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BREADWINNER

Meet the Arab Israeli Who Buys All of Israel's Hametz

By Luke Tress

**Hussein Jabar can afford a down payment for the nation's leavened goods every
Passover, but somehow never manages to scrape together the whole price**



**Hussein Jabar, a hotelier from Abu Ghosh who legally purchases all of
Israel's leavened goods each year for the duration of Passover. (Courtesy)**

Each year Israel is confronted with a problem ahead of Passover — what to do with the state's hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of leavened goods. Jews cannot possess the products, called *hametz*, during the festival according to Jewish law.

Enter Hussein Jabar.

On Thursday, the 57-year-old Arab Israeli hotelier from Abu Ghosh, outside Jerusalem, will meet with Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau and Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon to buy all of the *hametz*.

Jabar will make a down payment to the chief rabbinate, and will own the *hametz* for the duration of the holiday, until he is required to pay the full amount stipulated in the contract after Passover. If he fails to come up with the full amount, ownership will revert to the state, and he will get his down payment back.



Hussein Jabar, left, meets with Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef, finance minister Moshe Kahlon and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau. (Courtesy)

It is a legal fiction practiced the world over for centuries, allowing Jews to avoid having to destroy all of the *hametz* in their homes. Needless to say, in 20 years, Jabar has not managed to fulfill the contract.

“At 12 on Thursday I’m meeting the chief rabbinate. There is a contract saying what I need to pay for the advance. It’s NIS 50,000 (\$14,000), and by the end of Passover, according to the contract, I need to add \$300 million,” Jabar told The Times of Israel. “I buy it from the police, the army, every place in Israel.”

He receives the keys to relevant properties and a list detailing his vast acquisition, which includes the *hametz* of the state, state-owned companies, the prison service and the national emergency supply.

Despite his less-than-illustrious track record of fulfilling the payment, the work is deadly serious, he said.

“I’ll get the money,” he said. “Why would it be funny? We have a signed contract, it’s a serious challenge.”

Jabar, who works at the Ramada Hotel in Jerusalem when he is not exploiting legal loopholes with world-famous rabbis, took up this pursuit 20 years ago after it was discovered that his predecessor in the role had Jewish ancestry.



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (R) seen with Hussein Jabar (L), Chief Sephardi Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef (2L) and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau Jerusalem, during a ceremony to sell the hametz of the state of Israel before the upcoming Passover holiday. April 02, 2015. (photo credit: Haim Zach/GPO)

After two decades of cooperation, he has become friends with the rabbis, he said.

“They trust me, of course. If they didn’t trust me they wouldn’t do it for 20 years. All the state’s property is in my hands,” he said.

His family and neighbors do their best to help him with his fundraising.

“They actually see my role in a positive light. If I can help then why not? Why not cooperate?” Jabar said. “Family, friends, everyone tries to get the money together.

“We haven’t succeeded so far, but maybe one day, b’ezerat Hashem [G-d willing].”

Reprinted from the March 28, 2018 website of the Times of Israel.

Kosher Supermarkets Hate Cleaning for Passover As Much as You Do

By Ben Sales



An illustrative photo of a shopper at a grocery store picking up a box of matzah. (William Thomas Cain/Getty Images)

NEW YORK (JTA) — Pomegranate, a gourmet kosher supermarket in Brooklyn, spends \$75,000 every year getting its kitchen ready for Passover.

Hungarian Kosher Foods, a supermarket in Chicago, starts clearing its aisles for Passover eight weeks ahead of the holiday.

The week before Passover, at Zabar's, a Jewish favorite on Manhattan's Upper West Side, a staff of a dozen works for as long as 18 hours a day to pack a thousand food deliveries.

If you thought your Passover prep was hard, you've got nothing on the managers of Jewish supermarkets.

"We have no choice," said Isaac Bernstein, the culinary director of Pomegranate. "We have to do Passover. We don't lose money, it's just that a ton of work goes into it. If you look at the effort required and the return, no one would [do it]."

Passover, which comes with its own maze of dietary laws that prohibit even an iota of leavened food (including pasta, beer, bread and pastry), is a boon to kosher and otherwise Jewish grocery stores that specialize in adhering to the restrictions. But it's also a pain for the staffs of those stores, which need to clear out their entire stock and deep-clean machinery to prepare for a holiday that lasts only eight days.



Even so, managers say the work is worth it. Staying open for Passover is a service to the stores' often loyal local clientele. And for smaller kosher markets

that compete with local or national chains, being a reliable address for Passover is a way to raise awareness and attract customers the rest of the year.

“We service the community,” said Ira Kirsche, the owner of Hungarian in Chicago. “Even if it isn’t profitable, it pays throughout the year because people appreciate it, see what we’ve done and come back. ... Other people aren’t doing the extent we are, soup to nuts.”



Hungarian and Pomegranate, which are both fully kosher stores, described similarly arduous timelines to prepare for the holiday. Bernstein adds eight people to his staff of 30 each year for the process. They both have to clear out their shelves and cover them, which eliminates any trace of prohibited leaven. Then they have to arrange all of the kosher-for-Passover items and physically conceal any forbidden food because Jewish law prohibits even seeing leavened products in a kosher shop.

Kirsche estimates that 40 percent of his shelves are concealed over Passover. To move refrigerated goods, he sets up freezer trailers outside the store.

The fish and meat departments — and the kitchen — are even harder. Both stores have to dismantle some of their large-scale tools, like a meat slicer, to thoroughly clean and boil them in water for the holiday. Bernstein says that because Jewish law prohibits koshering some instruments, he has to purchase new ones for the holiday.

Four weeks ahead of time, Kirsche makes his kitchen kosher for Passover. That entails a thorough cleaning that takes two days, a 24-hour waiting period mandated by Jewish law and then dowsing all the surfaces in boiling water. In non-kosher stores, “all they have to do is switch out their kosher aisle — it’s just a lot easier,” Bernstein said. “But kosher markets, it keeps you up half the year. This is the service industry. This isn’t slavery. It’s really difficult. The tensions are high. All the employees are working crazy hours.”



It costs Pomegranate, a gourmet kosher supermarket in Brooklyn, \$75,000 every year to clean its kitchen for Passover. (Courtesy of Pomegranate)

At the Trader Joe’s supermarket chain, which stocks kosher items year-round alongside plenty of non-kosher goods, the process is indeed less involved. All Trader Joe’s markets have to do is buy kosher-for-Passover packaged food, place it in the kosher aisle, maybe put up a display and voila.

“Whether it’s any holiday or observance throughout the year, we just always try to make sure we have those products,” Friend-Daniel said. “Our level of preparation is what we do throughout the year and that’s, we put a lot of work into always trying to make sure we have the products on hand.”

Zabar's, which sells ethnically Jewish foods but is not fully kosher, also doesn't have the stresses of a kosher store. But because it's a popular destination for the neighborhood's many Jewish residents, Passover is still a challenging season. The store, for example, advertises a \$265 seder dinner for six — its website cautions the food is not certified kosher.

"We know how to make 500 briskets," said Scott Goldshine, Zabar's general manager. "It's just keeping the quality to the highest level we know, and trying not to [mess] up any orders."

And what happens to all of those unsold matzah boxes after the holiday? Stores were touchy about the question.

Some said they discount the leftover Passover goods and others donate them to charitable organizations. But a couple preferred not to talk about Passover leftovers. Whole Foods declined repeated requests for comment, and Seasons, a kosher supermarket in Manhattan, hung up on a reporter twice.

But Bernstein said leftovers aren't really a problem. Profit margins are especially thin on Passover, so Pomegranate looks at what it sold the previous year and buys accordingly. Bernstein said his biggest challenge is getting through the holiday, not dealing with what comes after.

"I just want the Messiah to come so there's no more Passover," he said. "I want it to end, and we can go back to being normal."

Reprinted from the March 27, 2018 website of the JTA (Jewish Telegraph Agency)

Grocer Burns Entire Stock After Forgetting To sell His Chametz

By Tzvi Lev

A Jerusalem grocer burned his entire stock after forgetting to sell his Chametz to a non-Jew before Passover, racking up enormous losses.

The custom of selling chametz allows Jews to fulfill the religious obligations of the holiday and not have chametz in their possession while at the same time not taking a critical financial loss. The sale contract stipulates that if the purchaser does not pay the balance by the end of Passover the ownership reverts back to the original owner, in a scenario that is agreed upon by both sides.

Gavriel, who owned the store in Jerusalem, said that he forgot to sell his Chametz due to the absence of his brother, who had been responsible for the sale

for many years. After consulting with his rabbi, he was told that he had no recourse other than to burn everything he owned.

"I worked almost continuously to clean until the holiday came clean and I did not have time to think about the extra task that I had this year. During the holiday, my Rabbi came to me and asked me why I did not come to sell chametz this year. Then I remembered that I had actually forgotten to sell the chametz," recounted Gavriel.



"We took out the Chametz and completely burned it. I was left with a loss of NIS 50,000 but Jewish law is Jewish law," he continued.

Gavriel told the *Kol Berama* radio that he hoped that his actions, which he called "a sanctification of G-d's name", would make up for his monumental financial loss. "This was a sanctification of G-d's name here and I hope that G-d will make up my loss from someplace else. I don't regret it," he said.

Reprinted from the April 8, 2018 email of Arutz Sheva

The Rebbe Does Not Make a Mistake

By Rabbi Sholom DovBer Avtzon

In honor of the upcoming birthday of my father-in-law, HaRav Moshe Pesach ben Chana Goldman l'arichus yomim v'shonim tovim, I am posting one of his favorite Pesach stories, a story he often relates at the seder.

Every chossid has his special day or Yom Tov which he spends with his Rebbe. With some it is Rosh Hashanah, when he can hear the Rebbe's *tekios* (blowing of the shofar), and with others it is Simchas Torah, when he can participate in the Rebbe's *hakafos*.

In Lubavitch, Shavuos was known as *Chag Hama"tzos*, as that was the Yom Tov for which Rabbonim (who are called *moreh tzedek*, the acronym of which is *ma"tzos*) would be able to come to Lubavitch.

The chossid of our story, whom we will call Shimon, would come to his Rebbe every year for Pesach. (Perhaps this was because as an innkeeper who ran a tavern, this was the only time of the year when he closed his doors, as all of his whiskey was *chometz*.)

In addition to participating generously in his community's *maos chittim* fund for the poor, he would take a sizeable amount of money to give to the Rebbe to distribute as he saw fit. He would begin cleaning his house early enough so that it would be ready for Pesach when he left. His married children would lead the *seder* for his family, and he would be in seventh heaven, spending Pesach with the Rebbe.

Every year, shortly after *Maariv* on the first night of Pesach, the *gabbai* would enter the *shul* and read a list of twenty visitors who were invited to participate as the Rebbe's guests at his *seder*. There were a number of people who were always among the honored individuals, and Shimon was one of them. Everyone knew that Shimon was one of the Rebbe's devoted chassidim who gave extremely generously to the Rebbe's causes.

On the second night of Pesach, another group of twenty people would be invited. Shimon would join the *seder* that had been arranged for all of the chassidim who had not been invited to the Rebbe's *seder*. Shimon would review for them the thoughts, insights, and stories that the Rebbe had related at the *seder* on the first night. In addition to being quite wealthy, Shimon was also a *talmid*

chochom and he had a wonderful way of explaining the Rebbe's teachings and insights.

After Pesach, he would take leave of his Rebbe, and at that time the Rebbe would bless him with longevity and continued success. He would come home invigorated and enriched in his appreciation of his Rebbe's greatness, and he would conduct his life accordingly.

One year, as soon as he arrived at the Rebbe's court as usual, he gave the *gabbai* an envelope containing his yearly generous participation in the Rebbe's *tzedakos* (charitable causes). He then went to his friend's house where he was given a room to use for the duration of his stay. He proceeded to help his hosts for Pesach as well, by giving them financial assistance as well as personally participating in preparing for Yom Tov.

The first night of Pesach arrived, and Shimon took a place next to the *bimah*, waiting for when he would hear the *gabbai* call out his name. After *Maariv*, as soon as the *gabbai* re-entered the *beis hamidrash* everyone became silent and waited with bated breath to hear who the Rebbe had invited this year. The *gabbai* ascended the *bimah* and began announcing the names, reading from the paper in his hand.

Each time a name was announced, the chossid's face shone with happiness. He had merited to be invited to the Rebbe's *seder*! Shimon was smiling from the beginning, expecting to hear his name as usual. However, as the *gabbai* reached the last few names on the list, he began feeling uneasy. Something was wrong here. There must have been a mistake. The Rebbe always invited him!

The *gabbai* concluded reading the names of the Rebbe's guests at his *seder*, and began to leave the *shul*. Shimon stopped him and asked if he had missed mentioning his name by mistake. "After all," Shimon added, "for the last fourteen years the Rebbe has always included me on his list!"

The *gabbai* opened the paper and looked at the names again. "No, the Rebbe did not include you on the list this year," he stated. Seeing the look of disbelief written all over Shimon's face, he allowed Shimon himself to look at the paper, which the Rebbe had personally written. To his surprise, he saw that his name indeed did not appear on the list.

Shimon couldn't believe it. "It must be a mistake!" he blurted out.

Before he could continue, the *gabbai* replied: "The Rebbe doesn't make a mistake. If your name is not on the list, it is because the Rebbe wants you to eat today's *seder* with all of the other guests who also were not invited."

"Perhaps the Rebbe doesn't know that I am here," Shimon said. "Did you give the Rebbe my envelope and letter?"

"Yes, Reb Shimon," replied the *gabbai*. "The Rebbe knows you are here. I gave him your envelope and letter and I saw him read it. He certainly knows you arrived. But as I said before, the Rebbe doesn't make a mistake. If he didn't put you on the list, he has a reason for it. The Rebbe knows what he is doing!"

Hearing those words, Shimon was confused. What the *gabbai* had said was indeed true. He himself would often say those very words to others. The Rebbe is a *malach elokim*, a G-dly man, and doesn't make mistakes; all of his actions are correct and precise. But it just didn't feel right. Why had the Rebbe excluded him from his *seder* this year?!

He joined the numerous other chassidim at their *seder*, but he did not join them in their joy. They were rejoicing that they had merited to spend this special Yom Tov with the Rebbe, but Shimon was perturbed, lost in thought: "Why wasn't I invited this year? Did I perhaps do something wrong? How can I rectify it?"

After some time, he concluded: "Perhaps the Rebbe plans to invite me to the second *seder* tomorrow night. Perhaps the Rebbe does certain things on the second night differently than on the first night, and he wants to give me a chance to experience those unique moments."

Convincing himself that this indeed was the reason and confident that he would be invited for the second *seder*, Shimon forced himself to smile and participate in the singing and joy. Yes, it would be good.

The next day he made sure to stand where the Rebbe would notice him when the Rebbe entered the *shul* to daven. That way, just in case he wasn't on the written list, maybe the Rebbe would verbally instruct the *gabbai* to invite him as well.

Once again, after *Maariv* Shimon stood next to the *bimah*, except that this time he was apprehensive. Would his name be called out or not? He tried to make eye contact with the *gabbai* to receive some assurance, but to no avail. The *gabbai* began reading the list, and once again he was not included.

Shimon was dumbfounded and aghast. Something was definitely wrong. Once again, he went to the *gabbai* and asked, this time in a subdued tone: "Are you sure I am not on the list?"

The *gabbai* showed the second list to Shimon, and his world turned dark. Indeed, his name was not on the list! Unable to control his anguish, he once again blurted out: "This must be a mistake!"

The *gabbai* saw Shimon's disappointment and grief. Trying to console him, he replied: "Reb Shimon, you know how great our Rebbe is. The Rebbe doesn't make a mistake. There must be a good reason why you weren't invited this year. But who are we to understand the Rebbe? The Rebbe sees things that we don't. Reb Shimon, have a *freilichen* Yom Tov."

To Shimon, it was more like Tisha B'av and the deep reflections of Yom Kippur, than Pesach. He concluded that the Rebbe must have seen a *gezeirah* (heavenly decree) against him, and therefore he didn't invite him. "It must be," he thought, "that the *gezeirah* is so severe that the Rebbe can't nullify it with his tremendous *tefillos*. I am doomed. I must do *teshuvah* (repent)! Maybe Hashem will accept my *teshuvah*."

The other chassidim saved his regular place for him at one of the main tables, where this year he would be able hear from the lucky individuals what had transpired last night at the Rebbe's *seider*. They were hoping that Reb Shimon would elucidate the Rebbe's teachings, as he has done in the previous years. However, Shimon wasn't in the mood of doing so. He sat at a table in the corner of the room, immersed in his painful thoughts. He tried to recall any incident that may have caused this *gezeirah* to befall him. What terrible thing had he done? Gone was any façade of happiness and joy of Yom Tov. Instead, it was replaced with noticeable apprehension and despair of some impending tragedy.

While the chassidim were in the midst of reading and discussing the *haggadah*, the *gabbai* suddenly entered. "Where is Shimon?" he asked frantically. "The Rebbe is calling for him!"

Shimon was so depressed and lost in thought that he didn't hear the *gabbai's* words, until many of the chassidim began saying loudly: "Reb Shimon, the Rebbe is waiting for you!"

Hearing this, Shimon began to smile. "This must mean that the Rebbe noticed I am not at his *seider*," he thought, "and he realizes that I should be there. That is why the Rebbe sent his *gabbai* to call me!" He got up from his place, and, with happiness in his heart, he swiftly followed the *gabbai*.

As soon as Shimon entered the room, the Rebbe motioned that he should come over to him. When he came close to the Rebbe, the Rebbe handed Shimon an empty bottle and asked him to hold it. Then, to his shock and horror, the Rebbe began to pour the wine of the *eser makkos* (ten plagues) into it. When he concluded, the Rebbe took the cap and secured the bottle tightly, saying: "Shimon, keep this with you and safeguard it. You may now return to your *seider*. *Gut Yom Tov!*"

If Shimon was sad and depressed before this, now he was heartbroken and devastated. He thought: "The Rebbe is giving me all of the curses associated with the wine that is poured out from the *becher* (cup) while mentioning each of the ten plagues. This must mean that there is a real and terrible *gezeirah* against me!" Returning to his place, he mustered all of his strength to control himself from breaking out in tears on Yom Tov.

After Yom Tov, the Rebbe blessed him with a safe trip and wished him that all should be well. But Shimon was far from relaxed. He felt as if his world was collapsing and that he needed to do *teshuvah*. However, he resolved to conceal his anxiety from his family as much as possible.

When he returned home, he repeated to his family and fellow chassidim a few insights and teachings he had overheard or that he remembered from previous years, but he didn't inform anyone that he hadn't been invited to participate in the Rebbe's *seider*. They all assumed that he had joined in the Rebbe's *seider* as usual.

When he informed the older members of his family that he was planning to remain in *shul* every morning for one hour after *Shacharis*, they thought this was an

instruction he had received from the Rebbe. No one realized that it was part of his self-imposed *teshuvah* regimen.

Shimon then proceeded to focus on the Rebbe's directive to keep the bottle with him and safeguard it. He realized that in order to fulfill this instruction properly, he would need to put the bottle in a place where he alone could access it, but was still considered "with him." It was an unsealed bottle, so if it would be left out in the open, one of his family workers might think that it was useable, and he didn't want to tell anyone that this wine was from the Rebbe's *eser makkos*.

After giving the matter some thought, he decided to put the bottle on the top shelf in his tavern, where the more expensive bottles were kept behind doors. Moreover, he decided to place it in a small compartment on that shelf which had its own door, and to place a small lock on the door so that no one would take it by mistake.

The next few weeks and months passed by uneventfully. Nevertheless, Shimon intensified his *teshuvah*, fearing that something harmful would happen to him or to a member of his family.

One very hot summer day, Shimon sat in his tavern, waiting for a customer to come in. Seeing that no one was coming, Shimon began saying *Tehillim*. He had almost concluded the entire *sefer* when three men entered the room.

Shimon took out his regular bottle to serve them, but one of the men said, "We would appreciate wine or whiskey of higher quality." Pulling out a ten-ruble note (which was five times the price of a regular drink), he said, "Please bring us something better."

Shimon was happy to hear this. These three customers might be his only visitors this hot day, but if they would take just a few more drinks, he might earn more from them than what he would usually earn from his regular customers! After sipping from their cups, they called him back and said: "That was good, but we want to enjoy something even better. Here is a twenty-ruble note."

Shimon proceeded to take out a bottle from a higher shelf. After tasting it and paying him for it, they said: "Now please give us your best wine. Don't worry about the cost; we have plenty of money." To prove their point, one of them took a thick wad of bills out of his pocket.

Now Shimon was thrilled. This would indeed be a profitable day! He took a step stool and chose a bottle from among those on the top shelf. As he was pouring from it into their cups, two of the men suddenly stood up and grabbed him. Holding him tightly, they warned him not to scream or he would regret it. They then instructed him to sit down, took out a rope from their bag, and tied him up. Next, they stuffed his mouth with a napkin so he wouldn't be able to scream.

The bandits went behind the counter, and, after emptying the cash register, they began eyeing the bottles on the higher shelves. They then noticed that one of the

shelves had a lock on it. Thinking that a very expensive bottle must be behind that door, they broke the lock and removed the bottle.

They sat down next to him and began taunting him. “Aahh, this must be good stuff. Look, only one third of the bottle is left. You must have been saving it for a special occasion. Haha! Are we going to enjoy it!”

One of them brought three clean cups and divided the wine equally among them. Glancing at Shimon, they saw a look of horror on his face. However, they took that as a sign of his anguish over his tremendous loss, proving to them that they had indeed discovered a truly special bottle of wine.

Adding insult to injury, one of them placed his cup next to Shimon’s nostrils and said: “We are good guys. We will share the wine with you. Here, take a whiff!” Shimon recoiled in fear and tried to speak, but his voice was muffled by the napkin in his mouth. After clicking their glasses together, they began to sip the wine, hoping to prolong their savoring of every drop.

As soon as they took their first sip, drowsiness overtook them and they fell into a deep slumber, dropping to the floor. Seeing that they were out cold, Shimon began wiggling around, trying to loosen the rope tied around his body. After a few minutes he succeeded in pushing out the napkin from his mouth and began shouting for help. A few moments passed, and a passerby heard his screams and entered the tavern. He immediately untied Shimon, and together they took the rope along with additional rope and tied up the three men securely. Then, the passerby rushed out to call the local police.

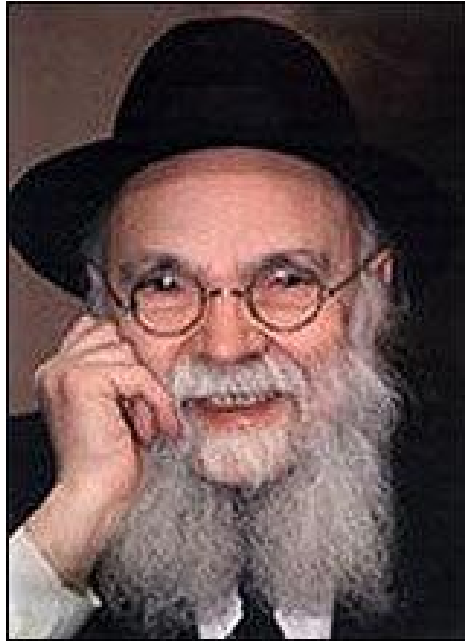
As soon as the officers saw the bandits, they declared: “These men have been terrorizing the area for some time. There is a large reward being offered for any information that leads to their capture, and you will receive it. But please tell us: How did you manage to catch them by yourself, and why are they in such a deep sleep?”

By then his entire family was informed of the close call and converged upon the inn, asking him how he was feeling.

Shimon related to them the entire story of what had transpired the past Pesach, and then added: “Yes, the Rebbe never makes a mistake. The Rebbe saw that I would be in danger and gave me this wine to save me. Perhaps he also saw that I needed to do *teshuvah* in order to merit to be saved, and therefore he didn’t invite me this year to his *seder*. How great is the Rebbe’s vision!”

Reprinted from the Pesach 5779 email of Rabbi Avtzon’s Weekly Story. Rabbi Avtzon is a veteran mechanech and the author of numerous books on the Rebbeim and their chassidim. He is available to speak or farbreng in your community and can be contacted at avtzonbooks@gmail.com

Rav Avrohom Pam And the Matzah Bakery



Before Pesach each year, Rav [Avrohom] Pam, zt”l, would bake Matzos for the Seder with a distinguished group of Talmidim. One year, a new Matzah bakery opened which used a number of Hidurim and Halachic stringencies in the baking process, and some of the students thought that it would be an excellent idea to use the new bakery for their Matzos.

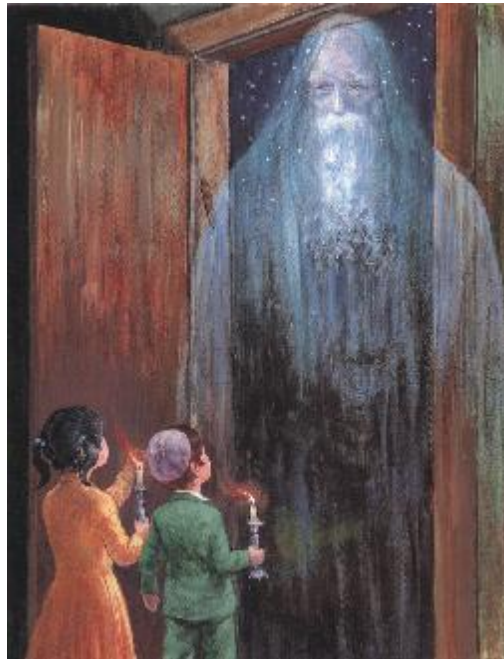
When they presented their suggestion to Rav Pam, he said, “Just as there is a Mitzvah to be strict and have Hidurim in the Matzos we bake, it is also a Mitzvah to have Hidurim in helping another Jew to earn a livelihood.”

The students understood that if they switch bakeries, the regular bakery that they have always used would lose their business, and Rav Pam was not willing to do this. Therefore, the idea was dropped and they remained with their original bakery!

Reprinted from the Parshas Tzav 5778 email of Torah U'Tefilah: A Collection of Inspiring Insights compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.

The Three Visits of Elijah the Prophet

By Yaakov Brawer



"Eliyahu Hanavi" - by Zalman Kleinman

Twenty eight years ago, I attended a farbrengen(Chassidic gathering) in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn and set eyes on the Rebbe for the first time. The year that followed was truly a year of miracles, not the least of which was a visit by Elijah the Prophet.

On the first night of Passover my family and I, suffused with the wonder of our newly discovered Chassidism and aflame with inspiration, were seated around the seder table. I had never before experienced a seder with such spiritual delight and longing for redemption.

At the conclusion of the meal, the cup of Elijah was filled and my six year old son, candle in hand, was sent to open the front door, an old fashioned, ponderous wooden structure that was secured with a heavy iron latch. The door could be seen clearly from where I sat.

However, before my son could take a step, the door unlatched and swung wide open. No one, or at least no one visible, was there. My son dropped the

candle and ran to his mother. I hesitantly got up and went to the open doorway. The night was clear and there was not so much as a breeze.

With us that Passover was my parents' housekeeper, a simple, devout, G-d fearing Catholic woman. She had come to us a few days before and stayed on to help with the children. During the seder, she stayed in her room, which was at the top of the stairs on the second floor. When she came down the next morning, she told us that during the night, she had heard the front door open and that she was suddenly and inexplicably overcome by an intense, awesome feeling of fear.

My second encounter with Elijah occurred on the following Passover. In the interim, we had moved from Boston to Montreal. As Passover approached and we immersed ourselves in the seemingly endless scrubbing, kashering, buying, and cooking, the exertion was sweetened by anticipations of the seder. Moreover, in light of the experience of the past year, it was not unreasonable to hope that Elijah would visit us, once again, in person.

The night of Passover arrived and the seder was conducted with joy and expectation. In due course, the cup of Elijah was filled and I sent my (now) seven year old and his four year old brother to open the front door. Our home in Montreal occupied the second story of a duplex, so that the front door was downstairs. I heard the children open the door, and then I heard screams of terror and the sound of their feet scrambling up the steps.

They burst into the dining room, faces white with fear, and they babbled and clung to me as if their very lives were threatened. Although their agitated jabbering was totally unintelligible, I wondered whether Elijah had not appeared this time in visible form. After all, it all made a great deal of sense.

When Elijah had arrived last year, I was not yet worthy to behold his presence. Now, however, after a whole year of studying Tanya, and donning the additional "Rabeinu Tam" tefillin as per Chassidic custom, and after having been to the Rebbe a half a dozen times—perhaps I had reached the state of personal perfection necessary for a full revelation of Elijah.

I disengaged myself from my hysterical offspring and went downstairs to greet the prophet. What I encountered, however, was something else. There, at the entrance, was not the angelic figure of Elijah, but two massive dogs sitting on the front porch. I now understood the children's delirium. My kids would cross the street if they saw a miniature poodle leashed to its owner two blocks away.

At a distance of one block they would begin to tremble and whimper. These two dogs were truly grotesque. They looked like those prehistoric carnivores whose fossilized remains populate the LaBrea tar pits. They placidly sat on my porch contemplating me with mild curiosity. I could not imagine what they were doing there.

I closed the door and dejectedly climbed the stairs. How was I to explain to my family that after six trips to the Rebbe, a year of learning Tanya, and putting on Rabbeinu Tam's tefillin in addition to the regular, requisite pair, I was worthy to be visited on Passover night by a couple of dogs? As it turned out, however, they weren't ordinary dogs.

On the following morning in shul, I was approached by one of the Yeshivah administrators who asked if I could take a guest for the midday meal. One of the supporters of the Yeshivah had a son who was studying law at an American school, and while there, he had become attracted to Torah learning and Jewish observance. He was now home, visiting his parents for Passover, and this administrator thought it would be a good idea if I spoke with him. I readily agreed.

