

# MJE Passover Prep Guide 2024/5784

An (almost) complete Beginner-friendly guide to Passover in NYC



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# PASSOVER 2024 SCHEDULE

## SUNDAY, APRIL 21 SEARCH FOR CHAMETZ

**8:12 PM** Search for Chametz

## MONDAY, APRIL 22 BURN CHAMETZ

**6:33 AM** Fast of the Firstborn begins  
**7:15AM** Morning services with the Jewish Center, followed by a siyum for fast of the elders  
**10:37 AM** Latest time for eating Chametz  
**11:45 AM** Chametz needs to be burnt by  
**7:30 PM** Mincha/ Afternoon & Maariv/Evening Service with the Jewish Center, 3rd floor  
**7:25 PM** Candle Lighting  
**Begin Seder 1**

## TUESDAY, APRIL 23 PESACH DAY 1

**9:30 AM** Shacharit/Morning Service at MJE  
**7:20 PM** Mincha/ Afternoon & Maariv/Evening Service with the Jewish Center, 3rd floor  
**8:28 PM** Candle Lighting for Yom Tov/Holiday from an existing flame & Start Prep for Seder 2  
**Begin Seder 2 ONLY AFTER 8:28 PM**  
**\*Count day 1 of Omer\***

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24 PESACH DAY 2

### OMER DAY 1

**9:30 AM** Shacharit/Morning Service with MJE  
**7:20 PM** Mincha/ Afternoon & Maariv/Evening Service with the Jewish Center, 3rd floor  
**8:29 PM** Holiday Ends

## FRIDAY, APRIL 26 PESACH DAY 4

### OMER DAY 3

**7:30 PM** Candle Lighting  
**7:30 PM** FNL With MJE

## SATURDAY, APRIL 27 PESACH DAY 5

### OMER DAY 4

**9:30AM** Shacharit/Morning Services with MJE  
**7:15 PM** Candle Lighting for Yom Tov/Holiday from an existing flame  
**7:20 PM** Mincha/ Afternoon & Maariv/Evening Service with the Jewish Center, 3rd floor  
**8:33 PM** Shabbat Ends

## SUNDAY, APRIL 28 PESACH DAY 6

### OMER DAY 5

**7:32 PM** Candle Lighting for Yom Tov/Holiday  
**7:20 PM** Mincha/ Afternoon & Maariv/Evening Service with the Jewish Center, 3rd floor  
**8:15 PM** Candle Lighting for Yom Tov/Holiday

## MONDAY, APRIL 29 PESACH DAY 7

### OMER DAY 7

**9:30AM** Shacharit/Morning Services With MJE  
**7:20PM** Mincha/ Afternoon & Maariv/Evening Service with the Jewish Center, 3rd floor  
**7:32 PM** Candle Lighting for Yom Tov/Holiday from an existing flame

## TUESDAY, APRIL 30 PESACH DAY 8

**9:30AM** Shacharit/Morning Services With MJE  
**7:20PM** Mincha/ Afternoon & Maariv/Evening Service with the Jewish Center, 3rd floor  
**8:36 PM** Holiday Ends

## MJE EAST SIDE PASSOVER CLASSES



**PASSOVER 101**  
DRINKS. DINNER. DISCUSSION.  
TUESDAYS @ 7 PM | 125 E 85TH

WITH RABBI AVI HELLER

TUESDAY, MARCH 26  
SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF THE HOLIDAY  
TUESDAY, APRIL 9  
PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE HOLIDAY

CLASS TICKET - \$10

**MJE** east


TUESDAY, MARCH 26 | 7 PM

TUESDAY, APRIL 9 | 7PM

SIGN UP HERE



## MJE WEST SIDE PASSOVER CLASS



**MJE**  
manhattan jewish experience

**PASSOVER 101:  
THE THEMES OF PESACH**

DRINKS. DINNER. DISCUSSION.  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10 @ 7 PM  
131 W 86TH ST - 10TH FL

WITH RABBI MARK WILDES

CLASS TICKET - \$10

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10 | 7 PM

SIGN UP HERE



## MJE MOCK SEDER



**MJE**  
manhattan jewish experience

**MOCK SEDER**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17TH | 7:00 PM  
131 W 86TH ST. - 10TH FL

WITH RABBI MARK WILDES

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17 | 7 PM

SIGN UP HERE



## ASK THE RABBI



SATURDAY, APRIL 20 | 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM  
FOLLOWED BY SOCIAL KIDDUSH

## MJE PASSOVER SEDERS



SIGN UP HERE



MONDAY, APRIL 22 | TUESDAY, APRIL 23

Join 20s & 30s YJP's for spirited, social, interactive and engaging Seders. You are welcome to join us for the first night, second night, or both! PLEASE CHECK THE LOCATION AND TIME OF EACH SEDER!!

## "How To Passover" videos

### Hagalas Keilim--How To Kasher Our Pots and Pans

<https://oukosher.org/passover/four-ways-to-kasher-kitchen-utensils-for-passover/>



### Videos on how to Kasher the Kitchen, Oven, Microwave, Sink, etc

<https://oukosher.org/passover/preparing-for-pesach/>



<https://youtu.be/evp0R7mAJSw>



### How to do Bedikat Chametz/ Searching for Chametz

<https://tinyurl.com/hxbhv4p7>



## Got questions? Rabbi Pinny has the answers!

**Join Rabbi Pinny Rosenthal: Pesach Halacha Q & A**

**WhatsApp Chat for MJE!**

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/24khpl0Y3OUCKFfP1f2ozm>

## Other resources

### OU-Orthodox Union

<https://oukosher.org/passover/the-ou-guide-to-passover-2023/>



### Star K

<https://www.star-k.org/passover>



# Got Food?

In need of Matzah for Pesach? Food for Pesach? Check out these great options (who deliver near and far):

## Catering/Butcher

- **Fischer Bros**- <https://www.fischerbros.com/pages/passover-prepared-foods-menu>
- **Ma'adan - Bergen County, NY**- <https://maadan.com/holiday-special-menus/>
- **Olive Tree Catering** - <https://olivetreecateringny.com/passover/>
- **Simply Divine** -<https://tinyurl.com/2p8k8yte>
- **Chef's Table**- <https://www.chefstablekoshercatering.com/>
- **Talias Steakhouse**- <https://taliassteakhouse.com/passover>

## Restaurants- sit in & take out

- **18 Resteraunt** - <https://www.eighteenrestaurant.com/>
- **Talia's Steakhouse** - <https://taliassteakhouse.com/passover>
- **LE MARAIS**:- <https://www.lemarais.net>

## Grocery Stores

- **RKM- Riverdale Kosher Market** - <https://www.riverdalekoshermarket.com>
- **THE KOSHER MARKET PLACE**: <https://thekmp.com/collections/passover>
- **Breadberry (Brooklyn)**- <https://breadberry.com/passover-catering/storelocation>
- **Glatt Express (Teaneck, NJ)**- <https://www.glattexpressonline.com/>
- **Grand and Essex (Teaneck, NJ)** - <https://bit.ly/grandandessex22>
- **Pomegranate (Brooklyn)** - <https://bit.ly/pomegranate22>

## PASSOVER IN 12 EASY STEPS

Special thanks to Rabbi Yosie Levine, Rabbi Eliezer Buechler, Rabbi Noach Goldstein and The Jewish Center for sharing their guidelines. They have been modified by the MJE Rabbinic staff, so please address any questions to MJE. This is meant as a general guide; please consult your Rabbi for further clarification and specific questions. For more details, consult "Halachos of Pesach" by Rabbi Shimon Eider, [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org) and [www.star-k.org](http://www.star-k.org). It is customary on Passover to give Maot Chittin, money for the poor to prepare for the holiday with dignity. One may give the money online or give it to the Rabbi at the time of the sale of chametz.

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# STEP #1: Preparing Your Passover Kitchen

## APPLIANCES:

**Gas Cooktop:** On a gas range, the metal grates upon which the pots on the range sit may be kashered by turning the flame on high for 10 minutes. In order to spread the flame over the entire grate, it is advisable to cover the grates with a blech, a piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, or a pot full of water during the kashering. The rest of the range (the area between the burners) should be cleaned and covered with a double layer of heavy-duty aluminum foil. The burners themselves do not need kashering or covering, just cleaning. The drip pans should be thoroughly cleaned and covered, but don't need kashering.

**Electric cook top:** One need only turn the burners to the high-heat setting for 7 minutes in order to kasher them since the burners come to a glow in a few minutes. The remaining cook top areas (in between burners) should be double-covered with heavy-duty aluminum foil.

**Glass Stovetop:** A glass stovetop cannot be kashered, and therefore must be dealt with as follows:

1. Clean the stovetop surface well and do not use for 24 hours.
2. During Pesach, pots should not be placed directly on the stove surface, but rather
3. an aluminum (or other metal) disk should be placed directly under the pots.

One should not cover the entire glass top surface, as this might cause it to overheat and crack. (\*from the OUKosher.org)

**Conventional oven:** Whether gas or electric, the oven and its racks must be completely cleaned of all surface dirt, food and grease before kashering. Oven cleaner may be necessary to remove baked-on grease. Once the oven and racks have been cleaned, they may be kashered by "Libbun Kal," i.e. turning the oven to the broil setting for at least 40 minutes. In a gas oven, the broil setting will allow the flame to burn continuously. In a conventional electric oven, the highest setting (broil or 550 degrees Fahrenheit) kashers the oven. If a caustic type of oven cleaner (such as Easy- Off) was used to clean the oven and some stubborn spots remain after the caustic cleaner has been applied a second time with similar results, the remaining spots may be disregarded.

