—and see if the answers we're looking for might already be within us.

מגיד

Important Note: This is a perfect time to involve everyone at the table, and let them know they're welcome to read aloud, not just follow along silently.

Personally, I like to go around the table and have each person read a section out loud. Everyone else follows along quietly in their Haggadah, making it a shared experience.

The Rebbe's Custom:

Before Avadim Hayinu, the Rebbe would uncover the matzos again.

The Deeper Meaning: Leaving Slavery—Today

The Seder isn't just about remembering history—it's about personal spiritual freedom. According to Chassidic thought, Mitzrayim (Egypt) is related to the word meitzarim—boundaries or limitations. It represents everything that holds back the soul's divine light.

Each of us experiences our own personal exile—whether it's fear, bad habits, or emotional blocks. These are our inner "Pharaohs," preventing the flow of divine light within us and covering over the deepest part of the soul that wants to reconnect with its source.

The Hebrew word Pesach has the same numerical value as the word netzach (148), meaning "victory." This night gives us the strength to overcome our limitations.

On Pesach night, G-d "jumps over" the usual spiritual process

and shines His infinite light straight into our reality.

With that in mind, the story of the Exodus takes on a personal meaning. Every time we read about Egypt, we're talking about our own limitations. Every time we mention Pharaoh, we're referring to our internal resistance to developing our connection to G-d.

"Avadim hayinu l'Pharaoh b'Mitzrayim"—we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt—can also mean: "Our holy sparks are trapped in the prison of ego and limitation."

The solution is matzah—lechem oni, the bread of humility and faith. While chametz (leaven) represents ego and inflation, matzah is flat and simple, symbolizing surrender and trust.

We're often afraid to let go of our egos. We think we'll lose ourselves. But when we let go, we find something deeper: our truest self—our soul.

That inner truth is the spark of Mashiach within each of us. After starting with "Ha Lachma Anya," we will now move toward "B'tzeit Yisrael MiMitzrayim"; we're climbing toward redemption—personal and collective.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: What Comes Next?

The power of Jewish tradition is on full display at the Seder. Every year, millions of Jews around the world gather to retell the story of the Exodus—using the same framework first taught by those who actually experienced it: the generation that lived through the plagues, crossed the sea, and stood at Mount Sinai.

Since then, without interruption, the story has been passed down—father to child, generation after generation. It's no wonder that children are at the heart of the Seder. They are the future, and it's our responsibility to give them the tools to carry the following messages forward:

1. Who are we?

The Haggadah begins with our story: from Abraham discovering G-d, to Jacob descending to Egypt with his family. The Jews began as respected guests, but over time became slaves. After 210 years of exile—when our identity was nearly lost—the redemption began. Moses, the ten plagues, the Exodus, and the giving of the Torah turned us into G-d's chosen nation.

2. Who is above us?

Jewish faith is built on the Exodus—a national experience witnessed by 600,000 men, plus women and children. They saw the plagues, the splitting of the sea, and stood at Sinai, where they heard G-d proclaim, "I am the L-rd your G-d, who took you out of Egypt."

3. What's next?

Our responsibility is to continue along G-d's path. Even before Sinai, in Egypt, the Jews were given their first mitzvot—sanctifying the new moon, circumcision, and the Pesach offering—to help elevate them above Egyptian impurity. Then came the Ten Commandments and G-d's eternal moral code: the Torah.

Pesach isn't just about physical freedom—it's about spiritual freedom. Through keeping the mitzvot passed down in our

tradition, we rise above materialism and connect to something infinite.

"כל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים..."

Stories of the Seder: Why Are We Telling Sob Stories?

Our Sages taught, "Whoever tells the story of the Exodus at great length—harei zeh meshubach—this person is praiseworthy." But let's look carefully at the wording. Rather than saying someone "deserves praise," the text says he is praiseworthy—as if the person themselves becomes elevated.

To understand this more deeply, let's consider a parable:

Imagine a ship carrying passengers from all walks of life. Some are wealthy merchants, others are destitute refugees escaping hardship. Suddenly, a violent storm strikes. As the ship rocks and danger looms, every Jew on board—regardless of background—cries out to G-d in prayer. That inner spark, the Jewish soul, comes alive in times of crisis.

Miraculously, the storm calms and the ship is saved. Everyone is grateful. But their reactions vary: the wealthy throw lavish meals in thanks; the poor offer quiet, humble prayers. While all were saved, some felt the miracle more deeply, because of how much they had to lose—or how much they gained.

So too on Seder night. Our ancestors didn't just leave slavery—they were rescued from spiritual darkness. The Torah says they had to run from Egypt, not just physically but spiritually, from the depths of impurity.

When we sit at the Seder and give thanks for our redemption, some people see it only through a physical lens—freedom from slavery, the ability to live life with comfort: money, a

home, a car, social status. For them, Pesach is about material liberation. But others—those who strive to live with purpose and connect to G-d—see it as spiritual redemption too. They feel deeply grateful that we were not just freed, but uplifted.

That's the deeper meaning of "harei zeh meshubach." The person who tells the story with enthusiasm and joy—he is praiseworthy. Because when the redemption feels big to you, your gratitude will be just as great. It's not just what happened—it's how deeply you feel it.

Humorous tales: A Slave's Pride

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once said:

"I never truly understood what pride was—until I met the bathhouse attendant in Warsaw.

"One time I was in Warsaw and went to the public bathhouse. The custom there was to pay the attendant if you wanted him to scrub your back. He began scrubbing me with a lot of force, and I said, 'Could you perhaps scrub a little more gently?'

"The man got upset and shouted, 'Do you know who I am? I'm the bathhouse attendant of Warsaw! And who are you to tell me how to scrub?!'"

"מעשה ברבי אליעזר"

The Deeper Meaning: Illuminating the Night

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah famously said, "I am like a man of seventy years, and I never merited to understand how the Exodus from Egypt must be mentioned at night—until Ben Zoma derived it from a verse."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak (the Rebbe's father) offers a mystical take: the name "Elazar ben Azaryah" itself tells a story. "Elazar" means "G-d is my help," and "Azaryah" is "Helped by G-d." In times of hardship, we survive only with Hashem's help.

Why does he say he is "like" a man of seventy? In times of suffering and persecution, even the young can feel aged. Fear, exile, hiding, and trauma leave a mark.

And then comes the question: "I never merited to understand how the Exodus from Egypt must be mentioned at night." Night represents darkness, pain, and spiritual exile. How can we talk about freedom while still feeling so bound?

The answer? "Until Ben Zoma explained it." The name "Zoma" is related to the word machshava—thought. The key is in how we choose to see things in our minds. Even in the darkest times, we can remind ourselves that G-d has redeemed us in the past, and He will do it again.

And the Sages take it further: "All the days of your life—to bring the days of Moshiach." It's not enough to hope for a bet-

ter future—we need to work toward it, every day, right here in this world.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Drawing Strength from a Previous Lifetime

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah famously declared, "I am like a man of seventy years." In truth, he was only eighteen at the time. But on the day he was appointed head of the Sanhedrin, a miracle occurred—his hair turned white, and he appeared as someone much older.

The Arizal explains that Rabbi Elazar's soul was a reincarnation of the prophet Shmuel, who lived for 52 years. Together with his 18 current years, this completed a total of seventy. So when he said "I am like a man of seventy," he meant it—perhaps not in appearance, but in spiritual stature and experience carried over from a previous lifetime.

The Rebbe said that many souls in our generation are not new, but have returned from earlier generations. That means that they carry within them strengths and spiritual achievements from earlier incarnations. So, when we face challenges that seem beyond our current capacity, it may be those hidden gifts from the past that give us the strength to succeed.

Each of us carries a wellspring of spiritual potential—some of it visible, some of it waiting to be revealed. When Divine Providence places an opportunity or mission before us, it's often a sign that the necessary strength already lies within us.

It's not unusual today to see young people taking on respon-

sibilities that once seemed far beyond their years—a success that can be traced to inner reserves built over generations—spiritual potential that's now finding expression in a new context.

So don't underestimate your own capacity. Within you lies the wisdom and strength of generations. Just as Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah revealed the depth of his soul at a young age, so too each of us can tap into a deeper self.

Humorous Tales: A Story from Bnei Brak

Legend has it that only once in Jewish history did students come and tell their teachers what to do—and that was in the story we just read about the sages in Bnei Brak. That kind of thing could only happen in Bnei Brak...

Humorous Tales: Rabbis vs. Torah Scholars

The Noda B'Yehuda was famously strict in halachah, but in one case he was actually more lenient than many of his colleagues. Regarding a man whose wife had become mentally incapacitated, he ruled that the husband could receive permission to marry again not just from 100 rabbis (as was the norm), but from 100 Torah scholars.

That sounds easier—until Reb Eizel quipped: "In this, the Noda B'Yehuda was even stricter than everyone else! After all, finding 100 people who call themselves 'rabbis' is much easier than finding 100 actual Torah scholars!"

"למען תזכור . . כל ימי חייך"

Stories of the Seder: Celebrating Pesach All Year Round

In the early 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, close to a million Jews made aliyah to Israel. One of the great challenges was verifying Jewish status for many of the new immigrants.

A 42-year-old man appeared at the Tel Aviv rabbinical court, headed by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, and asked to be officially recognized as Jewish. He brought two witnesses: one testified that he had been present at the man's bris, and the other was an elderly Chabad chassid who shared the following remarkable story.

"I don't actually know this man personally," the chassid began, "but I knew his mother well. She was the head of a hospital department in Moscow. Not observant, but there was one mitzvah she was fiercely devoted to.

She smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. But every single night, without fail, she would take one cigarette, quietly place it in a tin under her bed, and save it.

After Purim, she'd collect all 365 cigarettes she had saved over the past year and bring them to my home. I would sell them on the black market, use the money to buy flour, and personally bake her a batch of strictly kosher matzos for the Seder—made with utmost care to avoid even the smallest trace of chametz."

Rabbi Lau was moved to tears. He picked up the phone, called

the mother in Russia, and said: "I celebrate Pesach once a year—but you? You celebrated it 365 days a year."

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Escape and Remembrance

In May 1943, only 250 Jews remained in the Novogrudok labor camp. The rest had already been murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. Realizing their days were numbered, the remaining prisoners gathered to discuss a plan of escape. After considering various ideas, they settled on digging a tunnel.

They secretly built tools at their work sites and dug at night. The tunnel had electric lighting, air vents, an alarm bell, and even a cart on a track to carry out the dirt. They hid the soil in attics, between walls, and—on Sundays, when the guards were drunk—they scattered it in the yard.

The tunnel's entrance was hidden beneath a bed in one of the barracks, and it stretched over 200 meters beyond the camp's fence. Digging went on for four months, in shifts, with extra bread and water provided to the diggers.

On the stormy night of September 26, 1943, the escape began. All 250 prisoners entered the tunnel. When they emerged from its exit, amidst gunfire, many were disoriented and mistakenly ran back toward the camp and were killed. But about 170 escaped into the forests, joined the Bielski partisans, and survived.

In 2012, a film crew set out to document the story. They found three surviving escapees and convinced them to return to

Belarus. Joined by around 50 of their descendants, they unearthed the tunnel's original entrance, along with remnants like wires, shoe soles, and digging tools.

One granddaughter later shared: "Only after I dug with my own hands in that place did I realize how little I had understood my grandmother's story."

What made this act of remembrance so unique was that the descendants returned and re-dug the tunnel. The conditions were, of course, entirely different—with archaeologists and modern equipment—but it allowed them to physically experience part of their parents' and grandparents' past.

This is how the Jewish people remember their suffering and their miracles. For three thousand years we've retold the Exodus. But how do we remember it so vividly? What's the secret of Jewish memory?

Because we don't just tell the story—we re-live it. We eat the same matzah our ancestors ate as slaves. We taste the bitter herbs. We sit together, generation after generation, reliving the Exodus as if we, too, are walking out of Egypt tonight.

Some communities have a custom to wrap the afikoman in a cloth, place it over the shoulder, and take a few steps while saying, "This is how our ancestors left Egypt, with their leftovers bundled in their garments on their shoulders."

In other traditions, they add a short dialogue: "Where are you coming from?" — "From Egypt." "Where are you headed?" — "To the Land of Israel." And the response: "Next year in Jerusalem!"

These symbolic acts spark the imagination—especially for

children, but also for adults. They turn the Seder into more than a story; they make it a journey we are living. It's one of the most powerful ways to connect to the essence of Pesach—the Exodus from slavery to freedom.

"ארבעה בנים"

The Deeper Meaning: Even the Wicked Child is 'One'

The Rebbe quotes the Talmud (Sanhedrin 44a), which states: "Even though he has sinned, he is still a Jew." No matter where a Jew may be spiritually, the core of their Jewish soul remains intact.

The Rebbe adds that this is how the Previous Rebbe explains the Haggadah's phrase "One is wise, one is wicked…": each child—each one—contains within them the essence of "Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One."

Even the wicked child is still "one." The difference is that his divine spark is hidden and needs to be uncovered.

Stories of the Seder: The Best Student

The great Rabbi Eizil Charif was once seeking a worthy groom for his daughter. He went to a prestigious yeshivah and asked to meet a fine student. The Rosh Yeshivah invited him to evaluate the boys himself and choose the one he found most fitting.

Rabbi Eizil entered the study hall and posed a sharp question on the Rambam. He waited to see who could respond. Two hours passed—no one answered. Disappointed, he turned to leave.

Suddenly, one student came running after him. “Rabbi,” he said, “maybe I won’t merit marrying your daughter—but at least tell me the answer! I’m dying to know!”

Rabbi Eizil hugged the boy and said, “You’re exactly the kind of person I’m looking for—not someone who knows everything, but someone who truly wants to know.”