We were introduced, and following the morning prayers, my children, my guest and I set out for home. As we reached my house, my guest became excited and exclaimed "I don't believe it! This can't be real".

I asked him what the excitement was about. My guest told me that he had come to Montreal the day before Passover. With him, were his two pet dogs. Just before the seder at his parents' home, the dogs escaped and ran out into the street. By the time their absence was noticed, they were nowhere to be seen, and my guest took to the streets to search for them. Hours later, he found them, very far from home, in a strange neighborhood, sitting on someone's front porch. That someone was me.

Providence had guided those monsters, his "pets", to my house. The experience left a deep impression on all of us and I felt particularly uplifted. If Elijah did not exactly come in person, at least he sent his dogs.

My guest and I became friends and in time, he embraced Torah completely, married, and raised a wonderful Chassidic family.

The third visit, which occurred the following year and has been repeated ever since, is somewhat less dramatic. Following grace after the meal, the cup of Elijah is filled, and my grandchildren go to the door, candles in hand. The door is opened, the appropriate verses are recited and that's it. Although it would be improper and incorrect to refer to it as a "no show", it is a very low key visit.

In truth, intuition notwithstanding, this third visit is the most momentous of all, but one must know how to appreciate it. Last year, while spending Passover with my eldest son (the six- and seven-year old in the above accounts) he related a story about the Rebbe of Kotsk that puts this third visit in proper focus.

One year the Kotsker Rebbe promised his Chassidim that Elijah the Prophet would be revealed at his seder. On the first night of Passover, the Rebbe's dining room was crammed with Chassidim. The air was electric with anticipation and excitement. The seder progressed, the cup of Elijah was filled and the door opened.

What happened next, left the Chassidim speechless. Nothing. Nothing happened. There was no one there.

The Chassidim were crushed. After all, the Rebbe had promised them a revelation of Elijah. The Kotsker, his face radiating holy joy, perceived their bitter disappointment and inquired as to what was the problem. They told him. "Fools!" he thundered. "Do you think that Elijah the Prophet comes in through the door? Elijah comes in through the heart."

The true light of redemption comes from within. Miracles provide inspiration and cause us to direct our attention and efforts to spiritual truths. The ultimate miracle, however, is not the abrogation of nature, but the transformation of the natural into the G-dly.

Although the redemption from Egypt came from "without"--it was orchestrated and produced entirely by the Almighty, our Sages tell us the future and ultimate redemption will be the product of our own effort. Indeed, the whole point of liberating us from Egypt was to provide us with the opportunity to refine ourselves and the world around us to the extent that Divine Will which is the hidden source and root of all of existence becomes openly manifest.

This is what we achieve when we struggle to overcome the ego-centric inertia of worldly life. Every small, private, inner step on the path to spirituality and goodness is a step toward the Redemption. The Torah-study, good deeds, and character refinement with which we occupy themselves all year open the door of the heart to Elijah the Prophet and all that he represents.

When the cup of Elijah is filled this Passover and the front door is opened, don't concentrate on the doorway. If you peek into your heart, there's a very good chance that you will behold the holy prophet smiling back at you.

*Reprinted from Pesach 5778/Passover 2018 website of Chabad.Org Dr. Yaakov Brawer is Professor Emeritus of the Faculty of Medicine at McGill University. He is the author of two books of Chassidic philosophy, **Something From Nothing** and **Eyes That See***

How a Teshuvah HaRashba Foiled 13 Terrorists

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman



Yes, it is true. Six Hamas terrorist were killed and 7 were foiled because of the Teshuvah HaRashba (Volume 7 #20).

It happened almost four years ago, in Kibbutz Sufa at 4:00 AM Thursday morning on July 17th, 2014.

Kibbutz Sufa was founded in 1982 by evacuated settlers. It is on the border of Central Gaza very near the Egyptian border. It was shortly after 4:00 AM that the Teshuvah haRashba did the deed.

THE VERY BEGINNING

The story actually begins well over 3300 years ago. The Jews are taken out of Egypt. To commemorate the miraculous occurrence that has happened and to imbue the Jewish nation with an ever-constant source of nourishment of faith itself – the Jewish people are given the Mitzvah of consuming Matzah.

We fast forward 1600 years.

THE PASSAGE IN THE TALMUD

We are now in Babylonia, as the Talmud is being written. Torah scholars are discussing a difficult topic. There is a fascinating exposition that the Talmud presents (Psachim 33a) in regard to the obligation to give a Kohain the gift of Trumah. The verse in the Torah states, “Venasata lo and you shall give it to him.” The Talmud expounds – “Lo velo l’uro – to him, but not to his flame.”

In other words, the Terumah that is given to the Kohain must, at the outset, be completely edible, it cannot be something that is prohibited in consumption – to the degree that the Kohain would be obligated to burn it as soon as it reaches his hands.

The Talmud is searching for an illustration of such a thing. The Talmud is looking for an example where this exposition might apply. Finally, an answer – wheat that is still attached to the ground which became Chometz. This is the first section of our tale, which took place in Babylonia in the late 300’s.

The observant reader may now be thinking: Wait – just one second. Wheat still attached to the ground that became Chometz? Wheat that got wet? Every plant gets wet! That’s how they receive nutrition! What is the Talmud talking about? A question that requires an answer.

Now we move on to the next part of our tale.

BARCELONA SPAIN

We are now in Barcelona, Spain. It is the late 1200’s. We are at the home of the well-regarded Rashba, Rabbi Shlomo Ben Aderet. Indeed, the Rashba is so well regarded that even Queen Isabella of Spain has sent him to rule upon some of her country’s most perplexing cases.

The Rashba receives a letter concerning our section of Talmud. It is the very same question that the observant reader had above. It is now posed for the first time to the Rashba. He responds (Volume 7 #20) with the following explanation:

“That section of the Talmud refers to wheat that became completely ripened while still attached to the ground, and it does not need any further nutrients at all. Everything that has dried out completely while still attached to the ground – it is considered as if it is resting in the pitcher – and thus susceptible to becoming Chometz if rain falls upon it.”

TZFAT, ISRAEL

It is now 1563. We are in Tzfas, in Eretz Yisroel. The author of the Shulchan Aruch has just codified the Rashba's explanation of our Talmudic passage into his Shulchan Aruch (Chapter 467:5). Wheat that has completely ripened can become Chometz if it is rained upon. If it still requires sustenance from the ground to reach full develop – then there is no problem.

RADIN, POLAND

We move to Radin, Poland. It is now the late 1890's.

The Chofetz Chaim, in his Mishna Brurah explains, what apparently has been the custom for Jews in Europe for some time. He states that Shulchan Aruch only refers to an abundance of rain. However, if it rains a little bit – then the fully developed wheat is fine and can be used for the highest standard of Matzah.

However, he does mention a tradition cited by Rabbi Adam Danziger in the Chayei Adam that the custom of the very pious is to cut the wheat earlier, while it is still somewhat green in order to ensure that there are no problems. The concern, of course, is the issue first mentioned in the Rashba.

The Chofetz Chaim mentions this custom of cutting the wheat early twice in his Mishna Brurah. Once regarding this topic and once earlier in a discussion (SA 453:4) about whether the wheat has to be guarded when it is cut or when it undergoes the grinding process. In his Biur Halacha, the Chofetz Chaim cites the practice of the Vilna Gaon who was careful only to eat Matzah that was watched from when it was cut. This too, the Chofetz Chaim points out, is because of the Rashba's position.

GAZA, HAMAS HEADQUARTERS

It is now either 2013 or early 2014. Hamas leaders plan a devastating attack on Israeli citizens. They will send terrorists through a tunnel. They will tunnel across the border and emerge in a completely camouflaged, carefully chosen, wheat field. The thirteen terrorists will have several types of weapons, including AK 45 Assault Rifles and Rocket-Propelled Grenade Launchers.

The plan is perfect. The wheat is high enough to serve as camouflage but not yet ripe enough to be harvested. Who would harvest green wheat in July? The plan to kill Israelis is more than perfect. It is brilliant.

BNEI BRAK, ISRAEL

It is now 2014. A group of Matzah bakers in Bnei Brak are in serious need of some green wheat still on the ground in order to fulfill the requirements of the responsum of the Rashba. They search almost all of Eretz Yisroel. Finally, they

come across a wheat field located in the Hevel Shalom area of the north-western Negev desert. It was an area administered by the Eshkol Regional Council.

Time is of the essence. They cut a deal with the farmer and arrange for the wheat to be reaped immediately. They compensate the farmers nicely for the wheat. It is mid-July.

KIBBUTZ SUFA

As planned, 13 terrorists emerge from the tunnel. But wait. Lo and behold, the wheat field is bare. It is completely bare! The terrorists think: “Who moved our wheat stalks?! And wait. Oh no! An IDF watch station spotted us! Arghh! Bombs! They are bombing us! Let’s crawl back into our hole in the ground! Arghh! Six of us are hit! Let’s abandon them! Let’s go back to Gaza!”

Were it not for the Teshuvah HaRashba, the wheat field would never have been *plowed*. *The Teshuvah HaRashba saves the day.*

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Weekly Chasidic Story #1059

Meeting the Rebbe from Paris, Israel and Lakewood, NJ

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

"I could not appreciate my father's intensity at the Seder until he disclosed the story of my birth."

Connections (2): Seasonal -- PESACH!; and Nissan 11 is the 116th anniversary of the birthday of **the Lubavitcher Rebbe**.

*[The narrator requested to remain anonymous.
All interjections in square brackets are mine. -y.t.]*



The Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l

I was born in Paris after World War II, about forty-five years ago. I remained an only son as my parents were already middle-aged. Even when I was young, I sensed that my parents were withholding some secret about my birth.

I became engaged at the age of twenty-four. A short while before my wedding, my father, may he rest in peace, disclosed the story. I can still see him, as he sat close to me, with tears coming to his eyes when he lifted the veil of confidence from his long-kept secret.

My parents were among the lucky Polish Jews who escaped to Russia during World War II. They joined bands of homeless refugees who wandered from place to place until they arrived in the city of Tashkent in the Carpathian Mountains. Tashkent was a temporary haven for refugees, including many Lubavitcher chasidim.

My father always spoke highly of the Lubavitchers whom he had met in Tashkent. Self-sacrifice was their way of life. They offered assistance and support beyond their means. Their prayers reflected a deep commitment to Judaism. But most outstanding was their intense struggle to educate the young, despite their hardships during these difficult years.

My father was already nearly fifty years old, and my mother was about forty, when the war ended. They wanted to establish a home. Fortunately, being Polish citizens, they were able to leave Russia. They mingled with the migrating masses who were crossing Europe, and eventually made their home in Paris. They were grateful for having survived, but they faced the pain of childlessness after twenty years of marriage.

In those days, Paris was a melting pot of refugees, and my parents were delighted to come across former acquaintances. Among there were some Lubavitcher chassidim whom they had befriended in Tashkent.

One day, shortly after my parents arrived in Paris, my father met a beaming Lubavitcher chassid, who exclaimed. "We've merited an important guest in town. Rabbi Schneerson the son-in-law of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, has arrived in Paris. He came to welcome his mother, Rebbetzin Chanah Schneerson, who just left Russia."

On several occasions, my father met Rabbi Schneerson in the shul at the Pletzel in Paris and talked with him. My father was a learned scholar, and he cherished these talks with Rabbi Schneerson. During one of those conversations, Rabbi Schneerson inquired about my father's experiences during the war. When he touched upon the topic of family, my father tearfully explained that he did not have children.

With compassion in eyes, Rabbi Schneerson [who was childless almost as long,] gripped my father's hand warmly, and blessed him, "May G-d enable you to fulfill the mitzvah of Vehigadeta levincha ('Tell [about the Exodus at the Seder] to your children...') next year."

The following year, when Pesach arrived, I was already two months old.

Two more years passed, and my parents emigrated from Europe to Israel. From the time I can remember, the Seder has always been an emotional experience for my father. He always expounded upon avadim hayinu [the "telling" section of the Passover Hagaddah] patiently and extensively, and with much love and joy.

I could not appreciate my father's intensity at the Seder until he disclosed the story of my birth."

And that's not all. Three years ago, my daughter married a yeshiva student from Lakewood, New Jersey. She was due to give birth the following Pesach. We had planned a family trip to the States to spend the holiday together, and celebrate the arrival of our grandchild. My wife arrived a month earlier to assist my daughter, while my younger children and I arrived in New Jersey a week before Pesach.

"At that time I told my son-in-law, 'I would like to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe and have my younger son receive his blessing.'

"My son-in-law was less enthusiastic. His home community did not have many followers of the Rebbe and he felt no need to make the two-hour journey. I, however, was not to be dissuaded.

When my son-in-law saw that I was intent on going, he told me about the opportunity to meet briefly with the Rebbe on Sunday morning, when the Rebbe distributes dollars to be given to charity. I readily agreed, and my son-in-law arranged a ride to Brooklyn for me and my young son.

"We neared '770', where we were amazed to see a winding, block-long line of people waiting to see the Rebbe. During those hours in which we waited our turn, I told the miraculous story of my birth to my son.

"He was very moved to hear the story, 'I was surprised that you were so determined to come here, he said, 'and I did not know why you were willing to wait so long. Time has always been very precious to you. Now I understand.'

"Finally, after hours of slowly inching forward, we reached a point from where we could see the distinguished and impressive appearance of the Rebbe. There was a tangible spirit of divinity in the air. I was amazed at the thousands of people who passed by. He blessed each one and handed out tzedakah [a dollar for (charity)] personally.

Though the line of people passed quickly, I could see that some of them said something to the Rebbe and that he responded. I hadn't planned to say anything. I just wanted to see and approach the Rebbe once. "Maybe because it was my personal need to thank him for the blessing that he gave my parents, which culminated in my birth," I thought to myself.

Our turn arrived more quickly than I had anticipated. The Rebbe gave my son, who was standing before me, a dollar. Brochah v'hatzlacha ("blessings and

success"), the Rebbe said. Then, without pause, he asked him in Yiddish, "Are you ready to ask the Four Questions?"

My son was caught by surprise, not having expected the Rebbe to address him. Sensing his surprise, the attendant explained the question.

My son regained his composure and responded, "Yes."

The Rebbe smiled and handed him another dollar. "This is for the Four Questions" he said.

As I approached the Rebbe, he handed me a dollar saying, "Brochah v'hatzlacha." Then, he handed me a second dollar, "for the answer to the Four Questions." Whereupon he gave me a deeply penetrating look, and with a tremendous smile he added: "and for Vehigadeta levincha."

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**Source:** Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from "*To Know and to Care*" Volume 1, by Eliyahu and Malka **Touger**.

**Connection:** Seasonal--the 116th anniversary of the birth of the Lubavitcher Rebbe  
*Biographical* *note:*

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, zt"l [11 Nissan 5662 - 3 Tammuz 5754 (April 1902 - June 1994 C.E.)], became the seventh Rebbe of the Chabad dynasty after his father-in-law's passing on 10 Shvat 5710 (1950 C.E.). He is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Jewish leaders of the second half of the 20th century. Although a dominant scholar in both the revealed and hidden aspects of Torah and fluent in many languages and scientific subjects, the Rebbe is best known for his extraordinary love and concern for every Jew on the planet. His emissaries around the globe dedicated to strengthening Judaism number in the thousands. Hundreds of volumes of his teachings have been printed, as well as dozens of English renditions.

*Reprinted from the Pesach 5778 website of Ascentofsafed.com*

# How Much is a Matzoh Worth?

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz -



How many advertisements have you seen that claim to “make your *Pesach* easier this year”? How often have you heard people complaining about the price of *matzoh*?

Every time I hear or see such *kvetching*, I’d like to remind the person, who likely doesn’t know any better, that it wasn’t too long ago that Jews paid for *matzoh* with their lives or blood, and how thankful we should be that we live in a time when Jews are free to hold a *Seder*, drink wine, and eat as much *matzoh* as they want.

Rather than complaining, we should be thankful. Instead of seeing *Yom Tov* as a difficult period, we should be thankful for the opportunity to have a break from the mundane and live on a higher plane, becoming closer to Hashem, raising our levels of *kedusha*, and living – at least for a few days – on a more sanctified level.

Not wanting to sound sanctimonious, I usually don’t respond when such comments are offered. I know that whatever I say will sound trite and I will be accused of being uncompassionate.

The next time someone complains about the expenses and “difficulties” of *Yom Tov*, think of this story related by Rav Yaakov Galinsky as told to him by Rav Yitzchok Shlomo Ungar, who served as *rov* of K’hal Chug Chasam Sofer in Bnei Brak.

Hungarian Jewry was virtually the last to fall into the evil grip of the Nazis. During the last year of World War II, as the German army faced multiple defeats



on the battlegrounds of Europe, they tightened their vice on Hungary. One million Hungarian Jews were herded into ghettos. Two months later, they were shipped off to death camps to be annihilated.

The protagonist of this story was one of those Jews. He arrived at the camp with his wife and children. They were sent straight to the gas chambers, while he was declared fit for work, tattooed with a number, and granted life. His bunkmate was a *rebbishe ainikel* who used every available moment to learn Torah. He would constantly offer *chizuk* to our friend and others in the block.

One day, the bunkmate whispered to him that *Pesach* was coming. There was no shortage of *marror*, he said, but he wondered how they would be able to observe the *mitzvah* of eating a *kezayis* of *matzoh*.

Our friend discovered where wheat was stored for the camp. Anybody caught taking anything faced being shot dead on the spot, but the *rebbishe kind* told our friend that he should be prepared to risk his life for the *mitzvah*. He began gathering a few wheat kernels at a time and hiding them until he had enough to make flour for two *kezaisim* of *matzoh*. One day, he found two stones and used them to grind the kernels into flour. He heated a piece of metal, added water to the flour, and baked the mixture on the white-hot piece of metal.

He produced a fist-sized *matzoh*, thick enough for two *kezeisim*, one for him and one for his friend. He hid the prize under his shirt and held his arm close to his body to keep the *matzoh* from falling. If he'd get caught, he'd be dead in an instant. He got past one check, but at the entrance to his block stood a Nazi, who saw that one arm was held stiffly. He pulled the arm of the hapless man and the treasure fell to the floor.

The accursed Nazi beat the man until he fainted and fell to the floor atop his *matzoh*. The Nazi continued stomping on him until he found another Jew to torture. The man came to, gathered as many of the crumbs and pieces of the *matzoh* as he could, and dragged himself to his cot, where he fainted again. His friend found him there and waited for him to awaken. When he did, with a wide smile upon his beaten face, he told his friend what had happened. He then opened his hand to reveal his treasure, a *kezayis* of *matzoh*.

And that was when the dispute broke out.

His friend begged, "Please, let me have the *matzoh*. I never missed having *matzoh* at the *Seder*."

He answered, "No way. It's my *matzoh*. I almost gave my life for it. I was beaten to a pulp and fainted a couple of times. I'm not giving it up."

And so it went, back and forth, in that awful bunk of the death camp.

"Please. I will recite for you the whole *Haggadah* from memory, and also the entire *Shir Hashirim*. You can repeat after me word by word. Just let me have the *matzoh*."

“No.”

“I’ll give you my whole *Olam Haba* for that *kezayis*. I lost my wife. I lost my children. I lost everything. Please, let me have the *matzoh*.”

“I also lost everything. But the *matzoh* is mine and I am not giving it up.”

Finally, our friend, the one who is retelling the story, could take it no more and gave up. He allowed his bunkmate to eat the *matzoh* and say the *Haggadah*, but the reward for the *mitzvah* was to accrue to him. They cried and laughed together, doing their best to relive the deliverance from Mitzrayim, and they prayed, “*Leshonah haba’ah b’Yerushalayim*,” with all their hearts.

The next day, they both went out on their work detail. The *rebbe* *einikel* began *davening* to himself. He got as far as *Hallel* and then collapsed and fell to the ground. He stood up and tried to walk, calling out the *brocha*, “*Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav*.” A Nazi bullet hit him just then. *Hashem yikom damo*.

The other man lived. After the war, he moved to Israel, established a new family, and became a member of the Chug Chasam Sofer *kehillah*.

All this he tells to Rav Ungar by way of introduction to his question.

Then he tells the rest of the story.

“Last night, that man came to me in a dream. He was dressed in white and his face was as bright as the morning sky. He said to me, ‘Do you remember when you let me eat the *matzoh* on the condition that you get the *s’char*? I came to ask you to please let me have the reward for that *mitzvah*. I received *s’char* for all the *mitzvos* I performed, except that one. It is the only *mitzvah* for which I received no reward. Please. I beg you to let me have the reward for that *mitzvah*.’

“In the dream, I responded to him. I reminded him that it was my *matzoh*. ‘I had risked my life for it. I gathered the kernels. I ground them. I baked them. I snuck it into the camp. Each step could have gotten me killed. I was beaten for it. I could have died on the spot. You begged. You cried. I gave you the act of performing the *mitzvah*. At least I should get the *s’char*.’

“He knew I was right. He agreed. But he reminded me that he was the one who kept track of the calendar. It was he who knew that *Yom Tov* was days away. He was the one who had prompted me to bake the *matzoh*. He recited the *Haggadah* with me. And now he came down to this world from on high to ask for the reward for that *mitzvah*. It was that important to him.

“I turned him down. His face became extremely sad. He was very upset. And then he disappeared.

“With that, I woke up. My heart and mind were racing. What was I supposed to tell him? It was my *mitzvah*. I should get the reward. But how can I say no to a holy *neshomah*? How can I turn down the wish of a dead man?”

He asked Rav Ungar what he should do. Should he let the martyred man have the reward for the *mitzvah* of *matzoh* or should he keep it for himself?

Rav Ungar told the man that this wasn't a question for a *rov*. It was a question for a *rebbe*. He sent him to the Machnovke Rebbe and asked him to please return and share the response he receives.

He returned the next day and told Rav Ungar what happened by the *rebbe*. He found out that the *rebbe* saw people in the evenings and waited with bated breath at the *rebbe*'s door until he was able to enter. Then he told his story.

The *rebbe* told him that by right, he should give the reward to the other man. "By right?" he exclaimed. "By right it belongs to me! My question is whether I should go beyond what is right and give it to him anyway."

"No," the *rebbe* responded. "You need to understand. Every day, you put on *tallis* and *tefillin*. You *daven* three times a day and make 100 *brachos* daily. There's *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* and so many other *mitzvos* that you perform. You have children who you were *mechaneich* to perform *mitzvos*, and thus you share in the reward for what they do. It is only fair that you be *mevater* and let the man have the reward for that *mitzvah*."

The man conceded.

"Okay," he muttered, "if the *rebbe* feels that I have to give him the reward, I will."

"No, not like that," the *rebbe* said. "You have to mean it. You have to do it *b'lev sholeim*."

The *rebbe* took a ring of keys from his pocket and gave them to the survivor. "Here. This key opens the door to the *bais medrash*. There is nobody there. Go inside. With this key, open the *aron kodesh*. Stick your head in there. Pour out your heart to Hashem. Tell Him how you got to know the other man. Tell Him of your friendly relationship. Tell Him of the *chizukhe* gave you in that awful place. Tell Hashem that he gave you the idea to obtain *matzoh* there.

"Tell Hashem what it was like that *Seder* night, the last night of that man's life. And when you are done, tell Hashem that *b'lev sholeim* you are *mevater* on the *s'char* for the *mitzvah* performed that night, and you surrender it to the other man, in order to give his *neshomah* a *nachas ruach* in the *olam ha'elyon*. When you are done, lock up and return to me."

The man did as the *rebbe* had told him. He recounted the whole experience in the camp. It took everything out of him. He could barely drag his legs away from the *aron kodesh*. He locked the *bais medrash*, but didn't have the strength to return to the *rebbe*. He was drained. He gave the keys to the *gabbai* and asked him to tell the *rebbe* that he would return the next day.

He went home, collapsed into bed, and fell asleep. His friend came to him in a dream once again. With a shining face and bright countenance, he said, "Thank you," and was gone.

The next morning, the man went to *daven* in the *minyan* of the *rebbe*. After *davening*, he went over to the *rebbe* and told him what happened. The *rebbe* was not surprised. He shared with the man a message that he remembered for the rest of his life and that we should take to heart, particularly in this period leading up to *Yom Tov*. This is what he said:

“Think about it. Your friend was a *rebbe*’s *kind*. He grew up in a home of Torah and *yiras Shomayim*. There is no doubt that he performed many *mitzvos*. To top it off, he merited to die *al kiddush Hashem*. Even if Heaven would have had any complaints against him, they would have been erased. So he was a person who had only *mitzvos* and no *aveiros*, which is why *Chazal* say that in *Gan Eden* nobody can come close to people who were killed *al kiddush Hashem*. They are in the most exalted place.

“Yet, it was worth it for him to leave the bliss of basking in the glow of the *Shechinah* to come down here, to come like a beggar, and plead with you to give him the reward of just one more *mitzvah*. Think about what that tells you regarding the value of a single *mitzvah*.

“And here we are, with the opportunity everywhere to pick up *mitzvos*, and we don’t run after them. Every *parsha* of the Torah, every *Mishnah* and every page of *Gemara* contains so many *mitzvos*, yet we lackadaisically waste time.

“Every time we help someone, when we just say a nice word to someone, we get another *mitzvah*, yet we ignore other people. Think about it.”

The man returned to Rav Ungar and told him all that happened and what the *rebbe* said.

There are so many teachings of *Chazal* about the value of a *mitzvah*. There are so many lessons we have come across in our lifetimes about the reward that awaits those who fulfill Hashem’s commandments, but rather than engage in a discussion of them as we usually do in this space, I thought to try something else and instead, transcribed this story.

How can we not be moved by it? Who can complain about the price of a *kezayis* of *matzoh* after reading this? Who cannot feel proud to be a Jew? Who cannot be excited that *Pesach* – the *Yom Tov* of *cheirus*, *daled kosos*, *Mah Nishtanah* and *matzoh* – is almost here?

Let us get our priorities straight and enjoy and appreciate all we have been blessed with.

*Reprinted from the March 21, 2018 email of the Yated Ne’eman*



Story #904

# A Large Communal Pesach Seder

From the desk of Yerachmiel Tilles

[editor@ascentofsafed.com](mailto:editor@ascentofsafed.com)

The year 5608 (1848) saw many wild outbreaks of violence in Eastern Europe. Not surprisingly, the Jews were the first victims.

Word spread in Szerdahely (in Hungary near Budapest,) that a gang of robbers was preparing to overrun the town on the first night of Pesach, while all the Jews were sitting at their Seder tables. When the news was brought to the chief rabbi of the town, **Rabbi Yehuda Assad**, he decreed that all the Jews in town should join together to conduct one large communal Seder.



Immediately after the Evening Prayer for the first night of the Passover festival, the Jewish families of Szerdahely arranged themselves around large tables in a central hall. Rabbi Assad at the head of the main table, and spoke words of encouragement to the frightened citizens.

When the scout came running in with the news that the robbers were approaching the town gates, Rabbi Assad went out alone to meet them. Clad in his long white *kittel* (robe), he walked confidently toward the violent men. On coming within sight of them, he lifted a *shofar* to his mouth and began to blow.

Confusion overwhelmed the robber gang. They began running wildly in all directions. A number of them were trampled to death by their companions' fleeing

horses. A statue was later erected on that spot, to commemorate the events of that night.

The town's gentiles were driven to fury by the Rabbi's feat. They decided to attack him and waited in ambush in the town square. When the rabbi approached, the bakery owner -- a violent man -- ran out brandishing a sword. R' Yehuda Assad continued to walk toward him, unafraid.

Furious, the baker raised his sword with all his might, intending to bring it forcefully down on the rabbi. But a miracle occurred, and instead of piercing the rabbi's body, the sword swerved and cut off the baker's own hand.