**"Continuous-cleaning" oven:** One cannot assume that the oven is clean simply because the manufacturer claims it to be continuously clean. A visual inspection is required. After it is observed to be clean, the oven should then be kashered by turning it to the broil setting for at least 40 minutes. Since caustic or abrasive oven cleaners (e.g. , Easy-Off) cannot be used without destroying the continuous-clean properties of the oven, a non-abrasive, non-caustic, cleaner must be used. Grease spots will usually disappear if the top layer of grease is cleaned with Fantastic and a nylon brush. The oven should then be turned to 450 degrees Fahrenheit for an hour so that the continuous-clean mechanism can work.

**Self-cleaning oven:** The self-cleaning cycle cleans and kashers the oven simultaneously. This is true for convection ovens with a self-cleaning feature, as well. The oven need not be carefully cleaned before-hand, because everything inside the oven is reduced to ash. The oven door and rubber around the door should, however, be completely clean before beginning the self-clean cycle.

**Broiler:** The broiler pan and grill cannot be kashered by just turning on the gas or electricity. Since food is cooked directly on the pan or grill, they must be heated to a glow ("Libbun Gamur") in order to be used on Passover. An alternate method is to replace the pan with a new pan and kasher the empty broiler cavity by cleaning and setting it to broil for 40 minutes. If one does not intend to use the broiler on Passover, one may still use the oven, even without kashering the broiler, provided that the broiler has been thoroughly cleaned or covered with heavy-duty tin foil. Other cooktop inserts would require heating the surface to a red glow before usage ("Libbun Gamur").

**Microwave Ovens:** Microwaves in which the inside is made of metal may be kashered by first cleaning them out thoroughly (after not using for 24 hours), then placing a microwave-safe container filled with water in the oven and boiling it until the oven fills with steam, usually at least 10 minutes. Microwave ovens whose inside is made of plastic present a kashering problem. Fortunately, many do not heat up the oven walls enough to cause a real kashrut concern. One may boil a cup of water in the microwave (after thoroughly cleaning) and then quickly insert your hand and touch the oven ceiling: if it is too hot to touch, the microwave should not be used for Passover. If it is relatively cool (or even warm), the oven may be used and has just been kashered. The glass plate (if you have one) should be covered. If it is absolutely necessary to use a non-kasherable microwave during Passover, one may line the inner walls with cardboard and then use it.

**Microwave Convection Ovens:** must be kashered using the convection and/or browning mode. The convection microwave should first be cleaned well. If the fan area cannot be properly cleaned, it should be sprayed with a caustic cleaner (e.g., Easy Off) while the fan is on, and rinsed off before kashering. One should then test the convection microwave to see if it reaches the required heat for libun kal by putting it on its highest setting for 40 minutes. A piece of paper should then be held against the interior wall to see if it gets singed. If the paper is singed, the convection microwave has been heated sufficiently and can be kashered. (\*from the Star-K.org)



**Dishwasher:** You may kasher if it made of metal and plastic. Clean the filter at the bottom of the dishwasher, and run a cycle with soap, let the dishwasher sit for 24 hours without use. run one cycle without soap.

**Formica countertops:** should be cleaned and covered with a waterproof material. The same goes for tables with synthetic tops.

**Wood tables:** can theoretically be *kashered* with boiling water, but the custom is to clean and cover them.

**Refrigerators:** should be washed (shelves, walls and compartments). The prevailing custom is to line shelves being used for Passover with aluminum foil.

**Utensils:** It is preferred to have utensils reserved for Passover use. If one is unable to use special utensils for Passover, many utensils used throughout the year may be *kashered* for Passover. These include metal utensils which are not difficult to clean (a sieve, for example, or a utensil which has parts that are glued together, would not be *kasherable*) and glass utensils that were used strictly for cold.

**Cookware:** According to Ashkenazic custom, glassware used for cooking, as well as earthenware, pottery, porcelain, Pyrex, and chinaware may not be *kashered*. Arcolac, Duralex & Corelle should be treated as glass for *kashering* purposes. Plastic utensils may not generally be *kashered*.

**Glass utensils** which came into contact with only cold *chametz* should be cleaned with a cleaning solution and then immersed in water for three days, changing the water every 24 hours.\_

#### There are two different procedures for kashering:

- 1. Hag'alah:** Metal utensils which came into contact with heated chametz in a medium of water (i.e., utensils in which chametz was cooked; pots are a good example) may be kashered via the procedure known as hag'alah, which involves immersion in boiling water, as explained below.
- 2. Libbun:** Metal utensils which came into direct contact with heated chametz without the medium of water (e.g., a broiler) may be kashered by heating them until they are literally "red-hot," or by placing them in a self-cleaning oven during the self-clean cycle.

## **STEP #2: Cleaning for Passover**

- Although the official search for chametz is performed on Tuesday night, April 4th after 7:52 PM this year (see Step #3), we begin cleaning well before then.
- Where to clean: Cleaning should extend to every place into which chametz is brought (including all rooms into which chametz is brought even periodically), pockets in clothing, book bags and briefcases, pocketbooks, tallit bags, under and behind furniture, and under and between furniture cushions. Heavy appliances which are not moved during the year, such as stoves and refrigerators, need NOT be moved in order to clean away chametz under them. Special care should be taken in areas that little children live or visit, since they tend to bring food everywhere. Any chametz one owns at one's workplace or in one's car must be either destroyed or sold.
- Note that the goal is to clean away pieces of chametz of significant size (larger than an olive's worth); while any chametz you find should be destroyed, it is not imperative to search for or clean away every single crumb.
- Non-Kosher-for-Passover dishes: Dishes and utensils should be cleaned and stored away in such a manner that they cannot be accidentally used during Passover. It is good to tape or tie shut cabinets that contain things you cannot use, as well as things that have been sold.

## **STEP #3: Shopping for Pesach (from Rabbi Marmorstein)**

### **What is Chametz?**

The Torah forbids eating, deriving benefit from, or owning chametz during Pesach. Chametz results when any of the five grains (wheat, barley, rye, oats, or spelt), after harvesting, makes contact with water and fermentation takes place. Mixtures including chametz are also prohibited as are edible extracts and alcoholic fermentation of chametz. Bread, cereal, cake, cookies, crackers, pastas & spaghetti from the 5 grains are pure chametz.

Potatoes, fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, fish and dairy products are permitted when in their pure form. If processed, one must be careful that the product does not include or did not absorb a chametz derivative. Items containing vinegar, starch, cream or alcohol that do not have Pesach supervision or that were not specifically investigated for Pesach are not acceptable, as many companies use chametz derivatives for these ingredients.

**MEDICINES** Since chametz binding agents are used in many pills, the following guidelines should be followed: If the medicine is required for life-sustaining therapy, it may be used on Pesach. If it is not for life-sustaining therapy, some authorities permit, while others prohibit. If available, capsules are preferable. Before discontinuing any medications consult your doctor. It's best to consult a Rabbi on these matters as well.

**PROHIBITED FOODS** include bread, cakes, biscuits, cereal, crackers, pasta, alcohol and vinegar made from these five grains; wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye. Most Ashkenazi authorities have added the following foods (kitniyot) to the above list: rice, corn, millet, string beans/green beans, and legumes, for example beans and peas. Most of these authorities also forbid chickpeas, peanuts, sesame seeds, and lecithin. Sephardim should consult a Sephardic rabbi.

**PERMITTED FOODS** include the following fresh, unprocessed foods, which DO NOT NEED a kosher for Passover label:

- Fruits and vegetables (for exceptions see above)
- Eggs, kosher fish and meat

### **Things to buy BEFORE Passover**

During the eight days of Pesach chametz cannot become nullified in other foods. Therefore, even the smallest amount of chametz renders an entire food forbidden. However, before Passover, chametz may be nullified. This allows us to differentiate between foods purchased before and during Pesach. The following foods require no "kosher le-Pesach' label if purchased before Pesach" and if they remain unopened until Pesach. During Pesach, if one wants to purchase these products, they require a "kosher le-Pesach" label:

- Milk, butter, cottage cheeses, cream cheese
- Frozen, uncooked vegetables with no additives (for legumes, see above)
- Frozen, uncooked fruit with no additives
- Sugar, non-iodized salt, pepper and other natural spices
- Baking soda
- Tea-unflavored, non-herbal, and non-decaffeinated
- Coffee-without cereal additives, non-decaffeinated
- Cocoa-100% pure, no additives

The following processed foods always require a "Kosher le-Pesach" label:

- Baked products including matzah, cakes, matzah flour, farfel, matzah meal, and any products containing matzah.
- Fruit juices (canned or bottled)
- Fish (canned or breaded)
- Wine, liquor, vinegar, ketchup, soda
- Oils, margarine
- Dried fruits, candy, chocolate milk
- Ice cream, yogurt, sour cream, and other dairy products
- Decaffeinated or flavored coffees and teas, herbal teas

**BAKED GOODS** Baked products are a particular problem and their preparation by a bakery under Jewish ownership is not a guarantee of kashrut. Fresh bakeries bake Kosher for Pesach items. Signs indicating "Passover Products" or "Passover Style" are not acceptable. Bakeries that are kosher during the remainder of the year are not necessarily acceptable on Pesach. It is also important to note that Jewish law forbids the purchase of bread immediately after Pesach if the bread was baked during Pesach.