And You Shall Tell Your Child: The Four Sons as Generations

We often view the Four Sons in the Haggadah as four different personality types. But there’s another way to see them—as four successive generations in a Jewish family, each growing more distant from tradition.

It all begins with someone who isn’t mentioned in the Haggadah—the original grandfather. A simple Jew, unwavering in his faith. He burned chametz before Pesach, ate matzah and maror, and fulfilled every mitzvah with wholehearted devotion.

His son is the Wise Son. He grew up with a solid Jewish education, but later acquired secular knowledge as well. He remains observant but begins to ask questions: “What are the laws, testimonies, and judgments that Hashem our G-d commanded you?”—he wants to understand the deeper meaning behind it all.

The Wise Son’s child grows up in a secular world, disconnected from Jewish life. He doesn’t wear tefillin or observe Shabbat. When he returns home for Pesach and sees unfamiliar customs delaying his dinner, he protests: “What is this service

to you?" He is the Wicked Son.

The Wicked Son now has a child. This boy grows up without any Jewish signs at home. On Pesach, his parents bring him to visit his grandfather—the Wise Son. While the father scrolls on his phone, the grandson joins his grandfather at shul, intrigued.

Back at the house, his grandmother lovingly sets the Seder table—matzah, wine, and Elijah's cup. This boy, the Simple Son, looks around and asks, "What is this?"

But the next generation isn't so lucky. The great-grandfather—the devout one—is long gone. So is the Wise Son. Now, the boy who "doesn't even know how to ask" is growing up in a home with no Pesach at all. There's no one to lead a Seder, no questions to awaken wonder.

To stop this downward spiral, the Torah tells us: "And you shall tell your child." Keep the chain unbroken. Hold onto our tradition. Live it, love it, and pass it on.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Don't Give Up on Them

We read about the Four Sons: the Wise, the Wicked, the Simple, and the One Who Doesn't Know How to Ask. But it's curious—why is the Wicked Son seated at the Seder at all? And why place him near the Wise Son? Shouldn't he be at the very end of the table—or not there at all?

The answer is: yes, the "Wicked" Son is against it all—but he still cares. He scoffs, but he shows up. He argues, but he's paying attention. He may be combative, but he hasn't tuned

out. That's already something.

And that's why we don't give up on him. In fact, he needs to be drawn in even closer. He's seated next to the Wise Son, because if anyone can reach him—it's the Wise one.

"בשעה שמצה ומרור מונחים לפניך"

Stories of the Seder: A Blessing Over Bread Instead of Matzah

A number of years ago, I came across a chilling document displayed at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel. It was a halachic ruling issued by a rabbi in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, permitting the eating of chametz on Pesach—for the sake of survival.

The rabbi was Rabbi Yissachar Davids, who served as the chief rabbi of Rotterdam, Holland. After the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands, he and his family were deported to Bergen-Belsen. His presence in the camp was a source of spiritual strength to many Jewish inmates.

One year on Pesach, when there was absolutely no kosher food available, Rabbi Davids ruled that due to pikuach nefesh—danger to life—Jews in the camp were permitted, even obligated, to eat chametz. On Seder night, when they reached the blessing "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to eat matzah," the rabbi paused.

In a clear and strong voice, he declared:

"Our Father in Heaven, You know our deepest desire is to do Your will—to eat matzah and avoid chametz. But our bitter exile has prevented us from fulfilling this. We find ourselves in mortal danger, and so we fulfill Your commandment to 'live by them,' and not to die by the mitzvot. We heed Your words: 'Guard yourself and your soul exceedingly.' Therefore,

we pray to You: give us life, give us strength, and redeem us quickly, so that we may once again fulfill Your Torah and serve You with a full heart."

He then recited the blessing—"hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz"—over a piece of bread, ate it, and distributed pieces to the others.

About two months before the camp was liberated in 1945, Rabbi Davids died of illness, in his early 40s. His son passed away at the same time. His wife, Erica, and their surviving daughters immigrated to Israel in 1947. Erica safeguarded her husband's written ruling and later donated it to the museum before her passing in 1997.

How deeply humbling it is to know that we, today, are able to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah while also living in safety, health, and joy. To be able to keep both "You shall live by them" and "on this night, you shall eat matzah"—with a full heart and a smile—is a blessing our ancestors could only dream of.

Humorous Tales: Remember Where You Came From

An elderly man once scolded a disrespectful young fellow: "You should show me some respect—I'm one generation closer to Avraham Avinu than you are!"

The young man smiled and replied: "Well then, you should show me some respect—because you're one generation closer to Terach than I am!"

Humorous Tales: A Distant Relative

A poor Jew once traveled through the towns of Poland collecting money to marry off his daughters. When he reached the Chozeh of Lublin, the Rebbe gave him 18 zloty.

The man said, "But Rebbe, we're family—you and I! Shouldn't I get a bit more?" He quickly sketched a family tree and showed that they were fourth cousins.

The Chozeh replied, "That's true—we're relatives, but distant ones. That hardly counts anymore."

That evening, at Mincha, the Chozeh led the prayers. As he began the Amidah and said, "G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov," the poor man called out from the back: "Distant relatives, huh?"

As my grandfather used to say, "Every joke includes a kernel of truth." The Chozeh was right, and so was the poor man. Yes, we may be distant relatives... but at the end of the day, we're still family.

"ואקח את אביכם את אברהם..."

Stories of the Seder: We Were Born to Be Different

A group of Bar Mitzvah boys from a religious school once had the privilege of a private audience (yechidus) with the Rebbe. The Rebbe asked them, "After you graduate, will you be continuing your studies in yeshiva?" Most of them answered no.

The Rebbe asked why. One boy explained, "Because no one in my neighborhood goes to yeshiva."

The Rebbe smiled and asked him, "What did you learn most recently in school?"

The boy answered, "About Abraham our forefather."

To which the Rebbe replied: "Then you already know—our entire people exists today only because Abraham didn't follow what everyone else in his neighborhood was doing."

Humorous Tales: Forgot the Name

Once, Reb Eizel Charif was honored with being the sandek at a bris. He wrapped himself in his tallis and took his seat on the Chair of Eliyahu. The mohel made the blessings and performed the circumcision. When it was time to announce the baby's name, the shamash leaned in to ask the father—who suddenly realized he forgot it.

Reb Eizel quickly said, "No problem—call him Avraham."

Someone asked, "Is the baby a convert?"

Rabbi Eizel replied, "No, but I saw the father standing there like Terach, so I figured his son should be called Avraham."

"ברוך שומר הבטחתו לישראל"

Stories of the Seder: From Blessing to Promise

Rabbi Moshe Feller, a longtime Chabad emissary, shares the following story:

"For six years after our wedding, my wife and I remained childless. Each time we had the opportunity to pass by the Rebbe, we received a heartfelt blessing: 'Zolst hobn kinder' — 'You should have children.' It was always phrased as a warm wish, a prayer.

"But then, in the final year before we were finally blessed, the Rebbe's words changed. This time, he said, 'Ir vet hobn kinder' — 'You will have children!' It wasn't a blessing anymore. It was a statement. A promise.

"And sure enough," Rabbi Feller concludes, "that very year — we were blessed with a child."

Stories of the Seder: Knowing What to Ask For

Rabbi Leibel Groner shared the following story:

A chassid once faced a complicated surgery on his knees. In New York, there were two top specialists for the procedure — each with their own strengths and drawbacks.

He went into the Rebbe's office and asked which of the two doctors he should choose for the operation.

The Rebbe responded, “If you’re already coming to ask — why didn’t you ask for a blessing not to need surgery at all?”

The chassid quickly said, “Rebbe, I’m asking now — please give me a blessing that I won’t need surgery.”

The Rebbe shook his head and said, “Now it won’t help. When you first opened the door and stood at the threshold — if, at that moment, you truly believed that a blessing from here could eliminate the need for surgery, that belief could’ve changed everything. But now that you’re asking only because I suggested it — not because of faith, but because it makes sense to you — your logic can’t undo what faith could have.”

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Rethinking the Timeline

What does it mean that G-d “calculated the end”? When we look closely, the Jews were actually in Egypt for only 210 years — far less than the 400 years originally prophesied.

So that raises the obvious question: What happened to the 400 years of exile that were foretold?

Rashi explains that the countdown started with the birth of Isaac — long before the descent into Egypt. That means the Jews never actually had to complete the full term of exile in Egypt itself.

In a sense, G-d “moved the clock forward” by 190 years. That’s why we thank Him for “calculating the end” — because the word ketz (end) has a numerical value of 190. When He saw the pain and suffering of His people, He chose to bring the redemption early.

The takeaway for us? If we want G-d to go easy on us — to change the rules in our favor — we should be willing to do the same for others. Family, friends, people around us. Instead of being rigid or nitpicky, sometimes the best thing we can do is take a page from G-d's book and "adjust the timeline."

Humorous Tales: Leaving with Riches Means Not Coming Back

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk once offered a humorous insight:

Why did G-d command the Jews to borrow gold and silver from the Egyptians before the Exodus? So they wouldn't even think about going back! After all, he joked, everyone knows — when you borrow something from a friend, you try your best to avoid ever seeing them again...

Humorous Tales: Nothing Left of the Great Wealth

Everything from the Exodus has some kind of reminder on the Seder plate: the shank bone reminds us of the Passover sacrifice, the matzah recalls the dough that didn't have time to rise, and the bitter herbs symbolize the suffering in Egypt.

So the commentators ask: Why don't we have something to remember the "great wealth" the Jews took with them?

And they answer — with a wink — because that wealth is long gone... there's nothing left to remember!

Humorous Tales: Boruch the Miser

When Baruch the Miser passed away, his only son stood there silent and dry-eyed. But then, as the pallbearers lifted the coffin and the nearby charity boxes began to rattle, the son

suddenly burst into tears.

Someone asked him, "Why are you crying now, all of a sudden?"

He replied, "Now I know for sure my father is really gone — the charity boxes are shaking, and he's not running away!"

"והיא שעמדה"

Before reciting Vehi She'amda, the matzos are covered and the cup of wine is lifted. Once the paragraph is finished, the cup is placed back on the table, and only then are the matzos uncovered in preparation for Tze U'Lmad.

The Rebbe's Customs:

When it came time for Vehi She'amda, he would cover the matzos and raise the cup – holding it as one does for Kiddush, resting it on the palm of the hand. He recited the paragraph aloud together with everyone present. When finished, he gently set the cup down and then uncovered the matzos once again.

Humorous Tales: Vehi She'amda – The Little Cup That Could

Chassidim used to joke that when we say Vehi She'amda — "And it is this that stood by our ancestors"—we're actually talking about the cup in our hands. After all, it's the same cup we raise from time to time with a heartfelt l'chaim, and that's what's really kept us going through all the generations!

Humorous Tales: Where Would the Nations Get Their G-d From?

Rabbi Yonasan Eybeschutz, famous for his quick wit in debates with anti-Semites, once faced a clever bishop who challenged him with a twist: "You're sharp, Rabbi, and we never win with you. Let's switch roles — I'll argue for Judaism, and you argue for Christianity."

The bishop began: "Jews have Passover, and Christians have Easter. Now, it makes sense for the Jews — something miraculous actually happened for them on that day. But what do Christians have to do with it?"

Rabbi Yonasan smiled and replied, "Simple. If the Jews hadn't been redeemed from Egypt — where would the nations have gotten their god from?"

"במתי מעט"

The Deeper Meaning: Not to Die as a Martyr

The prophet Yechezkel, when describing the Exodus from Egypt, quotes G-d saying: "I passed over you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you: 'By your blood, you shall live.'"

These words carry a powerful message. G-d is saying: Yes, Jews are ready to give their lives for their faith — but that's not the goal. The point isn't to die as martyrs. "By your blood, you shall live" — the sacrifice is meant to bring life, to energize ourselves and those around us.

Thankfully, in our times, we're not called upon to give actual blood. Today, the "blood" represents our passion — the warmth and vitality each of us has inside. That energy is what we're meant to pour into Torah, mitzvos, and meaningful living.

Our enthusiasm, excitement, and inner spark — that's what we should use to give spiritual life to others. When we live with warmth and passion, it becomes contagious. We uplift everyone around us and help fill the world with light.

"וישמע ה' את קולינו"

And You Shall Tell Your Child: "I Heard Them Too"

In his sefer Shmuas Yitzchak, Rabbi Yitzchak of Vorka offers a striking interpretation of the verse, "And I, too, have heard the groaning of the Children of Israel whom Egypt enslaved":

Some people only wake up spiritually when they're in crisis. The phrase "whom Egypt enslaved" can be understood as "those who are moved to serve G-d only by constricting, painful circumstances."

And yet, G-d says: "I heard them too." Even those who reach out only in hard times — their cries are precious to Me. I listen with love.

The Ohev Yisrael of Apta takes it a step further. He explains that the Jews weren't only crying out from physical suffering — they were asking something deeper:

Why is it that only suffering pushes us to connect with G-d? Why do we wait until we're broken to seek something higher? Why can't we grow from joy, from a good place?

And because of that honest, soul-searching question, G-d responds: "I will remember My covenant." That deep awareness — that yearning to connect with G-d beyond the pain — is what made them worthy of redemption.

These insights challenge us even today: Do we wait for hardship to turn toward G-d? Or are we ready to grow, to reach higher — simply because we want to?

"ואת עמלינו"

The Deeper Meaning: A Parenting Lesson from the Mishkan

In a talk delivered in Riga to the women of the Jewish community, the Frierdiker Rebbe pointed out that the women contributed four types of jewelry to the Mishkan (Tabernacle): Chach – an earring for the ear, Nezem – a nose ring, Tabaas – a ring for the finger, Kumaz – which, according to the Ibn Ezra, was worn on the upper arm.