The gentiles' respect for R' Yehuda rose sharply after this incident, and because of him they were careful to treat the entire Jewish community respectfully as well. As for the crippled baker, he wandered through the town for years, no longer able to work, warning his fellow gentiles and reminding them of what awaited those who dared harm a Jew.

~~~~~  
Source: Adapted and supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from "*Stories my Grandfather told me*" (Mesorah) by Zev Greenwald.

Biographical note:

Rabbi Yehuda Assad (1796-1866) is the author of several volumes of *Responsa* as well as an important commentary on *Pirkei Avot*. Born in Assad, north of Budapest, he served as Rabbi of Szerdahely from 1853 until his death. After the passing of the *Chasam Sofer*, he was regarded as the head of Hungarian Jewry. He was also known to be a proficient Kabbalist, yet humble to an extreme (see Addendum, below).

Connection: Seasonal -â€ ten days until Seder night

Addendum:

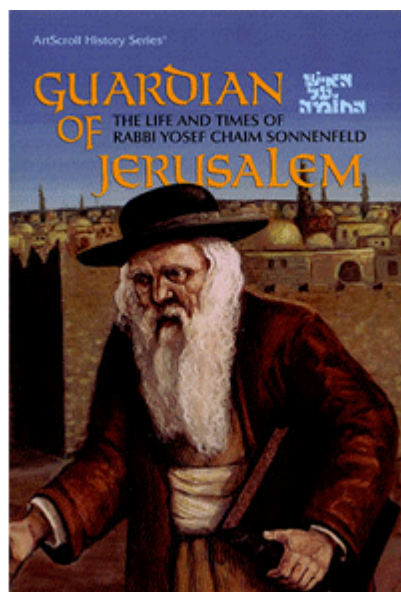
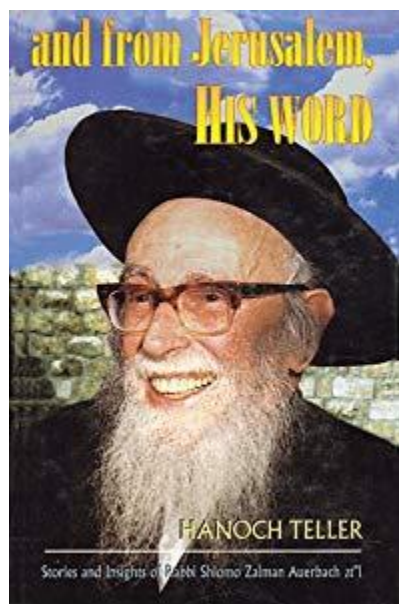
Once, a delegation of leading Jewish rabbis went to visit the Austro-Hungarian Kaiser, Franz Josef, on an important communal matter. In the waiting room, before their audience, they were discussing among themselves who among them should address the Kaiser first.

The waiting room had mirrors on all its walls. The holy rabbi of Szerdahely, Rabbi Yehuda Assad, the most senior rabbi there, happened to glance over to the other side of the room. There, he saw in the mirror opposite him his own reflection. For Rabbi Assad, it was the first time in his life that he had ever seen his own appearance, for out of his piety and humility he had never looked at his reflection in a mirror!

So what was his reaction? Seeing a Jew whose face shone with holy dignity and beauty, he pointed at the image in the mirror and whispered to some of his colleagues in the delegation, "Look at that elderly Jew there. You can see the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, on his face! We should let him be the first to speak."

Reprinted from the Pesach 5775 email of KabbalaOnline.org, a project of Ascent of Safed.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, Rabbi Yosef Chaim and the Four Questions



On the first day of Pesach, young Shlomo Zalman was walking with his father through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, returning from the Western Wall where they had prayed. They came face to face with the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, O”BM.

After exchanging the customary "Gut Yom Tov" wishes, R' Yosef Chaim turned to young Shlomo Zalman and gently pinched his cheek. "Tell me, my son," he asked warmly, "did you ask the 'Four Questions' at the Seder?"

The boy nodded proudly.

"Did you ask the 'Four Questions' last year too?" R' Yosef Chaim caressed the young boy's cheek.

"Yes, of course," Shlomo Zalman replied with conviction.

"Well then, what answer did you receive for these questions?"

The boy exclaimed, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt."

R' Yosef Chaim then asked with a twinkle in his eye, "if you heard the answer last year, why did you ask the same questions again this year? Did you forget?"

The boy just stood there, tongue-tied. He did not know what to say. Flustered and confused, he broke into tears. Imagine, the Rav had asked him a simple question, and he could not answer!

Many years later, young Shlomo Zalman, now the renowned Tzaddik, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, O"BM, once paid a visit on Chol HaMoed Pesach to a friend. Turning to the youngsters in the room, R' Shlomo Zalman asked, "Tell me, children, why did you ask the 'Four Questions' this year? After all, you asked the same questions last year, and you already received the answer!"

The children came up with a variety of answers, each trying a different approach. It was obvious that R' Shlomo Zalman relished listening to the bright remarks.

"Baruch Hashem, the children have good heads. When I was your age, someone once asked me this very same question," he said, smiling gleefully. "But I could not think of an answer. You know what I did? I broke down and cried!"

(Story from Torah Tavlin) Comment: Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky once remarked that most people end up having the same Seder eighty times in their lives, instead of having eighty different Seders. Before the Seder, let us think about the Haggadah and ponder new questions to raise this year!

Reprinted from the Pesach 5778 email of Torah Sweet Weekly edited by Mendel Berlin.

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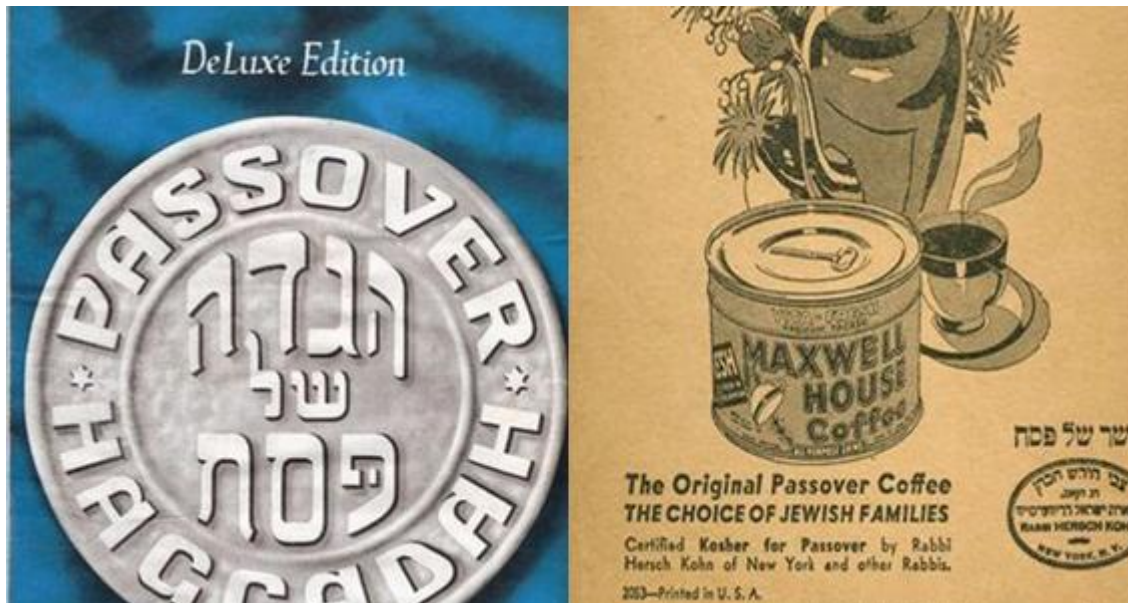
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HISTORY

1,000 Years of Haggadahs

[Part 3]

Rabbi Aubrey Hersh



20th Century Haggadahs

For many American Jews, it is not an exaggeration to claim the Maxwell House Haggadah as the most commonly used and widely known. The story begins as a result of the immigration of Eastern European Ashkenazim into the USA, who were unused to drinking coffee and unsure whether the coffee bean was permissible during Pesach or whether it was kitniyos.

In 1932 Joseph Jacobs, an advertising genius in New York City, obtained a Pesach hechsher from Rabbi Hersch Kohn. General Foods and the Joseph Jacobs Advertising Agency, then approached Maxwell House and convinced them to give away a free haggadah with each purchase of a can of Maxwell House coffee.

Sales rose dramatically. It wasn't the first time haggadas had been marketed—the State Bank of New York had done earlier giveaways—but it was the most successful by far.

More than 50 million copies of the Maxwell House Haggadah have been distributed over the years and it was famously used in the first White House Seder in 2009. Maxwell House stands in sharp contrast to one other mass-produced American Haggadah: the one given to more than 350,000 Jews serving in the United States military during World War II.

Its authors were not shy about making the link between the safe haven of America (the Goldene Medina) and the Promised Land of the Seder. It ends therefore, not at Chad Gadya, but with a trio of songs: Hatikvah, the Star-Spangled Banner, and America.

The first print run in 1943 carried an apt reminder about “generation after generation of Jews who have stood up to cruel taskmasters.” An equally poignant Haggadah was created in Gurs, in SouthWestern France.

Gurs was a Nazi internment camp for foreign born French Jews, which existed until 1942, at which time the majority of the prisoners were deported to Auschwitz via Drancy. Amazingly, in 1941 many of the Jews in the camp attended a seder, after Rav Shmuel Koppel managed to convince the authorities to allow Matza into the camp, and after one of the inmates produced a hand-written haggadah.

Rabbi Koppel described both the haggadah and Pesach itself in Gurs: “Before the Passover holiday, I brought an abbreviated version of the Haggadah, one that had been very well prepared by Aryeh Zuckerman. The Haggadah as written, with paintings by various painters incarcerated in the camp and short notes, all emphasized the concern of the imprisoned community... Thus, all the participants in the Seder could express their faith in the Rock of Israel while singing the traditional tunes of Echad Mi Yode'ah and Chad Gadya.

Rabbi Yehoshua Zuckerman, the son of the author of the Haggadah, related that his father who was born in Germany and emigrated to Belgium in 1924, was arrested in May 1940 and deported to France.

At Gurs he concerned himself with caring for the sick, education, organising religious life and Torah learning. His father told him how he had written the Haggadah from memory, and had apparently used a sharpened stone as a stylus to impress the stencils.

Another rather remarkable Haggadah was produced in Germany for Pesach of 1945, a month before the full Nazi surrender, by the advancing 42nd Infantry Division, known as the Rainbow Division. The Haggadah includes a letter from Eli Bohnen, a Jewish chaplain with the division, dated April 16, 1945.

“I am confident,” he wrote, “that it is the first Hebrew religious work printed in Germany since the advent of Hitler.” The letter recounts that the Haggadah was printed on a captured offset press. “You may also be interested to learn that the soldiers who did the actual printing told us that when they had to clean the press before printing the Haggadah, the only rags available were some Nazi flags, which for once served a useful purpose.



The Seder was attended by over 1500 soldiers. Since fresh eggs were essential to a Seder, we had to travel back into France to get 8 carts of eggs. Supervising the preparation for the Seder meal were GI cooks who had the local citizenry cleaning up.

Major General Collins came to express his good wishes.” Another unusual Haggadah was produced in Munich in 1946 for the DPs, who although no longer in bondage to Hitler, were not really free. They could not go home to their former lives, nor to Palestine as a result of the British blockade. And even America was closed to them.

How were they to “celebrate” Passover? The opening page starkly rewrote the text’s most echoing words as: “We were slaves to Hitler in Germany.... And answered the question: What is the difference between this night and any other night, as being the absence of small children who traditionally asked the four questions.

The earliest candidate as a kiruv Haggadah in the 20th century was created not in Germany or the USA but in Cairo, Egypt. In 1917, Dr Hillel Farchi translated a Haggadah into Arabic. Despite other Arabic translations having appeared on the scene in earlier centuries, this one had two important differences.

The language used was not Judaeo-Arabic but a more literary version, which was used by the more accultured and intellectual Jews, whom he was attempting to reach. And the Haggadah appears with copious notes. These are not simply a commentary on the Haggadah, they also cover history, archaeology and geography with the stated goal of proving that the biblical narrative is true.

Starting with the evidence of for Avraham and of civilisation in Ur Kasdim 4,000 years ago (see photo above), it includes maps, quotes and scientific data. Dr Farchi was born in Damascus in 1868 and after studying in yeshiva, earnt a degree in medicine and served as a doctor in Egypt for 27 years.

He was fluent in Arabic, Turkish, French, English and Italian and put his talents to use for the Jewish community. Closer to our day, the Unofficial Hogwarts Haggadah was launched in 2017 by Rabbi Moshe Rosenberg of Queens, New York, and was the top-selling book in Amazon’s Judaism category

Reprinted from the Parashat Shemini 5778 email of ONEG SHABBOS – North West London’s Weekly Torah & Opinion Sheets.

The Lesson of Passover: Anything Can Happen

By Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

Here are a few Chassidic ideas and a story to enliven your Pesach Seder.

1) Pesach on one hand is the birthday of the Jewish people. On this day it was revealed to the world that we are the Sons of the Creator (Exodus 4:22) and free not only from Egypt but from the entire creation! But on the other hand, only a small percentage of Jews actually left Egypt (one Fifth!).

2) Although Pesach called the Holiday of Freedom (Zman Cherusenu) because we were freed from Egypt (sons of G-d), fifty days later at Sinai we became SERVANTS of G-d. (Lev.25:55): G-d made us responsible for the entire world. This is because freedom is worthless without responsibility.

3) It is a positive commandment on this night to talk of G-d's miracles in taking us from Egypt. The word Pesach can be divided into 'Pe' (mouth) Sach (speaks). Indeed, the power of the Jews is in their mouths; Saying words of Torah and praising G-d's miracles brings it both into to our hearts and out to the world. It helps us to remember who we are, feel how much HaShem loves us and gives us power to transform the present moment into the future redemption.

4) But on the other hand, the Haggada is very negative. It begins negatively (Before Abraham we were idolaters) and continues in detail to tell us how terrible the Egyptian slavery was. Even the name Pharaoh can be divided into 'Pe' (mouth) 'Ra' (evil). And he tricked us into backbreaking labor 'Perach' which can also be divided into 'Pe' (mouth) 'Rach' (soft talk).

5) Similarly, MATZAH, is called the food of faith and the food of healing. Simple and unleavened it represents an attitude of unquestioning, childlike, complete surrender to the Creator; open to the infinite. One of the biggest Mitzvas in Judaism is to eat Matza on Pesach. But it is almost identical to Chametz!

One of the biggest sins in the Torah is to eat Chametz or even to possess it on Passover. It is a commandment to get rid of it six hours before the holiday starts and the custom is to begin to search and destroy it the previous evening.

But both have the same ingredients; flour and water. And both are spelled almost identically. Both MaTZah and chaMeTZ have Mem and Tzadik. The difference is that 'Chametz' is spelled with the letter 'Chet' and Matzah has a 'Hey'. But Chet and Hey are also almost identical, the difference is that 'Hey' has a little opening at the top.

So, the only difference between unholy Chametz and holy Matza is a little hole. But that little hole has big ramifications. Chametz closed at the top, represents total disinterest in what's above while Matza is the opposite: total surrender to the Creator.

That's why Matza is 'low' and unleavened; because it gives us the feeling of how small we are and, simultaneously, we can connect to the Almighty and do the impossible.

6) MOROR is bitter and its letters (MROR) are the numerical value of Death (446). Paradoxically it is also connected with G-d's mercy [because it is put in the middle of the items on the Seder plate and according to Kabala mercy is in the 'middle' of the Ten Sferot].

Eating it reminds us of the bitter-as-death exile we are in and the even more-bitter fact that we don't really want to leave it. This will bring us to plead to G-d for mercy: that we should desire the redemption.

7) The four cups represent the four words for redemption used in the Torah (Exodus 6:6,7). Each cup of wine is another step in bringing out the redemption of the secret Jewish Soul in each of us [The letters of Wine (YYN) are the numerical value of 'Secret' (70)] and reveal our power to bring Moshiach and redeem the entire world.

Just like the wine is hidden in the grapes and must be squeezed out so too this two-thousand-year exile is only to bring out the hidden G-dliness in each of us and, consequently, in the entire world as well.

8) And just as wine brings joy, so too, the only way we can bring our Jewish souls into action and manifest the redemption is through Joy.

9) Finally, remember that when we open the door for Eliyahu, HaShem opens all the doors in heaven to our prayers; that is the time to REALLY request Moshiach NOW!!

To help feel all the above here is a story:

Some fifteen years ago over fifteen years after the fall of the iron curtain, a young Chabad Chassid was invited by a Chabad house in Russia to make a Passover "Seder" in a nearby town.

The young man, recently ordained as a Rabbi, arrived several weeks before the holiday. He went, together with the Chabad representative that invited him, to the Mayor of that town to look for a suitable place to hold the festive ceremony. They were expecting several hundred people and needed a big hall.

After a few minutes the Mayor decided that the only place in his town that would serve their purposes was the Communist meeting hall. It seems that when the Communists were in power, they made sure that the biggest building in every town in Russia would be their party meeting hall. The Rabbis and the Mayor went and had a look, and sure enough the place was perfect.

Posters were put up, people were invited personally, and food was brought and prepared. All the vessels had to be new, all the meat had to be strictly Kosher, the cooking had to be supervised constantly so that no one would bring "Chametz (leavened bread products) into the kitchen, and the building had to be completely cleaned, "koshered" and decorated.

All the work paid off. Some three hundred people arrived! Young and old, men and women, all dressed in their nicest clothes and with shining faces. Some came from nostalgia, some from curiosity, some for a good time. But everyone, whether they knew it or not, came because they were Jews and tonight was Passover.

It took a while to get everyone seated and settled. The Rabbi, through his translator, made a short welcoming speech telling them what to expect. For some of them it was their first "Seder" in fifty years, and for many the first in their lives. Hagaddas (Seder books) translated into Russian were handed out, cups were filled with wine, Matzot were distributed, and the evening began.

Everyone did what they were told with joy and listened to the Rabbi's explanations with great interest. They all read aloud from their books about how G-d did great miracles thousands of years ago, and how He took the Jews out of Egypt. They all ate the Matza, drank four cups of wine, finished their holiday meal, sang, and even danced at the proper times.

Everything went smoothly until the cup of Elijah. This symbolic "extra" fifth cup of wine is poured at the end of the meal to remind us of the imminent total redemption (G'ula Shlema). The young Chabad Rabbi explained with enthusiasm how this fifth cup stood for Moshiach who will arrive any moment to gather all the Jews to Israel and make a beautiful new world with the revelation of G-d everywhere etc.

Suddenly one of the older men stood up, tapped on the table and said in a booming voice, "Young man! Excuse me please young Rabbi!"

The place went silent and just as they all had listened to the Rabbi they now turned to the new speaker. He waited a few seconds and continued.

"We are very grateful to you for this beautiful evening with the wonderful food and wine.

Everything is very nice. Very beautiful and very tasty." Everyone in the room turned to one another, shook their heads in agreement and wondered what he was getting at.

"Everything you said is also very interesting and nice." The man continued. "Beautiful stories; G-d took the Jews from Egypt, made miracles...very nice Bible stories. We all love stories.

But what you said about some Messiah coming and making a utopia, building a Holy Temple and all this. Please Rabbi, we are grown up people. Some

of us are academics, doctors, professors, intellectuals. We are not little children that we believe such nonsense! You are a very nice man and we are very grateful, but please save such foolish superstitions for your children not for intelligent adults. Please understand us, dear Rabbi, nothing personal but you are a naive person. You have been locked up in Yeshiva (Rabbinical College) and we live in the real world"

Everyone again shook their heads in agreement. And looked sheepishly at the Rabbi as though to say "We are sorry, but he's right."

The young rabbi however did not lose his composure. He waited a few minutes and before the man sat down he replied.

"My friend" he said with a warm smile, "My friends!" he opened his arms and looked around the room.

"Do you realize where we are? Do you realize what we are doing? Do you realize what you are saying!?"

If someone would have told you twenty years ago that you would make a Passover SEDER in the COMMUNIST MEETING HALL, would you believe them?

Why, twenty years ago there was nothing more powerful and secure than Communism, and nothing weaker than Judaism! Communism was the complete opposite and biggest enemy of G-d and everyone in Russia was sure that Communism was right.

But here we are! The impossible has happened! Communism has not only fallen; this building—the communist CENTER has been transformed to Judaism! So, is it really so far-fetched that Moshiach can change the entire world?"

The man looked at the crowd then back at the young rabbi, straightened up, smiled broadly and said..."BRAVO!!". And the entire crowd broke into applause.

May this story repeat itself with the entire world and all the potential blessings, optimism and holiness be revealed to change everything around us so we all dance in the true, final, complete redemption with...Moshiach NOW!!!

Reprinted from the March 29, 2019 email of Yeshiva Ohr Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel.

Prepping for Passover from Anchorage to Zanzibar

By Karen Schwartz

Chabad delivers millions of shmurah matzahs; will host thousands of Seders worldwide



Children in Anchorage, Alaska, re-enact the crossing of the Red Sea following the Exodus from Egypt. (Photo: Lisa J. Seifert)

With Passover less than a week away, Rabbi Yossi Grossbaum was on the road Tuesday evening, delivering *shmurah* matzah to people in his community. Grossbaum, who with his wife, Goldie, co-directs the Chabad Jewish Community Center serving Folsom, El Dorado Hills and the surrounding region in California, will spend some 50 hours getting the round, handmade matzah to area residents before the holiday begins this Friday night, March 30.

The Chabad center's preparation for the eight-day festival (seven days in Israel), which commemorates the emancipation of the Israelites from slavery in

ancient Egypt, started even before Purim. They placed orders for *shmurah* matzah, which the Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—had long encouraged. The round, handmade matzah, which was watched to make sure the flour used to make it did not come into any contact with water or moisture, also serves as a way to raise awareness about the upcoming holiday, says Grossbaum.



The Alaska program includes matzah-baking. (Photo: Lisa J. Seifert)

He and a group of volunteers will deliver some 100 to 150 boxes of the matzah for people to use at their Seders as they join Jews near and far in drinking four cups of wine, eating matzah and bitter herbs, and retelling the story of the Exodus on Friday and Saturday nights (Friday night in Israel). The Grossbaums, like Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries around the globe, will be welcoming guests to community Seders, theirs in Folsom and also in Placerville, some 25 miles away.

Thousands of such Seders will be taking place in hundreds of cities around the globe. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, emissaries Rabbi Asher and Henya Federman of Chabad-Lubavitch of the U.S. Virgin Islands will host some 100 Jewish local residents, as well as private and government contractors, on the island for the relief

and rebuilding effort following hurricanes that raged through the islands in September, for the first night's Seder. Meanwhile, Rabbi Yosef and Chani Konikov of Chabad-Lubavitch of South Orlando are getting ready to run Seders simultaneously in Hebrew and English for hundreds of visitors who head to the central Florida city for its warm weather and theme parks over the Passover holiday.

In rural Australia, Chabad of Rural and Regional Australia, will bring rabbinical couples and students to hold Seders in 11 locations, for nearly 1,000 Jews in remote cities. Chabad of Central Africa will be hosting seders in 20 locations from Zambia to Zanzibar. And in Russia, Chabad-Lubavitch will hold nearly 400 Seders in more than 200 communities.




**Cleaning for Passover looks the same just about everywhere,
including here in Chiang Mai, Thailand.**

Meanwhile, some 4,500 attendees are expected to converge for Seders in Bangkok, Thailand, and another 2,000 in other locations around the country. Additionally, in Kathmandu, Nepal, Rabbi Chezki and Chani Lifshitz are preparing for what's considered the largest Seder in the world, which draws close to 2,000 travelers, many Israeli backpackers, in Kathmandu each year.


Chabad of Central Africa will host 20 Seders.

ב"ה

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IN AFRICA

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MARCH 30 - APRIL 7TH 5778 - 2018

THIS PASSOVER JOIN US FOR THE SEDER IN ONE OF OUR LOCATIONS

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Preparing for the Holiday

All over the world, Chabad-Lubvitch emissaries will be helping people this holiday season with the many pre-Passover activities, including distributing millions of *shmurah matzah* and holiday guides in 17 different languages; cleaning for Passover; selling and burning *chametz*; and other preparations for the eight-day holiday. More than a million people around the world will sell their *chametz* via their local Chabad rabbi, in person or via mail.



Chabad hosts thousands of educational programs before Passover all over the globe. (Photo: Lisa J. Seifert)

Online, Chabad.org offers a full range of inspiration, information and services leading up to the holiday on the Chabad.org Passover mini-site. More than 80,000 people sold their chametz through Chabad.org in 2017, and website administrators say they are expecting even more to use the service this year.

The holiday is a time for gathering together, says Mushky Glitsenstein, youth director of the Lubavitch Jewish Center of Alaska in Anchorage. They'll be hosting a model matzah bakery for elementary-school kids, parents and community members where participants will be able to make their own matzah, from grinding the wheat to making the dough and rolling it out.

They'll also have a live, mega-sized seder and interactive game show competition with 3-foot by 3-foot Haggadahs and matzahs 4-feet long by 4-feet wide ahead of the holiday. And they're running a Passover experience program that lets kids bake their own matzah, shred their own *maror* (bitter herbs) and make their own *charoset* (paste of fruit and nuts). It's a way to help engage kids and make Passover memories that will stick with them the rest of their lives, says Glitsenstein.



Children in Anchorage learn to be part of the Passover story. (Photo: Lisa J. Seifert)

“The goal is really for people to connect to the holidays, to identify with the story of Passover to make it relevant, to make it interesting, fun and something they want to be a part of,” says Glitsenstein. “When people experience the joy of Judaism, that’s when they want to bring it into their lives and make it something that’s lasting.”

The Chabad center, which flies in all of its Passover food from Seattle, will host a community Seder on Friday, March 30, sharing the holiday many feel a deep connection with, explains Glitsenstein.

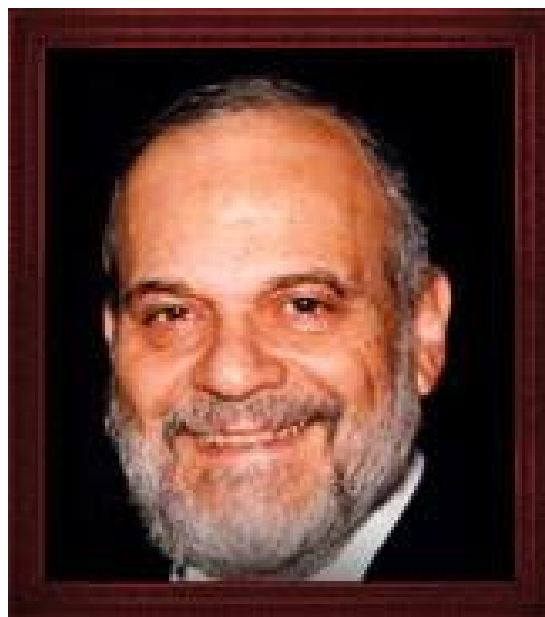
“There is something about Passover that wakes up a Jewish soul,” she says. “Jewish people, no matter who or where they are, want to be at a Passover Seder. They want to celebrate it.”

Reprinted from the Pesach 5778 website of Chabad.Org



A page from the classic 1940 Haggadah made by Polish artist Arthur Szyk.

Rabbi Berel Wein on Pesach



One of the more amazing things about the holiday of Pesach is that even though it is over 3300 years old it is relevant and current to our world today just as it was when it was originally celebrated by the Jewish people in Egypt long ago. It naturally speaks to every generation in a different tone and nuance, but its basic message of human freedom and Godly service has never changed.

Its rituals and commandments are the key to its longevity and survival over all the centuries and, in spite of all of the challenges and difficulties that are so replete in Jewish history. In fact, were it not for these rituals and commandments the holiday itself, if not even the Jewish people, would have long ago disappeared into the ash heap of history.

The G-dly instinct that has made ritual a daily part of the life of every Jew has been the surest method of Jewish survival and continuity. It is what binds the generations one to another in families and nationally. Without it, the disconnect between generations and the circumstances of society would be so great that it would be impossible to overcome.

The night of the Pesach Seder is the greatest example of the power of ritual and tradition to preserve human relationships and to bind disparate generations together. It is no exaggeration to say that the Jewish world is founded on the night of the Pesach Seder. Without it, we are doomed to extinction. With it, we become immortal and eternal.

I myself have always been privileged to celebrate Pesach and the Seder at home. I only went to a hotel for Pesach once in my lifetime when my wife was ill, and we had no other choice. I am not here to decry all of the Pesach programs that exist and prosper worldwide. I understand and appreciate why they are so popular and in our generation of relative affluence in the Jewish world, it is completely rational to use these services.

But it is completely ironic that in our time, because of technological advances, all sorts of automatic appliances, Pesach kitchens and an unbelievable plethora of prepared Pesach foods and products, that giving one's family the unforgettable experience of a Pesach at home is slowly disappearing from the Jewish scene in many parts of the world.

Let me hasten to say again that I do not criticize anyone for any reason who celebrates Pesach at a hotel or with any sort of organized program. There are many circumstances in life that justify these choices. However, for the purposes of Jewish continuity and survival, I feel that it is important for children to remember a family Pesach at home, to recall how their parents and grandparents conducted a Seder and to be able to give personal expression to the glory of the holiday and to the memory of our history.

At the Pesach Seder there is a potential for uniting hundreds of years of family memories. Grandparents remember their grandparents and the little great-grandchildren, whose sole interest is to extort their elders for the return of the afikomen, are united in binding together hundreds of years of family life and Judaism. A Seder at home with the family provides the optimum setting for such an emotional and spiritual experience.

Eighty years ago, I attended the first Seder that I can recall. It was in the house of my grandfather who was educated in the great yeshiva of Volozhin and who was a rabbi of a congregation in Chicago as well as being one of the heads of the yeshiva that then existed in Chicago. That Seder is one of my earliest memories in life. I remember the deference that my father and uncles paid my grandfather and I recall how my cousin and I hesitatingly recited the four questions to him and the delight that shown on his face when we did so.

There were about 30 people at my grandfather's Seder that year. Only my cousin and I still survive but I have tried to pass on the memory of that Seder to my own grandchildren and now great-grandchildren. By so doing, a whiff of Volozhin, and even of Egypt and Sinai, may be transmitted to them and from them to their generations as well. Like all else in Judaism, Pesach is memory. And memory is the most powerful tool for the preservation of a Jewish way of life.

I wish you and your families a happy and kosher Pesach.

Reprinted from the Pesach 5778 website of Rabbiwein.com

Jewish History

Has the Exodus from Egypt Been Verified by Egyptian Archaeology?

Not many people know that the Israelites are clearly mentioned in ancient Egypt more than 3200 years ago. Perhaps it is hard to believe; Pharaoh lied about what actually took place



Question: I learn with a non-religious young man who is interested in Judaism. We were discussing the mitzvah to remember what happened in Egypt and he said he would like to hear what Egypt says about what happened. He wants to hear their perspective, from historical writings, etc. I don't know where to find such information. Could you help me?

Answer: To the Questioner,

Papyrus Eifor describes massive reversals of nature in Egypt, dying in every house, a pillar of fire, and even tells that all the river has turned into blood (but in his mind it happened because of bodies in the water).

Also found in Egypt is the tomb of Merneptah, which is explicitly mentions the Nation of Israel more than 3,000 years ago.

Although the Egyptians wrote many papyri and documented history, unlike what many believe, they were not very truthful in their documentation, and did not record events that did not compliment them and their kings. The Egyptians obsessively covered up defeats and failures, to the extent that they did not document at all the 500 years of the rule of the Hyksos.