**PESACH LABELS** No product can be used on Pesach unless it is accompanied by a reliable "Kosher le- Pesach" label and endorsement by a rabbi whose name and location is clearly stated. A label reading simply "For Passover" and adorned with Jewish symbols is not reliable, especially if not integral to the package. These guidelines do not cover every situation. Consult a Rabbi for reliability of specific certifications.

**DETERGENTS** Kosher powder and liquid detergents don't require a "Kosher le-Pesach" label.

## **STEP #4: The Search for Chametz**

Time: The time for *bedikat chametz* (searching for chametz) is the night before Seder. This year the search for chametz is conducted on Tuesday night, April 4, after 7:52 pm, which is *tzeit hakochavim*- nightfall.

• When the time for the bedikah arrives, one should begin immediately, deferring eating and other activities until after the search. The search itself is begun with the beracha recited by an adult on behalf of all of those participating in the search. Although the blessing mentions destroying the chametz rather than searching for it, it is appropriate at this point because searching for the chametz is the first step in its destruction. Those who will be leaving the area before Sunday night should conduct the search on their last evening home, but without the beracha. The search is conducted silently except for speech relevant to the search.

*The Blessing: "Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al bi'ur chametz"*

- **Lighting:** bedikat chametz is traditionally done by the light of a candle in a dark room. If necessary, a flashlight may be used for the search.
- **Ten Pieces of Chametz:** There is a custom of long standing to distribute ten pieces of chametz to be found during the search. In many homes, children put out the chametz, but an adult should supervise where they put it.
- "But I've been cleaning for weeks!" One must perform a serious search for chametz even if one has previously cleaned one's house and believes that there is no further chametz. This search should cover all of the places into which chametz may have been introduced (see above, "Where to clean"). One who will not be home at all for Passover and is selling all of his or her chametz should speak to one of the rabbis about how and when to conduct the search for chametz. One who is away for all Pesach but will have guests over Pesach in their home should consult a Rabbi about what to clean and other steps to take.
- **Bittul:** At the conclusion of the search, all chametz is placed in a known location, and a declaration ("Bittul", see below) is made annulling all chametz which remains hidden. Because this declaration is a legal declaration, it is valid only if one understands what one is saying. If one does not understand the Aramaic version ("Kol Chamira"), one should certainly recite the English version, see below.

**Following the search, the following Bittul declaration should be recited: "Kol chamira v'chamiya d'ika birshuti, d'lo chamitei ud'lo bi'artei, libateil v'lehevei hefker k'afra d'ar'ah."**

"Any chametz or leaven that is in my possession, which I have not seen and have not removed, shall be annulled and ownerless, like the dust of the Earth."

## **STEP #5: The Sale of Chametz**

- If you own chametz which you prefer not to destroy, you may authorize someone to sell these items to a non-Jew for you. Please note that the chametz is not sold to the Rabbi; you are merely authorizing him to sell it on your behalf.
- Chametz which you will be selling may remain in your home, but should be placed in specific locations and sealed off with string, tape, or a lock and a sign to indicate that it is chametz and does not belong to you. (You are storing it for the owner.)
- After Passover, please allow one hour for Rabbi Levine to arrange the re-purchase of your chametz for you before you begin to use it.
- Pet food must also be chametz-free. Please consult your rabbi about the possibilities of purchasing or making Kosher for Passover pet food or selling your pet to a non- Jew for the duration of the holiday.
- Please take care to discuss with the rabbis if you will be in a different time zone for Passover, such as Israel or the Far East. Please see form on pg. 13 for details on the sale. Deadline to get form to MJE: Thursday, April 18

## STEP #6: Fast of the First-Born

- All male first-born males fast on Erev Passover to commemorate their having been saved from the last and most terrible of the ten plagues of Egypt.
- This year, the fast is observed on Monday, April 22
- Halacha provides, however, that if a first-born attends a celebration such as a siyyum (a meal following the completion of a Talmudic tractate) he is exempted from this fast. Many synagogues have these siyums- reach out to any MJ E staff member to find one.
- A siyyum will take place at The Jewish Center on Monday, April 22 betweenafter Shacharit minyan

## STEP #7: No more eating Chametz/Burning the Chametz/Annulling Chametz

- **One is not allowed to partake in eating Chametz after 10:37 AM on Monday, April 22nd**
- Chametz is burned the morning before Pesach begins. This year chametz is burned on Wednesday morning, April 5. Chametz must be burned on Wednesday morning THE LATEST by 11:41 am.
- You may bring your chametz to The Jewish Center on Monday, April 22 morning before 11:45 AM to be burned**
- One then needs to annul and relinquish ownership of any remaining chametz, and that is done by reciting "Kol Chamira". See below
- No bracha (blessing) should be said at the time of burning, since the beracha recited before the search the previous night applied to the burning as well.

"Kol chamira v'chamiya d'ika birshuti, d'chamitei ud'lo chamitei, d'vi'artei ud'lo vi'artei, libateil v'lehevei hfeker k'afra d'ar'ah."

"Any chametz or leaven that is in my possession, whether I have recognized it or not, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have removed it or not, shall be annulled and ownerless, like the dust of the Earth."

## STEP #8: The Seder Meal (Rabbi Levine, Rabbi Heller)

**Six items are placed on the seder plate:**

- 1) The shankbone ("zero'a") is a small piece of roasted meat, placed on the Seder plate to commemorate the Paschal sacrifice.
- 2) The roasted egg, commemorates the Chagiga sacrifice offered on Passover.
- 3) Charoset, usually composed of ground apples, pears, dates, cinnamon, and red wine, is placed on the Seder plate in memory of the mortar that our ancestors used to construct buildings in Egypt.
- 4) Maror, the bitter vegetable. The most common choices are romaine lettuce and horseradish (unsweetened). Romaine lettuce must be washed and examined carefully for insects. (Take care not to soak the vegetable used for maror for 24 hours, since this would compromise its sharpness.)
- 5) Karpas, a vegetable, usually parsley or potato
- 6) Chazeret (romaine lettuce or bitter herb) are also on the plate. Many have a custom of placing three matzot on top of the seder plate to be used during the seder.



Here is a diagram of the most common way of setting the seder plate

The seder should not begin (i.e., kiddush) until nightfall on each night. This year, the first seder should not begin before 8:17 pm on Friday night, April 15th. Preparatory steps such as setting the table and singing the steps of the seder may be done before-hand on the first night, but NO preparations of any kind may be done for the second seder until the first day of yontef is over, i.e. 8:18 pm on Saturday night, April 16. Every seder should have a seder leader and an appropriate haggada. Many haggadot are online or at local Jewish bookstores. Make sure it has a full traditional text before purchasing.

The two Biblical commandments of the seder night are to eat matza and to recite the story of the Exodus. One should take particular care to fulfill these requirements. Many are careful to consume the afikoman before halachic midnight, which is 12:56 am this year. The three Rabbinic commandments are to drink four cups of wine, to eat maror and to recite the hallel.

## STEPS OF THE SEDER

1) KADESH	Make the Kiddush. Lean to the left while drinking.
2) URCHATZ	Wash without a blessing
3) KARPAS	Make a blessing and eat a bit of vegetable dipped in salt water
4) YACHATZ	Break the middle matza
5) MAGGID	Tell the Exodus story through question and answer
6) RACHTZA	Wash with a blessing
7) MOTZI MATZA	Make 2 blessings and eat the top matzah
8) MAROR	Make a blessing and eat the bitter herb
9) KORECH	Eat the bottom matzah with maror and a little charoset
10) SHULCHAN ORECH	Eat the festive meal
11) TZAFUN	Eat the afikoman for "dessert"
12) BARECH	Grace after meals
13) HALLEL	Sing songs of thanks and praise
14) NIRTZA	Ask God to accept our seder, sing final songs

## MEASUREMENTS FOR THE SEDER (Rabbi Alan Schwartz, Ohab Zedek)

See the following page for a graphic representation of seder measurements

- 1) **The Four Cups of Wine.** It is preferable to use a red wine or wine mixed with grape juice for the four cups. The cup should hold at least 3.3 fluid ounces and a majority of the cup should be consumed, while reclining to the left.
- 2) **Karpas.** Any vegetable which grows from the ground may be used. The prevalent custom is to use parsley, celery, radishes or potatoes.
- 3) **Yachatz.** Break the middle matzah and hide the larger half for the afikomen.
- 4) **Matzah.** Ideally use Matzah Shemura to fulfill this basic mitzvah. While reclining to the left, enough matzah should be eaten that will cover the area indicated in the graph.
- 5) **Maror.** If one uses Romaine lettuce leaves or stalks then the amount needed to be eaten to fulfill the mitzvah is shown on the graph. If ground horseradish is used, 1.1 fluid ounces, or 3 level tablespoons must be eaten. Minimally, 0.7 fluid ounces or 2 level tablespoons will suffice.
- 6) **Korech.** The bottom matzah combined with additional matzot sufficient to cover the area shown is combined with 0.7 fluid ounces or 2 level tablespoons of horseradish. If Romaine lettuce is used then the measurement is the same as the Maror.
- 7) **Afikomen.** A piece of the hidden matzah along with other matzos to cover the area shown.