The Rebbe explained that this teaches us about a mother's role in educating her children: She must give her ear — to truly listen. Her nose — to sense what interests and influences them. Her finger — to gently guide them in the right direction. And her arm — to stand firm and strong when it comes to their values and upbringing.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Moshe Was Worried About Education

In the very moments of the Exodus, Moshe Rabbeinu turns to the Jewish people and emphasizes the education of children — not once, not twice, but three separate times. Over and over, he makes it clear: your kids will ask questions, and you must be ready to answer.

Moshe's concern for education wasn't about the present — it was about the future. While the Jews were still in Egypt, poor

and enslaved, he wasn't worried about their kids losing their way. As our sages say, "Torah comes from the children of the poor." When life is tough, there's no room for entitlement or recklessness.

But once they'd enter the Land — a land of milk, honey, and abundance — Moshe feared the next generation would grow up comfortable and start asking questions their parents had never even considered. The parents had lived through slavery and redemption; their faith was crystal clear. But would that clarity pass down to children raised in luxury?

That's why Moshe warned: the real challenge won't be financial or military — it will be educational. He foresaw a time when everything that felt so obvious would become a question mark for the next generation. So even if you personally understand and believe, you still have to translate those truths into a language your child can grasp — to know what to say when "your son will ask tomorrow."

We see this same emphasis on education in the laws of the Korban Pesach, the Passover offering. In Temple times, families would travel to Jerusalem and bring the offering together. But the Torah makes a clear condition: "No outsider may eat of it," and anyone who wants to join must first be circumcised.

The Rebbe highlights a remarkable halachah: If even one child in the household is not circumcised, the father is disqualified from offering the Korban Pesach. Even if he is fully observant, and so are the rest of the family — one child's status holds everyone back. It's a powerful message: our responsibility isn't just for our own Judaism, but for the Judaism of our children.

Humorous Tales: Let's Not Talk About the Kids

Four old Jewish women meet at a café. The first one sighs and says, "Oy."

The second sighs twice: "Oy vey."

The third stretches it out: "Oy vey iz mir."

The fourth woman says, "I thought we agreed not to talk about our kids today..."

"דם ואש ותמרות עשן"

It is customary that during the recitation of "blood, fire, and pillars of smoke," and again when listing the Ten Plagues, and again when we say their abbreviation (D'tzach, Adash, B'achav), drops of wine are spilled from the second cup. In total, sixteen drops are spilled — corresponding to the angel of divine retribution, associated with the mystical name Yo-hach.

According to Chabad custom, the wine is poured directly from the cup into a broken vessel. After the pouring is completed, wine is added back into the cup to continue the Haggadah.

The Rebbe's Customs: The Rebbe would pour the wine into a vessel placed on the floor. He would refill the cup after all the drops were spilled.

When refilling the cup, the Rebbe would pour in wine three separate times — until the cup overflowed and spilled into the saucer beneath, just like during Kiddush.

The Deeper Meaning: Strength, Sweetened

Of the four cups of wine at the Seder, two are part of Jewish life year-round:

The first cup — for Kiddush — is used every Shabbat and holiday.

The third — for Birkat Hamazon — appears at many festive meals throughout the year.

But the second and fourth cups are unique to Pesach:

The second is used for the telling of the Haggadah.

The fourth is used for reciting Hallel.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, the Rebbe's father, explains that these two special cups — the ones that recount the story of the Exodus — are associated with the "left side" in Kabbalistic terms, meaning the attribute of gevurah, or strength/judgment.

Although Pesach is generally associated with Avraham Avinu — the embodiment of kindness (chesed) — it also carries strong undertones of gevurah. Our sages say about the verse, "To You, G-d, is greatness and strength..." — that "greatness" refers to creation, and "strength" refers to the Exodus from Egypt.

Yitzchak Avinu, whose defining trait is gevurah, was born on Pesach.

The connection between Yitzchak and Pesach appears in other ways too: When Yitzchak blessed Yaakov "with the dew of heaven," it was the eve of Pesach — the time when the "storehouses of dew" are opened.

On that night, Yitzchak ate "two young goats" (symbolizing the Pesach and Chagigah offerings), matzah ("the bread Rivkah prepared"), and wine (brought by Yaakov) — just like a Seder!

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak points out how, in fact, every part of the Seder night connects to gevurah:

1. Matzah:

The word matzah is related to matzah u'merivah — strife. The Hebrew word rogez (anger or intensity) has the numeri-

cal value of 216, the same as Ha Lachma Anya and gevurah. The central matzah — the middle one — represents the tribe of Levi, which is also linked to gevurah.

2. Wine:

The word kos (cup) equals 86 in gematria — the same as Elokim, the Divine name associated with judgment. And red wine — the preferred type for the Seder — also symbolizes gevurah.

3. The Paschal Offering:

It's roasted over fire — a clear symbol of gevurah. And it's cooked on a spit made of pomegranate wood — the pomegranate being the fifth of the Seven Species, representing the trait of hod, which is linked to gevurah.

4. Maror (Bitter Herbs):

Bitterness expresses gevurah. The Mishnah lists five types of maror — each corresponding to one of the five levels of strength or judgment.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak adds a few fascinating gematria insights:

"Pesach, matzah, maror" equals 729 — the same as kerah satan ("tear apart the Satan").

The initials of "Pesach, Matzah, Maror, Kosot" equal 180 — the exact number of years Yitzchak lived.

In conclusion, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak teaches that although the night of the Seder is full of gevurah, it's not harsh. It's sweetened strength — judgment that has been softened by kindness.

That's why Pesach, as a whole, is considered a holiday of chesed, even though its details reflect gevurah. On Seder night, we experience the perfect harmony between strength and compassion, between justice and mercy.

Humorous Tales: Bookbinding and the Plagues

Chaim's holy books were getting worn and tattered, so he brought them to a bookbinder for repair.

The binder, knowing Chaim wasn't exactly a scholar, didn't bother being too careful. He mixed up the books — replacing his machzor with a siddur, the Shavuos Tikkun with Megillas Esther, and worst of all... his Selichos with the Haggadah.

Come Pesach night, Chaim sat down to lead the Seder and accidentally opened his Selichos instead of the Haggadah.

When he got to the part about the plagues, he dutifully dipped his finger in the wine and began reciting: "We have sinned, we have betrayed, we have stolen..."

His son looked confused. "Tatty, weren't the plagues much shorter last year?"

Chaim snapped: "Ignoramus! Don't you know? It's a leap year!"

"כמה מעלות טובות למקום עלינו"

Stories of the Seder: But What Do We Give?

When we recite Dayeinu at the Seder, we list all the kindnesses G-d has done for us. But it's more than a song — it's an invitation for reflection. Do we truly remember our responsibility to G-d, or do we just keep asking and receiving?

Rabbi Bentzion Lipsker, the Rebbe's shliach to Petersburg, once shared a powerful story:

During a farbrengen in his home, a man turned to him and asked with deep pain, "Why is G-d testing me so harshly? Why must I suffer through this difficult challenge?"

The rabbi responded with a parable:

A fundraiser once traveled to Italy in search of support. On Friday afternoon, as he searched for a place to stay for Shabbos, he followed those buying fish for Shabbos. He saw a wealthy man step down from a fancy carriage to purchase fish and asked him if he might be hosted for Shabbos. The man warmly agreed.

Upon arriving at the man's grand home, the visitor noticed something odd: among all the treasures in the display case sat a broken bottle. Out of respect, he didn't ask.

But just before leaving, curiosity got the better of him. He asked, "What's the story with the bottle?"

The wealthy man replied, "That bottle is the story of my life. I

lost my parents as a child and had to abandon my Torah studies to support my family. I found success in business, but I drifted far from where I came from."

"One day, I saw a young Jewish boy crying in the street. I asked him why he was crying. He told me, 'My father sent me to buy olive oil for Chanukah, but the bottle broke. How can I face him now?'"

"I gave him money to buy two bottles — one for himself and one for me. But his words shook me: 'How can I return to my Father in Heaven without spiritual oil?' I kept that broken bottle as a reminder — and that moment brought me back to the Torah I had left behind."

Rabbi Lipsker concluded with a teaching from the Alter Rebbe to Reb Zalman Senders: "You're constantly thinking about what you need — but have you ever stopped to ask what you're needed for?"

Humorous Tales: The Drunk Who Could Drink the Sea

Rabbi Eizel once asked with a smirk: "Why did Moshe need to perform a miracle and split the Red Sea? Couldn't he have just called over the drunk from Slonim, the one who can drink an entire sea?"

And he answered: "Because our drunk spits out twice as much as he drinks!"

Humorous Tales: It's Your Fault!

Two business partners who had lost all their money came to Rabbi Eizel. One said, "It's your fault we lost everything!" The other replied, "No, you're the one to blame!"

Rabbi Eizel looked through their books and said, "You're as wise as the rabbis of the Haggadah! They argued over how many plagues hit the Egyptians — one said fifty, another said two hundred — but in the end, everyone agrees: it ends with a beating!"

"פסח מצה ומרור"

Take note: If the Seder is being conducted in a setting where people cannot stay for the entire Haggadah, it is important to know: there are certain sections that must not be skipped.

The Rebbe's custom:

When reaching the section beginning with "Rabban Gamliel used to say..." and saying the words "matzah" and "maror", the Rebbe would glance at the actual matzah and maror on the table.

When reciting "this matzah..." — although the Haggadah instructs one to hold the broken piece in hand — the actual custom is to hold the matzah using the cloth it's wrapped in. As for the maror, the Rebbe would place his right hand over the maror and his left hand over the ko'rech (the sandwich portion).

The Deeper Meaning: Gifts of Freedom

In Parshas Re'eh, the Torah commands us to give generous gifts to a Jewish servant when he completes his term and goes free: "Shower him with gifts — from your flock, your grain, and your winepress. Give him from all that G-d has blessed you with."

Why these three specifically — sheep, grain, and wine? Rabbi Levi Yitzchak finds a beautiful connection to the Exodus from Egypt.

The Torah itself hints at this connection in the very next verse: "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and

that G-d redeemed you — that is why I am commanding you this today."

In other words, just as G-d gave us gifts when we left slavery in Egypt, we are expected to do the same for someone transitioning from servitude to freedom.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explains that the Jews received these very same three items when leaving Egypt:

Sheep – used for the Korban Pesach, the Passover offering, representing how G-d "passed over" the homes of the Israelites in Egypt.

Grain – used to bake matzah, because the dough didn't have time to rise when they rushed out of Egypt.

Wine – from which we drink the four cups at the Seder, each one representing a stage of redemption.

That's why the Torah instructs us to give these same gifts to a freed servant — they're symbols of liberation and dignity.

Still, there's a question: if this is meant to echo the Exodus, why don't we give maror — bitter herbs — to the freed servant as well?

The answer has two parts:

(1) Maror doesn't symbolize freedom — it represents the pain and bitterness of slavery.

(2) And unlike the harsh servitude in Egypt, the Torah explicitly commands the master not to treat a Jewish servant with cruelty: "Do not work him with crushing labor."

So giving maror wouldn't make sense — the servant's experi-

ence was not meant to be one of bitterness.

In short: the gifts we give to a freed servant are all about celebrating his freedom — not reminding him of the pain of the past.

Stories of the Seder: Why Jews Don't Build Statues

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau once shared the story of a European dignitary who visited Israel and asked a simple question: "All over the world, people build statues and monuments to honor great figures and historical moments. But here — in the land of the Bible — I didn't see a single monument for Moses, King David, the Exodus, or Mount Sinai. Isn't that surprising for the people with the richest history on earth?"

I told him: "The Jewish people wandered across the globe for generations — we didn't have the luxury of stone memorials. So we created portable monuments instead. And we carried them with us, everywhere."

Take matzah, for example. It's not just food — it's a living monument. For over 3,300 years, Jews have baked and eaten the same simple bread on the same night, year after year, in every country and language. What other nation has preserved a dish for over three millennia to remember one foundational night?

And it's not just the matzah. The maror remembers our suffering, the charoset the bricks and mortar, the shank bone the "outstretched arm," the egg the festival offering, and the four cups of wine represent the four expressions of redemption.

Each element of the Seder is a portable monument. And we have many others: Tefillin, tzitzis, Shabbos — each one a living tribute to our story, our faith, our survival.

Tefillin? They're our monument to who we are — our belief in one G-d and the memory of the Exodus.

The menorah shines with the memory of the Maccabees' victory over the Greeks, two thousand years ago.

For centuries, Jews wandered the world carrying their "monuments" in their suitcases: a tallis and tefillin, a siddur and Chumash, Shabbat candles and a kiddush cup, a spice box for havdalah, a menorah, a Seder plate, a Megillah.

This is how we, the eternal people, remember our past — not with statues in stone, but through the way we live our lives.

"מצה זו"

The Deeper Meaning: Between Faith and Understanding

When the Torah speaks about the Korban Todah — the Thanksgiving offering — it highlights something unusual: unlike most offerings that must be brought with matzah (unleavened bread), the Todah offering is accompanied specifically by chametz — leavened bread.

Why chametz? Rabbi Levi Yitzchak uncovers a deep connection between giving thanks, chametz, and daas — conscious knowledge.

In the chapter of Psalms recited with the Thanksgiving offering — "Mizmor L'Todah" — we find the words: "Know that Hashem is the G-d." The key word is "know" — highlighting not just faith, but conscious awareness and understanding.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak explains a beautiful parallel:

Chametz symbolizes intellectual comprehension — rich, complex, full of depth, like understanding.

Matzah represents simple faith — flat, plain, and unadorned, yet powerful in its simplicity.

The Zohar even calls matzah "the food of faith." When we eat it, we're expressing a simple, pure belief that doesn't rely on logic or explanation.

He then connects it to a verse from Hoshea: "I will betroth you to Me with faith, and you shall know G-d."