Hyksos was a Semitic group that invaded and ruled Egypt for 500 years until the Egyptians took over their kingdom. But despite 500 years of Hyksos history in Egypt - monarchy, construction, politics, government, laws and religions - the Egyptians did not record the history of the Hyksos who controlled them, thereby obliterating Egyptian history of 500 years.

All the remains that were found from the Hyksos rule are indirect finds (such as structures, pottery vessels, etc.), but not direct or hieroglyphic documents on this great chapter in the history of ancient Egypt. The only place in Egypt where the Hyksos are mentioned is almost incidentally - in the tomb of the sons of Hassan.

I cannot tell you whether the Egyptians destroyed evidence, but what is clear is that they did not want to document events of defeat and failure, not even if it be major and important events of 500 years. Let alone expecting that they would record the fact that their own slaves managed to humiliate and defeat them by means of divine signs and wonders.

But few know that the Israelites are clearly mentioned in ancient Egypt more than 3200 years ago. And perhaps it is hard to believe: But Pharaoh lied about what actually took place!

This is one of the most amazing finds from ancient Egypt, a famous tombstone called "the tombstone of Israel," in which Pharaoh Merneptah recounts how he made journeys in the land of Canaan, defeated various peoples, and finally destroyed the Israelites to the last of them! Thus he wrote: "Israel was destroyed - there is no seed for him." (Is it really surprising that the first external source in which the Children of Israel are mentioned is the description of their destruction?).

Well, the tombstone proves that the Israelites were known in ancient Egypt over 3200 years ago, and that they had already settled in the land of Canaan. But why did Pharaoh, the ruler of the mighty Egyptian empire, see it fit to lie saying he persecuted the Children of Israel in the land of Canaan and destroyed them to the last of them? Moreover, Pharaoh did not claim that he had destroyed any other of the nations.

In regard to other nations, Pharaoh only told that he had defeated them and pillaged them, yet only in regard to the people of Israel, did he declare with great enthusiasm that he did not leave even one of them...! For this reason it seems that Pharaoh had a very strong personal agenda in regard to the Israelites: he had

acquired a great hatred for them and wanted to claim to the world that he had destroyed specifically their nation completely. It is interesting to note that in terms of the lineage, Pharaoh Merneptah was the son of Ramses II of the era of enslavement to Egypt. In other words, the son who wanted to protect his father's honor ...

The very fact that Pharaoh establishes a tombstone full of lies about his great victories, and lied about the extinction of the Israelites, shows once again that there is no reason to trust the integrity of Egyptian documentation. Moreover, the exaggerated boast of the annihilation of all of Israel implies that the Egyptians erased any evidence of the Israelites who might have degraded them (or rather, they simply did not record it).

In any event, with or without such evidence, one must know that archeology lacks much knowledge, and it is impossible to bring evidence from it *against* an event. The Egyptian dynasty is extinct, so it has no continuous history. Moreover, there are almost no archaeological finds from the Early Bronze Age. The lineage of Egypt is based largely on the writings of an Egyptian historian named Manatoun who lived about 2000 years ago.

Did you know that in all the inscriptions and hieroglyphics found in ancient Egypt, there is not even one mention of building pyramids in Egypt? Inside the pyramids there are no hieroglyphs and inscriptions at all. Archaeologists have many speculations about building pyramids, but ancient Egypt does not provide information about this connection. From this you can understand that the information about ancient Egypt and other cultures is deficient, and is based on scholarly hypotheses - more often than upon real facts.

With Blessings,
Hidabroot

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HISTORY [Part 1]

1,000 Years of Haggadahs Creating the Text

By Rabbi Aubrey Hersh

The Mitzva to convey the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim is mentioned explicitly in the Torah, as are many of the pesukim associated with this experience. Yet certain elements of the Seder were only defined over the course of many centuries.



Illustration of the famed Barcelona Haggadah

The Tanna'im and early Amoraim created many of the familiar stages, including the central focus of the 4 cups of wine. However some well-known features such as Dayeinu, the story of Rabbi Akiva in Bnei Brak and the Four Sons, were introduced during the tekufos of the Geonim and Rishonim.

Even at that stage though, Nirtzah was still absent; indeed both the Shulchan Aruch and the Rama end the prescribed Seder immediately after the 4th cup of wine. Nevertheless we do find traces of Nirtzah within the Rishonim.

The Maharil (1360- 1427) mentions חסל סידור פסח - a paragraph originally said only as part of the Yotzros of Shabbos HaGadol – whereas כי לו נאה is to be found in the sefer Etz Chayim, which was written in pre-expulsion England in 1287.

The piyut אדיר הוא was composed, to be recited on Yomtov, although not necessarily on Pesach, as was the case for both Chad Gadya and Echad Mi Yodeah. All of these were subsequently adopted into the Seder by the Ashkenazim, however most Sefardi communities do not have any formal version of Nirtzah to this day.

Yet the importance of these additions can be seen from a teshuva of the Chida (whose Haggadah has no Nirtza at all) in שאל שו"ת חיים. He was responding to a query about someone who had publicly mocked the reciting of Chad Gadya and had therefore been placed into Cherem, which was now being challenged.

Chida replies that the piyut originates from the mekubalim of Ashkenaz, and therefore דחייב נידוי פשיטא טובא – it is obvious that he should be ostracised.

Earliest copies of Haggadah

The oldest extant copies are to be found in the Geniza collection. They include a 9th century excerpt of the Rav Amram Gaon Siddur, and a 10th century complete Haggadah based on Rav Sadiyah Gaon. A more unusual piece from the Geniza features the beginning of the Seder, but contains five rather than four questions. The extra question relates to being permitted only roasted meat on this night, and is formulated in the past tense:

“When the Beis Hamikdash stood, we used to eat only roasted meat”, which was how the original four questions are stated in the Mishna in Pesachim. It was removed from most Haggadahs after the Churban.

This excerpt also has a change to the standard order of Mah Nishtanah by first asking about the dipping of food on Seder night and then subsequently the question regarding chometz and matza. It was written in three languages. On the right hand column we find the concluding part of Havdallah in Hebrew, although the nussach includes sections that we do not קדוש כי תהיו קדושים as such nowadays say by followed is This. instructions and halachos written in JudeoArabic (which uses Hebrew letters to write Arabic) and the brocho of Borei Nefashos to be said after Karpas - as opposed to our custom of eating less than a kzayis, so as to avoid the question of requiring this brocho.

The left hand column contains the Four/Five questions in Hebrew until the penultimate line of the fragment, where an Aramaic translation begins (מה שנא לילא)

הדין), as some people would have been more familiar with Aramaic than Hebrew, at the time this hagaddah was composed in the 11th century.

Handwritten Illuminated Haggadahs The Haggadah first appeared as a separate book (rather than as part of the Siddur) in 1280, although the more famous illustrated ones would only be produced from 1300 onwards.

These would subsequently become known by a specific title which would relate to either the place of origin (Barcelona Haggadah, Darmstadt Haggadah), design (Golden Haggadah, Sister Haggadah), current location (Cincinnati Haggadah, Rylands Haggadah) or owner (Kaufman Haggadah, Mocatta Haggadah).



Illustration from the Birds' Head Haggadah

The Birds' Head Haggadah (c. 1320) is so named because this feature replaces human faces throughout. There is no consensus in academic circles as to the reason behind this, although some point to the prohibition of drawing the image of a human being. And whereas all adult Jewish males have a beard and a Jewish hat, children are bare headed, as is the image of Yosef as the ruler over Egypt.

Interestingly, whilst the drawings of Jews have a bird's head, the non-Jews are depicted with blank circles instead of faces. Hence in the scene of the

Egyptians pursuing the Jews immediately after after Yetzias Mitzrayim, the former are all faceless, yet two figures do appear with birds' heads.



Illustration from the Rothschild/ Murphy Haggadah (Italy, circa 1450)

It has been suggested that these two are Dassan and Aviram, Indeed, they are brandishing whips indicative of their role as nogsim (Jewish taskmasters). The Haggadah was acquired by the Israel Museum for \$600 in 1946, from a German Jewish refugee called Herbert Kahn. However in 2016, the heirs of the family that had owned the Haggadah prior to the war, asked for compensation, claiming the Haggadah had been sold on without permission. Their precise demand was not made public but was understood to be for a few million dollars (which is substantially less than the Haggadah's actual value). In addition they asked for the manuscript to be renamed the "Marum Haggadah".

The museum – which considers itself a caretaker of any heirless Judaica that was once owned by Holocaust victims - acknowledged the family's ownership preWorld War II, but requested documentation for the period between 1933 and 1946. In response, the Marum family obtained more than 1,000 documents from Karlsruhe, which depict Kahn as a low-paid schoolteacher who was in constant need of cash.

The family claim that Kahn somehow obtained the Haggadah in 1939 after the Marum family patriarch was deported, although they do not believe it was

stolen. More likely the book ended up in a Jewish school in Germany (where Kahn was teaching), to avoid it being confiscated by the Nazis.

One of the illustrated pages features Mattan Torah. Although two luchos were given at Har Sinai, since the Torah is made up of five books, the artist incorporated both these concepts by transforming the two into five.

A similar fate befell the “Rothschild/ Murphy Haggadah” (Italy c. 1450). Up until 1939 it belonged to Baron Rothschild. It was subsequently looted, and then sold to an American, by the name of F.T. Murphy, who bequeathed it to Yale University. In 1980 it was identified and returned to the Rothschild family.

One particular Haggadah was known as much for its controversy as for its art: the Washington Haggadah, which came into being two centuries before any Jews lived in the USA. Written by a scribe called Yoel ben Shimon, who completed it on the 25th Shevat 5238 [January 29th 1478], it was donated to the Library of Congress at the start of the 20th century, although as a handwritten comment in the margin makes clear, it was still in active use in Germany as late as 1879.

However in the text for Eruv Tavshilin, we find the scribe writing that the procedure permits one to cook on Yomtov for Shabbos and on Shabbos for Yomtov. The latter phrase is clearly mistaken (it is unclear with whom the mistake originated), and when facsimile editions were published in the USA in 1964 and sold publicly, Rabbonim were concerned that people might be misled.

The Agudas HaRabbonim therefore put advertisements in the Yiddish newspapers, to warn everyone of this erroneous statement. The Haggadah also contains a drawing of a man pointing to his wife, when he declares: “This bitter herb”!

This theme first appears in the Chilek & Bilek Haggadah – produced in the mid- 1400s and currently at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris - in which both spouses point at each other when the husband picks up the Marror, and a dialogue with ‘speech bubbles’, shows each spouse making the accusation that the other is the real bitter herb.

The Wicked son is portrayed as a Christian knight, wearing armour and holding a sword. This familiar image, which is the Western embodiment of chivalry, was for the Jews a symbol of crime and violence, and is very revealing about Christian and Jewish relationships in Ashkenaz.

Reprinted from last year's (5778/2018) email of Oneg Shabbos, North West London's Weekly Torah & Opinion Sheets for Parshas Tzav/Shabbos Hagadol 5778. Rabbi Hersh is a Lecturer, Historian & European Tour Provide. The author can be contacted at aubrey@jle.org.uk

The Timeless Symbolism Of the Seder Egg

By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss



One of the ancient symbols at the Seder table is the egg and there is a plethora of reasons why we eat it on Pesach by night. An egg is symbolic of birth and beginnings, and is therefore a fitting reminder that the Jewish nation was born on Pesach, and that our history as a people began as we exited from Egypt.

Eggs also have the unique feature. The longer we cook them the harder they become. So too, says the Chasam Sofer, *Zi'l, Zy"a*, were the Jews: in Egypt, the more they persecuted us the more we increased, as the posuk says, "*K'asher y'anu-u oso, kein yirbeh v'chein yifrotz* – In direct proportion to the amount that they afflicted us, so did we multiply and so did we spread out."

Also, the egg is the counterpart of the zeroah and reminds us of the two sacrifices we ate from on the night of Pesach, namely the korban Pesach and the korban Chagigah.

But, the egg is also the premier symbol of mourning. Firstly, because an egg is round and, as such, it represents the wheel of life that turns and reaches everyone, when ultimately the fate of death touches us all.

But, even more prominent is the fact that an egg is seamless. It has no openings and thus represents the mourner, for Chazal tell us, "*Ovel ein lo peh* –

The mourner has no mouth.” He is speechless and dumbfounded by his loss and therefore the egg, which has no cracks, crevices, indentations, or niches, is a fitting symbol for the mourner who is silent in grief.

The reasons why we eat the food of mourning at our festive Seder table are also varied. One reason is because we are mourning the destruction of our Temple and thus our inability to enjoy the korban Pesach, the centerpiece of the ancient Seder. We also realize that every year, on the same night of the week in which the Seder falls, so too falls Tisha B’Av and therefore the egg brings to mind the destruction of our Beis HaMikdash. The egg is also a sad reminder of the passing of Avraham Avinu, whose yahrzeit is on the eve of Pesach.

But, there is another vital symbolism in the fact that the egg has no opening. The night of the Seder is the anniversary of Makos Bechoros, the Death of the Firstborn. Chazal tell us that, on that night, incredible devastation struck the people of Egypt. “Ein bais asher ein sham meis,” there was literally no house that was spared from death. If there wasn’t a firstborn in a particular Egyptian house, then the head of the household was struck down. Thus, in a very real sense, Egypt was silenced on this night. They were all in mourning. They were speechless and they had no mouth. The egg recalls this great miracle.

Why were the Egyptians punished in this devastating way? In Hallel we say, “B’tzeis Yisroel m’Mitzrayim, Beis Yaakov meam loez – When Yisroel left Egypt, the House of Yaakov from a land of a foreign tongue.” There is however, another definition of ‘meam loez.’ The word ‘laz’ also means slander and thus it can be rendered that Hashem took out the House of Yaakov from a nation that slandered us.

As we know the posuk tells us, and in the Haggadah we recite it, “Vayare-u osanu HaMitzrim – The Egyptians made us into evil people,” slandering us by saying that if an enemy would attack, we would traitorously join with the enemy and drive the Egyptians from their land.

Using this terrible slander, they turned their backs on the kindness of Yosef and instituted the final solution of drowning our babies and crushing our people with avodas perech, the incredibly cruel and sadistic backbreaking labor. It was for this campaign of slander that Hashem silenced all of their mouths with the grief of Makos Bechoros.

Unfortunately, we too were affected from the Egyptian environment and also succumbed to the sin of slander, as we find that Dasan and Aviram slandered Moshe Rabbeinu to Paroh, and Moshe Rabbeinu made the declaration “Achein nodah hadavar – Now I understand the matter.”

As Rashi explains, Moshe Rabbeinu declared, ‘Now I see why the Jews are suffering in Egypt. Because, they are guilty of the heinous crime of slander.’ It would only be later, after suffering through the torture of persecution that the

Medrash states that we were then worthy to be redeemed, “Shelo hayu bahem daleitora – There were no more talebearers among us.”

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for silence is ‘sheket,’ made up of the letters shin-kuf-tes. Those letters also spell the Hebrew word ‘keshot,’ to adorn oneself, because Yiddishkeit recognizes the beauty of silence. When we have the self-control to hold back from talking about others, we beautify ourselves with the trait of refined speech.

It is scary to note what happened to Dasan and Aviram. As the Medrash reveals to us, for their slander against Moshe Rabbeinu, Hashem caused them to become impoverished by taking away their influence so that no one would take their word seriously. Unfortunately, they didn’t get the message and they continued in their sinful ways until they met a horrible end, dying with Korach and his cohorts.

This teaches us how dangerous it is to turn a deaf ear to Hashem’s warnings and signals. Rather, the smart person, when something chas v’sholom goes wrong, always asks himself, ‘What must I change and how can I mend my behavior?’

The Seder narrative is called Magid. Once again it is interesting to note that an anagram of the word ‘magid’ is ‘dagim,’ fish. Perhaps this is because fish have no speech. We, on the other hand, utilize our speech but only to relate Hashem’s praise.

The egg, therefore, the symbol of silence, is a terrific springboard at the Seder table to remind our children and our loved ones that we must avoid, at all costs, the ruination of talking about the flaws and weakness of others. This was the way of Egypt, which led to their doom. May it be the will of Hashem that we guard our tongues from speaking evil and, in that merit, may Hashem bless us with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

Reprinted from the Pesach 5778 email of The VUES.

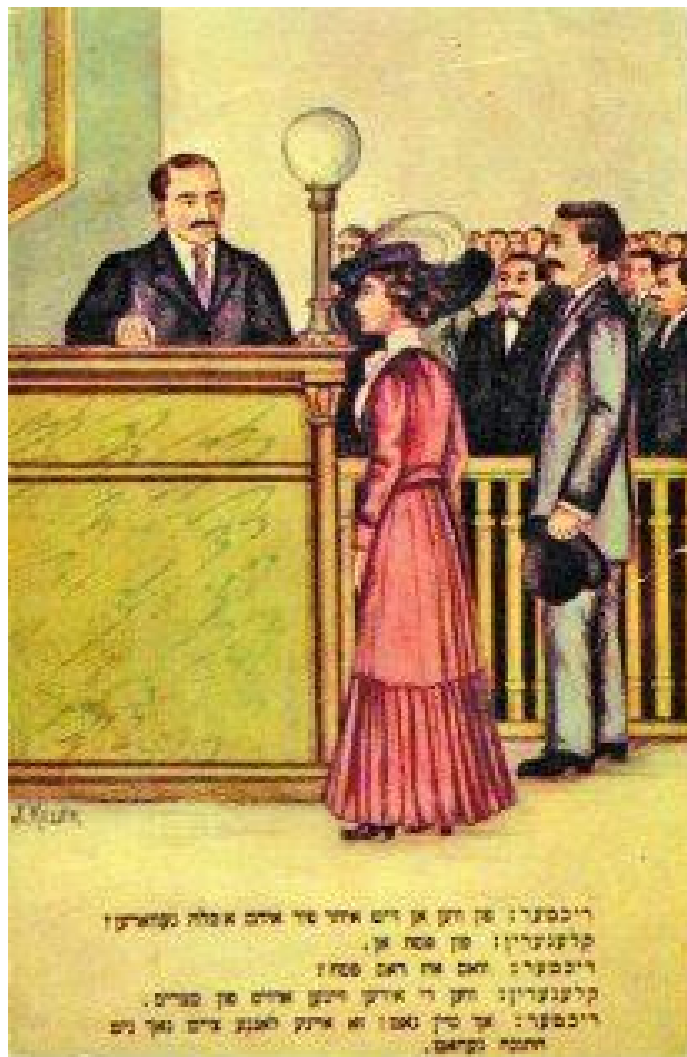
Unusual Passover Cards

By Saul Jay Singer

Regular readers of this column know that in my Jewish festival pieces, I often like to feature intriguing and historical greeting cards, which constitute a window into Jewish history in general and how Jews have historically celebrated their holy days in particular.

In this piece, however, I would like to showcase four of the more unusual Passover cards in my collection.

Exhibit 1 is a Yiddish card circa 1910, which shows a couple dressed in their finery appearing before a judge in a crowded American courtroom. The exchange on the card, a classic example of Yiddish vaudeville humor at its best, runs as follows:



Judge: When were you married?

Parties: On Pessach

Judge: What is Pessach?

Parties: When the Jews left Egypt

Judge: Oh my G-d, that's a long time to be married!

Not to step on an amusing punchline, but it is worth noting that the author of this card was apparently unaware that Jewish law prohibits marriages on Jewish holidays, including during the intermediate days of Passover. First, because “we do not mix one joyous occasion with another” (*Moed Katan*8b), which would detract from the pure joy of each occasion; second, because we do not enter into a legal transaction during holidays, including *Chol HaMoed*, and the wedding ceremony is considered a legal transaction.



Exhibit 2 is a very unusual postcard written in Braille; can you determine which of the Four Questions is written on it? (The answer appears at the end of this column.)

An old gag, typical of old Borsht Belt humor: A blind man at a Seder inadvertently picks up a piece of matzah instead of his Braille Haggadah, runs his fingers over it, and asks “Who wrote this nonsense?”

The Jewish Braille Institute (now called “JBI International”), founded in 1931, compiled worldwide censuses of blind Jews; began a correspondence course program for blind Jewish youth; and maintained a circulating library of books

related to Judaism and Jewish culture. (In 2003, JBI donated its entire 70,000 volume library to the Library of Congress.)

Today, it provides religious instruction to blind Jewish children and also published a free international Braille magazine of Jewish culture, to which Helen Keller wrote (1959): “With pride, I still read the Jewish Braille Review, which the Institute publishes for the blind, and bless the spirit of sympathy and brotherhood in which it serves both Jews and Christians in many lands.”

One of the first challenges faced by the Institute was the need for a uniform Hebrew Braille (which would be read from right to left!), so it mobilized an international panel, which formulated an International Hebrew Braille Code (1936) and which, after many adaptations, was completed in 1944. Mrs. Harry Cole, an early Hebrew Braille Code expert, took over five years to complete the first Braille translation of the Hebrew Bible.

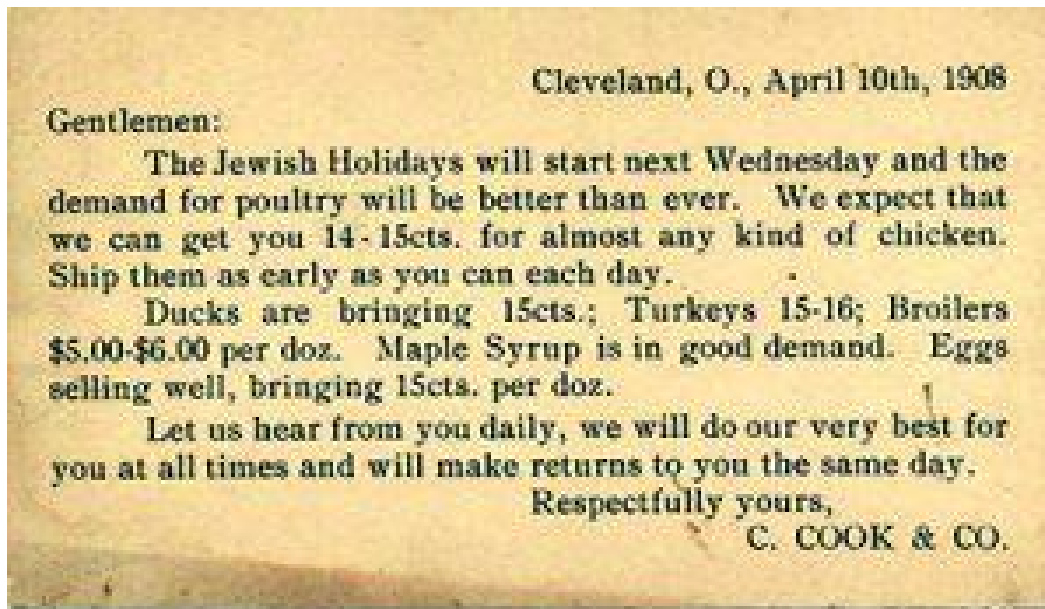
It is difficult to pin down who created the first Braille Haggadah and when. Possibly the first such Haggadah, which was acquired by the National Library for its renowned collection of *haggadot*, was printed in the United States in the early 1950s in cooperation with the New York Guild for the Jewish Blind. In the mid-1950s, Temple Shalom in Succasunna, NJ produced what it claimed was the first Hebrew-English edition of the Haggadah, and Rhea Fink created a version in 1956.

Another claim to publishing the first Hebrew-English Braille Haggadah was made by the son of Bernice Wolfson of Beth El Congregation in Omaha, Nebraska, who tells a wonderful story: The renowned blind jazz pianist, George Shearing (famous for “Lullaby of Birdland”), was in town for Passover, and Bernice invited him to attend the family Seder, where he was thrilled to read from her Braille Haggadah.

The family was invited to attend his concert the following night, at which he announced, “Last night, I had an extraordinary Passover experience with the Wolfson family” and proceeded to play a jazz variation of *Dayeinu*.

Though there is a general decline in the use of Braille books due to technological advances using computer-assisted reading technology, Braille *haggadot* continue to be in demand to facilitate the full participation by the blind in the Passover experience.

Exhibit 3 is an April 10, 1908 advertising card mailed from Cleveland by the C. Cook & Co. that reads as follows:



The Jewish Holidays will start next Wednesday and the demand for poultry will be better than ever. We expect that we can get you 14-15 cts. for almost any kind of chicken. Ship them as early as you can each day.

Ducks are bringing 15cts.; Turkeys 15-16; Broilers \$5.00 – \$6.00 per doz. Maple syrup is in good demand. Eggs selling well, bringing in 15cts. per doz.

Let us hear from you daily, we will do our very best for you at all times and will make returns to you the same day.

According to the Commodity Year Book, which used U.S. Department of Agriculture data, the average price of a dozen eggs in New York in 1908 was 22 cents. At first blush, one might think that the Cook Company was offering its customers a tremendous bargain but, in fact, the price of eggs in New York was much higher (a staggering 47 percent higher), which may be traced to 1906 when a group of New York City kosher poultry distributors organized the Live Poultry Commission Merchant's Protection Association, which fixed wholesale prices for kosher poultry; forced poultry retailers to buy exclusively from the Association; and punished uncooperating retailers while setting up competing local retailers who sold their goods at significantly reduced prices.

Thirteen Association members were convicted of illegal price-fixing in 1911 based principally upon the testimony of Bernard Baff. As a result – aside from his livestock being poisoned and his store bombed – he was murdered by 100 poultry retailers who resented his cutting out middlemen and selling at prices significantly lower than the competition.

To lend a bit of perspective to these prices, however: One 1908 dollar is worth about \$25.60 today. As such, kosher poultry for Passover would run the

1908 consumer about \$3.58 to \$3.84 at today's prices (and a dozen eggs would also be about \$3.84).

During the beginning of the 20th century, chickens were mostly raised on family farms, which sold eggs as their primary income source; chicken meat was a delicacy reserved for holidays and special occasions – and the Passover Seder certainly ranked as both a holiday and “a special occasion” for Jews. Kosher poultry was more expensive than beef but, only a few decades after the Cook Company issued our Passover price list, industrialized farming and transportation made chicken widely available and much cheaper.

And that's why, even today (and ever since Herbert Hoover's 1929 presidential campaign), politicians always promise “a chicken in every pot” – albeit not necessarily a *kosher* chicken, which is still far more expensive.

Exhibit it 4 is an anti-Semitic card displaying a grinning “Jewish matzah,” complete with a caricature Jewish beard and hat, with the Yiddish caption: *Du Bist a Matze Ponem* (“You have a Matzah face”). Due in part to the increased immigration of European Jews to American shores at the turn of the century and the accompanying increase in anti-Semitism, it was issued in 1905 as part of a series mocking the Yiddish language and showing less-than-flattering depictions of Jews.



And now for the answer to the Pesach Braille quiz: The card features the first question of the *Ma Nishtanah*: “On all other nights, we eat chametz and matzah, but on this night only matzah.”

Wishing all a *chag kasher v'sameach*.

Reprinted from the March 28, 2018 website of The Jewish Press.

A Hardened Heart



Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski

Later in the parasha, when Egypt was barely surviving the plagues inflicted on it by Hashem's wrath, we read, "*But I shall harden Pharaoh's heart and I shall multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt*" (7:3). Hashem is speaking after Pharaoh was stubbornly refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt to serve Hashem.

The famous question is asked by all the commentaries: "*How can Hashem harden Pharaoh's heart, thereby removing his bechira (free will), and then punish him and his people with even more severe plagues?*"

The answer our Rabbis give is that Pharaoh was his own worst enemy. Hashem gives everyone a chance to choose how to utilize their own free will. We must not ignore the numerous opportunities that Hashem gives us to improve our ways. Nevertheless, Hashem can remove our free will at any time — as He did with Pharaoh, after he ignored Moshe's request to let B'nei Yisrael go. If we choose to follow a path that leads us to sin and we continue on that path, then Hashem will make it harder for us to refrain from committing that sin.

In parashat Balak (22:35) the angel of Hashem says to Balaam, "*Go with the men, but do not say anything other than the exact words that I declare to you.*"

Rashi comments: “*bederech she’adam rotze le’lech, ba molchin oto* — Along the road on which a person wishes to go, there he will be led!” In other words, the way that you really wish to go, that is the way you will allow yourself to be led. Hashem’s guidance proceeds from our own decisions. It is entirely in our hands, which path we want to take: One that will lead us to spiritual growth or *has veshalom*, to spiritual decline.

Rabbi Twersky relates how forty years of working with alcoholics enabled him to understand Pharaoh’s obstinacy. The alcoholic can suffer blow after blow, each time swearing off drinking: “*I will never drink another drop as long as I live!*” Invariably, the alcoholic resumes the drinking soon afterward.

The Rabbi remembers one man whose drinking resulted in severe pancreatitis, which caused such horrific pain that it was not relieved even by morphine. He cried bitterly, “*If you can only get me over this pain, Doc, I swear I will never, ever even look at alcohol.*” Three weeks after being released from the hospital, he was drunk once again. Alcoholics who go through the ordeal of a liver transplant may drink on their first visit outside the hospital.

Pharaoh acted like a typical alcoholic. When he felt the distress of a plague, he pleaded with Moshe (just as the patient pleaded with Dr. Twersky), promising to send out the Israelites. No sooner was the plague removed, when Pharaoh immediately retracted his words. Rabbi Twersky relates that this behavior is not at all unusual.

Reprinted from the Va’era 5779 email of Rabbi Amram Sananes as written by Jack E. Rahmey.

The Shmuz on Pesach

I'm Never Wrong

By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier
Founder of TheShmuz.com



Rabbi Bentzion Shafier (The Shmuz.com)

“Moshe said: “So said HASHEM, ‘At about midnight, I shall go out in the midst of Egypt.’” – Shemos 11:4

Moshe Changed the Wording

After months and months of HASHEM showing the Mitzrim that He alone controls every aspect of Creation, Moshe was instructed to warn Pharaoh that if he still wouldn't let the Jewish people go, then exactly at the stroke of midnight, every firstborn in Mitzrayim would die. Yet when Moshe appeared in front of Pharaoh, he changed the message and said, “If Pharaoh doesn't free the Jews, then approximately at midnight, every first born will die.”

Rashi is troubled by why Moshe would change HASHEM's wording. He explains that Moshe was afraid that if he gave an exact time, the Mitzrim would be watching the clock and might miscalculate. Rather than assuming that they were wrong, they would attribute the error to Moshe and assume that he was a liar. To remove this potential pitfall, Moshe changed what HASHEM said and told Pharaoh that at around midnight, the firstborn would begin dying.

How Did the Mitzrim Tell Time?

This Rashi seems quite difficult to understand. In our times, we have precise instruments to measure time; we have clocks, watches, and chronographs. In the ancient world, timepieces were crude. During the day, a sundial might provide some degree of accuracy, give or take a few minutes.

But the makkah of b'choros was at night. The way the Mitzrim would tell time at night was by gazing at the stars. They would look up at the stars' alignments and approximate the time. How accurate could this possibly be? The telescope had yet to be invented; sophisticated mathematics was yet to be discovered. So what right would they have to assume that they were right and Moshe was wrong?

Ten Months of Being Proven right

What makes this even more difficult to understand is that for close to a year, Moshe and Aaron appeared in Pharaoh's palace, miraculously foretelling what would happen if Pharaoh didn't allow the Jews out of Mitzrayim. Time after time, events occurred exactly as Moshe predicted. In the precise manner, in the specific time, and with startling exactness, what Moshe said would happen, did happen. So why would the Mitzrim assume that they were correct and Moshe was lying? Wasn't it much more likely that they were the ones who made the error?

I Am Never Wrong

The answer to this question is based on human nature. We tend to assume that our opinions are correct, regardless of the evidence against us, and irrespective of whom we might be arguing with. While we may not have given much thought to how we arrived at our understanding, once something becomes accepted as our opinion, it becomes very difficult to change.

We are heedless in the forming of our opinions

Moshe was afraid the Mitzrim would calculate the time, and despite the questionable accuracy of their calculations, they would jump to the conclusion that Moshe was wrong – that he was, in fact, a liar who fabricated the entire situation.