MAROR  
ROMAINE LETTUCE

**LEAVES**

The entire Area 8" x 10"

MAROR  
ROMAINE LETTUCE

**STALKS**

**MATZOH**

**KORECH**

**AFIKOMEN**

## **STEP #9: Eruv Tavshilin: This is not needed this year**

When Shabbat occurs immediately following a festival day, an Eruv Tavshilin must be prepared prior to the festival, to permit preparation of food for Shabbat during the festival. This year, it is required in order to prepare food on Friday for Shabbat. Ordinarily, it is NOT permitted

- a) to cook on one day of a festival for the next day, or
- b) to cook on the festival for Shabbat.

However, the sages gave special dispensation for one who began cooking for Shabbat on Friday (the day BEFORE the festival) to continue to prepare on Friday for their Shabbat needs. Thus, one should take a hard-boiled egg (or any other cooked item) and a matza on this day, and set them aside as the beginning of their Shabbat meal.

The following blessing and declaration is said while holding them:

### **The Blessing:**

"Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam asher kid'shanu b',mitzvotav v'tzivanu al mitzvat eruv"  
Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us on the mitzva of eruv.

### **The Declaration:**

"Bahadein eiruva, yehei shara lana l'afuyei u'levashulei u'le-adlukei shraga u'letakna u'leme'ebad kol tzarcana miyoma tava l'shab'ta lana u'lechol Yisrael ha-darim ba-ir ha-zot."  
With this eruv, let it be permitted for us to bake and cook and light a candle and to prepare and do anything necessary on the festival for Shabbat for us and for all the Jews who live in this city.

It is not required, but is customary to eat the eruv (the egg and matzah) at the third meal on Shabbat.

## **STEP #10: After Passover**

Chametz owned by a Jew during Passover may not be eaten by a Jew even after Passover. Care must therefore be taken after Passover to purchase chametz with this issue in view. Stores owned by non-Jews present no problem; products in stores owned by Jews may be purchased if the proprietor sells the chametz for Passover, or once enough time has passed that the items owned over Passover have been purchased by other customers and have been replaced by new products from the store's suppliers.

## **STEP #11: Counting of the Omer**

Each night, beginning the second night of Passover, we count the 49 days (7 weeks) up to Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people.

The Blessing: "Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al sefirat ha-omer."

Blessed are You, God, Our Lord, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us on the counting of the Omer.

### **During the first week:**

We count each day: "Today is the first day of the omer"

### **Starting on the eighth day:**

We count days and weeks "Today is eight days, which one week and one day of the omer".  
Counting can be found in most prayer books following the weekday night time service.

- For an omer calendar: <https://tinyurl.com/2uzccwy5>.
- For text reminders: <https://www.tefillos.com/signup.asp>
- for email reminders: <https://www.ou.org/sefirah-email/>
- Android app called "Sefirah Reminder-Lite" (free) or Search iTunes store for "sefirat ha-omer", "sefirah", or "counting the omer"

## **STEP #12: Next Passover...**

**April 12, 2025**

**Le-shanah ha-ba'ah bi-Yerushalayyim!**

**Next year in Jerusalem!**



**EMAIL COMPLETED FORM TO Leah Hashimi: leah@jewishexperience.org**  
**YOU CAN FILL THIS OUT ONLINE: https://bit.ly/mjechametzform2024**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

One way to avoid the prohibition of owning chametz on Pesach is to sell it to a non-Jew. It is customary to appoint the Rabbi as one's agent to transact this sale. Please fill out the form below or online at: <https://bit.ly/mjechametzform2024> and MJE will get it to the rabbis. Please sure it reaches the MJE office by Thursday, April 18. If by Monday you do not receive confirmation of our receipt of this form, please email [leah@jewishexperience.org](mailto:leah@jewishexperience.org)

The sale of chametz is a legal transaction in which the buyer becomes the full owner of the chametz. For the sale to be considered a serious transaction, the buyer must be able to have access to his goods. If you are going away for Pesach, please indicate where your keys can be found (e.g., doorman, super) in the form.

By filling out this form you agree to appoint Rabbi Yosie Levine as your agent of sale. If you have any questions, please email [leah@jewishexperience.org](mailto:leah@jewishexperience.org) or any of the MJE educators.

To enact a kinyan, an acquisition, it is best to turn to another person in your home and lift up an object, like a pen, that belongs to them. If this is not possible, the sale is still valid. Please fill out the form below by Thursday, April 18.

The sale of chametz is a legal transaction in which the buyer becomes the full owner of the chametz. For the sale to be considered a serious transaction, the buyer must be able to have access to his goods. If you are going away for Pesach, please indicate where your keys can be found (e.g., doorman, super) in the form.

**POWER OF ATTORNEY:**

I, the undersigned, fully empower and permit Rabbi Yosie Levine or his designee to act in my place and stead and on my behalf to sell all chametz possessed by me knowingly or unknowingly, as defined by Torah and Rabbinic law, and to lease all places in which chametz owned by me may be found, especially at:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. #: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel.: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Second Address (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. #: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel.: \_\_\_\_\_

**[Specific items and values may be listed on the back of this form]**

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

If you will be out of town for the entirety of the holiday of Pesach

Please check here if you will be in Israel, Europe or the Far East for Pesach.

If you will be away for all of Pesach, please check here and complete the following:

The keys to my home can be found with: Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. #: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel.: \_\_\_\_\_

**Many follow the custom of making a donation at this time, which will be distributed to the needy. Please make checks payable to the Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung Memorial Fund.**





The Chametz I possess includes the following:

	Type of Chametz (Groceries, Liquor, Medicine, Toiletries)	Exact Location (kitchen, pantry, living room, etc.)	Approximate value \$
1)			
2)			
3)			
4)			
5)			
6)			

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 YOU CAN FILL THIS OUT ONLINE: <https://bit.ly/mjechametzform2024>**

# Kashering As A Metaphor For Personal Change

## Rabbi Avi Heller

It is a Jewish custom to kasher – make kosher -- pots and silverware before Pesach. Even our poor utensils are redeemed from their non-kosher enslavement. We take any non-kosher or chametz (leaven) and get rid of it. Making a utensil "kosher" is based on the premise that cooking is not always skin deep. Traces – or 'taste' - of food that was once cooked in these pots remains in their walls, their pores, their molecules. Kashering is a simple physical process by which this condition is reversed. It is not magic, not ritual (no blessing is said), but it is a good way to get Jewish men in beards to wield flame-throwers. The two most important ways of koshering are as follows:

**Libbun**, or firing. This literally means to make white-hot, after which a utensil is considered as good as new. If it was meat or dairy before, it is now parve. If it was treif, now it is kosher. Remember, though, that white-hot leads to red-hot and that red-hot leads to a hole in your pot.

**Hag'alah**, or boiling. This is a form of kashering done with large pots of boiling water. For dramatic effect, a hot rock is dumped in, sending the boiling water into frothy paroxysms.

In libbun, firing, the intention is to destroy the taste of the food. It is a severe and unrelenting process, an incineration. Hag'ala, on the other hand, is a more persuasive process. The idea is not to destroy the taste of the food, but to draw it out and neutralize it. The small amount of non-kosher absorbed taste is quickly overwhelmed by the large quantity of water. Rather than killing the fugitive chametz, we negotiate it out into the open and take it into custody.

Perhaps we can approach our own challenges to be good people in the same way. One can try to blowtorch out our evil inclinations. If we have an inappropriate sexual desire, a desire to act unethically, if you covet, or hate, or lust after cheeseburgers, we can squash those desires like a bug, nip our urges in the bud, rip out the part of us that desires sin. This is a viable solution for very strong individuals who like a tough fight, who like black-and white rules, and it is ok under certain circumstances.

However, one can also utilize the hag'ala solution. I sometimes call this the jujitsu solution, because "the main concept [in jujitsu] is yielding and using the opponent's energy to your advantage" (according to Kudan Tom Ball). When he comes to attack you, you just flip him on his head with his own momentum. In hag'ala, we use the same energy -- hot water – that allowed the chametz to get into the pot in order to get it out of the pot. In other words, we force the evil inclination to do what we want it to do by making it feel like it's in charge.

While there are certainly instincts that should be incinerated if they will lead us to grave sins, often it can be more effective and healthy for us to subvert our instincts. The Talmud's advice to someone who has a murderous instinct is to become a shochet. Rather than, God forbid, becoming a violent criminal, he should channel that energy into providing others with kosher meat. We should apply our passionate energy to our spouses, turn our aggression into fighting the bad guys, even apply our skepticism and hunger for answers to devoted Jewish study. May we all be able to destroy or redirect our negative energy this year and go into Pesach feeling refreshed and inspired. Happy Pesach!

# SOMETHING FOR YOUR SEDER

## Rabbi Mark Wildes

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchick told the story of a Seder he remembered from his early childhood. Yosef Dov, who would later become the great Rav Solotveitchick, was just about six years old when he was sitting with his family on the Seder night in their hometown in Poland. They had just made the Kiddush and in walks the Rav's grandfather, the revered Rav Chaim Soloveitchick, also known as Rav Chaim Brisker. One of the leading Torah authorities for the Eastern European Jewish community, Rav Chaim Brisker was a huge Torah sage and part of a dynastic rabbinic family. In walks Rav Chaim wearing a pot on his head. His grandson, little Yosef Dov, looks up at his grandfather and asks: "Zaide, why are you wearing a pot on your head?" To which Rav Chaim answered: "Because tonight, my dear grandson, is different than all other nights. Tonight our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt." He then proceeded to engage the entire family which included small children, women and older men in a dialogue, in a conversation about the story of the Exodus.