Our spiritual growth has two phases:

On Pesach, we eat matzah — that's the "I will betroth you with faith" stage, where the relationship with G-d begins with simple, unquestioning belief.

On Shavuos, we bring two loaves of chametz to the Temple — that's "you shall know G-d" — the stage where faith matures into deep understanding.

That's why, on Shavuos — the holiday of receiving the Torah — we offer chametz. It represents a higher level: thoughtful, internalized, mature awareness of G-d.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak is teaching us that in serving G-d, there's a time for both: the simple strength of matzah-like faith, and the full flavor of chametz-like understanding. Each has its place. Each is holy.

Stories of the Seder: The Pauper and the Heiress

A fabulously wealthy man had one daughter — and she was exceptional. Brilliant, diligent, refined, and well educated.

The father set out to find a husband worthy of her. But no matter how many prospects he met, he found flaws in each one.

Determined, he traveled far and wide in search of the perfect match. One Friday, weary from the road, he arrived in a small Jewish village just before Shabbat.

In shul, he noticed a young man sitting in the corner. His

clothes were ragged, his shoes torn, and he looked like he hadn't bathed in days. But he prayed with devotion and immersed himself deeply in his learning.

After speaking with him in learning, the wealthy man realized this boy was a Torah scholar, deeply humble, and G-d-fearing. He knew at once: this was the one. He brought his wife to the village, and they made a beautiful wedding right there.

As the groom was being prepared for the chuppah, the wealthy father secretly cut a piece from the boy's tattered garment. He thought, "If he ever becomes arrogant, I'll show him where he came from, and remind him who raised him from poverty."

But the groom saw what the father did. Quietly, he tore a piece from the exquisite challah set out for the wedding feast. "If he ever grows tired of me," he thought, "I'll remind him how joyful he was to find me, and how well he treated me at the start."

This story mirrors our relationship with G-d on Pesach. G-d offered the Torah to every nation — but only the Jewish people said, "We will do and we will hear."

Every Pesach, G-d shows us the matzah — the "bread of affliction" — to remind us where we came from. And we lift up that very same matzah — now the "bread of freedom" — and say to Him: "See how much You loved us...."

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Hand-Made Shmura Matzah

The Torah says, "You shall guard the matzos," and our sages explain that matzah must be protected from becoming chametz.

So when does this "guarding" begin? Ideally, we guard the wheat from the moment of harvest — ensuring that it never comes into contact with water.

But "guarding" doesn't only mean physical protection. It also means intentionality — from the moment the dough is kneaded, the matzah must be made specifically for the sake of the mitzvah, by observant Jews whose intent can be trusted.

That's why before every stage of the baking process, those involved say out loud: "L'shem matzas mitzvah" — for the sake of the mitzvah. Just like preparing parchment for tefillin requires a clear declaration of purpose, so too with matzah.

And this ties deeply into "And you shall tell your child." Just as matzah requires guarding and intentional effort, so too our children require attentive, purposeful education. And just as the mitzvah of matzah needs a spoken declaration, so too education must be spoken — with clarity and heartfelt explanation.

Hand-made shmura matzah has two unique virtues: it's guarded from the time of harvest, and it's crafted by a human being with conscious intent.

What makes matzah so special? It's the only mitzvah that a Jew actually eats. We wear tzitzis made for the sake of the mitzvah, we write tefillin and mezuzos with the same intention — but matzah is the one mitzvah we physically consume; it becomes part of our very being.

So when eating matzah, we should remember: this isn't just unleavened bread. It's a sacred food.

Just like the offerings in the Temple were described as "G-d's

bread," matzah — though not a sacrifice — is still a holy food, one we bless: "al achilat matzah."

The Zohar calls matzah "the bread of faith." When a Jew eats it, that very act strengthens his belief. As Chassidus explains, "through eating matzah, one ingests G-dliness." It's also known as "the bread of healing," with the power to bring both physical and spiritual health.

This is why the Rebbe so strongly encouraged distributing shmura matzah before Pesach — because eating it doesn't just fulfill a mitzvah. It uplifts the soul, strengthens faith, and brings healing to the body and spirit.

"בכל דור ודור"

The Deeper Meaning: The Wicked Child—He's Also "One"

Pharaoh's decree in Egypt specifically targeted the sons: "If it's a boy — kill him," and later, "Every boy born — throw him into the Nile."

Since the exile began with an attack on the sons, it's no wonder that the redemption comes with a strong emphasis on telling the story to your sons: "You shall tell your son," and "When your child will ask you…", and at the Seder, we meet the Four Sons: the Wise, the Wicked, the Simple, and the one who doesn't know how to ask.

The Torah emphasizes telling this story in the context of the Plague of Locusts: "So that you may tell your children and grandchildren."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak reveals a striking connection: the word "arbeh" (locust) has the numerical value of 208 — which is exactly four times the value of the word "ben" (son), 52. A hidden allusion to the Four Sons.

But he takes it a step further — suggesting there may actually be a fifth, hidden son. How?

In the Haggadah, the word "echad" — "one" — is said four times: "One is wise, one is wicked…" And the numerical value of echad is 13. Four times 13 equals 52 — the value of ben. So the word "one" itself is quietly hinting at a fifth son.

Kabbalah teaches that there are five levels of chesed (lov-

ing-kindness) — three revealed and two hidden — and also five levels of gevurah (strictness or judgment).

The four sons correspond to the three revealed kindnesses and the five levels of strictness, like this:

If we multiply Hashem's name (yud kei vov kei) three times (3 × 26 = 78) to represent the three kindnesses, and mutiply the Name five times (5 × 26 = 130) for the strictnesses — together that's 208. The same number as four ben's.

But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak adds: there are two hidden kindnesses — 2 × 26 = 52 — another "ben." This hidden son is hinted at through the four times we say the word "echad" — which also equals 52.

Another interesting clue: while the word "echad" appears four times, only once is it written alone. The other three times it's written "ve'echad" — "and one" — with the extra letter vav.

If you add up the full gematria of those forms — echad and ve'echad — you get 70. A clear allusion to the Haggadah's own words: "I am like a man of seventy years."

So behind the simple surface of the Haggadah lies a rich world of mystical depth.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: In the Merit of Righteous Women

Our Sages teach that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of three things: they didn't change their names, their language, or their style of dress. Elsewhere, the

sages say that it was specifically in the merit of the righteous women of that generation that the Jews were redeemed.

At first glance, these teachings seem to point in different directions — was the redemption thanks to the women, or because the people preserved their identity? Rabbi Aharon Chazan, son-in-law of Rabbi Zushe Friedman (the rov of Odessa under Communism) explains that these ideas are actually one and the same.

Since women are the ones primarily raising the children and shaping the home, it was they who ensured that the next generation retained their Jewish names, spoke the Jewish language, and wore traditional Jewish clothing.

After all, it's the mother who uses a child's name most often, who passes on her language through everyday speech, and who chooses her children's clothing. The cultural identity of the Jewish people in Egypt was preserved because the women kept it alive in the home.

And so, just as our ancestors were redeemed through righteous women, so too will the final redemption come in their merit. In today's generation — the heels of Moshiach — it is once again the role of women to ensure that Jewish children hold onto their names, their language, and their way of life.

And in their merit — we will be redeemed.

"ונאמר לפניו הללוי"ה"

Note: We now continue reading the Haggadah until the paragraph "Therefore we must thank..." Remind the participants to cover the matzah and lift their cup again.

This is also the time to remind the crowd that our custom is to hold the cup raised only until the end of this paragraph: "venomar lefanav halleluka."

We continue: "Bitzeis yisrael mimitzrayim" until "chalamish limayno mayim."

Before the blessing of "Asher Ge'alanu," remind everyone to lift the cup once again and hold it up until the end of the passage: "Ga'al Yisrael." Then we say the blessing "Borei Pri Hagafen" and drink the second cup while reclining. If someone did not recline, they should drink again while reclining, without repeating the blessing.

If the Seder night falls on Saturday night, we reverse the usual wording and say: min haPesachim u'min haZevachim instead of min haZevachim u'min haPesachim.

The Ohev Yisrael of Apta taught: Anyone who, on the night of Pesach, recites the blessing "Who redeemed us and redeemed our ancestors from Egypt" with complete faith in the words coming from their mouth, can break free from all their limitations and be redeemed with an everlasting redemption — both spiritual and physical. For this time is uniquely suited for redemption.

The Rebbe's Custom:

When reciting "Lefichach," the Rebbe would hold the cup until the words V'nomar lefanav Halleluyah. He would then lift the cup again for the blessing of "Asher Ge'alanu."

The blessing over the second cup — Borei Pri Hagafen — was recited while holding the cup just as one holds it for Kiddush. The Rebbe would drink the entire cup, down to the last drop.

Stories of the Seder: How We Must Thank

The early commentators asked: Why do we say Hallel twice on the night of Pesach? Once during the Maariv service in shul, and a second time during the Seder itself?

The Imrei Chaim explains that the second Hallel is said in gratitude for the privilege of saying the first Hallel.

When we stop and reflect on the fact that we said Hallel tonight — even though Hallel is usually not said at night on other holidays — that realization itself inspires us to praise and thank Hashem for the incredible merit of being able to say Hallel at all.

Rabbi Zelig Feldman shared a story: When Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky visited the Previous Rebbe and described his suffering in Siberia, he told how one day he woke up feeling crushed in spirit — with no Torah books, no students, nothing — and he almost gave up on saying even Modeh Ani.

But then he caught himself: "After all the wicked have taken from me, there's one thing they definitely didn't take — my ability to say Modeh Ani. So I'll say Modeh Ani now just for the simple fact that I can still say Modeh Ani!"

The Previous Rebbe responded: The entire exile in Siberia was worth it just to come to that realization.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: From Slavery to Freedom

Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz, describes a powerful moment in his memoir If This Is a Man.

In January 1945, when the Nazis abandoned the camp ahead of the advancing Russian army, only the sick and weak remained behind. For ten days, they stayed in the freezing camp with barely any food or fuel.

Levi organized a few fellow prisoners who still had strength, and together they managed to light a fire to warm the sick. He writes: "Once the window was repaired and the stove began heating, everyone felt some relief. Suddenly, Tuberovsky, a Jew sick with typhus, turned to the others and suggested that each person give up a slice of bread for those who had done the work. The idea was accepted."

Levi continues: "A day earlier, something like that would have been unthinkable. The law of the camp was: 'Eat your bread—and if you can, eat your neighbor's too.' Tuberovsky's proposal marked the end of the camp. It was the first human act among us, and in that moment, the process of returning to humanity began."

Sharing food is one of the first acts that marks the shift from slavery to freedom. A person who fears for tomorrow doesn't share their bread. But someone who gives to another reveals the capacity for brotherhood and faith — the roots of hope. True freedom begins when we help someone else.

As the Rebbe taught: A Jew cannot truly be free while another Jew is still in chains. Only when we care for others and invite them to our Seder table can we fulfill the Seder's mission — and experience real freedom.

רחצה

We'll now go wash for netilat yadayim. When we return to the room, we'll say the blessing al netilat yadayim together, followed by the blessings said before eating the matzah.

Please note: it's best not to wash with everyone else. Instead, wait a moment so you can guide the crowd clearly through the blessings and how to eat the matzah properly.

The Rebbe's Custom:

Before washing for rachtza, the Rebbe would recite all of the Seder steps printed in the Haggadah, up through korech. This was apparently to avoid speaking later between eating the matzah, maror, and korech.

מצוות אכילת מצה

Please note: These ideas can be shared before everyone washes for netilat yadayim, or while they are eating the matzah. (The second option is especially suitable for those who will be making their own private Seder after the public one.)

The Deeper Meaning: Two Matzot and the Battle Within

The Torah commands us to eat matzah on Pesach in two verses. The first says: "For seven days you shall eat matzah, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival for G-d." The second says: "Matzot shall be eaten for seven days, and no chametz or leaven shall be seen in all your borders."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak asks: Why are two verses needed for the same thing? He points out an interesting difference: The first verse is a direct command — "you shall eat matzah" — while the second describes it passively, "matzot shall be eaten," as if it happens on its own. The same goes for chametz — in the second verse, it's not that we remove it, it simply isn't seen.

The key to this lies in the spelling. In the first verse, the word matzah is spelled without the letter vav. In the second, it's spelled with a vav. This isn't just a grammatical detail; it reflects two different spiritual states.

The word matzat (without a vav) hints at matzah u'merivah — struggle and conflict. This matzah represents the internal battle with the yetzer hara, the evil inclination. At this stage, the yetzer hara (symbolized by chametz and leaven) is still present, and we must actively fight against it. Our sages even

call the yetzer hara “the leaven in the dough.”

The first matzah, from the first verse, represents the time before midnight — before the turning point of the Exodus, when G-d revealed Himself in full. At that stage, personal effort is still required. There’s struggle, commitment, and choice. That’s why it says “you shall eat matzah” — it depends on your effort.

The second matzah, from the verse spelled with the letter vav, represents what comes after midnight — after G-d’s full revelation. The letter vav looks like a vertical line coming down from above, symbolizing a divine flow entering our physical world. At that point, the battle — the eating — becomes effortless. The verse says “matzah shall be eaten”, as if it happens on its own. And chametz simply “won’t be seen” — the inner negativity is no longer a threat.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak adds a beautiful touch: the Hebrew word rogez — meaning inner struggle or turmoil — has the same numerical value as the phrase Ha lachma anya (“This is the bread of affliction”), which opens the Haggadah. This shows the link between the first matzah — poor man’s bread — and the emotional, internal struggle that it represents.

Together, the two verses show us the full journey to freedom. First, there’s a stage of hard work — of active struggle with our own instincts. But eventually, once a spiritual breakthrough happens, we reach an inner freedom, where growth starts to flow naturally.