To prevent this Moshe said, “around midnight.”

The implications of this concept are far-reaching when we take them to their logical conclusion. Let's assume for a minute that Moshe hadn't changed the expression. Let's assume he said that exactly at midnight HASHEM would kill the first born. Moshe was afraid that when the makkah began, the Mitzrim would miscalculate the time and conclude that it began at exactly 11:45 PM.

What would that prove? If Moshe was off by a few minutes, therefore what? Everything else he said till then was true. But even more, every firstborn would miraculously have died, exactly as Moshe said they would. What possible

conclusion could the Mitzrim reach that would make it worthwhile for Moshe to change the words that HASHEM said to him?

Here again, we see another human tendency. Moshe was afraid that he'd be defrocked and discredited. Once caught in one lie, the assumption would be that nothing he said had any credibility, despite its being proven true time after time. Rather than carefully going back to see that the basis of their opinion was highly speculative, the Mitzrim would assume Moshe was wrong, and they would then create an entire philosophy – despite the overwhelming evidence against it.

This concept has great relevance to us both on the receiving as well as on the giving end. To be effective, truthful people we must recognize our tendency to be biased. When we find ourselves in a disagreement with others, it is difficult to hear their position, regardless of the logic or evidence in their favor.

Whether in regards to politics, sports, the economy, or what color tie best matches this suit, we tend to be heedless in the formation of our opinions. Yet when challenged, we become locked in and almost incapable of hearing the other perspective.

“A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still”

On the other side of the coin, this idea has great impact when it is our goal to convince others. Whether it is a co-worker we wish to influence in issues of religion, or a child in regards to acting responsibly, the more clearly we understand human nature, the more effective we can be.

The operating principle is that arguing will beget the exact opposite reaction that I am seeking.

The reason for this is that when I directly challenge something that you think to be true, it is no longer the belief that is under assault – it is you. It is as if I am ripping out a bastion that supports you, and your instinct for self-preservation will come to your defense.

At this point, the very idea that you may not have fully believed up till now becomes rooted and grounded in your very being, and you become almost incapable of giving it up. Doing so would be admitting defeat, something we find so distasteful.

The only method to effectively influence others is to recognize the inner makeup of the human, and to then gingerly bring people around to the correct understanding, allowing their sense of self to remain untouched.

Reprinted from this year's Pesach website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the *Shmuz on the Parsha* book.

Were the Egyptians Right?

By Rabbi Gil Student



I. ENSLAVING THE JEWS

Were the Egyptians right in enslaving the Jews? The question seems outrageous at first. However, Pharaoh and the Egyptians fulfilled G-d's prophecy to Avraham that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land (Gen. 15:13). Why, then, were the Egyptians punished? Ramban's answer to this question reflects a broader opinion of his that is much-criticized but under-appreciated.

Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah 6:5) answers that while G-d's plan includes people enslaving Jews, it does not specify who will serve this evil role. Every individual has the choice of doing good or bad and receiving appropriate recompense. The Egyptians chose to enslave the Jews rather than allowing another nation to do so. Therefore, they deserved punishment.

Ramban (Gen. 15:14) rejects this approach. The Egyptians fulfilled G-d's prophecy, accomplishing His express will. Doing so is a mitzvah, not a sin. Rather, the Egyptians were punished for going beyond the prophecy, for overly oppressing the enslaved nation. Had they merely fulfilled the prophecy, they would presumably have been rewarded. However, because they went too far, they sinned and were punished.

The Ramban, at the end of his words, adds another explanation: The Egyptians had the wrong intention. They wanted to hurt the Jewish people, not to fulfill G-d's will. Therefore, their actions were considered a sin rather than a mitzvah (see also Ra'avad's gloss to Mishneh Torah, ad loc.).

II. FULFILLING G-D'S WILL

Ramban's approach is surprising but intuitive and consistent. You can ask why people should feel obligated to instantiate a prophecy. Isn't that G-d's business? Indeed, many commentators ask this question on another passage where the Ramban adopts this approach. The answer to that question explains the Ramban's view here, as well.

Why did Yosef refrain from immediately revealing his identity when his brothers appeared before him in Egypt? Ramban (Gen. 42:9) explains that Yosef wished to fulfill his dreams that his brothers and father would bow down to him. He deceived his brothers so they would bring Binyamin, and eventually their father, to bow down to him in Egypt. Why, many commentators ask, should Yosef feel obligated to ensure the dreams come true (e.g. Akeidas Yitzchak 29; Toras Moshe, ad loc.)?

The Vilna Gaon (Aderes Eliyahu, ad loc.) says simply that Yosef did not want to contradict G-d's will. His concern was not specifically with serving as the defender of G-d's words. Rather, he just wanted to be sure that he was on G-d's side, doing what the Boss wanted. Fulfilling G-d's will is not merely praiseworthy; it is a life goal to which all people must strive. Yosef refused to violate G-d's will by attempting (presumably futilely) to circumvent the prophecies.

With this idea, we can better understand Ramban's position (Gen. 49:10) that the Hasmoneans were punished for taking the kingship, which is reserved for the tribe of Yehudah and not priests like them. Why should they be punished when only a prophecy declares this, and not a command forbidding members of other tribes from taking the monarchy? As above, G-d's will was revealed in a prophecy. Regardless of whether it was commanded, we must certainly strive to guide our will toward G-d's. As the Mishnah (Avos 2:4) states, "Make your will like G-d's will."

Similarly, the Egyptians should have desired to fulfill G-d's will, which the Torah tells us included enslaving the Jews. Had they not been overly zealous, their doing so would have been a mitzvah, an accomplishment that moved the divine plan forward.

III. COMMANDMENTS & DIVINE WILL

This position is so compelling that, to defend the Rambam, the Meshech Chochmah (Gen. 15:14) had to add another component. Granted, we must strive to fulfill G-d's will. But we cannot make any such calculations when facing an explicit command to the contrary. The Meshech Chochmah posits that the Egyptians were forbidden to enslave the Jews. Therefore, their doing so, even in fulfillment of G-d's will, was a punishable sin.

While the Meshech Chochmah does not cite his source, I believe his approach is consistent with that of Rav Chaim Volozhiner in *Nefesh Ha-Chaim* (3:21). Rav Chaim asked why, if according to the Talmud the Patriarchs fulfilled all the commandments, they occasionally violated them. For example, Ya'akov married two sisters, which the Torah forbids.

Many answers have been given to this question but Rav Chaim Volozhiner's bears relevance to our discussion. He suggested that without explicit commands, the Patriarchs were free to do whatever they, with their deep insight, thought was spiritually best.

In my simplistic, non-kabbalistic terms: they could violate commandments to fulfill G-d's will precisely because they were not commanded in them. Lacking that explicit imperative, they were permitted to look at G-d's will more broadly defined. However, had they been commanded, they would have had to fulfill those obligations even at the expense of other indications of G-d's will.

What law did the Egyptians violate by enslaving the Jews? The Meshech Chochmah suggests that the Egyptians violated one of the seven Noahide commandments, that of *dinim* (laws). He adds that they exhibited ingratitude because Yosef had saved the Egyptians from starvation. This is puzzling because it is entirely unclear how enslaving Jews violates the command of *dinim* and how ingratitude fits into that commandment. Rav Yehudah Cooperman, in his notes to the Meshech Chochmah, quotes the Ramban's own words (Deut. 23:5) that Noahides are obligated to show gratitude.

However, this connection is still difficult within the *Nefesh Ha-Chaim's* framework. If the Egyptians faced an explicit command, they could not violate it in order to fulfill a prophecy. However, if they faced a vague command based on an intuitive sense of G-d's will, then they should certainly incorporate a broader understanding of G-d's will, including an explicit prophecy. Is the obligation to show gratitude really an explicit command such that we may not instead choose G-d's will as expressed in a prophecy?

IV. LAWS AND GRATITUDE

Perhaps the Meshech Chochmah intended to tie this issue into another debate between the Rambam and Ramban. According to the Rambam (*Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchos Melachim* 9:14), Noahides are commanded to institute laws and judges (*dinim*). He is sufficiently vague to allow for an interpretation that Noahides are obligated to establish justice, which perhaps also includes legislating gratitude.

However, Ramban (Gen. 34:13) disagrees with the Rambam. Ramban states that the commandment of *dinim* requires that Noahides establish courts that enforce the Torah's civil laws (see *Responsa Rema*, no. 10).

Perhaps the Meshech Chochmah means that, according to the Rambam, Noahides are explicitly commanded within the framework of dinim to enforce gratitude. Therefore, the Egyptians were obligated to respect the Jewish economic salvation of Egypt, even in the face of a prophecy to the contrary. G-d's apparent prophetic will cannot set aside His explicit legal will. However, the Ramban disagrees that gratitude is included within dinim. Therefore, broader concerns of G-d's will can be weighed and fulfilling the prophecy of enslaving the Jews becomes a mitzvah.

We all want to be on the right side of history. Presumably, siding with G-d's prophecies guarantees this. However, before we start calculating what G-d wants in a broader sense, we have to fulfill our local duties, obeying His will in that sense and, if need be, allowing others to accomplish His will. G-d will do what He wants but we may not always be able to play a role in that.

Reprinted from the Pesach 5778 email of The ViEWS.

A Blast from the Recent Past (2015)

The Power of Good Women

By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss



As I get ready once again to accept power of attorney to sell people chometz,, let me share with you the following memory. Several years ago when “facilitating the sale of chometz”, I had a remarkable discussion with one of my *mispallelim*.

While we were talking, I discovered that this would be his fourth opportunity to say Birchas HaChamah. In 1925, he was twelve years old - and

now as he gets ready to bless the sun the fourth time, he is in his 95th year - may he live to greet the Moshiach.

As we were talking, I asked him if he remembers what the Great Depression was like. He answered in the affirmative and related to me that life in Brownsville, Brooklyn, in the late 1920s and 1930s was very difficult indeed. He remembered how his father was a carpenter and would not have regular work.

Rather, he would take his heavy toolbox on his shoulder early each morning and trek to a worksite where he would stand in line together with many other hopeful carpenters, hoping to have a chance to be chosen for a day's work. The foreman would select a few fortunate individuals and everyone else was sent home in disappointment.

This man said that he remembered, as a young man, the shining wisdom of his mother. Afraid that his father might fall into a depression when he came home dispirited for not being selected to work, she would set out a nice table and offer reviving food to lift his spirits. He recalled that she would buy a box of rotten apples (for this was all that they could afford!) and cut away the bad parts and then wondrously manufacture apple strudel, apple cake, candied apples, and a host of other delicacies.

I told him that this wisdom of his virtuous mother, *zichrona levracha*, is taught to us in the Meam Loez on Parshas Ki Tzaitzay. There, the Meam Loez informs us that the true sign of an *Eishes Chayil*, a Woman of Valor, is how she behaves when her husband is out of work.

This story got me thinking about our present situation a little less than a century later. As we are reeling from an economic meltdown and suffering through a deep recession, many, many homes are today also facing such challenges.

While most of us do not have to buy rotten apples, the problems are of a different nature. The worries about bank foreclosures on homes and cars, utilities being shut down, medical coverage being lost, and tuition not being met, causes the heads of households sleepless nights, stomach agitation, and all different types of stress related ailments. It is here that I would like especially my women readership to absorb the sage words of the Meam Loez: that, in these times of tension, their status of *Eishes Chayil* is truly put to the test.

As I am writing this, I know that the almost instant reaction, especially of the American reader, is, "Wait, just one minute! Why are you putting this on the women? The men should equally be there for all of the stress that the women have because of today's economy!" So, let me explain. As we remember the Pesach experience, the Medrash teaches, "*She'b'zuchus noshim tzidkonios she'b'oso hador, nigalu* - In the merit of the righteous women of that generation, we were saved."

Besides the several extraordinary women that this refers to, such as Yocheved, Miriam, Tziporah, Bisya, and Elisheva, it is also a sweeping statement of praise about the millions of Jewish women in Egypt who, with great courage, encouraged their husbands to continue building Jewish families. The Medrash tells us that the men became broken and crushed and weren't interested in having more children. They argued, Should we bring children into such a world to be crushed in the walls of Pitom and Ramses or to be faced with a horrible existence of tortuous slavery?

The women, however, with wise optimism, rejuvenated their husbands under the apple tress (which we commemorate at the Seder with the eating of *charoses*) and infused them with new hope to continue to build Klal Yisroel. It was their valor that allowed for the increased Jewish population that Chazal teach us, enabled the years of servitude to end more quickly.

You might argue that the women in Mitzrayim had it easier than the men and that was why they were able to cope better. But, in reality, it is just the opposite. The Medrash tells us that part of Paroh's diabolical treatment of the Jews was that he gave the men women's work to do, and men's work to the women. So, the women were actually doing the hard labor formerly associated with men. Yet, it didn't break their spirits. To the contrary, they persevered and took the initiative to rekindle the hope and spirit of their families.

This is a very important point that needs to be emphasized as we experience Pesach this year. The women have to take the initiative in bolstering their husband's confidence in seeking ways to be a calming influence in the home, a source of comfort after the harsh realities of a tough and oftentimes cruel workplace.

Our history teaches us, time and time again, good women throughout the ages, have the strength to do this. While we do not have to buy rotten apples, women do have to figure out ways to cut down on household expenses, minimize use of credit cards, and set the tone for this behavior for the entire family.

In the merit of all the wonderful women out there, may we all be blessed with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

Reprinted from the March 10, 2015 website of Matzav.com

Passing Down Passover Traditions [in Oklahoma]

By Carla Hinton

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Eliyah Houston, 3, shows her finished afikoman bag after a Passover related PJ Library session at the Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City. The word "afikoman" is written in English and Hebrew on the bag. [Photo by Carla Hinton, The Oklahoman]

Diane Barton-Lewis remembers when she was a young child embarking on the all-important search toward the end of the Passover Seder meal.

Young people participating in the meal are traditionally encouraged to look for the afikoman, a piece of matzoh taken from the Seder plate and hidden somewhere in the house. Once it's found, it is eaten as a dessert and in commemoration of the paschal sacrifice.

In Barton-Lewis' childhood home, children received a prize for finding the hidden matzah.

Those memories of yesteryear came flooding back as she watched her daughter Ally, 4, learn more about afikoman and its part in the Passover Seder ritual.

"This is like the kids' favorite part because they go look for it," she said. "I know in my family, there's always money associated with it."

Passover traditions were the topic of conversation at the Jewish Federation of Greater Oklahoma City's PJ Library session, which Barton-Lewis and her daughter attended.

Roberta Clark, the federation's executive director, said PJ Library is a national program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, and it is designed to bring Jewish families and children together around Jewish storytelling and Jewish values.

"It's a great opportunity to bring the Jewish community together for wonderful Jewish moments," Clark said.

She said the federation offers four to six sessions a year, typically tied to a holiday like Passover. The Jewish holiday begins at sundown Friday and ends at sundown April 7. It commemorates the Hebrews' exodus from slavery in Egypt as told in the Book of Exodus.

'Part of it'

During a recent PJ Library session, families gathered at the Jewish federation's office where Clark started things off with a colorful reading of "Company's Coming," a children's book about Passover.

After the story, Clark showed children and their parents how to make a matzah tray for Passover and a bag to store the afikoman. By tradition, it is typically stored in a bag or wrapped in a piece of cloth.

With nearby bowls of animal crackers to help keep their creative spark alive, Ally and Gabriel Friesen, 4, began working on their Passover projects, with Eliyah Houston, 3, and her brother Moshe Houston, 2, pursuing the same goal next to them.

Jennifer Friesen, Gabriel's mother, said she takes him to PJ Library sessions to make sure he has opportunities to learn about Jewish traditions that she didn't have.

"It's for him to be able to grow up and be a part of it and get to know all the traditional stuff that I missed out on," she said.

B.J. and Kim Johnston helped daughter Josephine, 1, who was interested in the marker colors but needed a little help with her craft projects.

The couple said Rabbi Vered Harris, the spiritual leader at their house of worship, Temple B'nai Israel, had encouraged them to allow their tot to participate in the sessions and activities like it.

"Rabbi gave the recommendation. She said even if you think she can't understand it, she can absorb it by being around it," Kim Johnston said.

Clark said Jewish leaders always have wanted children to be engaged with the Seder meal, and thus the afikoman was introduced. The Seder is a sacred, ceremonial meal, which includes special foods, prayers and rituals that help to tell the story of the Israelites' redemption from Egypt.

Matzoh is a Passover staple because the flat unleavened bread (resembling a cracker) is an integral part of the Passover story. There was no time for the Hebrew slaves' dough to rise before they fled Egypt and Pharoah, so their resulting unleavened bread, matzoh, is often called the "bread of affliction" or the "bread of haste."

Clark said the afikoman is the middle piece of matzoh taken from three matzoh squares at the Seder meal.

The children at the recent PJ Library session used markers to decorate their bag for the afikoman.

"Bubbe (grandmother) is going to like it!" Clark told Ally as the young girl and Gabriel both expressed great pride in their finished bag.

Family members said they already had participated in several activities designed to share Passover on a child-friendly level. Barton-Lewis said Alley had made a Seder plate at a Shabbat Tot activity at Temple B'nai Israel.

And Friesen said Gabriel got a chance to make matzoh at Chabad Jewish Center for Life and Learning.

Nechoma Goldman, Chabad's program director, said the matzoh-making session at Chabad's Hebrew School was in keeping with the organization's mission to teach Passover traditions and other aspects of Jewish life and culture to young people.

"It's really our history. It's who we are so it's important to teach it to our children. They are the next generation," she said.

Reprinted from the March 24, 2018 website of The Oklahoman (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma)

Wine Only or is Grape Juice O.K.?



QUESTION: Must I use wine for the four cups [on the Pesach Seder], or may I use grape juice instead?

ANSWER: There are two schools of thought among the Poskim. R' Moshe Feinstein (Hagaddah Kol Dodi 3:4) maintains that since Chazal instituted the drinking of four cups of wine to feel a sense of freedom, grape juice should not be drunk.

Although it has the *halachic* status of wine, it is not an alcoholic beverage, and one only feels a sense of freedom when drinking an alcoholic beverage. (If there is the possibility that the person will be endangered by drinking the wine, grape juice may be used.)

This was also the opinion of R' Eliyashiv (Shvus Yitzchak, Pesach 10:2) and R' Ben Tzion Abba Shaul (Ohr Letzion III, 15:4).

However, the Chazon Ish (Hilchos Chag B'Chag, Chapter 19: fn. 24), the Brisker Rav and the Tchebiner Rav (Teshuvos VeHanhagos II, 243) held that it is unnecessary to drink wine, and grape juice is acceptable. Indeed, these great Sages actually drank grape juice at the *seder* (ibid.).

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik as well drank grape juice for the last three cups. However, he insisted on drinking wine for the first cup (*Kiddush*) to satisfy the opinion of Rambam that one may not use cooked wine for *Kiddush*. Since grape juice is always cooked, he would only use non-*mevushal* wine for *Kiddush*. R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo, Pesach 9:11) explained that since grape juice has the *halachic* status of wine, one experiences freedom when drinking grape juice even though it is non-alcoholic.

Reprinted from the March 29, 2019 Halacha Yomis email of OU Kosher.

Perhaps the Largest Passover/Pesach Seder In the World - in Nepal



Thousands of young Israelis often take a year to travel the world after completing their military service, and many end up in Nepal. This Seder in Kathmandu last year may have been the largest in the world, according to its organizer, Chabad House of Kathmandu under the direction of co-directors Rabbi Chezky and Rabbanit Chani Lifshitz. Rabbanit Lifshitz is seen fourth from the left as she encourages other Jewish women to light the Yom Tov tea lights at the Nepalese Seder.

SUPPLEMENTAL STORIES FOR YOM TOV PESACH 5779

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When the Settlers Came to Stay **Half-a-century ago, 60-odd people gathered in** **Hebron for a Seder — and never left** **By Colin Shindler**

Fifty years ago, Rabbi Haim Druckman rose to his feet in the Park Hotel in Hebron, greeted more than 60 guests and proceeded to lead the Pesach Seder.



Recent photo of Rabbi Haim Druckman

The Arab owners of the hotel were told that their visitors were Swiss tourists. The hotel kitchen was koshered and the mezuzot affixed. Moshe Levinger even brought a refrigerator and a washing machine with him.

The visitors later carried Torah scrolls to the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, the site within the confines of the al-Ibrahimi mosque that is the accredited resting place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives Sarah, Rebecca and Leah.

A telegram was then sent to Yigal Allon, Israel's Minister of Labour, announcing that the Jews intended to stay.

This Seder, in 1968, celebrated not only the exodus from Egypt but the return to Hebron, 30 years after the last Jew had left in the midst of the Arab Revolt. It was a symbol, a year after the Six-Day War, of the settlement drive in Gaza, Sinai and the West Bank.

Many of the participants in the Seder had originally been members of a faction of the Bnei Akiva youth movement, Gachelet, which had integrated "a more extreme Orthodoxy with a more extreme nationalism". Gachelet found a home in Merkaz HaRav in Jerusalem, the yeshiva of Zvi Yehuda Kook, later the mentor of the religious settlers.

His disciples viewed the victory of 1967 as divine revelation and messianic expectation. Kook told his charges that any decision by a political leader in Israel to return land for peace would lack legal validity and would contradict a dictate of the Torah.



A man rides a donkey past construction workers building new houses in the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba, east the West Bank town of Hebron, August 24, 2017. / AFP PHOTO / HAZEM BADER/AFP/Getty Images)

There were others, too, who believed that the West Bank should be retained. Menachem Begin's nationalists never accepted partition between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs in 1947. Yitzhak Tabenkin's Marxist Zionists of Ahdut Ha'avodah argued there would be an ongoing conflict if the feudal system was allowed to continue in Arab society — and therefore a matrix of socialist kibbutzim should be constructed on the West Bank.

Military hawks such as Ariel Sharon believed the West Bank provided strategic depth and that any invading army would be hindered by the planting of settlements at invasion routes. The literary intelligentsia — Natan Alterman, Shai Agnon, Uri Zvi Greenberg — all supported the maximalist Land of Israel movement.



Photo of the Machpela, the Cave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish people.

Hebron, where Jews had lived for centuries, was often separated from the West Bank in the minds of many. During the 19th century it had been a centre of the Chabad Chasidim who had vehemently opposed the rise of Zionism.

But, during the Tarpat killings in 1929, there was a wholesale slaughter of families, mutilations and rapes in Hebron by Arab gangs. Sixty-six Jews lost their lives; the British police was slow in responding and many Arab notables stood aside even though some, such as the Kurdiyya family, hid their Jewish neighbours.



PaPalestinians clash with Israeli troops during clashes in the West Bank city of Hebron, February 9, 2018. Photo by Wisam Hashlamoun/Flash90

By 1968, there was a desire by many Israelis to return to locations where they had once lived and were forced to leave. Even the aged David Ben-Gurion argued just a few days after the end of the Six-Day War that, while Israel should not annex territory, Hebron was “the sister of Jerusalem” and an exception.

After six weeks of indecision, Levi Eshkol’s government granted permission to the Seder participants to establish a yeshiva and they were relocated to a nearby military compound. On Yom Kippur they held a service in the Cave of Machpelah. In 1970, Golda Meir authorised the construction of Kiryat Arba, an urban settlement adjacent to Hebron that is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.

The first residents moved in during the following year; today it is a city of 7,000 inhabitants.

Several hundred settlers moved into the Jewish quarter in the heart of Hebron in 1979. Today, they have nearly a quarter-of-a-million Palestinian neighbours.

Many Israelis, like many British Jews, were never enthusiastic about the settlement drive and the religious fervour of its advocates. But Likud-led governments were elected by the voters primarily to protect them in such times of violence as the first Intifada of 1988, the advent of suicide bombers eight years later and the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2001. Security for their families rated above any qualms about the settlements.

The city's Hebrew and Arabic names, Hevron and al-Khalil respectively, both derive from the same root, meaning "friend" in English. Given the continuing, often violent tensions between the two communities, it remains a name steeped in irony.

Colin Shindler is emeritus professor of Israel Studies at SOAS, University of London. His most recent book, 'The Hebrew Republic: Israel's Return to History' was published by Rowman and Littlefield

Reprinted from the April 4, 2018 website of JC (United Kingdom)

Now we move on to the next part of our tale.

Were it not for the Teshuvah HaRashba, the wheat field would never have been *plowed*. *The Teshuvah HaRashba saves the day*.

Reprinted from the March 13, 2018 website of yeshiva world.com. Originally published in the Five Towns Jewish News.

What It's Like to Be The Rabbi of the Amazon Rainforest

By Menachem Posner

*Serving one of the most isolated Jewish
communities in the world*



When Rabbi Arie Raichman was growing up in Texas he never imagined that he would be koshering pots and pans in Brazil's Amazon River.

Nestled deep in the Amazon rainforest lies one of the most isolated Jewish communities in the world. Located where the Solimões and Negro rivers join to form the Amazon—1,500 kilometers upstream from the Atlantic and inaccessible by roads—Manaus is the capital of the resource-rich Brazilian state of Amazonas.

Rabbi Ariele and Devorah Lea Raichman have co-directed the Chabad House in Manaus for nearly 10 years.

A native Texan, Rabbi Raichman recently shared some of the challenges and joys of tending to Jewish life (and raising six children) in a city that sits smack-dab in the middle of a jungle.



Putting on tefillin with the vast Amazon rainforest in the background.

Q: Rabbi Raichman, please describe Manaus. Does it really feel different from any other major city in a developing part of the world?

A: In a sense, Manaus is a typical Brazilian city with its fair share of slums, malls, high-rises and highways. But you constantly feel the jungle with every one of your senses.

The heat and humidity here are oppressive, so people rarely walk outside if they can avoid it. It rains a lot out here in the tropics, and our Chabad House (which is also our home) flooded twice this past year.

There are also jungle animals in the city. When driving, you sometimes need to wait for monkeys or snakes to cross the road; our previous Chabad House had jungle bats in the roof.

You hear the Amazon sounds as well. There are lizards that make terrible screeching sounds at night, and the acai tree in front of our Chabad House attracts all kinds of chirpy parrots. It's cute for tourists, but a nuisance that we locals just get used to.

Q: How does the isolation affect things?

A: For the most part, it means that you sometimes need to learn patience. If, for example, your air-conditioner breaks, you may need to wait a few days for a spare part to be shipped (literally) from Belem or flown in from S. Paulo.



Devorah Lea Raichman, left, is the first rebbetzin in the city's history.

The lack of parts may also be the reason we have frequent power outages. When that happens, we have to check into a hotel for the night since it is nearly impossible to sleep without air-conditioning.

At the same time, being so distant makes our community very close-knit. People are here for the long-term, and they value friendships and companionship.

It also means that we need to be everything for everyone all the time.

For example, there was someone hiking through the Amazon to raise money and awareness for cancer. He contracted malaria and then got arrested on the

Amazon border with Colombia, where he was in dire need of help. His family reached out to us since we are the only Jewish resource for miles around.