Rav Chaim did something strange to try to connect not only with his son, Rav Moshe, who was a great sage too, but also with his six year old grandson, his wife, children and grandchildren. Rav Chaim made certain that everyone at the table was involved in the conversation because that is the mitzvah of the Seder Night – for everyone, no matter what age, background or gender, to speak about and relate to the story of the Exodus of our people. Therefore, the discussion must be tailored to all those assembled and we must do things to make sure everyone is engaged and everyone's attention is aroused, even if it means wearing a pot on our heads. The idea of tailoring the Seder to whoever is present is most dramatically demonstrated through the famous Fours Sons. The Hagadah speaks about four types of children who each ask their own question at the Seder table, the wise son, the rebellious son, the simple son and the child who cannot even ask. In relating to the very different questions, these different children all ask different questions and receive different answers. In doing so, our Sages teach us a fundamental principal in education: "Teach your son according to his way" (Proverbs 22:6). Based on this verse our Sages teach that children of different dispositions, tendencies, and abilities, need to receive different answers and approaches, even to the same question or event.

This same idea is echoed in the Tanchumah, (an important Midrashic source) which comments on the verse: "Moses spoke and God answered with a voice" (Exodus 19:19). Our Sages point out that at Mt. Sinai, when God was giving the Torah to the Jewish people, God spoke with a "voice" that Moshe could handle. Similarly, God's "voice", says the Tanchumah, came to each and every Jew according to his and her capacity. "The elders heard the voice according to their capacity, the young men according to theirs, the children according to their capacity, the infants according to theirs, the women, all according to their own capacity." In the same vein, the Hagadah has four different children, representing four different parent-child dialogues, to teach how the Torah recognizes different types of children, all with different questions. Each child receives attention and each is given an answer. Although the wise son's question is posed in a more sophisticated way than the simple son – this does not mean that only he receives an answer. Each asks and each receives a response. For both the wise and simple son bring their own special strength to the dialogue and to the Jewish community. The wise son brings his profound and inquisitive mind and the simple son – his readiness and purity of faith. As the Brurei Hamidot (commentary on the Mechilta) writes, the opposite of the wicked son is not the wise son but the simple son. For the simple son is ready and willing to serve God in his utter simplicity and faith, to accept every aspect of the Torah, even the non-rational parts, which the rebellious son mocks. And yes, even the rebellious son receives an answer. Even after denying the foundation of our faith he receives an answer because he shows up. Finally, the child who knows not even to ask – for this kind of child, the Hagadah teaches "you must open" – you the parent or teacher must begin a dialogue for this child does not know even enough to pose a question.

The Hagadah is teaching us how to respond to the different kinds of questions posed by the varying types of personalities within the Jewish community. We can no longer afford to simply provide answers for those with background and knowledge. The vast majority of Jews today do not come to the Seder asking the wise son's question and so we must be patient and in many cases take the initiative and open the conversation. All four sons however are to be commended for being present. The most problematic son is the "fifth son" – a term coined by the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, the child who never showed, for Passover and much of Judaism has little or no meaning to him. We must learn how to answer questions posed by all types of Jews, for if we don't, then in coming Passovers we will find ourselves even without simple sons or children who cannot ask.

However, we must learn how to speak to all Jews for a more fundamental reason: so we can answer the questions posed by our own children. There are some who view the four sons – not as representing four different types of Jews, but as one individual Jew, at different stages of his or her life. A child is born as someone who cannot even ask. The small child grows a bit and now he can ask but he is simple minded – his perspective of the world is black and white. As the child continues to mature into his adolescent years, he goes through a period of rebellion, questioning the values in which he has been raised. Of course, we pray our children continue on to the final phase, to that of the wise son, someone sincerely interested and inquisitive for wisdom and knowledge – one who spends the rest of their learning, studying, and searching for answers.

There is a true story told of a great Rabbi, Rav Eisel Charif of Slonim who was looking to marry off his daughter. He of course wanted her to meet someone very learned in Torah and so he traveled to the greatest yeshiva of the time, the world famous Yeshiva of Volozhin where the best and brightest Talmudic students were enrolled. Upon his arrival he informed the head of the Yeshiva he would present an involved question on Torah to all the students and whoever could give a suitable answer would be given his daughter's hand in marriage. Rav Eisel posed the question which quickly made its way around the yeshiva. The question was so difficult no-one could answer it right away. He therefore stipulated he would give all the yeshiva students one day to come up with an answer. The day came and went and no one came forward and so Rav Eisel got onto his couch and proceeded back home. Suddenly the couch driver heard a voice crying: "Stop, stop". Looking behind him he saw one of the students from the yeshiva running, desperately trying to catch up with the coach. The driver began to slow down but Rav Eisel told him to keep going: "It's too late for him to answer now" he told the driver. The couch driver pleaded with the Rabbi: "Have pity on this young man, look how he's running with all his strength to catch up to us". Rav Eisel relented and the driver stopped the horses. As soon as the young man caught up, the Rabbi told him: "Look, it's too late to be considered for my daughter, the day has already passed". "I realize that" the student responded, "But I just want to know the answer to your question. Can you tell me?" The Rabbi was so impressed with the students' inquisitiveness and great desire to know the answer to the Torah question, he posed that he took him and brought him to meet his daughter. They eventually married and that young man became the legendary and famous Rav Yossele of Slonim, the great Slonimer Rebbe.

The Four Sons teach how much Judaism values our questions but our tradition also demands we search for answers. How much do we try to find the answers to our life's questions? How far are we willing to go, how fast are we willing to run to learn and grow in our Judaism? Passover is a holiday that requires us to learn and observe more, inspiring us to never be content with where we are now, but to keep learning and acquiring greater knowledge and wisdom. For when we stop learning, we stop growing. Our Judaism becomes stale and Torah ceases to be the dynamic and exciting approach to life we know it to be. This is why the Hagadah records how the greatest sages of the Talmud stayed up all night discussing the story of the Exodus – for they wanted to know more. May we all follow their example and may this Passover inspire us all to recommit ourselves to learn and study more, take more classes, read more Jewish books and in doing so bring greater wisdom and insight and ultimately redemption to ourselves and our people.

# THE STORY WE TELL ABOUT OURSELVES (BO 5780)

## Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Sometimes others know us better than we know ourselves. In the year 2000, a British Jewish research institute came up with a proposal that Jews in Britain be redefined as an ethnic group and not as a religious community. It was a non-Jewish journalist, Andrew Marr, who stated what should have been obvious. He said: "All this is shallow water, and the further in you wade, the shallower it gets."

It is what he wrote next that I found inspirational: "The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us. They have had their Bible, one of the great imaginative works of the human spirit. They have been victim of the worst modernity can do, a mirror for Western madness. Above all they have had the story of their cultural and genetic survival from the Roman Empire to the 2000s, weaving and thriving amid uncomprehending, hostile European tribes."

The Jews have always had stories for the rest of us. I love that testimony. And indeed, from early on, storytelling has been central to the Jewish tradition. Every culture has its stories. (The late Elie Wiesel once said, "God created man because God loves stories"). Almost certainly, the tradition goes back to the days when our ancestors were hunter-gatherers telling stories around the campfire at night. We are the storytelling animal.

But what is truly remarkable is the way in which, in this week's parsha, on the brink of the Exodus, Moses three times tells the Israelites how they are to tell the story to their children in future generations.

1. When your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians.' (Ex. 12:26-27)
2. On that day tell your child, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Ex. 13:8)
3. "In days to come, when your child asks you, 'What does this mean?' say, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.' (Ex. 13:14)

The Israelites had not yet left Egypt, and yet already Moses was telling them how to tell the story. That is the extraordinary fact. Why so? Why this obsession with storytelling?

The simplest answer is that we are the story we tell about ourselves. There is an intrinsic, perhaps necessary, link between narrative and identity. In the words of the thinker who did more than most to place this idea at the centre of contemporary thought, Alasdair MacIntyre, "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal." We come to know who we are by discovering of which story or stories we are a part.

Jerome Bruner has persuasively argued that narrative is central to the construction of meaning, and meaning is what makes the human condition human. No computer needs to be persuaded of its purpose in life before it does what it is supposed to do. Genes need no motivational encouragement. No virus needs a coach. We do not have to enter their mindset to understand what they do and how they do it, because they do not have a mindset to enter. But humans do. We act in the present because of things we did or that happened to us in the past, and in order to realise a sought-for future. Even minimally to explain what we are doing is already to tell a story. Take three people eating salad in a restaurant, one because he needs to lose weight, the second because she's a principled vegetarian, the third because of religious dietary laws. These are three outwardly similar acts, but they belong to different stories and they have different meanings for the people involved.

Why though storytelling and the Exodus?

One of the most powerful passages I have ever read on the nature of Jewish existence is contained in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1772). This is an unlikely place to find insight on the Jewish condition, but it is there. Rousseau is talking about the greatest of political leaders. First of these, he says, was Moses who "formed and executed the astonishing enterprise of instituting as a national body a swarm of wretched fugitives who had no arts, no weapons, no talents, no virtues, no courage, and who, since they had not an inch of territory of their own, were a troop of strangers upon the face of the earth."