Stories of the Seder: Sometimes, the Less We Say

One Erev Pesach, the charity collectors came to the home of the Ohev Yisrael of Apta to request matzah for the poor of the city.

His wife was in the middle of intense holiday preparations, and the household staff quickly rushed to give the collectors some matzah. In all the chaos, they mistakenly gave away the special handmade shemurah matzah that had just been baked that day especially for the Rebbe. The collectors gratefully took the matzah and left, unaware of the mistake.

When the Rebbe's wife realized what had happened, she was shaken. Knowing how important those special matzot were to her husband, she was afraid to tell him. So she quietly placed ordinary matzah into the same cloth where the special ones had been and said nothing.

That night, the Rebbe conducted the Seder using those regular matzot.

After Pesach, a couple came before the Rebbe requesting a divorce. The Rebbe turned to the husband and asked, "What's your reason for wanting to separate from your wife?"

The husband replied that his wife had not cooked for him using separate utensils for Pesach and had allowed gebrokts — matzah that had come in contact with water — which some are strict about avoiding.

The Rebbe called for his wife and asked her gently, "Tell me honestly: what matzot did I eat at the Seder?"

She was silent, afraid to tell the truth.

"Please tell me," the Rebbe encouraged her. "Don't be afraid."

"Ordinary matzah..." she admitted, and shared the entire story.

The Rebbe turned to the husband and said: "My son, I ate simple matzah at the Seder. I pretended not to notice, not to feel a thing — all to avoid anger or, G-d forbid, conflict. And you want to divorce your wife over gebrokts?"

Stories of the Seder: Eli Cohen and the Matzah in Damascus

It was chol hamoed Pesach, 1962, in the al-Hamidiya market of Damascus, Syria. A local Jewish jeweler sat in his shop with his young daughter when a well-dressed man walked in. His name was Kamel Amin Thaabet.

Kamel was known as a wealthy businessman, a Syrian nationalist, and a man with deep ties to the upper levels of the government, military, and economy.

"How can I help you, sir?" the jeweler asked.

"I'm hungry," Kamel replied unexpectedly. "Do you have anything to eat?"

"To eat?" the jeweler said, puzzled. "It's Passover. We don't eat bread or pita, only matzah."

"Matzah? What's that? Never mind, give me some — I'm really hungry," Kamel said.

The jeweler hesitated, unsure about offering this deeply Jewish food to such a prominent Syrian figure — but he handed

him a few pieces.

Kamel went to the corner of the room, murmured something quietly, and devoured the matzah with intensity. “Thank you,” he said, and walked out.

Three years later, in January 1965, both Syria and Israel were stunned by breaking news: “Israeli spy discovered in Syria!” The man known to everyone as Kamel Amin Thaabet — a well-connected, beloved figure — was actually the legendary Israeli spy, Eli Cohen.

When the Jewish jeweler heard the news, he suddenly remembered that strange encounter three years earlier — and it all made sense: the spy had asked for matzah! Somewhere deep inside, even in hostile Damascus, Eli Cohen’s Jewish soul was awake. He yearned to feel a connection to the traditions of his people — even if he couldn’t reveal his identity to his fellow Jews.

How lucky we are that we sit at our Seder tables not just like royalty, but as proud Jewish people who can rise freely, without fear, and openly wash our hands and eat matzah.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Bergen-Belsen — Who Should Eat the Matzah?

It was the eve of Passover, 1944, in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Reb Yisrael Spira, the Bluzhover Rebbe, approached the camp’s commander — a brutal murderer named Haas — with a request that, under these circumstances, could cost him his

life.

He asked for permission for forty Jews to bake matzah for Passover — in exchange for giving up their bread rations for the full eight days of the holiday.

Haas contacted the authorities in Berlin, and to everyone's astonishment, permission was granted about a week later.

Immediately, the Jews began to prepare. After a day of forced labor, they gathered what strength they had left, built an oven from broken bricks, ground wheat by hand using makeshift tools, and prepared water in advance for the dough.

One night, they lit a fire and began baking matzah — sacred work in the heart of hell.

Suddenly, Haas stormed into the barrack in a rage. He destroyed the oven, trampled the freshly baked matzah, and scattered the remaining flour. He beat the prisoners viciously.

When he saw the Rebbe, he focused his anger on him. The Rebbe, already 56 years old, survived the beating by a miracle.

The excuse for the attack was a letter that had been discovered in which the prisoners described their suffering. "How dare you?" Haas shouted. "I'm being kind to you — letting you bake matzah — and this is how you repay me?"

The Jews were left with neither matzah nor bread for the next eight days. Only one tiny piece of matzah, the size of a coin, had been hidden and saved.

That night, a small group gathered in the Rebbe's barrack for a Seder. They had everything — a Haggadah, which the Reb-

be knew by heart; four cups of wine, represented by the bitter, dirty liquid the Nazis served as "coffee"; maror — plenty of that, as the entire night was maror; and the tiny piece of matzah the Rebbe had hidden.

When it came time for achilat matzah, everyone assumed the Rebbe would eat it — he was the leader, the teacher, the one who upheld their faith.

But the Rebbe scanned the room as if searching for someone... then, from the far side of the barrack, a woman stood up — the widow Kashtzsky — and said, "Since tonight is about passing on our tradition to the next generation, I believe my young son should be the one to eat the matzah."

The Rebbe nodded. Indeed — it was a night of watching over the future.

A year after the liberation, the widow came to the Rebbe for advice about a marriage proposal.

"Who's the match?" the Rebbe asked.

"His name is Yisrael Spira," she replied.

"I know him well," the Rebbe said. "He's perfect for you."

She was stunned to realize she had never known the Rebbe's full name, and the match proposed had been for the Rebbe himself... She and the Rebbe soon married — and the little boy who ate the matzah became his son, continuing his legacy.

When asked why he chose her, the Rebbe replied:

"In the darkness of Bergen-Belsen, where you couldn't see five minutes ahead, one woman believed the Jewish people

would live on — and cared enough to pass on the tradition. That's the kind of person who deserves to carry on my legacy."

מוציא, מצה

Please note: Be sure to recite al netilat yadayim together with the group.

Order of Blessings:

Hold all three matzot together and recite the blessing hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Then, put down the bottom matzah, keeping just the top one and the half of the middle one in your hands. Now say the second blessing: al achilat matzah.

After the blessings, eat a kezayit (an olive-sized portion) from the top matzah and a kezayit from the middle one. Don't forget — we are like royalty tonight, so both pieces should be eaten while reclining.

The Rebbe's Customs:

The matzah is not dipped in salt, though salt is placed on the table.

The Rebbe would eat both pieces of matzah at the same time, holding them in both hands.

מרור

For maror, we take a piece of romaine lettuce along with some of the horseradish from the Seder plate.

Before eating the maror, remember to dip it in charoset.

To do this, we'll take a bit of the charoset from the Seder plate and place it into the small dish under our wine cup. This way, the charoset mixes with some leftover wine, and we'll use that mixture to lightly dip the maror.

We do not say borei pri ha'adamah now, since we already said that blessing earlier on the karpas, and we had in mind that it would also cover the maror. But there is a special blessing just for this moment: "Baruch Atah... al achilat maror" — "... who has commanded us regarding the eating of maror."

The maror is eaten without reclining. As you eat it, take a moment to reflect: Why don't we recline while eating the maror?

Also take note: we are taking something bitter (maror) — and yet we try to sweeten it (charoset). Maybe that says something about life: that even in hard times, we have the power to decide how to respond — to search for sweetness and meaning even in what's bitter.

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe would take the entire portion of maror from the Seder plate – including the unground horseradish and the romaine leaves – and eat it all.

He would place a bit of charoset into the wine dish beneath his cup using a knife. Then he would dip both the lettuce and the horseradish into that mixture – he would remove the horseradish from the leaves, dip it three times, wrap it back in the lettuce, and eat it.

Stories of the Seder: In the End, It Will Be Sweet

Yona Emanuel shared the following story at the bris of his grandson in 1985:

"Forty years earlier, on the morning of Erev Pesach, 1945, I set out for another day of forced labor in Bergen-Belsen, just as I had every day for the past two years. That night, I came back broken and exhausted, as always.

I was nineteen years old. My older brother Elchanan, my younger brother Shalom, and my little sister Batya — all of them were gone. Bergen-Belsen wasn't a death camp in the technical sense, but Jews there died every day from exhaustion, cold, hunger, and disease. Hundreds perished daily.

I went to my mother's barrack. She was gravely ill. I sat beside her and began whispering the Haggadah. We had no wine, no matzah—not even bread. The only thing we had in abundance was maror in our hearts.

I read quietly, unsure if my mother could even hear me. But when I reached the blessing of redemption — the words "May You bring us to future holidays in peace, rejoicing in the rebuilding of Your city, and celebrating Your service" — I suddenly realized I didn't believe what I was saying. Who among us would ever see Jerusalem? Who among us would ever celebrate again? I burst into tears, and I couldn't finish the blessing.

If only I had known back then — on that Seder night in 1945 — even a hint of what the future held. If only I had imagined that I would one day make it to the Land of Israel with my surviving siblings, live in Jerusalem, build a beautiful family, and one day — forty years later — serve as sandek at my grand-

son's bris in that same city... maybe then I would've had the strength to finish the Haggadah.

In other words, Yona Emanuel was telling us: If I had known that one day, the bitterness would be sweetened with the charoset of redemption — I would've found the strength to finish the story.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Maror — Even When You're Free

Why do we leave a piece of maror on the Seder plate? Haven't we had enough bitterness already? It's the holiday of freedom — do we really need a reminder of suffering sitting right in front of us?

The Talmud tells us that King David's name became famous across the world. Why? Because he had a coin minted — on one side was a shepherd's staff and pouch, and on the other side, a towering palace.

Same thing with Mordechai — you remember him from the Purim story. Even when he became second to the king, he made a coin with sackcloth and ashes on one side and a golden crown on the other.

What's the idea? Never forget where you came from. Even when they reached greatness, they still remembered the hard times. They kept both images side by side — success and struggle — because both were part of the story.

That's why we leave maror on the Seder plate. It's a quiet reminder: life wasn't always sweet. We were once slaves. Now

we're free — and the contrast makes our freedom real. But there's another message too.

The maror teaches us that just like we remember the struggle when things are going well, we also have to remember — in the middle of tough times — that things can get better. Nothing lasts forever. Even pain passes.

כורך

Now we move on to a happier kind of maror — still bitter, but a little easier to eat. This next step, korech, was done back when the Holy Temple still stood. People would eat matzah, maror, and the Passover lamb all together in one bite. Korech is basically the original Jewish sandwich.

You take the third matzah, then some lettuce from the Seder plate (make sure it's dry), a bit of horseradish, place the horseradish inside the lettuce, and wrap it all inside the matzah. Then, dip just a little of the lettuce into charoset — this time using the dry charoset (the one without wine) from the Seder plate.

We then say: "This is what Hillel did…" and eat it while reclining.

The Rebbe's Customs: For korech, the Rebbe would take the horseradish from the chazeres on the Seder plate. Just like before, he would take the full portion — both the ground and unground horseradish, along with the lettuce leaves — and place it inside the bottom matzah.

But unlike before, for korech, he would dip the lettuce into the dry charoset from the Seder plate — without mixing it with wine — and eat the whole thing while reclining.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: A Taste of the Apple

Everyone knows that charoset on Pesach is meant to remind us of the mortar the Jewish people used as slaves in Egypt —

it looks like the mud and bricks they were forced to make. In that way, it's similar to maror, which symbolizes the bitterness of slavery.

But the Talmud gives two opinions. Rabbi Yochanan says it's "in memory of the mortar," but Rabbi Levi says it's "in memory of the apple." Rashi explains that this refers to the apple trees under which the Jewish women gave birth in secret.

When the men gave up — afraid of Pharaoh's decrees and too hopeless to have more children — the women didn't lose faith. Even Amram, the father of Moses, had separated from his wife. But the women believed in the future. They brought food and warm water to their husbands in the fields and convinced them not to give up on having children.

When it came time to give birth, the women went to the fields, far away from the Egyptian guards, and delivered their babies under apple trees. Despite Pharaoh's efforts, the Jewish people continued to grow and flourish — and that terrified him.

When our sages say, "Because of the righteous women, the Jews were redeemed from Egypt," they weren't just talking about prayer. As the Rebbe explains, their greatness was shown in action — in their joy at bringing more Jewish life into the world, even in the darkest times. Without those women, there would have been no one left to redeem.

So the charoset on our plate holds a double meaning. Its texture reminds us of slavery — but its sweetness? That's the taste of the apple. A taste of faith, of courage, and of life continuing even when all hope seemed lost.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: "This Is What Hillel Did"

Why do we stop in the middle of the Seder and mention Hillel by name? Isn't it enough that we eat the sandwich the way he used to — matzah and maror together? Why call it out?

Hillel wasn't just a rabbi or a scholar — he was one of the most beloved figures in all of Jewish history. The Talmud is filled with stories about his patience, his humility, and how he greeted every person with kindness and a smile.

But what made him truly famous was one simple sentence: "What is hateful to you, don't do to someone else. That's the entire Torah — the rest is commentary."

That line changed everything. Hillel was the first Jewish leader to say clearly: the heart of Judaism is how we treat each other. Loving people — that's the Torah. Because of that, Hillel became the symbol of unconditional love for every Jew. Even outside the Jewish world, he's remembered that way.

So on the night when he became a national leader, we return the love. We remember him. We say, "This is what Hillel did."

And when we say those words, we're not just talking about his sandwich. We're making a statement: That we want to be like him — with patience like Hillel, humility like Hillel, and most of all, love for every Jew, like Hillel.