A visitor from Israel recently got into a car accident in Alter do Chão, which is more than an hour flight from here. The only Jewish person in the region happens to be an orthopedic surgeon, and we were able to connect them.

Q: What is the history of Jews in Manaus?



When you live near the jungle, who needs a zoo?

A: Jewish history begins here with the 19th-century rubber boom, when the city bloomed quickly, as did business all along the Amazon. The opportunities attracted Jewish explorers and entrepreneurs, especially from Morocco.

In 1910, Rabbi Shalom Muyal of Morocco, who had traveled up the Amazon to foster Jewish observance and perform circumcisions among the settlers, passed away from yellow fever and is buried in the Manaus municipal cemetery. He has

come to be regarded as a saint by many in the local non-Jewish population, who make regular pilgrimages to his gravesite.

His great-granddaughter, who now lives in France, recently came to visit. She shared that Rabbi Muyal had left behind a pregnant wife and three children when he came here on what he thought would be a temporary trip. His wife didn't even find out that he had died until eight years after his passing.

For 99 years between his death and our arrival, there had never been a rabbi living here. My wife is the first rebbetzin to ever live here.

Q: What is Jewish life like today?

A: The community here is small, maybe 500 Jewish people in total. Many are the descendants of the original Moroccan traders, but we also have others who came here for business opportunities or environmental purposes.

My wife grew up in Belem, where her parents direct the local Chabad center, so the mentality and customs are familiar to her. People are friendly here, so it did not take me long to become acclimated to the community as well.

When we arrived, there were three families who kept kosher. Ten years later, there are 14 households who buy kosher meat and other supplies from the store we run out of our Chabad House. There are weekly classes for children and adults, and different themed and holiday activities throughout the year. There are also 15 men who bought their own *tefillin* and put them on every morning, which is amazing.

Before we came, not one woman used the *mikvah*. Today, there are five.

Q: Is there a *mikvah* in the Chabad House? Can they just use the Amazon river?

A: We do not yet have a *mikvah*, which is obviously a challenge. The Amazon is not an option either. It's muddy and polluted, and not really safe for swimming. It is also not *halachically* ideal because it is fed largely by rainwater and would therefore need to be confined to a stagnant pool to be kosher, which it is not.

Until we get funds and a location for a *mikvah* (please G-d very soon), the women fly to S. Paulo, which is normally the cheapest ticket but takes four hours each way, or to Belem, which is two hours each way.

Q: How about the rainforest? In what ways does that impact Jewish life there?

A: Like I mentioned before, Manaus is deeply connected to the river and the rainforest on many levels. On a communal level, this Tu Bishvat, the New Year for Trees, 10 men from our community went out to a tower in middle of the rainforest, where we studied and prayed together as a *minyan*. There are very few places in the world where you can get that experience. One really feels the beauty and verdant vitality of G-d's world.

And, of course, the rainforest attracts many tourists, who we serve in many ways.

Q: Can you share more about the tourists?

A: Tourists come here from all over the world, to hike in the rainforest, swim with the pink dolphins, meet the monkeys, and all that. We provide them with prayer services, kosher food and whatever else they may need.



The area is world-famous for the variety of wildlife.

There are 20 cruises that come through every year during the rainy season, when the river is deep enough for the ships to pass safely.

We greet Jewish tourists at the famous Amazon Theater, which was built with imported materials in 1896 during the rubber boom, and is considered one of the city's most impressive landmarks. One year, we lit a giant Chanukah menorah there. Some tourists are surprised to see us, but others looked us up online and expect Chabad to be there for them, no matter where in the world.

Q: How hard it is to get kosher food?

A: For the most part, it takes patience and foresight since everything needs to be shipped down the Amazon from Belem in refrigerated containers. We often find ourselves without kosher milk. I tried a few times to supervise the milking at a local dairy farm and bring home some *chalav Yisrael* milk, but that proved impractical. The weather is so hot that by the time I brought the milk home and pasteurized it, most of it had spoiled.

When things get tough, we've just learned to make do, and do without.



Located at the gateway to the resource-rich rainforest, Manaus has a small but close-knit Jewish community.

Q: Are there children in the community, and what do you do for them?

A: There are several dozen Jewish children here that we know of, besides our own six kids. During the winter and summer breaks, we hold a day camp for them, where they explore Judaism and have fun in a kosher environment. On Sundays, the kids gather for learning and an activity. We do a lot of one-on-one tutoring, helping kids learn Hebrew, learn about the holidays and everything to give them a Jewish education.

We take tremendous pride in watching the kids grow in their Judaism, and celebrate bar and bat mitzvah, and other milestones. We recently had the pleasure of officiating at a wedding of a local young man who married a Jewish woman in the United States, and is now involved with Chabad in New York.



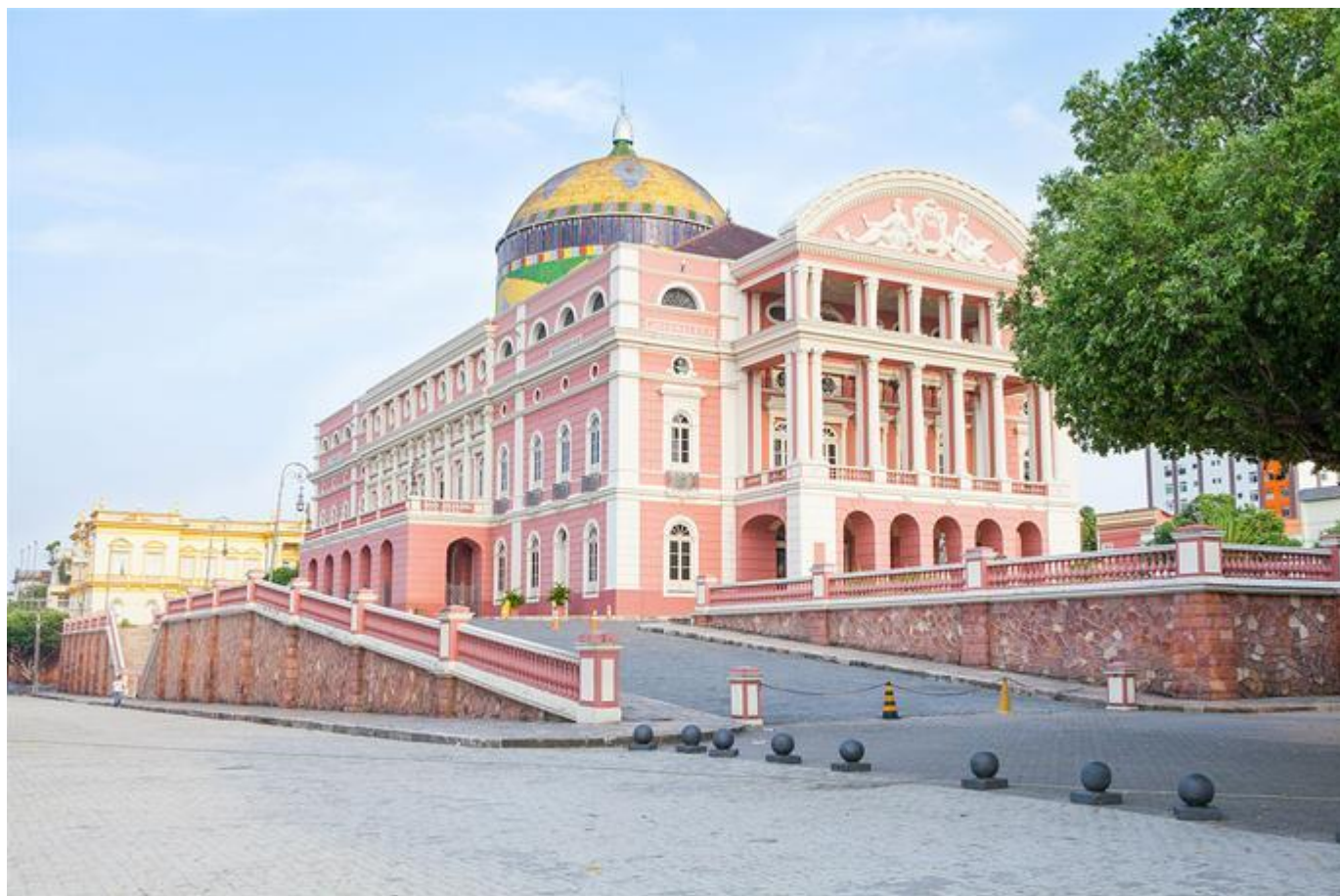
Frying up some local, fresh, kosher piranha.

Q: It sounds like things have really progressed. Is this what you imagined all along?

A: I have family in Brazil, and when I was a teenager my family came to tour Manaus. I really enjoyed the Amazon and wanted to go back, but I never envisioned that I would eventually live here. Back then, I didn't even know that there were Jews in the Amazon.

When we got married, my wife and I settled in Brooklyn, N.Y., and we considered becoming Chabad emissaries in Manaus. We took a pilot trip in June, and it was really a disheartening experience. Our 2-month-old baby kept on fainting from the heat, and the people we met seemed to be pretty far from Judaism. One elderly man we met told us that he had made the mistake of living a non-Jewish life and implored us to help make sure that the next generation does

not make that same mistake. That affected us, but we were not ready to make the commitment.



The rabbi greets Jewish tourists at the Amazon Theater, one of the city's most impressive landmarks.(Photo: Karine Hermes)

Then, a few months later, Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg were murdered in their Chabad House in Mumbai. We were inspired by their dedication and their willingness to move to the other side of the world for a small, isolated community. We decided to try Manaus for a year with the understanding that we would leave if we could not hack it out. We came here and have never looked back.

This past Shavuot, our sixth child was born right here in Manaus. This is home for us. The people are our people. Until Moshiach comes, this is our place in the world, and we wouldn't trade it for anywhere else.

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayakhel 5779 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.

For Houston's Scattered Hurricane Victims, Unity At Synagogue Seders

By Steve Lipman

'After Harvey, community has become more important,' says a communal leader.



People make their way out of a flooded neighborhood after it was inundated with rain water following Hurricane Harvey on August 29, 2017 in Houston, Texas. Getty Images

This year is not typical.

Seven months after Category 4 Hurricane Harvey struck Houston, flooding large sections of the city including the heavily Jewish Meyerland neighborhood, many members of Houston's Jewish population of 63,000 are still displaced, not ready to host their own seders.

The Browns, like many of their Jewish neighbors, will for the first time attend a communal seder. Though they won't be in their own home, the very fact of the communal seder is a sign of recovery here. That's because some of the Houston congregations that suffered the most extensive damage in the last August storm have repaired their facilities in time to offer community-wide seders for the first time in several decades.



Rabbi Barry Gelman stands in the former sanctuary of United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston, which is to be demolished following destructive flooding during Hurricane Harvey last August. (Photo by Steve Lipman)

The Browns, and their 15-year-old daughter, are living in “a tiny” apartment until their home is restored. They will be among some 150 people taking part in a second-night communal seder at United Orthodox Synagogues (UOS), the city’s major Orthodox congregation. UOS was the Houston synagogue most heavily damaged by Harvey.

The UOS seder will give the family a chance “to be together with everyone,” Marisa Brown said. “This raises achdus [unity].”

The communal seder will take place on March 31 in UOS’ Freedman-Levit Sanctuary and adjacent social hall, the only usable part of the one-story, tan-brick building. The rest of the building, including the sanctuary, religious school and

office space, are to be demolished in the next few weeks, to be rebuilt at a to-be-determined site on the synagogue's four-acre grounds or on higher ground a half-mile away.



A room in United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston, stripped of its furniture and floors. (Courtesy of United Orthodox Synagogues)

For members of UOS, and of Congregation Beth Yeshurun, a half-mile away, the city's largest Conservative synagogue, Passover this year represents an auspicious time to come together and continue the post-Harvey healing process.

Beth Yeshurun will offer communal seders both nights of Yom Tov.

With many members of the community lacking space in their temporary quarters to invite guests to a seder, and now separated from some of their friends, a communal seder is significant, said Taryn Baranowski, chief marketing officer of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston. "After Harvey, community has become more important," she said.

Rabbi David Rosen, longtime spiritual leader of Beth Yeshurun, agreed.

"Passover means family ... it means a connection with the Jewish community," he said.

UOS Rabbi Barry Gelman, who grew up in Oceanside, L.I., and formerly served at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun on the Upper East Side and the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, decided to renew the synagogue's discontinued practice of hosting a second-night communal seder after speaking with members of his congregation.



The Freedman Hall of United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston will be the venue next week for a second-night seder led by Rabbi Barry Gelman. Photo by Steve Lipman.

Last month UOS congregants bid farewell to the main part of the synagogue building, which was constructed in 1960 following the merger of three congregations. At a Sunday morning ceremony, following Shacharit worship services, some 150 members of the congregation shared memories and photographs.

“Some people just sat in the room and cried,” Rabbi Gelman said.

Since Harvey, all UOS activities have taken place in the elevated Freedman Hall.

With no architect's plans in place for the synagogue's new building, details about a multimillion-dollar fundraising effort are uncertain.

With roughly 350 member households, UOS is the largest Orthodox shul in the Southeast. Membership has not decreased since Harvey — no congregants have moved away, Rabbi Gelman said. "People are determined not to let the flood ruin the Jewish community."

After Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, large numbers of citizens, including members of the Jewish community, left the city. Especially hard hit was congregation Beth Israel, an Orthodox synagogue that for a few years shared space a few miles away with Congregation Gates of Prayer, which is Reform, and subsequently put up a new building next to Gates of Prayer.

Harvey gives the ancient story of people leaving their homes a contemporary meaning, said Marisa Brown, a native of Syosset, L.I., who has lived in Houston for four decades. "The story of the Exodus applies to us in a different context."

Though Harvey will be on people's minds at this year's communal seders, talk of the hurricane will not dominate the evenings, Rabb Gelman said — he will not add any references to the storm to the traditional readings and rituals.

"You don't want this to be a flood-themed seder," he said.

Reprinted from the March 29, 2018 email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Professional) Update. Originally printed in the March 20, 2018 website of the New York Jewish Week.

Affluent Jews Send Undocumented Domestic Workers on Risky Passover Trip

By Ari Feldman

What do you do when you want to bring the housekeeper to your home in Florida for Passover, but she can't fly because she is undocumented?

This is the conundrum that Israel, a private taxi driver, is here to help you solve. But it will cost you a chunk of change — and comes with a serious moral dilemma.

Israel, who asked to be identified only by his first name, operates Always On Time Limo Service. It is a one-man operation that advertises “Next day delivery” of hired help from the New York area to a desired Florida address. The round-trip ticket costs \$500 — roughly the cost of roundtrip airfare from New York to Orlando or West Palm Beach airports around Passover.

While bringing a domestic worker on vacation helps make childcare and cleaning the house more convenient, sending her on a 20-hour van ride while you jet down may not feel quite right.

More importantly, it poses grave legal risks to both the undocumented women and the families that employ them — not to mention the chauffeur.

“It’s really chutzpah of the highest sense,” said Michael Wildes, a prominent immigration attorney and former federal prosecutor in New York. “Your vacation may be fouled up, but that person could be deported.”

Many Jewish households employ hired help every Passover to assist with the arduous task of cleaning the house top to bottom and searching for every remaining bit of *chametz*, or leavened bread. Some families skip this step and spend the weeklong holiday at a resort, where the kitchens are supervised by rabbis who specialize in the laws of *kashrut*.

But few in the Jewish community know about the risk other families will place themselves and their employees in to alleviate the stress of the holiday.

‘Anybody who comes into contact with this is at risk’

Israel is one of many Orthodox men — thousands, he guessed — who make their living chauffeuring ultra-religious Jews around Brooklyn neighborhoods like Williamsburg, Flatbush and Borough Park. “Jewish Uber,” he called it — part of New York City’s “shadow transit” network coordinated by various ethnic communities.

“I only deal with Jewish people,” said Israel, who also lives in Brooklyn. Israel is wary about providing details about himself or his business. He declined to name his country of origin. He said that his clients are Orthodox Jews from all

backgrounds who primarily live in Brooklyn, New Jersey and Long Island. He says that the domestic employees he drives — all women — have “no paperwork.” But Israel believes he has no legal liability in accepting cash payments to transport women he knows are undocumented across several state lines.

“When a driver has a passenger, he doesn’t ask them, ‘Are you a citizen?’ or whatever,” Israel told the Forward. “I’m not worried about doing something illegal. I’m not bringing drugs.”

But Wildes, who has defended the immigration status of First Lady Melania Trump and her parents, says he is wrong.

It is one thing for undocumented immigrants to be transported around New York City, a sanctuary city. (Newark, home to an estimated 25,000 undocumented workers, is also a sanctuary city). The New York Police Department has denied 1,500 requests received from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, to detain immigrants since Donald Trump’s inauguration, and ICE agents must get consent before entering a private residence. As long as undocumented workers stay away from city transit hubs like bus stations and airports, risk of arrest and subsequent deportation is generally low.

But as soon as they leave New York, all bets are off. That is especially the case when a dozen or more undocumented workers are being chauffeured in a rented van down the busiest interstate corridor in the country — under a deadline.

“If somebody’s driving at a fast speed, they’re running the risk that they can be stopped and investigated by states that are less sympathetic than New York,” said Wildes.

If Israel’s van were pulled over, Wildes said that the result would be disastrous. It could lead to deportation of the undocumented women; criminal smuggling charges for Israel; and large fines — or worse — for the employers footing the bill. The rental van could be impounded.

“Anybody who comes into contact with this is at risk,” Wildes said.

A poorly kept secret

The practice of shuttling domestic workers to Florida — and likely other vacation getaways — has been going on for many years. Some families send the workers ahead by bus or train. Wildes says he knows of wealthy families that bring their domestic workers on their private jets.

Of course, in recent years, the issue of undocumented workers has become much more sensitive, and enforcement of immigration laws has become stricter, potentially raising the stakes for everyone involved.

Reprinted from the March 14, 2018 email of the FORWARD.

Watching Over My Grandmother

Jewish rituals serve to sanctify the dead—and to humanize the living.

By Bari Weiss

How do the rituals of death teach us how to live more meaningful lives? As religions go, Judaism is far more concerned about what happens in this world than the world to come. But as I learned this past weekend while burying my grandmother, Jewish rituals can serve not only to sanctify the dead, but also to humanize the living.

My grandmother, Sandy Steiner, who moved in with my family from Los Angeles 25 years ago to help raise my three younger sisters and me, was 81 years old when she died at home shortly after the Sabbath began on Friday night. In Judaism, a dead body is never to be left alone between the time of death and the time of burial. It's a tradition called *shmirah*, or guarding, which dates to an ancient time when fear of rodents and grave-robbers was real.

Typically, the task is performed by volunteers, members of the community's *hevra kadisha*—holy society—who do the watching in the funeral home. But if a person dies over the Sabbath the body cannot be buried or even removed.

And so my grandmother's family became her guardians: Over a 24-hour period, her body covered on her bed, we watched over her.

My grandmother's younger sister kept watch over Friday night. In the early-morning hours Saturday, I sat with my younger sister. In the afternoon, my father sat with my uncle, followed by other family members who took their turns as the *shomer* or guard.

Traditionally, the *shomer* is supposed to sit quietly and recite Psalms. Our grandma was not so into the Psalms, but she could give you chapter and verse about the latest doings on E! and Bravo. And so we shared funny anecdotes about her, when we weren't browsing through her copies of Vanity Fair or People. Surrounded by her books and family photos we were reminded of a full life lived as we sat beside the beautiful vessel of this woman we loved.

An hour after sundown on Saturday, which marks the end of the Sabbath, her body was taken from the house by members of the *hevra kadisha*. These are not

strangers, but people we sit next to in synagogue—my father’s doctor, my best friend’s mother, volunteers all.

The members of this holy society prepare bodies for burial according to detailed rituals meant to honor the deceased and preserve their modesty. (It is for this same reason that Jews prohibit open caskets.) Men prepare the bodies of men; women prepare women. The atmosphere in the room is quiet; only prayers are spoken in Hebrew, including a final one asking for forgiveness if the dignity of the deceased has been violated in any way. First the body is washed, then there is a ritual washing before it is dressed in simple linen shrouds.

Judaism emphasizes that all are equal in death, but for a time Jews lost sight of this spiritual reality. By the second century in the Holy Land, the funerals of the wealthy had become so ostentatious that the poor, ashamed that they couldn’t keep up, left their relatives unburied outside the walls of Jerusalem. Rabbi Gamliel, the leader of the Jewish community and a wealthy man, insisted that he be buried as a pauper in a plain shroud. His example of simplicity and humility in death has endured to this day.

My grandmother was buried in a plain wooden box. In keeping with Jewish law, the coffin had no metal—even the sides were connected by wooden dowels. The aim is to ensure its complete disintegration, fulfilling the verse from Genesis: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

At the burial, her family and friends filled in her grave. In shoveling the dirt, we were performing a *chesed shel emet*—a true act of kindness—because it is something that cannot be repaid.

My grandmother’s life’s work was as a caretaker for her family—in addition to bringing up three daughters, she helped raise four of her grandchildren. Diapers, meals, car pools; Saturday nights spent watching Blockbuster rentals with us so my parents could have a date night.

It is the natural way of things that those who have been caretakers ultimately become the cared for. In the last few weeks of her life—diagnosed with terminal cancer after already having survived bouts with breast and lung cancer, she didn’t cry—she was tended to around the clock by my mother and her two sisters, who made sure she died at home, surrounded by family.

When so much in modern life is outsourced, there is something clarifying, maybe even purifying, about witnessing a loved one’s final days. In caring for someone after death, and being expected to take part in rituals at once deeply uncomfortable and comforting, I realized that Judaism was forcing us to examine our own lives and deeds—and to ask ourselves: Are we putting our own vessels to their best use?

Reprinted from the March 18, 2016 edition of The Wall Street Journal. Ms. Weiss is an associate book-review editor at the Journal.

Operation Exodus: The Chabad Effort That Saved 1,800 Iranian Jewish Children

By Dovid Margolin

Forty years after the Iranian Revolution, recalling an unlikely and unheralded story



Image credit: Rivka Korf for Chabad.org

It was a cold day in the spring of 1979 when 13-year-old Anna Monahemi arrived at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. She came with a group of 40 Jewish girls – all of them from Iran, each of them alone. Her parents, like those of the other girls, had quietly bought her a ticket to Rome and sent her off, not knowing when they would see her next. There, the girls were greeted, processed and issued U.S. I-20 student visas. Five days later, they were safely in America.

From JFK, Anna and the girls were brought directly to Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y., and placed with host families – members of the Chabad-Lubavitch community. This was not the only group of Iranian Jewish children in Crown Heights. Since the end of 1978, planeloads of Jewish refugee children had followed the same path to safety, intensifying after the January 1979 fall of the Shah of Iran and the return from exile two weeks later of the Shi'ite cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

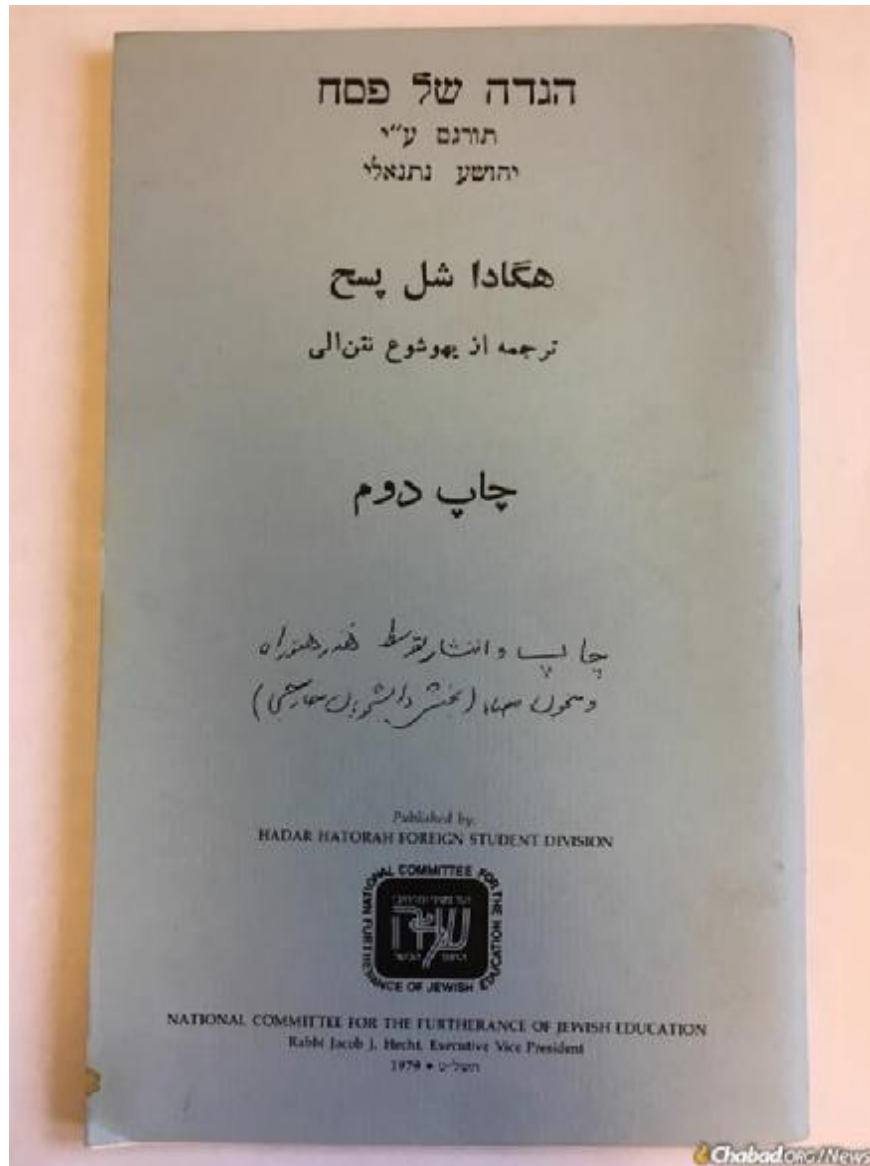
By Passover of 1979, there were 1,000 Iranian Jewish children staying in Crown Heights with families, living in dorms, and studying in schools and classes established especially for them in the neighborhood.



Chabad's campaign to bring 1,800 Iranian children to safety lasted between the end of 1978 and late summer of 1980. Pictured is one of the groups going through registration upon arrival in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY, circa 1979. Photo: Courtesy NCFJE

Jews had lived in what was long known as Persia for 2,500 years, and at the time of the revolution, 100,000 of them called it home. They were well-established and successful. But then came the Islamic revolution, followed swiftly, 40 years ago this month, by the Islamist seizure of power. Violence roiled the streets.

Threats against Jews were followed by the arrest and murder of leaders in the Jewish community. As the ground shifted under their feet, Persian Jews desperately sought avenues of escape, especially for their children.



The largest number of children in Crown Heights at one time was Passover 1979, when 1,000 children were spread throughout the neighborhood. Four special seders were conducted, which the Rebbe visited, with Haggadahs printed in Farsi for the occasion.

The answer came in the form of Operation Exodus, a historic Chabad-Lubavitch effort, still largely unknown, to rescue the Jewish children of Iran. With help from the Crown Heights community and an army of volunteers, the operation was spearheaded by the late Rabbi Yaakov Yehudah (J.J.) Hecht, the exuberant

executive vice president of the National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education (NCFJE), and personally approved and encouraged every step of the way by the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory. Operation Exodus was by far the largest organized effort to rescue the embattled Jews of Iran, and by the time it wrapped up in 1981 had brought 1,800 children to the United States. While Hecht was promised financial assistance from mainstream Jewish organizations, much of it never materialized, leaving him to cover the expenses alone. When Hecht passed away a decade later, his organization was still millions of dollars in debt. Yet he never for a second regretted it; there were Jewish children to be rescued, and he had gotten it done.



Illulian stands near the gates of a Tehran synagogue, August 1978. Photo: Courtesy NCFJE

‘Very Similar to Our World in Iran’

Anna Monahemi, today State Sen. Anna Kaplan, was elected this past November to the New York State Senate from North Hempstead. The first streets of America that she wandered were those of Chassidic Crown Heights, and she

recalls being taken by the pre-*Shabbat* shopping rush along the main commercial thoroughfare, Kingston Avenue, and hearing the Rebbe speak at the central Chabad synagogue at 770 Eastern Parkway. She still remembers the address on Montgomery Street where she stayed with a handful of other girls, the Chassidic family having taken a basement bedroom used by their own children and repurposing it for the girls.

That Passover she joined hundreds of other Iranian girls at one of the communal seders organized for them, where, along with Farsi Haggadahs, they were served rice as per the *Sephardic* custom.



The streets of Tehran, August 1978. Photo courtesy NCFJE.

In fact, it had been the Rebbe who insisted that every effort be made to make sure the Iranian children were as comfortable with their new surroundings as possible, including serving them rice, which is considered *kitniyot* and not consumed by *Ashkenazi* Jewry on Passover. The Rebbe personally visited the Iranian childrens' seders, held in multiple locations, stopping first in the kitchen to thank the staff, where he saw the rice being prepared. In the dining rooms he

addressed the children in Hebrew, waiting as one of the children translated his words into Farsi.

Kaplan remained in Crown Heights for the next few months, spending the summer at NCFJE's Camp Emunah in Upstate New York before joining one of her older brothers in Chicago. Another brother of hers followed a similar route as she, going from Tehran to Crown Heights before moving on to Chicago as well.

Kaplan says that for her, the differences in culture between the traditional, though not observant, home she came from in Tehran and the world of Chassidic Crown Heights were not all that different.

"My goal was continuing my studies and getting an education, which included Jewish classes I took there," Kaplan tells *Chabad.org*. "But the Lubavitcher community's emphasis on family and the family unit, it was very similar to our world in Iran."

To her, the moral of the story is simple: "Human beings try to help each other when someone needs help. The Rebbe was instrumental in that."

The decision to send her and her brother out of Iran had been a difficult one for her parents, but they felt a sense of urgency to get them out of the country. This was made easier, however, by the fact that they were being taken in by fellow Jews. "That fact gave them comfort."

Ultimately, it is the kindness of her hosts that has remained with her, as well as the opportunities she received as a result.

"They opened their home to us, and I'll always be grateful for that," she says. "Today, I'm living the American dream. I came as a political refugee and was now elected to a high office in a great state in the greatest country on earth."

Kaplan spoke to *Chabad.org* on a winter afternoon one Friday. "After this call, I'm going to prepare for *Shabbat*," she said. "My mother is joining us."

Accidental Beginning

This unlikely story of rescue began the late 1970s, when an Italian-born Chabad *yeshivah* student named Hertzell Illulian was studying in New York. His parents were successful Persian Jewish immigrants, traditional but not religious, and he had grown up in comfort in Milan. After serendipitously meeting a Chabad Chassid on the streets of Milan, who helped him don *tefillin* for the first time, Illulian became more religious and eventually came to New York to study at the Lubavitcher *yeshivah*.

Like his fellow Chabad *yeshivah* students, each summer he'd enlist in the Merkos Shlichus rabbinical visitation program to share, teach and strengthen Judaism in underserved and remote Jewish localities. Illulian dreamed of traveling to his ancestral homeland, Iran, to try to impact its Jews as he had once been influenced in Milan. Iran was safe, he spoke Farsi; it was a good match. In 1976,

he wrote to the Rebbe requesting a blessing for a summer posting to Iran, but received no reply. The same thing happened the next summer.

Then came the summer of 1978. Illulian had an uncle in Forest Hills, Queens, whom he often visited and who prayed at the Sephardic Jewish Congregation, led then as it is now by Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht, Rabbi J.J. Hecht's eldest son. It was to Hecht that Illulian broached the idea of going together on Merkos Shlichus to Iran.

Hecht was intrigued. From what he heard from his congregants – a mixture of *Sephardic* Jews, Persians included – Iran might benefit from such a visit. Illulian again wrote to the Rebbe, and this time got a positive response. The details were then worked out, and both Illulian and Hecht raised the funds needed to cover the trip.

“Our original intention was to establish a liaison with the community there, and then see if it made sense to send an official emissary there,” says Hecht.

Illulian went about translating some Jewish beginner texts into Farsi, as well as the 12 Torah passages (*pesukim*), specially chosen by the Rebbe as verses children should learn and know. He also packed a few suitcases with *mitzvah* lapel buttons, Chassidic records and mezuzahs – and off they went.

They landed in Tehran on a calm day in August of 1978. Revolution, refugees ... that was the last thing on their minds.

Tehran, 1978

The Iran the two young rabbis found was a rapidly Westernizing one, and the Jewish community, while traditional, was largely affluent and modernizing. Hecht and Illulian were officially greeted by Rabbi David Shofet, son of Iran's chief rabbi, Chacham Yedidia Shofet, and himself at the time head of the Jewish community umbrella organization; Chacham Netanel Ben-Haim, who headed the Ozar Hatorah religious school system; and Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Haim, who led both the Yusef Abad and Meshadi synagogues in Tehran.