Moses, he says, "dared to make out of this wandering and servile troop a body politic, a free people, and while it wandered in the wilderness without so much as a stone on which to rest its head, gave it the lasting institution, proof against time, fortune and conquerors, which 5000 years have not been able to destroy or even to weaken." This singular nation, he says, so often subjugated and scattered, "has nevertheless maintained itself down to our days, scattered among the other nations without ever merging with them." Moses' genius, he says, lay in the nature of the laws that kept Jews as a people apart. But that is only half the story. The other half lies in this week's parsha, in the institution of storytelling as a fundamental religious duty, recalling and re-enacting the events of the Exodus every year, and in particular, making children central to the story

. Noting that in three of the four storytelling passages (three in our parsha, the fourth in Va'etchanan) children are referred to as asking questions, the Sages held that the narrative of Seder night should be told in response to a question asked by a child wherever possible. If we are the story we tell about ourselves, then as long as we never lose the story, we will never lose our identity.

This idea found expression some years ago in a fascinating encounter. Tibet has been governed by the Chinese since 1950. During the 1959 uprising, the Dalai Lama, his life in danger, fled to Dharamsala in India where he and many of his followers have lived ever since. Realising that their stay in exile might be prolonged, in 1992 he decided to ask Jews, whom he regarded as the world's experts in maintaining identity in exile, for advice. What, he wanted to know, was the secret? The story of that week-long encounter has been told by Roger Kamenetz in his book, *The Jew in the Lotus*. One of the things they told him was the importance of memory and storytelling in keeping a people's culture and identity alive. They spoke about Pesach and the Seder service in particular. So in 1997 Rabbis and American dignitaries held a special Seder service in Washington DC with the Dalai Lama. He wrote this to the participants:

"In our dialogue with Rabbis and Jewish scholars, the Tibetan people have learned about the secrets of Jewish spiritual survival in exile: one secret is the Passover Seder. Through it for 2000 years, even in very difficult times, Jewish people remember their liberation from slavery to freedom and this has brought you hope in times of difficulty. We are grateful to our Jewish brothers and sisters for adding to their celebration of freedom the thought of freedom for the Tibetan people." Cultures are shaped by the range of stories to which they give rise. Some of these have a special role in shaping the self-understanding of those who tell them. We call them master-narratives. They are about large, ongoing groups of people: the tribe, the nation, the civilisation. They hold the group together horizontally across space and vertically across time, giving it a shared identity handed on across the generations.

None has been more powerful than the Exodus story, whose frame and context is set out in our parsha. It gave Jews the most tenacious identity ever held by a nation. In the eras of oppression, it gave hope of freedom. At times of exile, it promised return. It told two hundred generations of Jewish children who they were and of what story they were a part. It became the world's master-narrative of liberty, adopted by an astonishing variety of groups, from Puritans in the 17th century to African-Americans in the 19th and to Tibetan Buddhists today.

I believe that I am a character in our people's story, with my own chapter to write, and so are we all. To be a Jew is to see yourself as part of that story, to make it live in our time, and to do your best to hand it on to those who will come after us. Shabbat Shalom

*\*originally published on [www.RabbiSacks.org](http://www.RabbiSacks.org)*

## **THE LAST SEDER IN THE WARSAW GHETTO**

**Adam Ross**

In April 1943, at the height of the Final Solution, with the sounds of tank rounds and gunfire around them, the last remaining Jews of Warsaw huddled together in bunkers under their besieged ghetto to live their final hours as proud Jews, reading the Passover Haggadah. In the hours that followed, they would rise up in one of history's most iconic feats of resistance. The handful of Jews who survived the Nazi's final onslaught on Warsaw, once a major center of Jewish life, have this Seder night more than any other etched in the memories as a testament to Passover's powerful calling to connect to family, history, tradition and hope.

### **The Jewish Capital of Europe**

Every Passover during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw, which began in October 1939, the Jewish community did its best to celebrate the holiday. Even after being forced into a ghetto measuring just 2.5% of the city, subject to terrible starvation and disease, additional non-leavened foods were smuggled into the ghetto in the weeks before Passover. Several matzah factories were set up, ensuring the community, at its height numbering almost half a million, could eat the bread of freedom Seder night. Despite the hunger, typhus and dysentery, Jewish life in the ghetto continued. Passover in April 1943 would be the last for the Jews of Warsaw Ghetto, although by then the community was already unrecognizable. Almost a year earlier Adam Czierniakow, the Head of the Judenrat, the Jewish council appointed by the Nazis, had committed suicide after hearing of the Nazis plans, leaving a note to his wife that he "Would not be the hangman of Israel's children."

The Nazis had since begun a terrifying program of 'liquidation' deporting between 5,000 and 6,000 Jews daily to the Treblinka death camp where they were murdered within an hour of their arrival. On January 18 1943, the Nazis attempted to take another 8,000 Jews but this time members of a newly formed Jewish resistance fired shots at the SS guards and the Nazis rethought their plans, bolstering their military presence, delaying the final liquidation of ghetto to Passover which would fall in three months' time.

### **"That's what we felt in our hearts"**

On the 18th of April 1943, when news arrived that the Germans had stationed an army in Warsaw ready to empty the ghetto, members of the underground resistance movements went into high alert. While the rooftops were stationed with Jews keeping track of the enemy's every move, below the ghetto, Jews were busy embracing the story of the exodus from Egypt as a symbol of their own fight for dignity, pride and hope. Roma Frey was 24 that Passover, recalling how she and her family had tried their best to make the basement as nice as possible for the holiday, "We tried to put the candles on the table, and a white table cloth," she adds, "the table was made of a wooden board resting on a few things underneath." Surviving the Holocaust and moving to Melbourne Australia after the war she added. "We acknowledged to ourselves and to God and to ourselves that we want to keep the traditions. That's what we felt in our hearts, we remembered our grandfathers, the hard times, slavery and our slavery, and here we have, hardly a hope to survive even just one day or night."

### **Seder Night with Rabbi Meisel**

With families decimated by the deportations, the remnant Jews came together, relying on those who knew the Haggadah by heart to lead them. Many flocked to the home of the 60-year-old venerated Rabbi Eliezer Yitzchak Meisel, who had left his hometown of Lodz along with his followers years earlier when the Nazis invaded. In Warsaw he had become immediately involved in maintaining religious life amid the hardships; it was in his basement that many of the Jews active in the resistance joined for the Passover Seder. Tuvia Borzykowski was 29 at the time. "No one slept that night," he recalled. "The moon was full and the night was unusually bright." Along with the other fighters he joined Rabbi Meisels for the Seder. "Amidst this destruction, the table in the center of the room looked incongruous with glasses filled with wine, with the family seated around, the rabbi reading the Haggadah." Throughout the night, despite the increasing sounds of enemy fire, Tuvia and the other fighters held fast, engrossed in the retelling of the Jewish people's redemption from Egypt. He recalled, "The Rabbi's reading was punctuated by explosions and the rattling of machine-guns; the faces of the family around the table were lit by the red light from the burning buildings nearby." "Now is a good time to die," Rabbi Meisels said, buoyed by the feeling of pride, courage and faith, as he blessed one of the fighters who came to deliver a report. He died later that night in the flames of the ghetto. Tuvia Borzykowski survived the war and helped establish Kibbutz of Ghetto Fighters near Akko. He is one of several fighters who testified about the Passover Seder they took part in as the uprising began.

### **"I had never missed a Seder"**

Born in Warsaw, Itzchak Milchberg was the leader of a group of Jewish boys posing as non-Jews outside the Ghetto walls, selling cigarettes on the black market to survive. On the eve of Passover in 1943 he was just 12 years old but wise beyond his years. He had seen his father shot before his eyes, his mother and two sisters had already been deported and the only family he had left was an uncle named Fievel who was still in the ghetto.

When rumors spread that the Nazis were planning their final deportations, he returned to the ghetto to be with his uncle for Passover. "I had never missed a Seder," he said. "It was in my blood." With the sound of shooting around him, he entered his uncle's candle lit bunker where 60 people were crowded. "The building was shaking," he said, "People were crying." His uncle Feivel embraced him in Yiddish, "Ir vet firn di seder mit mir - You'll perform the Seder with me." However some were too distressed to think about running a Seder. He recalls people crying, "God led us out of Egypt. Nobody killed us. Here, they are murdering us." Pulling him close, whispering into his ear, Feivel told his nephew, "You may die, but if you die, you'll die as a Jew. If we live, we live as Jews." He added, "If you live, you'll tell your children and grandchildren about this." The Seder began. Feivel Milchberg had managed to organize matzah, "I don't know how he got it," Itzchak recalls, although he remembers there were no bitter herbs, "There was plenty of bitterness already," he says. Together with his uncle he read the Haggadah from memory and soon most of the bunker joined in. "We did most of the prayers by heart," he says. "The Seder went very, very late." He left the ghetto in the early hours of the morning through the sewer system, risking his life as he had done to be there in the first place. In the days that followed he worked as a runner, smuggling arms through the sewers to the Jewish fighters until he was caught on the sixth day of the Uprising. He would later jump from a train taking him to Treblinka and survive the Holocaust thanks to a Catholic family in Warsaw. After the war, he moved to Canada, raised a family of his own and made good in his promise to his uncle to tell his children and grandchildren about that Seder night he had led with his uncle in 1943.

## The Uprising

As promised a large SS unit entered the ghetto attempting to deport the remaining Jews to their deaths. But they were met instead by fierce fighting from the Jewish resistance and a barrage of Molotov cocktails, grenades and gun-fire. With renewed strength and pride, this fledgling Jewish fighting force killed 13 Nazis, wounded many more and sent them panicked, retreating out of the ghetto. They held out for almost a month as the Germans set to work painstakingly burning each building in the ghetto to the ground. 13,000 Jews died in the fighting and the flames while thousands more were arrested and deported to the east. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising will always be remembered as the greatest physical resistance throughout the Second World War, inspiring underground movements and partisan units across Nazi occupied Europe. Spiritually, the Seder service that took place below its charred streets that night can continue to inspire generations of Jews who refused to be broken even at the darkest of times.