On the Seder night, we say "ken asah Hillel" — this is what Hillel did — and we remind ourselves that the whole Torah, in the end, is one big commentary on the mitzvah of loving each other.

Humorous Tales: A Jewish Kid's Sandwich

Little Moishele comes to the honey seller with a jar and asks her to fill it up.

She fills it to the top, then asks, "Where's the money?"

"I don't have any," Moishele replies.

Of course, she takes the jar back and pours all the honey out.

Moishele takes the now-empty jar, looks at it, and says:

"Yep... Mom was right. That will be enough for two sandwiches."

שולחן עורך

The Egg

At the start of the holiday meal, we take the hard-boiled egg from the Seder plate, peel it, dip it in salt water, and eat it.

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe would take the egg from the Seder plate, peel it, and then add three drops of salt into the dish of salt water. He would dip the egg three times – just like with the karpas – and begin eating from the pointed end, finishing the whole egg.

During the meal, the Rebbe would occasionally eat a piece of matzah, dipped in salt. (Unlike the earlier kezayis of matzah, which he ate without salt.)

He did not recline during the meal. After eating fish, he would drink a bit of wine. He would eat three spoonfuls of soup, a little bit of chicken, and then finish with water.

He would also sip wine from his cup during the meal.

The Rebbe frequently wiped his hands and mouth with paper napkins, and would place the used napkins under the table – likely to avoid any concern of gebrokts (matzah mixing with liquid).

The Deeper Meaning: Why Don't We Mention Moshe and Aharon?

On Chanukah and Purim, we mention the heroes of the story by name. We tell their stories in our prayers, and every Jewish kid knows who they are — living monuments in our collective memory.

But on Pesach, Moshe is barely mentioned in the Haggadah — and Aharon isn't mentioned at all.

So what's going on here? Why don't they get credit? Is Moshe less important than Mordechai or Matisyahu? This is the man who risked his life returning to Egypt, led the ten plagues, split the sea, guided the people through the desert for forty years! Aharon brought peace, stopped plagues, and paid a heavy price for the golden calf. Don't they deserve to be remembered?

The answer lies in a concept from Jewish mysticism: Isarusa d'lesata and isarusa d'le'eila — human initiative vs. divine initiative.

Purim and Chanukah were isarusa d'lesata — sparked from below. On Purim, Mordechai took to the streets. Esther risked her life. They fasted and prayed. The miracle came from G-d, but the movement started with people.

On Chanukah, when the Greeks outlawed Shabbat and circumcision, Matisyahu and his sons rose up and went to war against an empire. It cost them dearly — three sons died in battle — but they took the first step.

But the Exodus from Egypt was different. It was entirely isarusa d'le'eila — G-d's initiative. Moshe didn't organize protests. Aharon didn't call a prayer rally. G-d called to Moshe — and Moshe didn't even want the job at first.

That's why the Haggadah says the Exodus happened "not through an angel, not through a messenger... but through G-d Himself." It wasn't a human-led campaign — it was G-d breaking every rule of nature to redeem His people.

So tonight, we raise our glasses and say: L'chaim. We pray for that kind of miracle again — not just a good outcome, but something bigger. We're not just hoping for a victory like Chanukah or Purim. We're asking for Moshiach. For complete redemption — may it be very soon.

Stories of the Seder: When Dry Bones Come to Life

In 1946, my father-in-law — Rabbi Moshe Greenberg — attempted to escape the Soviet Union with a group of friends. Their dream was to reach Romania and eventually settle in Israel, where they could live freely as observant Jews. At the time, Jewish life was illegal in the USSR.

Unfortunately, the group was caught and sent to prison.

Even in prison, he was determined not to eat non-kosher food — no matter the consequences.

Each day, the prisoners were given a slice of bread and a bowl of soup. The bread was kosher; the soup, filled with meat, was not. He bartered his soup with other inmates in exchange for sugar cubes, which he secretly saved for Pesach.

That year, with no matzah and no wine, he observed all eight days of Pesach surviving only on the sugar he had collected. Other Chassidim in prison did the same.

I once asked him, "What was the hardest part of prison?"

He told me that in his final year, he didn't have a Jewish calendar and miscalculated the dates. He started Pesach one day early — which meant that on the real last day of the holiday,

he mistakenly ate chametz.

"That," he said, "was the most painful moment of my entire sentence." Not the interrogations, not the beatings, not the two years in solitary confinement — but accidentally eating chametz on Pesach.

What's happened in the former Soviet Union over the past few decades is a real-life version of the famous haftorah we read on Chol Hamoed Pesach: the prophecy of the "dry bones."

The prophet Yechezkel sees a valley filled with dry bones — the remains of members of the Tribe of Ephraim who tried to leave Egypt too early and perished.

G-d asks him, "Can these bones live again?" Yechezkel answers, "Only You know, G-d."

Hashem commands him: "Prophesy over the bones... I will bring spirit into you, and you shall live." And the bones come together — sinews, flesh, skin — and they rise.

In the Talmud, there's a debate about what happened to them next. Rabbi Eliezer says they rose, sang praise to G-d, and returned to dust. But Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Yosi Haglili says they came to Eretz Yisrael, married, and had children.

Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira even testified: "I'm one of their descendants — and these tefillin belonged to my grandfather, who was one of them."

That's exactly what we've seen across the former USSR. After seventy years of communism, Jewish life was reduced to dry bones. And then — the miracle. Communism fell, and a spiritual revival began. Jews emerged with worn-out tefillin and rediscovered their identity.

But it didn't just happen. It happened because of the Rebbe. While the Iron Curtain was still up, he sent shluchim to keep the flame alive. And once it fell, he sent more shluchim to every corner of the former Soviet empire.

He taught us that Yetzias Mitzrayim isn't just a story from the past. It's something we're meant to live — every day.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: The Resume of a Leader

When the Torah introduces us to Moshe Rabbeinu, the man who would go on to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, it tells us very little about his life beforehand. Only fifteen verses cover everything from his birth until the moment G-d chooses him to redeem the Jews.

But look closely — those fifteen verses are Moshe's résumé. The first story: "He went out to his brothers and saw their suffering." A man raised in Pharaoh's palace, living in luxury, goes out to see the pain of his people. When he sees an Egyptian beating a Jew, he acts without hesitation: "He looked this way and that… and struck the Egyptian."

The second story happens the very next day. Moshe again visits his people and sees two Jews arguing. He steps in: "Why are you hitting your fellow?" From their response, he realizes his actions have become known, and Pharaoh is now after him. So he flees to Midian.

In the third story, in Midian, Moshe sees a group of shepherds harassing the daughters of Yisro. He steps in once again — this time not for his own people, but for strangers. He saves

them and waters their flocks.

Why does the Torah choose these three stories to define Moshe's early life? Wasn't the first one enough to show his courage and sense of justice? Surely more happened during the first 80 years of his life.

Because each of these stories reveals something different: The first shows a natural instinct to protect his fellow Jew from a violent enemy. The second shows a willingness to step into conflict between Jews — even when it's messy. And the third shows that Moshe will help any person in need, regardless of who they are.

And perhaps most impressively, Moshe doesn't stop helping others just because it once got him into trouble. Even after fleeing for his life, he still jumps in to defend the daughters of Yisro. That's not just a moment of bravery — that's a pattern. That's a leader.

Inside every Jew is a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu. Every one of us has the power to help another Jew — especially when they're struggling with their inner battles. And our job is to help the soul win. L'chaim.

צפון

We now eat the half-matzah that was broken and hidden during yachatz.

We distribute the afikoman to everyone at the table, adding extra matzah if needed to make sure each person eats at least a kezayis (the size of an olive). Some have the custom to eat a k'beitzah (the size of an egg) for the afikoman.

The afikoman should be eaten quickly and while reclining.

The afikoman is eaten in memory of the Passover offering, which was eaten at the end of the meal when everyone was already full — "al hasova." The taste of the korban was meant to linger, so no other food or dessert was eaten afterward.

Some families have a custom where the children "steal" or hide the afikoman and are promised a gift in exchange for returning it. This is meant to keep them alert and engaged. Our custom, however, is not to do this — so that even in play, children don't develop habits that resemble stealing.

Important note: On the first night of Pesach, the afikoman must be eaten before chatzos (halachic midnight). The exact time varies by location and is listed in Jewish calendars.

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe would eat the afikoman while reclining, in the amount of two kezaysim.

Stories of the Seder: A Lesson in Humility

There was once a Jew in the town of Lubavitch, a devoted chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, who took religious observance very seriously. When it came to Pesach, his caution reached a whole new level. He avoided even the smallest, most unlikely possibility of chametz.

He personally handled every detail of his holiday preparations — baking matzah, cooking meals, even drawing water only from a special well in his yard that he designated for Pesach. He refused to eat any food prepared by others.

He was so strict that he didn't visit the Rebbe's court the entire holiday — afraid someone might offer him food, and he wouldn't be able to refuse without insulting them or appearing to question the Rebbe's kashrus.

Only on the last day of Pesach, when many people are slightly more lenient (like eating gebrokts), did he finally allow himself to visit. As soon as the Tzemach Tzedek saw him, he said: "You should know — you accidentally ate chametz on Pesach. Go check your well."

Shocked, the chossid ran home. He inspected the well — and to his horror, found a loaf of bread floating in the water. Real chametz!

Terrified, he rushed back to the Rebbe and asked three questions: First, why was he punished so harshly when he had been so careful? Second, if the Rebbe could see this, why hadn't he warned him earlier? And third, what could he do to repair this serious mistake?

The Rebbe answered: "To your first question — this wasn't

a punishment. It was the result of relying only on yourself. A person must do everything they can — but they also need help from Heaven. Since you placed all your trust in your own precautions and not in G-d, this is what happened.

"To your second question — I couldn't warn you, because I didn't see you. You avoided coming here the entire Yom Tov."

And finally, the Rebbe gave him guidance for teshuvah — how to make things right again.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Bringing Every Jew Back to the Table

Here's something striking: the middle matzah — the smaller broken one — is the one we used for the entire telling of the Haggadah. The larger piece, the afikoman, wasn't even on the table most of the night. But yet, now we must eat it, and if we do not, our Pesach observance is lacking.

There is a deeper meaning here. The Jewish people are often compared to matzah; and some are like the afikoman—they aren't present. Unfortunately, not every Jew has made it to the Seder table. But at the end of the Seder, our job is to bring every Jew back to the table. Otherwise, we haven't truly completed the mitzvah.

That's the message of the afikoman — it's our responsibility to make sure every Jew knows their story. The Rebbe taught us that if you know just the letter alef, your job is to teach alef to someone else. Don't wait until you know everything. Just start. Every Jew matters, and every Jew belongs.

Humorous Tales: Scholarly Mice

During Chol HaMoed Pesach, an innkeeper came to town and visited the local rabbi. The rabbi saw that he looked troubled and asked, "Has something bad happened, G-d forbid?"

The innkeeper sighed. "Rabbi, demons have taken over my house!"

"Demons?" said the rabbi. "What exactly did you see?"

"Yes, Rabbi — demons!" said the man. "My wife is a pious woman, very careful about Pesach. And yet, yesterday and the day before, we found barley kernels in the matzah balls. If that's not the work of demons, what is?"

The rabbi paused to think, then asked, "Where do you keep the matzah?"

"Rabbi," said the innkeeper, "I know matzah must be protected. It has its own special room."

"And the chametz?" the rabbi asked.

"In the next room, completely sealed off."

"Do you keep barley in the chametz room?"

"Yes, Rabbi."

"And do you have mice?"

"Oy, Rabbi! Big as cats!"

"Well then," said the rabbi, "stop blaming demons. The mice are dragging the barley from the chametz room into the matzah room — and that's how it ends up in your matzah balls."

The innkeeper was amazed by the rabbi's wisdom. "Rabbi, is there any solution?"

The rabbi thought for a moment and said, "Go home and give the mice a bit of your afikoman. Once they eat that, they won't touch the barley — since after afikoman, no eating is allowed."

The innkeeper was baffled. "Rabbi... you think mice know halacha?"

The rabbi smiled. "Don't worry. They're well-versed. Two weeks ago, they ate my entire Shulchan Aruch."

Humorous Tales: 98 Afikomans

An elderly man was brought in to see the doctor. After examining him, the doctor leaned in and whispered to the man's son: "I'm afraid... it's the afikoman."

The son was confused. "Afikoman? But it's Chanukah!"

"Exactly," the doctor replied. "But your father has eaten 98 afikomans in his life — and honestly, I don't know anything more dangerous."

ברך

We now pour the third cup of wine, and we also pour the special Cup of Elijah. Then we begin Birkat HaMazon, the Grace After Meals.

After the blessing is complete, we make a blessing over the wine and drink the third cup, while reclining.

The Rebbe's Custom:

The Rebbe would have his cup rinsed out before pouring the third cup. He would dry the cup, then pour the wine.

He would also pour the Cup of Elijah before Birkat HaMazon. It was a large glass goblet.

He would hold his cup in his palm until the end of the blessing "Boneh berachamav Yerushalayim", and then place it on the table.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Don't Be a Prosecutor

On Seder night, Elijah the Prophet is a regular guest. Everyone knows about his special cup — Elijah's Cup — and we even open the door to welcome him. We also see his presence at a bris (circumcision ceremony), where there's a special seat called "Elijah's Chair." But that raises a question: Why Elijah? Wouldn't it make more sense to honor Abraham, the very first person in the Torah to perform a circumcision?

The Book of Kings tells how Elijah fled from Queen Jezebel and took shelter in a cave on Mount Sinai. There, G-d asked him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah replied, "I've been very zealous for the L-rd — the Israelites have aban-

doned Your covenant." G-d asked again, but Elijah repeated the same answer.