Arrangements were made for the pair to address on *Shabbat* the five or so main synagogues in Tehran, which on a weekly basis could draw anywhere from 500 to 1,500 people.

“A lot of people thought we were there to collect money,” remembers Hecht. Many Jews, but not all, lived in opulent homes, drove Cadillac Seattles or Mercedes 500s, and were accustomed to foreign rabbis coming to collect funds. “The first thing we did was get up and say, ‘We didn’t come to take; we came to give.’ That surprised them. We told them we were there because the Lubavitcher Rebbe has sent us there, we spoke about Judaism, encouraged them in their practice. We were very respectfully received.”

For many centuries the Jews of Persia, like those in other Muslim-majority societies, were *dhimmi*, a tolerated but second-class-status minority. In modern Iran under the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, this had changed. He instituted a series of reforms, including breaking down the barriers that had been placed upon the Jews. This proved to be a good investment for the regime, as the Jews flourished economically, contributing handsomely to the new Iran, repaying the Shah with their loyalty as well.

On the other hand, similar to what happens in other upwardly mobile societies, this had a negative impact upon the religious standards of the Persian Jewish community at large. Laxities crept in. Whereas the Ozar Hatorah schools, established in Iran in the aftermath of World War II, had once had thousands of Jewish students all over the country, by the time Hecht and Illulian visited, the branch in Tehran had perhaps a few hundred children enrolled.

Bension Kohen had studied at Ozar Hatorah's elementary school and graduated from the ORT high school in Tehran. When the two Chabad rabbis visited, Kohen was studying in a university and working part-time as an electrician at the Royal Gardens Hotel, where the pair stayed.

"I met them and volunteered to be their chauffeur," says Kohen. "You see two Jewish guys with beards and a *kipah*, you get excited. I introduced myself and stayed with them for the next couple of weeks."

While Hecht and Illulian had come to what was still a stable Iran, street demonstrations against the Shah had already begun. The Shah, while liberal in many ways, ran a police state, and his human-rights record did not match his economic reforms.

People were agitating for more basic freedoms, but it was not obviously being fueled by Islamists. "[T]he revolution ... at first appeared to be a broad-based coalition embracing the merchants, students, and many moderate elements, in addition to the reactionary clerics," writes the late foreign-policy expert Peter W. Rodman. "[O]nly gradually did it become clear that, as in Petrograd in 1917, vacuums are often filled by the most ruthless, the most disciplined, the most fanatical."

Hecht recalls sitting in the home of Chacham Ben-Haim following *Shabbat* and seeing the television screen flashing images of street demonstrations turned violent. "That's why we didn't go to any other cities outside of Tehran," he says. "We were afraid to get caught up."

The sudden violence frightened the Jewish community. Whereas the Chabad rabbis had hoped perhaps to meet a handful of Jewish boys who would be interested in coming to America to study in *yeshivah*, by the second week of their trip Iranian parents began approaching them about the possibility of sending their children with them. The trip was set to last one month, with Hecht, who was

married and had children, returning home after two weeks, and the late Rabbi Yossi Raichik, then a *yeshiva* student, joining Illulian for the second segment of the trip. By the time Hecht left, 20 sets of parents had inquired about sending their children to America.

Hecht also gave his phone number to Kohen, their young driver. “He told me, if you come to America, here is my number,” recalls Kohen. A few months later, that number would come in handy.

Meanwhile, Raichik arrived to join Illulian. He carried plates from which they printed a special Iranian edition of the *Tanya*, the central text of the Chabad movement, penned by its founder, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. But the circumstances on the ground were getting worse. Illulian was in regular contact with the Rebbe’s chief of staff, Rabbi Chaim Aizik Mordechai Hodakov, who counseled him to stay safe.

Illulian had a close call with the Shah’s secret police. One afternoon he found himself in a car close to Tehran’s InterContinental Hotel, and the window for praying the afternoon *minchah* service closing. He stopped, pulled out a prayerbook and began reciting the words as he swayed.

“Suddenly, I got surrounded by a lot of strange people,” Illulian recalls in an interview with Jewish Educational Media’s (JEM) My Encounter with the Rebbe oral history project. “They thought I was a terrorist ... and wanted to arrest me.”

Illulian’s Jewish driver tried to intercede, telling the agents that Illulian was harmless. The authorities left Illulian but detained the driver.

By that time, “they were burning things in the streets, destroying pictures of the Shah and government property,” remembers Kohen.

Instability or revolution almost always places the Jewish community in particular danger, but the Islamist element of this one was far more open from the outset about their antagonism. While Iran’s Jews had lived in relative safety, even prior to these events Iran was not a place by any stretch that was free of anti-Semitism. But now, the threats were becoming explicit.

“Warning to all the Jews of Iran,” read a June 1978 flyer signed by a group calling itself the National Front of Young Muslims in Iran and forwarded by cable from the U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the State Department in Washington. “You blood-sucking people who have gathered in our Islamic country and are bleeding every one of us Muslims by extorting money-lending interest, theft and swindling and sending the wealth collected in this way to the Zionist country of Israel ... be aware now that your golden days are over. ... You are hereby warned to leave the country as soon as you can otherwise we will massacre all Jews. ... A Hitler is a necessity once in a while to exterminate the Jews ... ”

Now Illulian and Raichik found themselves inundated with requests from parents asking them to take their children with them. Illulian called Hecht and

explained the unraveling situation. Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht turned to his father asking what they could do. Was it their job to now begin ferrying Persian Jewish children to the United States?

J.J. Hecht was a legendary personality. Loud, energetic, dedicated, he had the voice of an old-time orator, hosted a regular Jewish radio program on New York's WEVD and ran a whirlwind of projects through his organization, NCFJE. He was also fiercely loyal to the Rebbe, and in foot-soldier fashion would write reports and queries regarding his work to the Rebbe multiple times a day. There was even a joke that went around that he needed to hire a full-time courier to bring his messages down the block from his office at 824-828 Eastern Parkway to the Rebbe's secretariat at 770.

In this case, too, the elder Hecht turned to the Rebbe to ask whether this was a project he should now take on. Even a modest number of children would require I-20 student visas and all the paperwork that entailed, plus food, housing, schooling and more. The response was an unequivocal yes. The Rebbe said that this project would be a blessing for both the Iranian Jewish community, and for Hecht and his organization.

"That's what the Rebbe said, so that was it," says his son. "He undertook the whole task."

Did he have any idea what this would entail?

"I don't think he did," replies Rabbi J.J. Hecht's wife, Rebbetzin Chava Hecht. "That's how he was. He jumped in, even if the water was freezing."

A Trickle Turns Into a Flood

In October of 1978, during the intermediary days of the holiday of *Sukkot*, Illulian returned to Tehran alone, this time armed with I-20 visa applications issued by Hadar Hatorah, the first-ever *yeshivah* for young men returning to the traditions of their ancestors, run under the auspices of NCFJE.

"Herzel had the list of names of students who had decided they actually wanted to come, so we were able to start issuing I-20s for them," says Hecht. "So we started doing that, then we had to also send all the supporting documents, which also had to be signed, including source of income, etc. So my father decided to sign those also."

Aside from the street demonstrations, the Shah, struggling to squelch the unrest in his empire, began drafting young men not in university into his military. Another option that was given was to show proof of acceptance to a foreign university, so the young person would quickly be granted an exit visa. This was another reason for parents to find a way out for their children.

Despite the growing tensions, the American embassy in Tehran was still properly staffed at the time, and Illulian was able to file the paperwork at the

embassy, which issued the visas. A few weeks later, Illulian returned together with the first group of Iranian Jewish children, about 40 students. The boys were enrolled in Hadar Hatorah, while the girls attended Beth Rivkah, the flagship Chabad school for girls. There was plenty of dorm space for the boys, and the girls were put up with host families.

“The word got out in Iran that this is the way to get your kids out of trouble,” says Hecht. “All of a sudden, we started getting calls from Rabbi David Shofet; he heard from mothers that they needed hundreds of these visas. So from November, December, January ... those months, we started sending them huge numbers of I-20 applications.”

As the situation grew worse, the Shah received mixed messages from Washington. The State Department, on the one hand, led by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, was of the opinion that in order for Iran to stabilize and move in a more liberal direction, the Shah had to leave. President Jimmy Carter’s national security staff, on the other, led by Zbigniew Brzezinski, felt that the Shah was a stabilizing presence and a vital ally in the region who should be supported in his time of trouble.

While it was true that the Shah was a dictator, the alternative, Brzezinski and others felt, would spell disaster. Carter leaned towards Brzezinski’s view, but this wasn’t being clearly communicated to the Shah, especially by the American ambassador to Iran, William Sullivan.

The Shah vacillated, unwilling or unable to pull the trigger and order the military to harshly crack down on the revolution in his streets. On Jan. 16, 1979, the once-all-powerful monarch of the Imperial State of Iran boarded an airplane and left the country for the last time.

Bension Kohen left Iran the next day. He had purchased an acceptance form to Queens College on the streets and arrived in New York before *Shabbat*. On Sunday he dialed Hecht, who told him to stay where he was and he’d pick him up. The Farsi-speaking young man, who soon found himself volunteering as a counselor and cook in NCFJE’s booming Persian children’s program, has lived in Crown Heights ever since.

Two weeks after the Shah’s departure, the exiled Khomeini made his triumphant return to Iran. The Islamic revolution in full force, there was no turning back.

Murder and Panic in the Streets

The mood in the Iranian Jewish community was tense. While worried, they remained deeply tied to the country. They had homes, properties, businesses, investments; it had been their native land for millennia.

“People had this idea that this had happened once [the attempted coup against the Shah in 1953], and the Shah could still return,” explains Rabbi Shofet, who played a central role leading the teetering Jewish community in Tehran during those heady days, and is today the chief rabbi of the Nessah Synagogue and Center in Beverly Hills, Calif. “It was an illusion.”

And so Shofet encouraged parents to send their children out via Chabad.

“When there’s trouble, people turn to G-d,” says Dovid Loloyan, by now also a rabbi in California, but at the time a 12-year-old boy growing up in a non-religious Persian Jewish household in Tehran. “My mother started going to synagogue, and there, in Rabbi Shofet’s *shul*, she heard him saying that there’s this group, Chabad, taking children to the United States to study, and we’d be able to go to college, too, because with Iranians there’s no way their child isn’t going to college.”

Loloyan’s mother at first wanted to send her son to join his sister in Israel, but in Feb. 1979, El Al, fearing for the safety of its staff, suspended all flights to Tehran. That’s when she heard Shofet’s pronouncement in the synagogue, and the decision was made to send him to America.

Loloyan was 12 at the time, and had seen protesters burning banks and looting stores, soldiers mowing down protesters. He wanted to leave, and the family went about quietly preparing.

“It was known among the Jews that we children were leaving,” says Loloyan, “but we kept it secret from the Muslims.”

Loloyan was a part of one of the first groups to leave Iran after the actual revolution – 150 children in all. By this time the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, which had been briefly overrun by Islamist militants in February before being freed a few hours later, had pulled back much of their staff, with the ambassador, Sullivan, being recalled in March. The I-20s could no longer be processed in Tehran. A third country was needed, and with Illulian hailing from Italy and a Chabad emissary,

Rabbi Yitzchak Hazan, stationed in Rome, the decision was made to route the children through there.

Loloyan’s group landed in Rome on March 13, 1979, coincidentally, on the holiday of Purim, which commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people in ancient Persia approximately 2,400 years ago. In Rome, the children were promptly led to a reading of the *Megillah*, the Scroll of Esther retelling the story. It was the first time Loloyan ever heard it.

Miriam Finck has a similar story. In fact, her brother had nearly been a victim of the street violence. Among the enduring slogans of the Islamic Revolution were the chants “Death to America!” and “Death to Israel!” Two years her senior, Finck’s brother had seen a “Death to Israel!” placard hanging on the street and tried pulling it down. He was caught and taken to a university to be

hanged. It was only through the immediate intervention of her uncle – Finck’s father had recently passed away – who ran to an influential Muslim acquaintance and begged him to intercede on his nephew’s behalf that the boy was spared.

“That’s when my family knew it was over,” she says.

It was her uncle, too, who had heard a rabbi speaking in his synagogue of a way to send their children out. He told Finck’s mother about it; within three days, she and her sister had passports.

The two girls and their group headed to Rome in March of ’79 as well. When they were leaving, Finck remembers giving her coached response to Iranian authorities, that she was going to Rome to visit relatives.

In April of 1979 Khomeini announced the formal establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. But in May came the greatest blow to the community: the execution of Habib Elghanian, a wealthy and respected leader of the Iranian Jewish community.

“The execution of Habib Elghanian last week created a great sense of anxiety within the Iranian Jewish community ... ,” reads another U.S. embassy cable. “A general feeling was that, if a person of Elghanian’s stature was not safe, then all Jews were in jeopardy.”

In Rome, Loloyan, Finck and her sister, Anna Kaplan and her brother, and the hundreds of other children, were greeted by Illulian, who was stationed there for a period of months. While Loloyan was in Rome for three days, Finck recalls staying there for two weeks in a nursing home, waiting to be processed at the American Embassy in Rome.

“I was going to the American Embassy in Rome and they were so nice, so helpful, G-d bless this country, how much kindness, how much heart they have” Illulian told JEM in his interview. “I became like a worker in the American Embassy. I was going in and out like a consul, with three, four hundred passports of these little kids that I gathered.”

He would gather hundreds of children at a time at an embassy facility and in Farsi direct them in filling out the visa applications. A few hours later the visas were stamped, nearly pro forma, and the children ready to board airplanes to America.

“I was in Rome for a few months until every child came to America,” Illulian recalls. “I’d go to the airport, place them, go to the embassy and get the visas, and then send them to America. There was an unbelievable energy. I would speak to the children about what was going on, about Judaism, about *mitzvot*; we would spend *Shabbat* together. But there were many nights when I did not sleep more than an hour or two.

“The way we were getting these visas at the embassy,” Illulian adds, noting that there were thousands of other refugees in Rome working to get American visas, “it was a miracle.”



A special emphasis was made that the children feel comfortable, this famously extended to the Iranian children being served rice at the group Passover seders arranged for them. Photo courtesy NCFJE.

Not everyone believed Khomeini was all that bad or that the Jews were really endangered. Yet another U.S. embassy cable from Tehran, this one signed by Sullivan in March of 1979, states that although Jews were certainly the subject of prejudice in Iran in the new climate, they were no worse than any other minority and “appear to have reached a reasonably satisfactory accommodation with the new powers that be.”

Sullivan concludes that the general “shift does not, in our view, represent a change that would warrant treating Iranian visa applicants, whether members of minority groups or not, any differently than we have in the past.” While the Iranian

children in Operation Exodus were processed as students and not refugees, the speed at which it was done indicates that this advice was ignored.

From Rome, the groups headed in biweekly and then weekly waves to JFK airport, where they boarded buses to Crown Heights. Between November of 1978 and April of 1979, 1,000 children came to New York in this way.

In Rome, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) assisted greatly with the processing, but all of the other responsibilities – financial and logistical – lay with the Chabad movement and Rabbi J.J. Hecht.

The Hub: Crown Heights

In the beginning, things were simple enough. Most of the boys stayed in dormitories, while some of the younger boys and all of the girls were placed with hundreds of host families. Like Kaplan, Finck and her sister were placed with a family – with whom she remains close to this day – as was Loloyan.

“I used to visit families hosting the children every week,” says Moshe Chayempour, an Iranian Jew who had arrived in America in 1970 and was instrumental in Operation Exodus from the get-go. “These were not wealthy people hosting the children, but they took their own children’s bedrooms and gave them to these children. Who does that? It was unbelievable.”

Roslyn Malamud and her husband were one of the families that took in children; two boys stayed in her home for more than a year. Today, the boys are active Jewish community members in heavily Persian community of Great Neck on Long Island, N.Y., and Malamud remains in touch with them, attending their weddings and, more recently, their children’s weddings.

Her biggest motivation for taking in the children was her mother, who was born in Poland and had come to the United States before the war, but had lost much of her family in the Holocaust.

“My mother said, if before the war more people had taken in Jewish children, more children could have been saved,” says Malamud. “No one knew what was going to happen to the Jews over there, but this situation, it hit home.”

Malamud ultimately got involved in more ways, even later traveling with a group of involved Chabad women and the senior Rabbi Hecht to Washington to lobby members of Congress for more student visas for the Iranian children.

Hecht, responsible for the entire operation, was also not above hosting. He and his wife had two girls, Janet Afrah, then 14, and her sister Jackie, then 11, live in their home for months.

“I had no children at home, so I was able to give them my full attention,” says Rebbetzin Hecht.

The Hechts lived in nearby East Flatbush, where Rabbi J.J. Hecht was rabbi of a synagogue, so the solution was supposed to be temporary, as Rebbetzin Hecht didn't want the girls to feel alienated from the other Persian girls.



In April of 1979 Rabbi J.J. Hecht purchased the Lefferts General Hospital for \$500,000 as a dormitory for the Iranian boys. Unbeknownst to him the building had been previously gutted by looters, but NCFJE spent enormous sums to make it habitable. Beth Rivkah elementary school stands in its place today.

“But we gravitated towards each other,” says Afrah, “so we just stayed.”

The connection would end up being a lifelong one. Towards the end of 1979 the girls' parents managed to make it out of Iran and moved to Atlanta, with their daughters joining them soon thereafter. When Janet got married, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Hecht flew to her wedding in Atlanta where Rabbi Hecht presided over her *chuppah*; this repeated itself when her younger sister married some time later.

“Two years ago my son got married and Rebbetzin Hecht came with her son, who read the Rebbe's letter of blessing for the wedding, the one he sent when I got

married,” says Afrah. “Rebbetzin Hecht sat at the *badeken*[the ceremonial veiling], together with my mother. I have always said I have two sets of parents.”

For her part, Rebbetzin Hecht found herself overcome with emotion: “I cried,” she says.


EXODUS 1980

WILL IT EVER HAPPEN IN IRAN?

While the world waits in anticipation of the liberation of American hostages with a feeling of despair and utmost shock, we Jews are still engulfed with a sense of true belief and confidence in the strength that be ours and will assist us in saving our brethren around the world. The NCFJE is the only organization which has been responsible for the actual evacuation of more than 3,000 Iranian Jewish youth in the past year and which is still actively engaged in such activities on a major international scale.

EXODUS 1979

Last year's January 16-18 "Interruption operation" brought 392 Iranian Jewish youngsters to New York and Brooklyn. They were housed, fed, educated, housed and fed for extended periods of time. Some were transferred on their request to other educational facilities and others remained for extended periods of time in Crown Heights either housed in dormitory buildings or private homes. In all cases they were financially subsidized by the National Committee.



After the transfer of approximately 200 of these students which required the assistance of the NCFJE to reach the postwaraged specific destination our organization fulfilled its obligation of caring for the remainder of students.

HOME AND HOPE, TO 400+ YOUNG IRANIAN JEW, IS THE NCFJE

They were not cold statistics. They were spirited young children and teenagers who were depending on the NCFJE for love, care, shelter and a proper Jewish education. They came to us with hopes and dreams, waiting to enjoy the freedom and opportunities our America has offered them for decades. The NCFJE courageously accepted the burden and challenge of this noble cause. We did not let them down.

SPECIAL TEACHERS, SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Anticipating the special needs of our young Iranian youth, the NCFJE called upon the expertise of its two internationally renowned educational facilities, Heder Hachaim in Boca and Machon Chaim in Gile, to rapidly organize a staff and curriculum for the first complete Iranian Yeshiva in the U.S.

To overcome the language barrier, as most of the young Iranian youth neither speak nor read English or Hebrew, we hired accredited academic professors and high school level teachers who specialize in language. The success of this high priority program is fully evidenced in the fact that several of our original 40 students are now speaking English and Hebrew fluently, and have entered into the mainstream of a regular High School Program.

Taking steps to meet the needs of our rapidly expanding student body, ranging in age from 10 to 25, we added an Elementary and Post High-School program in our regular curriculum. Thus all of the youngsters were able to follow through with their original academic plans in addition to enjoying the benefits of their Torah studies.


A WHOLESOME JEWISH ENVIRONMENT

With love and care, as "parents per se," the NCFJE provided a proper home for all of our Iranian youngsters. Many of the boys were being housed in our recently acquired Foreign Students Building, in dormitories which have been remodelled and fitted all new furniture, carefully chosen for comfort as well as function.

At that time, as we did not have suitable facilities for all, some of the boys and the young women were being housed by families who were being paid a modest stipend by the NCFJE and Lithuanian management. Naturally all homes selected were carefully supervised beforehand to make sure that a proper Jewish home environment and warm human contact awaited the youngsters.

THE LABORS OF LOVE

Before the Passover holidays, the NCFJE purchased and converted Brooklyn's Lefferts General Hospital into a comfortable, fully equipped dormitory for the Iranian youth. The NCFJE established, completely equipped, staffed CAMP MONTICELLI, providing some 400 Iranian youngsters a measure of fun in a wholesome Jewish atmosphere.



From August through January 1980, the NCFJE assisted approximately 425 of these 600 students in settling with families and relatives in 40 communities around the U.S.

During that same period, NCFJE placed Iranian high school students in some 40 Yeshivas and Torah institutes where they are now learning, and aided over 100 others in maintaining or rearing their subventions.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

At this writing, 175 Iranian Jewish youngsters are still being cared for by the NCFJE, being fed, clothed, housed in a proper wholesome Jewish environment, attending Heder Hachaim, Machon Chaim, both Russian and Lithuanian schools, to give a Torah-like education.

EXODUS 1980 HAS JUST BEGUN

The hardest is just continuous guidance. And more families are asking for assistance in sending their children to us. And again we cannot refuse. This new work has begun and is being done by the NCFJE, and will continue until all homes have been furnished, despite the fact that we are facing staggering expenses, debts, and debts.

SHARING IN OUR MISSION

Although we consider it a privilege to care for the Iranian youth we are limited to share this mission with our fellow Jews. With expenses in the past year exceeding \$1,800,000 and income from kind raising, grants and some tuition and transportation fees of some \$300,000, the NCFJE is suffering from a massive deficit and credit enough critical to its survival.

AN URGENT PLEA FOR ACTION

Now children, there is an urgent need to provide the material, moral, and spiritual needs for Passover 1980. The NCFJE asks you to contribute your time and resources for our Jewish Iranian Children, to help us meet this EXODUS 1980 time, they will become members in the time that follows. And we say, "We care, we love you and we want to help."

SHOULD YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE EXODUS 1980 MISSION, PLEASE CONTACT:

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR FURTHERANCE OF JEWISH EDUCATION
824 EASTERN PARKWAY, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11213 PHONE (212) 735-0200

Chabad.org/News

fundraising advertisement.

But back in 1979, as more and more children came, there were problems that arose, especially in housing the older boys.

“Desperate for homes and beds for the children, who range in age from 10 to 22, Rabbi Jacob J. Hecht ... signed a \$500,000 contract on Monday [April 9, 1979] to buy Lefferts General Hospital,” reported *The New York Times* in an article titled

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“Jews in Crown Heights Make Room for Iranian Children.” The article notes that the building was in shambles, but excludes the fact that Hecht had signed the contract with the doctors with assurances that it was habitable, which it was not.

While desperate times call for desperate measures, the fact was that despite the revolution, many of the children did not regard themselves as refugees. The *Times* article even quotes a 17-year-old Iranian boy named Israel explaining that “[m]any people think we escaped from Iran. I personally came from Iran because I wanted to read and study Jewish studies ... I didn’t want to escape Iran because of the political situation.”

“Some of the children, especially who came from rich families, they didn’t understand they were refugees and they complained. When a guy is used to his parents’ villa and leather couches in Tehran and then is dumped on a *yeshivah* mattress in Brooklyn, they don’t appreciate it,” says Kohen. “Their parents were scared and sent them away, but the children didn’t always want to understand that the situation back home was so bad that there’s no way to live there anymore.”

“Everyone thought we just need a couple of months, things will calm down and we’ll return,” recalls Afrah. “That was 40 years ago and we never went back.” While mainstream Jewish philanthropic organizations promised (and raised) funds for the effort, Rabbi Hecht received only token amounts, struggling to cover his ballooning budget. Instead of money, he got explanations that the Iranian Jews were wealthy and could pay their own way. That meant that not only was NCFJE and Lubavitch alone in the work – a few other Orthodox Jewish organizations brought over children on a far smaller scale; mainstream organizations did not – Hecht was footing the bill.

“It was very hard; it was a lot of money and worry,” admits Rebbetzin Hecht.

The expenditures were not limited to the hospital. Hecht also obtained campgrounds in Monticello and Far Rockaway for summer camps for the Iranian children, aptly named Camp Mordechai for the hero of the Purim story, and established a new school with Farsi-speaking teachers, ESL classes and the like in Crown Heights. The costs soared, but he did it anyway.

“My husband’s approach was: The Rebbe told you to do it, you do it. You don’t do it for the thank you, you do it to do it,” says Rebbetzin Hecht. “My husband didn’t need a thank you; he wasn’t the type.”

The Hostage Crisis

Passover 1979 was meant to be the last hurrah for Operation Exodus. “As far as I know, I am now stopping,” Hecht told the *Times*. But he didn’t.

For one thing, things got even worse in Iran. As tensions between Iran and Iraq intensified, the new Islamic republic began snapping military-age boys off the streets to send them to what would turn into the devastating Iran-Iraq War. From the beginning there were also valid worries that the girls could be grabbed and raped on the simmering streets. But by late 1979, Rome had become overrun with other asylum seekers, and, as Chayempour recalls it, the Rebbe suggested London as an alternate center where the Jewish students could be processed.



A new group of arrivals from London in the summer of 1980. Rabbi J.J. Hecht can be seen second from the right, partially obscured by Moshe Chayempour, an Iranian Jew who played an instrumental role in Operation Exodus. Photo courtesy Moshe Chayempour.

Then came the Iran hostage crisis on Nov. 4, 1979. Islamists overran the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took its staff hostage for 444 days. The U.S. severed

relations with Iran, an embargo on Iran was put in place, and the United States stopped issuing student visas.

“Since there were no forthcoming American visas, Britain wasn’t prepared to issue even temporary visas for the Iranian children,” explains Rabbi Faivish Vogel, a leading Chabad figure in London. “I was asked to solve this problem and get visas for these children.”



A High Holiday booklet printed in Farsi by Lubavitch.