*\*originally published on [www.aish.org](http://www.aish.org)*

# PESACH

## Rabbi Berel Wein

At the great seder night of Pesach when we read and discuss the immortal words of the Pesach Hagada, my family has always enthusiastically sung the portion of the Hagada that we know as "Dayenu." By the grace of God, I have been able to witness a number of my generations singing this meaningful poem of praise to the Almighty for the bountiful goodness that he has bestowed upon us.

Since I am leading the singing that always accompanies this poem, the melody may be somewhat out of tune but what it lacks in pitch it makes up for in enthusiasm and volume. I have always thought about the words that make up this poem and the entire concept that "Dayenu" communicates to us. The poem deals with half measures, so to speak, of goodness that were bestowed upon us. As one of my grandchildren one intuitively remarks to me: "Zeydie, it is like proclaiming victory when only half the game has been played and your team is winning. But the game is not over yet, so is our cheering not a bit premature?"

That same question troubled me for quite some time. How can we say that it was sufficient for us to be delivered from Egyptian bondage even if later we would've been destroyed at Yam Suf? Or what advantage would have accrued to us had we come to the Mountain of Sinai but never received the Torah or experienced the revelation that took place there? Why would we say that all these half measures would have been more than enough for us?

The answer to all of this lies in the Jewish attitude towards the holy attribute of gratitude. Gratitude is the basis of all moral law and decent human conduct. It underpins all the beliefs and behavioral aspects of Judaism, Jewish values and lifestyle. And Judaism declares that gratitude must be shown every step of the way during a person's life.

We are to be grateful and thankful for our opportunities even if they did not yet lead to any positive results and accomplishments. The Talmud admonished us not to complain too loudly or too often about the difficulties of life "for is it not sufficient that one is still living?" If one expresses gratitude simply for opportunity, then how much more is that person likely to be truly grateful for positive results in one's life?

This is not only the message of the "Dayenu" poem in the Hagada, it is really the message of the entire recitation of the Hagada itself. Gratitude for everything in life is the message of Pesach, for the matzo and even for the maror as well. And perhaps this is why the poem of "Dayenu" is usually put to melody, for it is meant to be a poem of joy, a realistic appraisal to life and not a sad dirge. Like everything else in Jewish life, it is meant to be a song of eternity.

Shabbat shalom  
Pesach Kasher v'sameach

Rabbi Berel Wein

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# JEWISH COMEDIANS AND SPLITTING THE SEA

## Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff

When Robin Williams, arguably one of the greatest comedians died, some people gave him an interesting title: "honorary Jew." Why the Jew label? Couldn't he have been left as a brilliantly comedic non-Jew?

Well if you look back at most of the great comedians from the previous generation, they were predominantly Jewish. This is a group it seems some people badly wanted him to be part of. Here is a short list of some Jewish comedians, with their real names:

Jack Benny (Benjamin Kubelsky),  
Mel Brooks (Melvyn Kaminsky),  
Milton Berle (Mendel Berlinger),  
Gene Wilder (Jerome Silberman),  
Jackie Mason (Yaakov Moshe Maza),  
Buddy Hackett (Leonard Hacker),  
Jerry Lewis (Joseph Levitch),  
Danny Kaye (Daniel Kaminski),  
Victor Borge (Borge Rosenbaum),  
Rodney Dangerfield (Jacob Cohen),  
Joan Rivers (Joan Molinsky)  
And my personal favorite  
Tony Curtis (Bernie Schwartz)

Growing up I had a passion for jokes and stand-up comedy; I even performed once in a while. The fact that I became a rabbi instead of a stand-up comic tells you how good I was.

Why are Jews so funny? Is it a coincidence that nearly all the great entertainers of recent memory were of Jewish stock, or is something deeper going on?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of my favorite commentators on the Torah, answered the question for me. He makes a short but remarkable statement which changed the way I looked at comedy and why so many Jews are comedians. The relationship between Jews and comedy actually goes back to our birth as a people.

When the Jewish people left Egypt they were pursued by Pharaoh and the Egyptian army who regretted letting them leave in the first place. Several days after leaving Egypt the Jewish people arrived at the Red Sea. Behind them were the Egyptian soldiers and in front of them was the sea. They were trapped.

The Torah describes the scene quite vividly, "...and when Pharaoh drew close, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were very afraid; and the children of Israel cried out to God." (Exodus 14:10-11)

You could have expected them to cry out to God, or to complain to Moses, but what they did after that was rather unexpected: "And they said to Moses: Were there no graves in Egypt, that you brought us to die here in the wilderness?" What kind of statement is that? Of course there were graves in Egypt. Their own parents and grandparents had been buried there.

Rabbi Hirsch gives a short and fascinating explanation of this verse. He says, "This sharp and ironic statement was made at a time of the deepest anxiety and despair. This marks the sense of wit that is a characteristic trait of the clearheaded Jewish people."

He's telling us something remarkable: the Jewish people made a joke. They assumed that this was the end of the road. All bets were off. Hundreds of years of Jewish history were about to come to a gruesome and pitiful end. Instead of crying, they made a sarcastic comment. "Oh I see Moses, there wasn't a grave in Egypt that you had to shlep us to die here instead!"

Comedy and humor have a purpose. The Jewish people have gone through thousands of years of Jewish history, and along the way we have seen and been part of some of the worst atrocities the world has known. We have survived beatings, torture, forced conversions, exiles, pogroms and holocausts. We needed something to help us survive those hardships. I asked him how he had the mental stamina to survive such an atrocious experience. He replied that many people would tell each other jokes and funny stories from the shtetl in order to escape the terrible reality they were faced with on a daily basis. Those moments of laughter lifted them out of their misery for a few moments every day.

I even saw a book for sale in the Majdanek gift shop (yes, even the camps have gift shops) entitled "Laughter in Hell" that cataloged many of the stories, plays and jokes that were told in the camps.

Medical research has shown the benefits a good laugh can have on your mind and body. Among other things laughter can lower blood pressure, reduce stress hormone levels, improve cardiac health and trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural pain killers.

The Talmud tells a story about the great sage Rabbi Beroka who one day met Elijah the prophet in the market place. Rabbi Beroka asked him, "Who in the market is worthy of achieving the next world?" Elijah pointed at two men and said they were ideal candidates. Rabbi Beroka was surprised as these two men did not fit the image of very righteous individuals. Intrigued, Rabbi Beroka approached them and asked, "What do you do for a living?"

They replied, "We are clowns and we tell jokes for a living. When we see people around us who are a bit down hearted we cheer them up with a joke and a few funny words."

Using the power of humor to lift people's spirits when they are down is worthy enough of assuring a place in heaven.

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## **THANKING THOSE WHO PACKED YOUR PARACHUTE: THE ESSENCE OF DAYEINU**

### **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg**

It is almost impossible to imagine the Seder night without the singing of dayeinu. Young children to octogenarians can be found humming the addictive melody to dayeinu. Interestingly, the Rambam does not have dayeinu in his Hagaddah and even Rav Saadia Gaon whose Hagaddah serves essentially as the basis for ours, only has dayeinu as an addendum at the end of the Haggadah among those songs that only those who can hold their wine sing.

Yet for us, dayeinu is central, a centerpiece of the hagaddah and a highlight of Seder experience. The tune is catchy, but the words and theme are frankly bizarre. Had you taken us from Egypt but not split the sea, dayenu. Really, would it have been enough? If you had taken us to Har Sinai but not given us the Torah, dayenu, it would have been enough. Really, don't we talk about how the Torah is the air that we breathe, indispensable to our lives and to our very existence? Had He given us the Torah but not brought us into Israel it would have been enough. Really? Wasn't Israel created before the world because it, the Jewish people and Torah and the three pillars upon which the world is built?

Every commentator and every Hagadda asks the same question: What do you mean dayenu, it would have been enough?

Most of the discussions of dayeinu, center around an analysis of individual and particular stanzas. However, I want to share with you an insight that will give you an entirely new way to understand dayeinu. Understanding what dayeinu is really all about and why it is a centerpiece of our Seder requires us to zoom out the lens and instead of investigating specific lines, to look at the poem as a whole. What do the 15 stanzas have in common? Why were these events or experiences chosen?

Rabbi Nachman Cohen in his Historical Haggada offers a fantastic insight. If you look at the Chumash and in Tehillim, chapter 106 in particular you will notice that every stanza of dayeinu corresponds with an incredibly gracious act God did for us and our absolute ungrateful response.

Here are a few examples: We say "had God just taken us out of Egypt it would have been enough." However, if you look in Deuteronomy 1:27 it wasn't enough. "Because God hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us."

Another example: we say, "If you just fed us the manna it would have been enough." But it wasn't enough. We said, "our soul loathes this bread." We say, "If You just brought us into Israel dayeinu, it would have been enough," but it wasn't. It says in Numbers, "[Israel is ] the land that eats up its inhabitants."

Explains Rabbi Nachman Cohen, dayeinu is our reflecting on our history and repairing the lack of gratitude we exhibited in the past. Seder night we look back on our national history, we review our story and we identify those moments, those gifts from God that we failed to say thank you for. We rectify and repair our ingratitude and thanklessness through the years by saying dayeinu now. In truth, dayeinu, each of these things was enough to be exceedingly grateful for.