And then, because he spoke harshly about the Jewish people, G-d replaced him with Elisha. As Rashi puts it: "I don't want a prophet who accuses My children."

The Zohar adds that G-d told Elijah, "From now on, wherever My children enter into the covenant — at every bris — you will be there. The same mouth that once spoke against them will now testify that they keep the covenant." That's why we set a chair for Elijah at every bris.

But it raises a question: what was Elijah supposed to do? He was just reporting the truth. Things really weren't good. Did G-d expect him to lie?

The answer may come from the haftorah for the first day of Passover. As the Israelites were about to enter the Land of Israel, G-d told Joshua, "Circumcise the people again." Not literally the same people twice — just those who hadn't been circumcised in the desert. What's striking is that the text doesn't blame anyone. There's no outrage, no complaint. Just a quiet instruction: fix what needs fixing.

That was the Rebbe's approach too. When he saw something that needed fixing, he didn't spend time pointing fingers. He acted. As the saying goes, "He found a gap and built a fence." He saw a problem, and he got to work.

When the Rebbe saw assimilation rising, he didn't organize protests — he sent emissaries to every corner of the world to connect Jews with love and positivity, and help prevent further disconnection.

Our job is the same: to guide fellow Jews toward meaningful action — encouraging mitzvot that express Jewish identity in a hands-on way: putting on tefillin, lighting Shabbat candles, eating matzah on Passover. Less judgment, more invitation.

And You Shall Tell Your Child: What Are We Really Blessing For?

The Torah teaches us: "You shall eat, and you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless." We're not only commanded to bless G-d for the food we eat — but specifically for the feeling of being satisfied.

These are two very different things. "You shall eat" is about nourishing the body. "You shall be satisfied" is about nourishing the soul — finding peace and contentment.

Take a look around — so much of the world is designed to make sure we don't feel satisfied. Ads, media, marketing — all built to keep us wanting more. More to eat, more to buy, more to chase.

And without satisfaction, there can be no blessing. Without "vesavata", there is no "uverachta." When we're stuck in constant hunger — physical or emotional — we become slaves to consumption. Always chasing, never arriving.

Tonight, when we say Birkat HaMazon, the Grace After Meals, we can use it as a heartfelt prayer — that we merit not only physical food, but freedom from the trap of endless wanting. That we move from eating, to feeling full, to truly blessing — thanking G-d with a full heart for all the good in our lives.

"שפוך חמתך — פתיחת הדלת לאליהו הנביא"

We now pour the fourth cup of wine.

Any children still awake can take a candle from the table and go open the door — to symbolically welcome Elijah the Prophet. While they do that, we'll read together the text: "Shefoch Chamatcha..."

This is the moment when we invite Elijah the Prophet to join our Seder.

A suggestion: After we finish reading Shefoch Chamatcha, I invite everyone to close their eyes for a moment, and quietly ask for whatever blessing they truly need—and to believe — really believe — that those prayers will be fulfilled in full.

Stories of the Seder: Elijah Enters Through the Heart

One year, the Kotzker Rebbe told his chassidim that Elijah the Prophet would appear at the Passover Seder.

On the first night of Pesach, the Rebbe's dining room was packed wall to wall. The air was electric with anticipation. As the Seder progressed, Elijah's cup was filled and the door was opened.

And then... nothing. Nothing happened. There was no one there.

The chassidim were crushed. The Rebbe had promised them a revelation of Elijah — and it didn't happen.

The Kotzker Rebbe, his face glowing with a holy joy, looked at their disappointment and asked, “What’s the problem?”

“Fools!” he shouted. “You think Elijah comes through the door? Elijah comes through the heart.”

My friends: when Elijah’s cup is filled and the door is opened, don’t focus on the doorway. If you look inside your own heart — you just might catch a glimpse of the Prophet, smiling back at you.

Stories of the Seder: Opening the Right Door

During one of the Shabbats of Chol HaMoed Pesach, Rabbi Aryeh Levin — known as the “Rabbi of the Prisoners” in British Mandate Palestine — paid one of his regular visits to the jail. He asked the inmates how they had managed to hold a Seder.

One of the prisoners smiled and said, “The atmosphere was actually very uplifting. We even did a proper Seder according to tradition. But one thing really bothered us — when we got to Shefoch Chamatcha, we couldn’t open the door, like Jews always do. In prison, there’s no coming and going...”

Rabbi Aryeh gently responded, “You’re mistaken, my friend. Every person lives in some kind of prison — a prison of their own making. But no one escapes through a door in the wall. The only real way out is through the door in the heart.”

“And to open a hole in the heart — that, anyone can do. Even someone in a physical prison. That’s the path to true freedom — freedom of the soul.”

And You Shall Tell Your Child: Every One of Us Can Be Elijah

It was a special, uplifting moment when a chassid approached his Rebbe with awe and trembling. "Rebbe," he said humbly, "I would like a blessing... I want to merit seeing Elijah the Prophet."

"You wish to see Elijah?" the Rebbe replied, gazing at him intently.

The chassid became nervous — maybe he had asked for too much? But the Rebbe smiled gently and his fears melted away.

"I'll give you a simple path," the Rebbe said. "There's a Jewish family in a distant village, about two hundred miles from here. Go spend the Seder night with them. When you open the door to say Shefoch Chamatcha, you will see Elijah. But know this — the family is very poor. Bring food, matzah, and wine."

Excited beyond words, the chassid packed everything they would need for the holiday and asked his wife for permission to travel. She agreed happily — after all, it's not every day someone gets to see the herald of redemption!

On Seder night, the chassid sat nervously with the family, rushing through the Haggadah, waiting eagerly for the big moment. At last, the time came to open the door. With trembling hands he got up, opened it wide — and saw only darkness. Just a dog barking in the distance.

Disappointed, he wondered if he hadn't prepared properly. On the second night, he was even more careful, pronouncing every word with perfect attention. But again — nothing. Just silence and night.

As soon as the first Yom Tov ended, he rushed back to the Rebbe. "Rebbe, I did everything you said — and still didn't see Elijah. Where did I go wrong?"

The Rebbe looked at him with love. "Don't worry. You will see him. Go back to the same family during the last days of the holiday, and bring more food. But this time — before you go inside, stop and listen."

So he found himself once again standing outside that same humble home. As instructed, he paused at the door and listened. From inside, he heard the voices of children — laughter and crying. Then he heard the little girl, Rochel'eh, say: "Tatty, I'm hungry. I haven't eaten anything since morning."

Her father answered, "Don't worry, sweetheart. G-d won't abandon us. I'm sure He'll send us Elijah again — just like He did before the Seder."

Friends: Every one of us can be Elijah the Prophet. We just have to truly want to be.

Humorous Tales: The Secret to Good Wine

In the will of Yankel the wine merchant, his children found the following note:

"I feel the end is near. It's customary to pass down the business to one's children, and I will do the same. I will now reveal the secret of my winemaking — but promise to keep it to yourselves.

"Know this, my dear sons: In a year of drought, when apples are expensive and food coloring is hard to find... grapes also make pretty decent wine."

הלל נרצה "לשנה הבאה בירושלים"

When the children return from the door, we continue reading the Haggadah until its conclusion.

The Deeper Meaning: A Kosher and Joyous Pesach

The familiar blessing we give each other before Passover is: "Have a kosher and happy Pesach." In one of his letters to his son, the Rebbe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson — a great Torah scholar and mystic — explained the deeper meaning behind this wish.

The Seder night revolves around two key elements: the matzah we eat, and the four cups of wine we drink. Each part of the blessing corresponds to one of these. "Kosher" relates to the matzah — which must be guarded with care. "Joyous" relates to the wine — since wine is associated with happiness, as the verse says: "Wine gladdens the heart of man."

But the Exodus wasn't just a physical escape from slavery. It was also a spiritual redemption — the Jewish people uplifted holy sparks that had fallen into Egypt. This is the meaning of G-d's promise to Abraham: "Afterward, they will leave with great wealth." While this referred to physical wealth, it also hinted at spiritual treasure — sparks of holiness the Jews carried out with them.

This process of gathering and elevating these sparks is called birur hanitzotzos — extracting spiritual "treasures" from the material world and lifting them into holiness. It's the idea of "taking great spoil" from Egypt — not just wealth, but mean-

ing and purpose.

That's why matzah, which represents this process, must be carefully kosher. According to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, the word kasher ("kosher") itself is hinted at in the Hebrew phrase "kemotzei shalal rav" — "like one who finds great spoil." The matzah is our spiritual victory.

And the "joyous" part? That's the wine. Wine brings joy — and joy is the natural outcome of spiritual freedom.

TStories of the Seder: The Porter's Seder

One year, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev — one of the most beloved Chassidic masters — was leading his Seder on the first night of Passover. He was filled with deep spiritual intention. But then a message came to him from heaven: "Do not take pride in your Seder. There is a Jew in this town named Chaim the porter. His Seder was more precious than yours."

Many chassidim had already arrived at the Rebbe's home after finishing their own Seders. The Rebbe asked them, "Do any of you know Chaim the porter?" One said he knew of him but wasn't sure where he lived. The Rebbe said, "If you can bring him here, I'd be very grateful."

They spread out through the streets of Berditchev until they found his house. They knocked on the door. His wife opened and said, "What do you want with my husband? He's drunk and sleeping!"

The chassidim ignored her protests, woke Chaim up, and practically carried him to the Rebbe. The Rebbe sat him down

and asked gently:

"Reb Chaim, did you say Avadim Hayinu on Shabbat HaGadol?"

"Yes," Chaim answered.

"Did you check for chametz?"

"Yes."

"And did you conduct the Seder tonight?"

Chaim replied, "Rebbe, I'll be honest. I heard you're not allowed to drink vodka for eight days, so this morning I drank enough to last me the whole week. I got tired and fell asleep.

"Later that night, my wife woke me and asked, 'Why aren't you doing a Seder like everyone else?'

"I told her, 'What do you want from me? I'm just a simple man, like my father before me. I don't know much. But I do know this — our ancestors were once slaves to the Egyptians, and we have a G-d who took us out of slavery. And even now, we're in exile, but He will take us out again.'

"Then I saw matzah, wine, and eggs on the table. I ate the matzah and eggs, drank the wine, and went back to sleep."

The Rebbe listened to his words and sent him home. After he left, the Rebbe said:

"His words were accepted in heaven more than mine. He said them with honesty, without ego, and with complete sincerity. He may not know more — but he didn't need to."

Dear friends,

Today, thank G-d, we know what Passover is and how to celebrate it properly. But we have just three words left in the Haggadah — words that Jews have been saying for thousands of years on this night.

Let us say them like Chaim the porter — with truth. Let's feel the love and longing that millions of Jews felt when they said them, whether in joy or in suffering, in golden ages and in ghettos.

And just as the end seals everything, may our final words be accepted with full hearts — and may G-d send us the redemption. May we celebrate the next Pesach together, in Jerusalem.

Let's open our Haggadahs and say it together: "Next year in Jerusalem."

Wishing you a kosher and happy Pesach!

And You Shall Tell Your Child: The Secret of Jewish Survival

As we near the end of the Seder, having read the entire Haggadah and reached its final words, it's worth pausing to reflect.

What was this night about? A night of questions — beginning with "Ma Nishtanah." We explored why we celebrate the Exodus from Egypt, the moment that forever shaped our identity. And we recalled the miracles that have carried us through every generation since.

There's a well-known story about the Dalai Lama. Living in ex-

ile from Tibet, he once invited a group of American rabbis for a conversation. He told them, "Buddhism is now in exile, and I have lived as a refugee for many years. I fear that my people will one day disappear into the cultures around them. Tell me — what is the secret of Jewish survival?"

The answer lies in the very story we told tonight. At the Exodus, the Jewish people received something that would carry them through every exile — a spiritual trait that became our lifeline: freedom.

Through the miracles of the plagues and the splitting of the sea, G-d planted within us the unshakable knowledge that we are spiritually free. No matter what happens physically, no one can ever enslave our souls.

Yes, throughout history we've been beaten, imprisoned, and exiled. But our freedom to be who we are — to live as Jews, to believe and to practice — could never be taken away.

In 1927, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, was arrested by the Soviet regime for organizing mikvahs and underground Jewish schools. As he was being exiled to a remote village, he stood in the train station in Petersburg before hundreds of Jews who had come to see him off. He said these unforgettable words:

"Let it be known to all the nations of the earth: only our bodies were sent into exile and ruled over — never our souls. No power can force us to change our faith, our Torah, or our way of life."

That's what Passover really is — not just a holiday to remember, but a burst of energy to carry us through the year. It's the spark that reminds us we are free — not just politically, but

spiritually. Free to learn, to live, to be proudly Jewish — and no one can take that away.

So as we close this special evening, there's no phrase more fitting than the one our people have been declaring for centuries:

"Next year in Jerusalem" — not just the physical Jerusalem, but a Jerusalem of the soul, wherever we are. A place where our spirits and our bodies are fully free to live as Jews, joyfully and proudly.

Next year in Jerusalem!

Chag Pesach kasher ve'sameach!

The Rebbe's Customs:

After the declaration of "L'shanah haba'ah b'Yerushalayim" – the Rebbe would pour the wine from Elijah's Cup back into the bottle. While this was happening, everyone at the table would sing the Alter Rebbe's niggun, "Keili Atah."

The Rebbe would pour the wine from Elijah's Cup into his own cup, then into the bottle, then back into the cup—and again into the cup. Over and over, sometimes for ten minutes.

הוספה

אחד מי יודע - א'
Who Knows One – The Power of a Number

Yuli (Yoel) Edelstein, who served in the Knesset as a minister and Speaker of the House, was born in Chernivtsi, in the former Soviet Union. In his youth, he taught Hebrew in Moscow and was a well-known Zionist activist during the 1970s and '80s.

Because of his activism, he was refused permission to immigrate and was imprisoned between 1984 and 1987. After his release, he was finally allowed to move to Israel.

Yuli visited Odessa many times and made a strong impression on the community here during each visit. He was a man filled with depth, knowledge of Jewish tradition, and an ability to share Jewish wisdom in a warm and relatable way.

During one of his visits with his late wife Tanya, he shared a story. On their ketubah (Jewish marriage document), her name was written as "Tanya." Why? Because their wedding had been conducted in secret — in a cabin outside Moscow — by Chabad chassidim from Marina Roscha who risked their lives to keep Judaism alive.

When the elderly chassid asked for the bride's name, Yuli answered "Tanya." The man smiled and wrote "Tanya" — not in her Russian spelling, but as Tanya, the foundational text of Chabad Chassidism.

Another story Yuli told happened while he was imprisoned by the KGB on false charges. For three years he was held in soli-

tary confinement before his trial. On the day of his hearing, he knew his mother and fiancée would be there.

The trial was a sham. Surrounded by guards who blocked his view of his family, Yuli realized he had nothing to lose. He shoved the guards aside and shouted toward them:

"How many?" — knowing it was Chanukah, but not which night.

Tanya quickly raised two fingers to show it was the second night of Chanukah.

Yuli ended the story with a smile: "Ever since then, every time I see the number 2 — I remember two little Chanukah candles."

And that's really the heart of the song "Echad Mi Yodea – Who Knows One?" To most people, numbers are just numbers. But to a Jew, every number holds meaning.

"One" — our G-d in heaven.

"Two" — the Tablets of the Covenant.

"Eight" — days of circumcision.

"Ten" — the Ten Commandments.

For us, numbers don't just count — they tell a story. A Jewish story.

אחד מי יודע — ב'
Who Knows One – Part II: What Are We Really Worth?

Rabbi Yissachar Dov, the Mahari"d of Belz, once gave a beau-

tiful explanation for why we end the Seder with the playful poem "Echad Mi Yodea – Who Knows One?" He compared it to a wealthy man and how he talks about his fortune.

Usually, a rich person won't love being asked how much he's worth. But catch him in the right mood—maybe after a few drinks—and he might open up and start talking. As the Talmud says, "When wine goes in, secrets come out."

The Jewish people are spiritually rich. We're blessed with incredible treasures—Torah, mitzvot, tradition, memory. But like any wealthy person, we don't always go around listing everything we have. We'll say something general like "Ashreinu, how lucky we are"—but we rarely take time to count it all out.

And when do we drink wine? A little at Kiddush, maybe a bit more at Purim—but even then, says the Rema, you can fulfill the mitzvah by taking a nap! But at the Passover Seder, we are obligated to drink four full cups. And once the wine flows, the truth pours out.

So finally, we open up. We start listing our spiritual wealth: "One — our G-d in heaven and on earth. Two — the tablets of the covenant..." and so on. Each number, another treasure.

But some ask: is everything in that song really a "Jewish treasure"? What's so special about "nine months of pregnancy"? Why is that included?

The answer is in a teaching from the Talmud: "Rabbi Simlai taught—what is the fetus like in the mother's womb? Folded like a notebook, a light burns above its head, and it sees from one end of the world to the other... and is taught the entire Torah."

This spiritual experience happens only to a Jewish soul. That's why we count "nine months of pregnancy" as one of our national treasures. Those are months of pure goodness — a time when the soul is fully connected to Torah and to divine light.

As Chassidism explains, it's only because the soul studied Torah before birth that it's able to understand and connect to Torah afterward. That's why "nine months" are no small thing.

שיר השירים - א'
Song of Songs – Part I: A Knock at the Heart

There is a beautiful custom observed by many after the Seder, once the four cups of wine have been drunk: the reading of Shir HaShirim — the Song of Songs. Rebbetzin Chana, mother of the Rebbe, once shared that her husband, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak (the Rebbe's father), would lock himself in a room after the Seder and read the Megillah with such devotion that his tears could be heard through the door, often moving others to cry as well.

The Song of Songs is a love story — between a beloved and her partner — symbolizing the deep connection between G-d and the Jewish people. G-d is the loving partner who waits longingly; the Jewish people are the cherished one who searches in return. The entire book tells of that search, of closeness lost and found.

In Chapter 5, the verse says: "I am asleep, but my heart is awake." The Rebbe explains that this is a metaphor for exile — a spiritual slumber. When we sleep, we can't see or hear clearly. So too in exile, a Jew doesn't easily see Divine pres-

ence or hear a sense of calling. We ask, “Where is G-d?” and often hear only silence.

Exile is like a dark night with no visible door or window. The Jewish soul gropes in spiritual fog, unsure which way to turn.

But then: “The voice of my beloved knocks — open for Me.” G-d gently knocks at our heart, asking for even the smallest opening, the tiniest sign that we’re still willing to connect.

And how do we answer? “I’ve taken off my coat; how can I put it on again?” Meaning: “I’ve strayed too far… I no longer remember how to wear these spiritual clothes — no one ever taught me about prayer or tefillin or Passover Seders. How can I answer when He calls?”

But G-d doesn’t give up. “My beloved stretched His hand through the opening…” G-d, in infinite love, makes a hole in the wall — even when we don’t open it — and shines a light of love so strong that even the coldest soul stirs. “My heart was moved for him.”

Through that little crack in a Jew’s heart, G-d shines His love — and even those who feel far away suddenly long to reconnect. And so they look for a Seder, a tradition, a community to join.

שיר השירים - ב'

Song of Songs II: Love in Search of Meaning

Reading Shir HaShirim (The Song of Songs) during Pesach is a widespread custom, especially on the second night of the Seder or on Shabbat of Chol Hamoed, though it is not a Chabad tradition.

The Tanach includes five scrolls associated with Jewish holidays: Esther for Purim, Lamentations for Tisha B'Av, Ruth for Shavuot, Ecclesiastes for Sukkot, and Shir HaShirim for Pesach. Shir HaShirim is written as a romantic dialogue between two lovers.

In the early Second Temple era, there was serious debate about whether Shir HaShirim should be included in the holy scriptures. Many sages felt a book that described human romance was not appropriate for sacred texts.

The Talmud recounts how members of the Great Assembly initially feared that King Solomon had strayed from the path of holiness in writing it. In Avot D'Rabbi Natan, it says the scroll was originally hidden away—until the sages revealed its deeper meaning.

The argument was finally settled when Rabbi Akiva declared: "All the writings are holy, but Shir HaShirim is holy of holies." He taught that the book is not about romantic love, but about the deep bond between G-d and the people of Israel.

Throughout the Torah, the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people is compared to many things: a father and child, a servant and a king. But Shir HaShirim adds something more intimate—G-d as the loving partner, Israel as the beloved.

The Megillah describes the deep longing between the two lovers. In the most critical moment, the beloved comes knocking — but the woman is too lazy to get up. And by the time she opens the door, he's already gone: "My beloved slipped away… I called him, but he did not answer." A tragic missed opportunity.

Unlike most love stories, Shir HaShirim doesn't end with a re-

union. It ends mid-search: “Flee, my beloved… to the mountains of spices.” Chassidim used to speak about this kind of yearning—a chassid living far from his Rebbe would ache to see him and seize any chance to travel. But on the other hand, someone nearby often took it for granted. As they put it: “Around the sea, the ground is dry.”

The deeper idea is that G-d wants us to burn with love for Him—“like fiery flames.” And that intensity only comes from a place of yearning. That’s why our spiritual mission isn’t just to arrive, but to keep seeking, striving, and thirsting:

“My soul thirsts for You.”

חד גדיא
Chad Gadya – What’s the Story Really About?

We all know the playful, catchy song Chad Gadya — the little goat Dad bought for two coins. Then came the cat, who ate the goat; the dog, who bit the cat; the stick, that hit the dog; fire burned the stick; water put out the fire; the ox drank the water; the butcher slaughtered the ox… and then, the turning point: the Angel of Death struck the butcher, and G-d Himself took down the Angel of Death. One by one, each force meets a stronger one. Everyone gets their due.

Interestingly, this poem doesn’t appear in Chabad Haggadahs, and the Rebbe once noted: “Even though we don’t recite this song out loud, its entire message is absolutely present — and in some ways, even more so.”

(Hisvaaduyos 5747, vol. 2, p. 689)

So what’s the message of Chad Gadya? On the surface, it

seems to teach a basic but important idea: that there is a Master of the house, that nothing in the world happens by chance. But that theme appears throughout Jewish texts — in Torah verses, Talmudic teachings, and stories from every generation. There must be a deeper layer here.

One fascinating interpretation suggests the song is an allegory — a metaphorical retelling of the story of exile and redemption, starting with the very beginning of Jewish exile in Egypt.

The goat? That's Yosef. When his brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, the Torah says, "They took Yosef's robe and slaughtered a goat to stain it with blood." The "father" who bought the goat for two coins? That's Yaakov Avinu, who gave Yosef the special tunic — which the Sages say was worth exactly two silver coins.

The cat represents Yosef's brothers — who pounced on him, as a predator on its prey. The Midrash notes that Binyamin named his son "Bela" (swallowed) because Yosef had been "swallowed up" among the nations.

The dog symbolizes Egypt — who enslaved the descendants of Yosef's brothers. At the Exodus, the Torah says, "Not a single dog barked" at the Jews. The "dog" that bit the "cat" is Egypt punishing the brothers' descendants.

The stick? That's the staff of G-d, the mateh Elokim, which Moshe used to strike Egypt with ten plagues. Fire then comes — symbolizing the fire at Mount Sinai, where G-d's presence came down in smoke and flame.

And the fire burned the stick — meaning that the revelation at Sinai was so powerful, it overshadowed all the earlier mira-

cles. Moshe's status was no longer based on the plagues, but on the fact that every Jew personally heard G-d speak to him at Sinai.

The water symbolizes the Torah itself. As the prophet says, "All who are thirsty, go to the water." Tanya explains: Torah is compared to water because, just as water flows from a high place to a low one, Torah too descended from a heavenly source to our physical world. The water "put out" the fire — hinting to the idea that as powerful as the moment of Mount Sinai was, the ongoing daily study of Torah is even more transformative. It gives us life.

The ox reminds us of the sin of the Golden Calf. As Psalms says: "They exchanged their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass." The ox "drank the water" — symbolizing how that sin nearly wiped out the gift of Torah. When Moshe broke the tablets, it was as though the Torah itself had been nullified. If not for G-d's mercy and the giving of the second tablets, that moment could have ended it all.

The butcher represents Moshe Rabbeinu, who came down from the mountain, smashed the tablets, burned the calf, and ground it to dust. In doing so, he "slaughtered" the ox — he erased the sin of the calf and saved the goat, the Jewish people.

Then came the Angel of Death, who "slaughtered the butcher." Moshe, despite all he did and his heartfelt prayers, was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel. He died in the desert, just short of the final goal.

Finally — G-d. On the Seder night, after we've poured a cup for Elijah the Prophet, the herald of redemption, and opened the door in his honor, we express our hope that G-d will "slaughter

the Angel of Death" — that He will fulfill the promise "Death will be swallowed forever" with the coming of Moshiach, may it be speedily in our days.

Humorous Tales: Not Everyone Who's Right Is Righteous

In the town of Slonim, there was a simple-minded chassid who constantly bothered everyone — about spiritual matters, worldly matters, everything. One day, Reb Eizel asked him, "Why do you act this way?"

The chassid replied, "My intentions are for the sake of Heaven!"

Reb Eizel challenged him: "If you think about the song Chad Gadya, you'll notice something interesting: everyone in the story had a justification. The dog was right to bite the cat, who had eaten the innocent goat. The fire was right to burn the stick, which had hit the dog who was only defending justice. The water was right to put out the fire, the ox was right to drink the water, and even the Angel of Death was right to take the life of the butcher who had slaughtered the ox. Everyone was justified in their own way...

"But then G-d comes and strikes the Angel of Death. Why? What did he do wrong?

Reb Eizel concluded: 'From here we learn: even when you're technically right — it doesn't mean you should go around hurting others.'"

חסל סידור פסח
Chasal Siddur Pesach – The Seder Never Ends

In some communities, it's traditional to end the Seder with the poem Chasal Siddur Pesach — "The Passover Seder is concluded" — wrapping up the night with a wish for redemption: "And the redeemed will return to Zion with joy."

But in Chabad, this poem isn't said. The Alter Rebbe once ex-

plained why: because the Seder doesn't actually end. Not just because of its spiritual energy, but because the message of the Seder — the work of leaving our personal limitations and stepping into spiritual freedom — is meant to last all year long.

There's a great story told about a chassidic Seder with Reb Dovid of Tolna. As they were singing that very poem, a Jewish soldier in the Russian army walked into the room. He wasn't religious and was far from any connection to Jewish life. But as he listened to the final line, "the redeemed will return to Zion with joy," something unexpected happened.

The soldier misheard the Hebrew word for "redeemed" — peduyim — as the Russian word "pa-YED-um", which means "let's keep going!" or "move forward with strength!" He suddenly lit up, stood tall, and began shouting with excitement: "PaYEDum l'Tzion b'Rinah! Let's go to Zion with joy!"

Reb Dovid loved it. From that point on, whenever they sang the poem, they would echo that joyful call: "PaYEDum—let's keep moving forward to Zion, with joy, courage, and confidence."

And maybe that's the real takeaway from this whole night. We don't close the Haggadah and go back to "regular life." We take the inspiration with us, and keep marching forward — toward a better version of ourselves, toward a better world, and ultimately, toward redemption.

Let's keep going. Let's keep building. And let's do it with joy.

And may it be His will that this very year we merit to behold the Rebbe conducting the Seder, in the Third Holy Temple, and there shall we partake of the offerings and the Paschal lambs.

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