Freedom demands gratitude. If you have are set free, but fail to acknowledge how you attained that freedom, you in fact remain enslaved to your ego and your selfishness. If you can't recognize what has been done for you and that you could not have done it yourself, you are not freed from your narrow, self absorbed way of life. Gratitude is a byproduct of true freedom.

The Midrash describes – He who has no gratitude is like one who negates the existence of God. If you are so insensitive to those who benefit and sustain you, certainly you will never recognize the blessings which God provides. Ingratitude is a fatal character flaw individually and nationally. On the night of Pesach, when we relive the experience of becoming a people and celebrate our national birth we repair the ingratitude of our past with the recognition that we are unworthy and dayeinu, all that God did for us was beyond what we deserved.

## **Instilling Gratitude in the Home**

A couple of years ago the Wall Street Journal had an article entitled, Raising Children With an Attitude of Gratitude, Research Finds Real Benefits for Kids Who Say 'Thank You'. The author, Dianna Kapp writes:

"A field of research on gratitude in kids is emerging, and early findings indicate parents' instincts to elevate the topic are spot-on. Concrete benefits come to kids who literally count their blessings. Gratitude works like a muscle. Take time to recognize good fortune, and feelings of appreciation can increase."

The mere act of giving thanks has tangible benefits, research suggests. A 2008 study of 221 kids published in the Journal of School Psychology analyzed sixth- and seventh-graders assigned to list five things they were grateful for every day for two weeks. It found they had a better outlook on school and greater life satisfaction three weeks later, compared with kids assigned to list five hassles.

"The old adage that virtues are caught, not taught, applies here," says University of California, Davis psychology professor Robert Emmons. Parents need to model this behavior to build their children's gratitude muscle. "It's not what parents want to hear, but you cannot give your kids something that you yourselves do not have," Dr. Emmons says.

Everyday actions may be even more important than big efforts, researchers say. "Express gratitude to your spouse. Thank your kids," Hofstra's Dr. Froh says. "Parents say, 'Why should I thank them for doing something they should do, like clean their room?' By reinforcing this, kids will internalize the idea, and do it on their own."

Seder night is an incredible opportunity to model gratitude for our children, grandchildren and all gathered. During dayeinu, pause to be appreciative, not only to Hashem for what He has done for our people and for each of us. Be thankful to those who worked so hard to make Pesach happen. Someone or someones had to work hard to earn the money to pay for pesach. Someone had to shop, cook, clean, prepare, set up, clean up, etc. Don't just thank your spouse or your parents, but as the article says, thank your children for what they did to pitch in.

Dayeinu teaches that Pesach is not just a time to learn the attitude of gratitude and how to say thank you for the present. Pesach reminds us that to set ourselves free we need to look back at our lives and identify those who made all the difference and whom we neglected to thank. Pesach pushes us to make a tikkun, to repair the ingratitude and reach out to say thank you.

### **Who Packed Your Parachute?**

Charles Plumb, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a jet fighter pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a Communist prison. He survived that ordeal and one day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam and you were shot down!" "How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb. "I packed your parachute," the man replied, "I guess it worked!"

That night, Plumb couldn't sleep while thinking about that man. He kept wondering what this man might have looked like in a sailor uniform. He wondered how many times he might have passed him on the ship and never acknowledged him. How many times he never said hello, good morning or how are you. You see, Plumb was a fighter pilot, respected and revered, while this man was just a ordinary, lowly sailor. Now it grated on his conscious. Plumb thought of the many lonely hours the sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship carefully weaving the fabric together, making sure the parachute was just right and going to great lengths to make it as precise as can be, knowing that somebody's life depended on it. Only now, does Plumb have a full appreciation for what this anonymous man did and he now goes around the world as a motivational speaker asking people to recognize, who's packing your parachute.

I have a friend who set up a couple 20 years ago. He told me something incredible. Every single year on their anniversary, this couple not only get one another gifts but they get my friend, their shadchan, matchmaker, a gift as well. For their big anniversary they got him a big gift recognizing that the happiness they have together would never have happened without his bothering to set them up.

I know someone who received scholarships from the schools he attended growing up from elementary school through graduate school. When he became financially successful, the first thing he did was write a beautiful thank you note and make donations to each of the schools that helped give him a chance.

Have we thanked those who contributed to the lives we are blessed to live? Imagine if our kindergarten teacher got a note from us thanking her for nurturing us with love. Imagine if our high school principal, our childhood pediatrician, our housekeeper growing up who cleaned our room, out of the blue got a gesture of gratitude showing that we cared enough to track them down and say thank you after all of these years. Did we ever properly thank the teacher who was patient with us, the orthodontist who straightened out our teeth, the bus driver who drove us? Did we express enough appreciation to the person who set us up with our spouse, gave us our first job, safely delivered our children?

We all have family, friends, mentors and neighbors, whose efforts are responsible for who we are today. Freedom means knowing that we didn't get here on our own. This Pesach, let's sing our own personal dayeinu and repair our ingratitude by saying thank you to those who packed our parachutes.

# GOERING AND MY GRANDMOTHER

## Rabbi Leiby Burnham

My grandmother is one of the most fascinating people I know. Me'me, as we called her, fought in the French resistance, ran a DP camp in post-war Europe, was a professor in Columbia University and has traveled the world extensively.

My Me'me was living in Paris while it was under Nazi occupation. She was working with the French underground smuggling Jews out of the occupied zone of France into the free zone. She had been an emerging actress in pre-war Paris, and came from a family of well-heeled diplomats. A very attractive young lady, my grandmother was comfortable among the more glamorous echelons of society. She was "well appointed with the finest of accoutrements." Suspicion would be aroused if she were to suddenly start leading a more understated life, so she continued to shop at the finest boutiques in Paris while leading the secret life of a Jewish resistance fighter.

My grandmother was not going to let half a platoon of Nazis stop her from getting her Hermes gloves.

One day my grandmother excitedly set out to Hermes' flagship store in Paris to pick up a pair of gloves she had ordered. Much to her consternation, the entire street was blocked off by German military vehicles. My Me'me is not one to get thrown off a mission easily. She was not going to let half a platoon of Nazis stop her from getting her Hermes gloves. She also happened to know Paris like an accountant knows a calculator, so she simply went through a few back alleys and arrived at the back exit of Hermes, where the employees (in Hermes they are called personal shopping executives) would come in. She let herself into the store, and immediately discovered why the street was blocked off: Hermann Goering, the second most powerful Nazi and commander of the Luftwaffe, was shopping in Hermes. The whole store was filled with Nazi officers and bodyguards!

Cold fear coursed through her, as well as the repulsion of being in such close proximity to someone so intimately involved in the butchery of her people. But she quickly calculated that her best move would be to pretend like everything was normal and go about her business with no hint of fright or hatred. She walked up to the counter and asked for her gloves. The Hermes employees assumed she was an accompanying celebrity or official and assisted her expediently.

As she was exiting, she came to a narrow point in the store where only one person could walk through at a time. Right then, Goering was headed in the same direction. Who would go first? (They couldn't even possibly squeeze through together, because, as my Me'me told me, "Goering was a very fat man.") Goering, ever the effusive and charming gentleman, motioned for my grandmother to go first with a sweet, "Ladies First." She went through and left the store, and continued smuggling Jews out of the danger zone, now with a new pair of Hermes gloves.

"Never confuse culture with morality," my grandmother told me. "Did Goering have culture? Sure! He was of aristocratic heritage. He was a patron of the arts and attended opera, and he probably cried while listening to Wagner's beautiful compositions! And he most certainly always let the lady go first. But did he have morals? Not a shred! He was the highest official in the Nazi hierarchy to authorize on paper the Final Solution. Morality and culture have nothing to do with each other. Decency and morality come from a divine source, and no amount of culture can substitute for that."

We can see the same lesson in the first of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord, your God, who took you out of Egypt, the house of slavery." It sounds redundant; we know that Egypt is the house of slavery! Perhaps God is telling us, look at the Egyptians, the pinnacle of culture in the world. They have papyri, pyramids, incredible embalming technique, astrology, art, hieroglyphics, brain surgery, and achievements in every field imaginable, yet they are still the house of slavery, the place in which your male children were thrown into the Nile, your babies stuck in the wall as bricks if the parents didn't make enough bricks themselves. God is telling us that if we want to simply follow the prevailing dominant culture, then we may end up being the most cultured barbarians in the world.

Behind many great civilizations you will find incredible barbarism. The Greeks and Romans clubbed their children to death if they were born with any deformity or, sometimes, just for being born female. They would cheer gleefully as they watched thousands of people kill each other in "games" at the coliseums. The Germans were the most cultured people in the world with their composers, scientists, poets, and scholars leading the world in achievements, yet we saw what they were capable of in the Holocaust.

On Passover we celebrate the Jewish people's redemption from a place of mere culture to a world of morality. They left behind the pyramids, hieroglyphics, advanced agriculture, and music of the dominant culture, and went out to the desert to learn the ethical precepts of genuine humanity and civilization, from the only true source, the Creator of humanity.

On Passover our mission is to see ourselves as if we are leaving Egypt. We must walk in the very same footsteps as our ancestors did, turning away from the dominant culture, refusing to think that it is automatically right because that is "culture," and instead turn to the divine moral code of the Torah. This is how we discover real freedom and liberate our souls from the shackles of "cultural servitude."