Vogel phoned a Jewish member of parliament, Greville Janner, and told him there were 200 Iranian Jewish children who needed to get to London. He asked Janner, a member of the Labour Party, to approach the Home Secretary William Whitelaw, a Conservative, and request visas for the children.

“Whitelaw asked him: Who will guarantee that they will leave Britain?” recalls Vogel, “and Janner told him: Rabbi Vogel of the Lubavitch Foundation.”

Chayempour and Raichik flew to London to make arrangements for the children, whose presence in London was kept quiet. The children arrived in groups; Chayempour recalls heading to Heathrow to help take the children off the

plane and past immigration. In at least one case, the plane made a stopover in London on its way to a third destination, and Chayempour was ushered onto the plane to collect the children, who were transferred onto Chabad-sponsored buses while Chayempour had their passports validated and visas inserted.

A portion of the boys were sent to Carmel College, a since-closed elite Jewish boarding school in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, and Raichik went there to serve as their counselor. Another portion of the boys was enrolled at the Hasmonean School in London while the girls were enrolled at the Lubavitch Senior Girls School in Stamford Hill, London. But as the months stretched by, the American visas were still not forthcoming.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Avraham Shemtov, the director of American Friends of Lubavitch in Washington, worked his connections in the Carter administration and Congress.

“Rabbi Shemtov worked very hard to get the green signal from United States that the embassy in London should give visas to these kids,” Chayempour told JEM in an interview. “We waited many months until, thank G-d, on the day after *Tisha B’Av*, we got a call from him that we are approved and the kids can go.”

With the full participation of the American Embassy in London, the I-20 student visas were granted to the Iranian children – unusual given official U.S. policy at the time – and the children finally flew to New York.

With that, Operation Exodus came to a close, having saved 1,800 Jewish children from the clutches of an untested radical regime.

In the coming years, 80,000 Jews left Iran, many of them having to smuggle themselves out illegally. The children – Loloyan, Kaplan, Finck, hundreds of others – were only reunited with their parents years later, and Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht remembers signing hundreds of letters of support for Persian families attesting to their refugee status and the persecution in Iran, allowing countless more Iranian Jews to finally leave.

‘An Entire World’

Throughout Operation Exodus the senior Rabbi Hecht corresponded on a daily basis with the Rebbe, whose guidance was crucial to the operation’s success. NCFJE’s archives hold hundreds of letters written by Hecht to the Rebbe and replies on every minute detail of the plans. One letter from Hecht requests the Rebbe’s blessing for a group of 70 Jews who had been ferried by another organization via an illegal crossing on the Pakistani border and had been caught:

... It was done illegally, cost immense sums of money, and we did not want to be mixed up in this because we suspected that the organizers are unscrupulous people ... G-d Almighty should have mercy that they should be saved in a miraculous way.

*They are in need of great, unbounding and intense mercy.

The Rebbe's response in this case is unclear, but the Rebbe made a special point to constantly engage and encourage the Iranian children coming through Crown Heights. On Purim of 1979, the Rebbe famously had the Persian children seated together in a place of prominence at his gathering and requested that they sing a Jewish song familiar to them. They began singing the *Sephardic* tune of "Yigdal Elokim Chai," and the Rebbe motioned for the thousands of Chassidim gathered to join along.

On the last day of Passover that same year, the Rebbe spoke one of many talks on the subject of the Iranian children, requesting at the end that it be translated into Farsi for their benefit. He spoke of the revolution in Iran, the hidden blessings that it contained, and the new hope for the children who had been exiled from their homes. He pointed out that many of the Iranian children had joined along in the *taahalucha* – the Chabad tradition of walking to other synagogues to share words of Torah and the joy of the holiday with fellow Jews from all walks of life – and had brought happiness and song to local American Jews, while they had only just themselves arrived.

The organizers of Operation Exodus, the Rebbe said, "should not fear that they have wasted so much energy on such a [relatively] small number of children, for every individual is 'an entire world,' and they will go on to impact their entire family and their whole environment."

Forty years later, the Rebbe's words still ring true. The Persian Jewish community in the United States is blooming, proud of its roots and fiercely connected to its Jewish heritage.

"The Rebbe told my husband that if even 10 percent of the Iranian children remain connected to their Judaism, then the effort was all worth it," says Rebbetzin Hecht. "The numbers are far, far higher. We really saw the payoff."

"The Rebbe saw what was happening and acted upon it and saved a lot of people, not only physically but spiritually as well," says Afrah. "How many people were saved? A lot. I started off as one person and now have five children and six grandchildren. There were 1,800 children, and we are three generations already, and it will, G-d willing, continue."

Courtesy Chabad.org/News

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayakhel 5779 email of the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals) UPDATE. The article originally appeared in the February 22, 2019 email of Jewish Philanthropy.

PASSOVER

Exodus Story Now A Graphic Novel

By Steve Lipman

*In a sign of the times, a cartoonist
crafts a new-look Haggadah.*



Gorfinkel's haggadah tells the story of Passover in graphic form. Pictured here, a portion of the cover. Courtesy of Koren Publishers

On Passover, which commemorates an ancient story of liberation, a popular cartoonist has freed the narrative in a thoroughly modern way.

If ever a story carries a novelistic sweep and packs a visual punch, it's the Exodus story. In it, the Israelites break free from hundreds of years of bondage in

ancient Egypt, moving through the marsh grasses of the Red Sea as the reeds rise up to clear an escape route.



Courtesy of Koren Publishers

In a sign of the visual and attention-challenged times, Jordan Gorfinkel, whose “Everything’s Relative” strip appears in this publication, has combined the epic Passover story and indelible images into a Haggadah that seems tailor-made for millennials, “Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel” (Koren Publishers). In recent years, while there have been niche Haggadahs for vegetarians, the politically minded, even “Star Wars” and Harry Potter fans, Gorfinkel’s new work is believed to be the first graphic novel to tell the biblical tale in comic strip format.

The Exodus story, Gorfinkel told The Jewish Week, has “everything you want: larger-than-life characters and conflicts, sweeping settings, mammoth action sequences, memorable personal moments.” And, of course, “a happy ending ... especially if you don’t mind sand in your shoes,” he quipped.

But how to tell the story, which must be retold in every new generation, according to tradition, for *this* generation?

“The Haggadah is not a chronology,” he said. “Rather, it’s a terse summary of the sweep of Jewish history, theology, etc. that presumes a level of scholarship that contemporary Jews, living well after the age of the oral tradition, mostly do not possess.”



Courtesy of Koren Publishers

Gorfinkel’s dilemma was “how to dramatize what to modern eyes reads as disjointed in a structure that fits how we’re accustomed to consuming content today. I had to figure out how to enforce a narrative on the Jewish equivalent of a Wikipedia page.”

The vehicle for that narrative, which Jews around the world will gather to retell in two weeks, is a family of goats. On page one of “Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel,” a father goat, on seder night, asks his daughter about the meaning of Pesach.

“Freedom ...?” answers the precocious but impatient kid who’s in a hurry to get to the meal. On page 2 comes the 2019-ish snark: “Children,” the daddy goat says, “aren’t the only ones with questions. The Haggadah confounds adults, too. Hence, the Passover Graphic Novel.” Wisecracks the daughter goat, “No one says ‘hence’ anymore, you know.”

As the title suggests, the 170-page book, three years in the making, is two books in one. It contains the traditional Hebrew text of the Haggadah (transliterated into English letters), in easy-to-read fonts, and a modern English-language translation by David Olivestone, former director of communications at the Orthodox Union, as well as “how-to” instructional cartoons that lead the reader through each step of the seder.

And it is also an exquisite full-color graphic novel drawn by Israeli artist Erez Zadok, a Bezalel Academy of Art graduate, that features the unnamed goat family going through each step of the seder. The illustrations, which incorporate modern cityscapes and mythic biblical scenes, carry the story forward as it moves from the exodus from Egypt to Jewish life and history through the ages.

“The story boards are really clever and engaging,” said Daniel Levine, the longtime owner of J. Levine Books & Judaica in midtown, who added that he has “never seen a Haggadah like this” — one rendered as a full-length graphic novel. “In my 40 years [at the firm] this is the most captivating and creative one I have seen.”

Though a groundbreaking graphic novel like Art Spiegelman’s Holocaust classic “Maus” might seem a natural influence, Gorfinkel said the idea for a Haggadah in graphic novel form “just sort of happened” and was a natural growth of everything else he had previously done artistically.

Though an accomplished artist — with decades of experience of drawing the Batman comic — Gorfinkel wrote and envisioned in exacting details every word and every scene in the graphic novel part of the book, but chose to assign the drawing to another artist.

Busy with a career as an illustrator and businessman (he runs his own creative studio, Avalanche Comics Entertainment, which provides custom content for corporations and other clients) and musician (he produces and performs in independent CD releases), he realized he could not devote enough time to the execution of a project of this scope to do it justice.

Along the way, Gorfinkel, a Cleveland resident who lived for a while on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, was also responsible for fundraising a “six-figure” budget for the book, through connections in the Jewish community and some selective online crowd-funding.

He shared his conception of the book, and some early drawings, with a small circle of supporters, and adapted it according to their critiques. And he consulted

experts in history, archaeology, theology and other disciplines to ensure its authenticity.

Gorfinkel's Haggadah is the new face of the Passover text, arguably the most-published Jewish book in Jewish history, and one that has morphed in recent years into a palette for self-expression. If you are religious or secular, artistic or intellectual, serious or humorous, any description of Jew (and to a growing degree, non-Jew), there is a Haggadah for you. (Gorfinkel's own "go-to" Haggadah is the classic Maxwell House Haggadah, which dates from 1932.)



Courtesy of Koren Publishers

A Haggadah in graphic novel form is a perfect adaptation for the millennial generation that was raised in an atmosphere of individualized iTunes playlists, said Rabbi Elly Krinsky, program director of NJOP (formerly the National Jewish Outreach Program). Today, he said, people can find Haggadahs that reflects their way of thinking, that speak their language. "Instead of just reading a text," Rabbi Krinsky said, "they want to see how the text provides meaning for them."

“The words are almost an outline” of seder themes, not necessarily meant to be recited by rote, but to be interpreted and explained, the rabbi continued. “The seder needs to be geared to the people at the table ... as long as you don’t stray too far” from the seder’s theme of liberation and deliverance. “It’s meant to be interactive ... there is much flexibility” in its style.



The cover of the new graphic novel haggadah. Courtesy of Koren Publishers

Gorfinkel realizes the new cultural imperative. His goal, he said, is to make the 3,300-year-old liberation account transcend any particular denominational affiliation or time period or geographic setting. That’s why his graphic novel shows men and women as punk rockers, kibbutzniks, Revolutionary War soldiers, whites and blacks, ancient Egyptians and modern-day chasidim, businessmen and backpackers ... the list goes on.

As for the goats, Gorfinkel calls them avatars. Incarnations in human-ish (or in this case, two-legged, seder-leading) form. Seder-goers can themselves sitting with the unnamed goat family at the seder table; just as you’re supposed to imagine yourself on Pesach night taking part in the exodus from slavery, you can picture yourself in the graphic novel’s version of Jewish history.

Father goat, outfitted in a Superman-style costume (a matzah on his chest instead of an “S” in a pentagon), states, by way of introduction, that “We’re connecting a new generation to our living history, by illustrating the fully unabridged, authentic text in the sequential storytelling style of comics – a Jewish innovation, you know.”

The words in the text sometimes spill into Gorfinkel’s own explanations of what he’s up to in “Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel.”

“The sequential art medium,” he wrote in an email, “is the most primal format for delivering layers of depth in print,” he said. “If we did our job right, this Haggadah is like a good Bugs Bunny (or, dare I suggest, ‘The Simpsons’) cartoon: Wherever you’re at, you’ll enjoy the experience.”

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Opinion

Israel's Secret Founding Fathers

By Matti Friedman

Everyone knows the name David Ben-Gurion. Why don't we know about the spy Jamil Cohen?



Matti Friedman

March 1, 2019

JERUSALEM — Late on the night of Nov. 11, Hamas soldiers in southern Gaza stopped a van near the town of Khan Yunis. Inside were a group of Arabic-speaking men and women who said they were aid workers. The soldiers were suspicious. When the passengers understood that they couldn't talk their way out, they dropped the pretense and drew guns. In the ensuing firefight, seven Hamas men and one of the passengers died before the intruders were extracted by an Israeli rescue force.

The van's passengers were undercover agents, but in Hebrew their profession has a unique name: They were *mista'arvim*, which translates as "ones who become like Arabs." The work of the *mista'arvim*, who serve in Israel's Army and police and are meant to move around Palestinian areas undetected, has gained some international renown recently thanks to the success of the TV series "Fauda," a fictionalized version of their exploits.

But the odd term has roots older than Israel — and deeper than the world of spies. Its origins have much to tell us, not just about the history of covert operations here, but also about the complicated identity of this country.

Israel tends to tell a European story about itself — Theodor Herzl, socialism, the Holocaust — and many Israelis and many of our enemies like to imagine that this country doesn't quite belong where it exists. But even if we set aside the one-fifth of Israel's citizens who are Arab Muslims, half of the Jewish population here has roots in the Islamic world. They're the children and grandchildren of people like Jamil Cohen.



Jamil Cohen, 1950. Credit Palmach Museum, Tel Aviv

Who is Jamil Cohen? He isn't famous, and his name was new to me when I began researching a book about Israel's first spies. But his story is a window onto some crucial and forgotten Israeli history.

Cohen was born in 1922 in Damascus, Syria, and grew up in the alleys of that city's ancient Jewish Quarter. The existence of such a quarter seems unimaginable today, with the Arab world's old ethnic mosaic largely destroyed by state persecution, religious violence and civil war. But when Cohen was growing up, there were about one million Jews native to Islamic countries, most of them Arabic speakers. Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, was one-third Jewish in those days.

At 21, facing an uncertain future amid the Muslim majority, Cohen decided to run away to join the Zionist pioneers forging a new Jewish future in the country next door: British Mandate for Palestine. He crossed the border on foot and joined a group of idealistic young people working the land at a kibbutz. It was the beginning of 1944, with World War II still raging and the creation of the state of Israel still four years away.

In oral testimony recorded in the 1990s, Cohen remembered what the experience was like. He was exhilarated by the comradeship and ideology of

pioneer life. On the other hand, he was different from the others and found the difference hard to escape. Although Palestine had an old community of Jews who spoke Arabic, the native tongue of most Jews in the country at the time was Yiddish: They had come to the Middle East fleeing abject poverty and oppression in Poland and Russia.



A Backgammon game at the camp in the Arab Section. Credit Palmach Museum, Tel Aviv

To the kibbutz pioneers, Jamil Cohen was mystifying. He seemed Arab — in his appearance, in his Hebrew accent, in the music he loved, like that of the Egyptian diva Oum Kalthoum. He stopped using the Arabic name of his childhood, Jamil, and instead used his Hebrew name, Gamliel, but that didn't resolve the problem.

Cohen made friends but didn't talk about his old life in Damascus; they weren't interested. "Because I was the one who wanted to join them, and not the other way around," he remembered much later on, "I was the one who was worn down, who had to round his edges to fit the machine that spins around, sparing no one." The ability to "round your edges" is useful for a spy, as he'd soon find out.

The course of his life was changed the following year when someone came looking for him. Not for Gamliel, but for his earlier incarnation — Jamil. It turned

out that the Arab identity he was trying to escape was precisely what the Zionist movement needed.

Understanding that the Jews in Palestine would shortly face a war for survival against the combined might of the Arab world, a few officers in the Jewish military underground were running an ad hoc intelligence unit called the “Arab Section.” Its members were tasked with collecting information in Arab areas: How big was the local militia? What were the imams saying in the mosques? They needed people who could pass.

The people who could do this did not want to be called “spies” or “agents,” names which were seen as dishonorable. Another term was needed to describe their service, and one was found in the long history of the Jews of the Arab world. In Aleppo, Syria, for example, there had always been two Jewish communities: One was the Sephardim, who had been expelled from Spain after 1492, and the second consisted of people who had been in the metropolis since before Christianity or Islam, and who had adopted Arabic after the arrival of Arab conquerors in the seventh century A.D. Those Jews called themselves, in Arabic, *musta’arabin* — “ones who become like Arabs.” The word in Hebrew is nearly identical.

The mastermind of the *mista’arvim* endeavor in the embryonic Israeli intelligence services was an educated Jew from Baghdad who went by the Arabic name Saman. (His Hebrew name was Shimon Somech, but no one used it.) The ideal recruit to the Arab Section, he once explained, “isn’t just a young man with dark skin and a mustache who knows how to speak Arabic.” A successful candidate, he wrote, “must be a talented actor playing the part twenty-four hours a day, a role that comes at a cost of constant mental tension, and which is nerve-racking to the point of insanity.”

With that in mind, Saman set off at the end of the war to recruit young arrivals from the Arab world. One of the recruits was Cohen, who would operate as a Palestinian Muslim with the name Yussef el-Hamed.

The scope of their adventures has preoccupied me for much of the last seven years: their dramatic, overlooked role in the 1948 war; their creation of Israel’s first foreign intelligence station in Beirut; how some evaded capture and lived, and how others were exposed and killed; how those Jewish refugees from Arab countries experienced Israel’s birth while pretending to be Arab refugees from a Jewish country; how they witnessed the violent collapse of their world, the Jewish world in Arab lands; and then the flood of those newcomers into the new state, which wasn’t expecting them, and which was transformed by them into a place different than its founders had planned.

The members of the Arab Section were one part of what later became the Mossad. When Cohen died in 2002, having spent much of his life under an

assumed identity, he was described by a military historian as one of Israel's most successful agents: "We never heard of him because he was never caught."

Saman, the mastermind, eventually ran Eli Cohen, Israel's most famous spy, who penetrated the Syrian regime as the businessman Kamal Amin Thabet before he was exposed and hanged in 1965. But the point I'd like to make here is not about what they did, but instead about who they were and what it says about the country they helped create.



Jamil Cohen (left) with two other spies, Beirut, summer 1949. Credit Palmach Museum, Tel Aviv

Were they the "ones who become like Arabs"? Or was that identity real?

This is an important question beyond the particular case of these spies. The divide between Jews from Christian countries (known as Ashkenazim) and from Muslim countries (generally called Mizrahim) has always been the key fault line in Israeli society, with the former clearly on top.

But in recent years it has become more acceptable to admit or even celebrate the Middle Eastern component of Israel's Jewish identity. The Hebrew pop style known as Mizrahi, long scorned, now rules the airwaves. The dominance of the political right in recent years comes far less from the settler movement, as foreign

observers tend to think, than from the collective memory of Israelis who remember how vulnerable they were as a minority among Muslims and grasp what this part of the world does to the weak.

In the country's official view of itself, it might still seem as if the Jews of the Islamic world, by coming to Israel after the founding of the state, joined the story of the Jews of Europe. But in 2019 it's quite clear that what happened was closer to the opposite.



Jamil Cohen in Beirut in the spring of 1950. Credit Palmach Museum, Tel Aviv

As the young Jamil Cohen found when he was recruited in the 1940s, the world of military intelligence is, ironically, one corner of Israeli society where Arab identity has always been respected. The Israeli scholar Yehouda Shenhav opens his 2006 book “The Arab Jews” with an anecdote about his father, who came to Israel from Iraq and found his way into the secret services.

Looking at a photograph of his young father on a beach with friends from those early days, the author is forced to consider his father's tenuous position in Israeli society and his utility as a spy: His appearance, Mr. Shenhav wrote, “confronted me with my complex location within what is often represented as an

ancient, insurmountable conflict between Arabs (who are not Jews) and Jews (who are not Arabs).”

To an Israeli viewer, that ethnic blurriness runs clearly beneath the surface of “Fauda,” the popular Netflix thriller. In the second season it’s embodied in the character of Amos Kabilio, who confuses us when he first appears on screen — he’s speaking Arabic and it’s not clear which side he’s from, until we realize that he’s the father of Doron, the Israeli agent who’s the main character.

Amos is a Jew from Iraq, and when he speaks to his son, the Israeli spy, it’s partly in his mother tongue, Arabic. We’re meant to grasp that when Doron “becomes like an Arab” as part of his mission, it’s not entirely artificial.

“Espionage,” John le Carré once observed, “is the secret theater of our society.” Countries also have cover stories and hidden selves. The identity of Israel’s spies teaches us who Israel has to spy on, of course. But it also has much to say about what Israel is — and how that country differs from the country we know from stories.

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How Can I Get My Family to Help With Passover Cleaning?

By Chaggai Zadok

*When you complain what does your family hear?
How can you elicit cooperation?*



“Can you please help” is an immortal question heard everywhere. But let’s ask ourselves, is it effective? Is there a better way?

“David, I can’t do it anymore! Everything falls on me to do!” Indeed why does this sentence need to be repeated so often?

Let’s look through the mother/complainer’s eyes and afterwards through the eyes of the listeners. Perhaps we can then come to some conclusions.

Let’s start with mom:

Sometimes the family’s lack of participation in cleaning makes her feel alone. “Do I live here by myself? Aren’t you all part of this household?” It’s frustrating and even cause for anger sometimes! This is the paradigm that gives

rise to the “perhaps you can help some?” In her eyes the rest of the family is part of the deal and she needn’t shoulder the responsibility alone. It can’t be she is the only one that cares and she’s nobody’s slave!

But mom, I gently want to break it to you, it’s not clear that the rest of the family see it the same way. It’s true you *should* feel they are part of the deal and are active partners. But even so, the paradigm of your husband and other family members is somewhat different and may not change either no matter how frustrating it sounds.

Generally speaking a husband and other family members see themselves as those who help you do your job!

I know it's annoying, to hear such an idea at all. But the idea exists, it's alive and kicking...

Equally, it is important that the husband and other family members know mom's paradigm.

It is important that you understand that sometimes your feeling that you are a "volunteer" and that you should be admired for your willingness and kindness can be very infuriating in the eyes of your wife.

Please only because you are human, try to understand this. You do not have to agree with it (wow, what pressure!), But try to understand it - it's not difficult.

I know it's annoying, to hear such an idea at all. But it exists, and it's alive and kicking...

Well, but we want it to be good here, right? So here's the solution:

There is a saying: "Whoever says what he wants, when he wants to, and how he wants to, will end up hearing what he does not want, when he does not want to, and how he doesn't want to."

Those who ask for help and want to get it should take responsibility for their part. Anyone who wants to fulfill his need should recognize and consider the sensitivities of the person from whom he seeks help.

So, what does it do to him / her, when they hear "maybe you'll help a little?"

The listener's feeling is that the asker is sending a hidden message that says: "You are wrong, you do not care about me, you do not consider, you do not understand, no ... etc." A lot of negatives!

Even if it's really what you think, it does not really encourage him to help... He feels guilty. And don't forget, he feels that his area of responsibility to the family is outward - economic security, etc. In other words, you may be making more money, but financial responsibility is more his than yours. In the home area, he feels more as if he's a kind "helper". And the accusing attitude does not feel pleasant. So, even if the above approach helps sometimes, if you want a stronger effect, with pleasantness at home, I would suggest a simple switch approach.

Switch your tone to a calm tone, and gently ask: "Can you help me with the countertop? I would be very happy." And to the daughter: "Honey, can you get up now to help me, another half hour?" If you ask with a smile, it's already more effective.

It's important to be consistent! Stand up for yourself. There is no reason to give up something that is so basic to you, and there is no need to plead. It is only important that it be done pleasantly and efficiently.

It may feel unfair. I understand. But if the result is important, and you want the understanding, this is the approach. By the way, I'm not sure that now they are already rolling up their sleeves to help ... there are other factors too, but this way you'll increase your chances of getting help and definitely increase the pleasantness in your home.

Reprinted from the 03/18/2018 email of Hidabroot.com

FOOD

A Seder Feast in Provence, With Roots in Ancient Rome

By Joan Nathan



The synagogue in Carpentras (center building with brown door) was built in 1367 and is one of the oldest still in use in Europe. Photo Credit - France Keyser for The New York Times

CARPENTRAS, France — Since Roman times, Jews have lived in this town in northern Provence, which lies on an ancient trade route from Marseille to Bruges, Belgium. This year, about 50 people will hold a communal Passover Seder

at the Carpentras Synagogue, built in 1367 and one of the oldest active synagogues in Europe.

Today's congregation has about 100 members, many with roots in North Africa; their Seder traditions include salmon tagine and a feast of vegetable salads. But Gilberte Levy, who can trace her family tree here back to the 1600s, will also cook some of the kosher recipes that Provençal Jews have been making for centuries.



The synagogue's bland facade hides a Baroque interior, a ritual bath, a slaughterhouse and two communal bread ovens. Photo Credit - France Keyser for The New York Times

Haroseth, the fruit paste that evokes the bricks and mortar used by Jewish slaves in the Passover narrative of the Old Testament, is part of every Seder ritual. Her 13th-century recipe includes dried apricots, figs, raisins and chestnuts, reflecting the sunny climate of this Mediterranean region. And a traditional whole veal breast stuffed with Swiss chard will be the centerpiece of her table.

Because there is no longer a shochet, a kosher butcher, in Carpentras, Ms. Levy must order the meat from Marseille, about 70 miles (112 kilometers) away.

“Once, the community’s shochet slaughtered chickens, lamb, and goats right inside the synagogue building,” she said.

Carpentras became a center of Jewish life after 1306, one of many occasions on which Jews were expelled from the Kingdom of France. Like other nearby sanctuaries such as Avignon and Cavaillon, Carpentras was not in France, but within the Comtat Venaissin, a papal state, where Pope John XXII decreed that refugees would be welcome. With more than 1,000 Jews among its population of about 10,000, Carpentras became known as “la petite Jerusalem,” with a large ghetto arising around its famous synagogue.



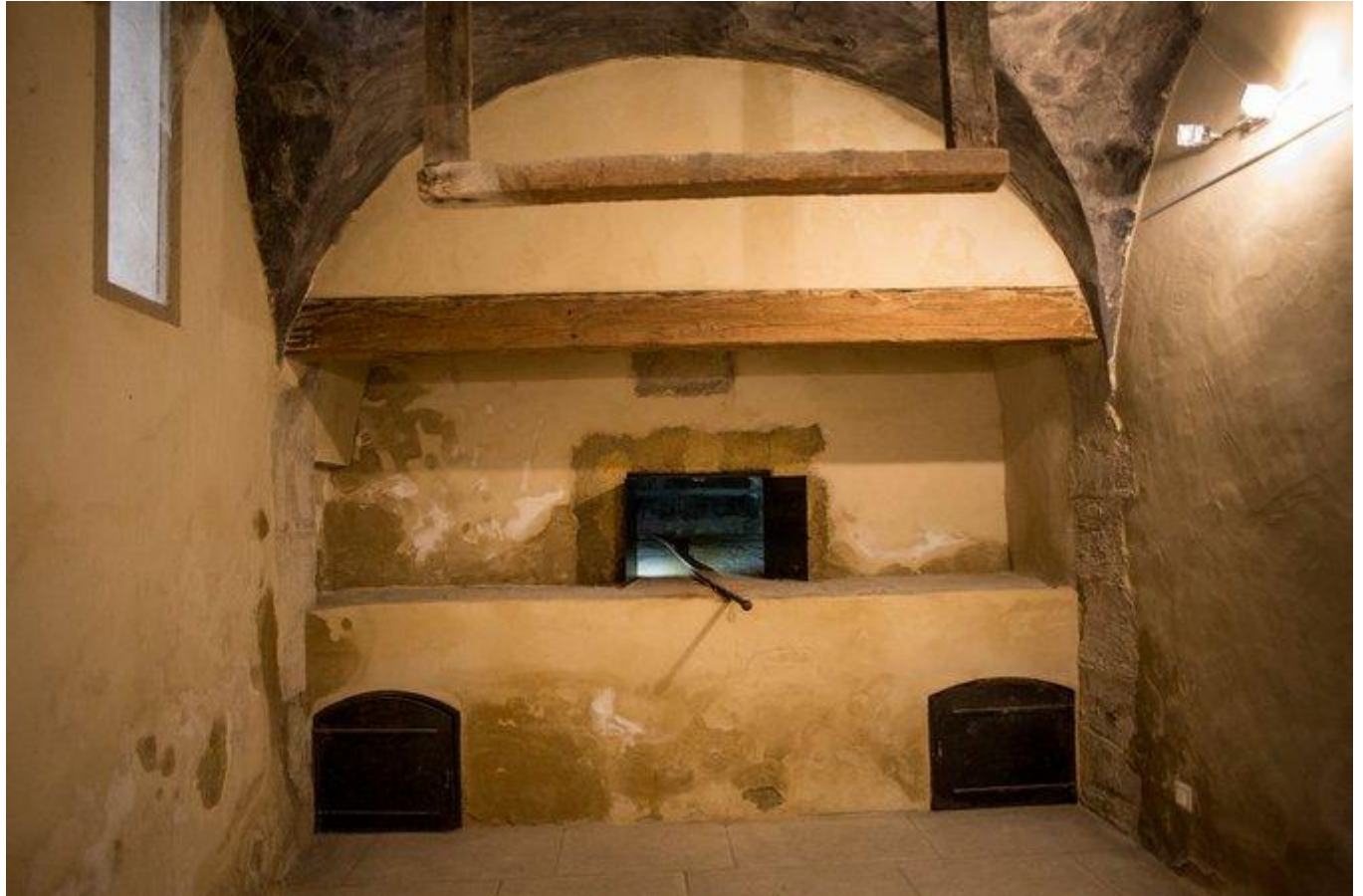
The ghetto had kosher butchers and grocers, and for cooking, the residents shared two communal ovens at the synagogue: one used year-round for bread, and the other for Passover matzos.

For more than 300 years, by papal decree, the ghetto was locked at night to protect the residents, and unlocked each morning to allow them to shop, travel and work under strictly limited conditions.

In some periods, “Jewish men living in the carriero could only be horse traders, secondhand clothing and furniture dealers, or tailors,” said Ms. Levy, using the term for ghetto in Shuadit, a Hebrew-French-Provençal dialect that is almost extinct. Jewish men and women alike had to wear a yellow item of clothing when outside the ghetto, to denote their difference.

In 1791, when French Jews were finally granted citizenship, most Jews still living in Carpentras moved to cities, including nearby Avignon and Marseille. But not Ms. Levy's ancestors. Many have served the synagogue as its rabbi; she continues the tradition as a historian and volunteer.

Her great-grandmother Noémie Cohen Bédaride "was one of the last to bake coudoles in the synagogue's oven," Ms. Levy said, using the Shuadit word for matzo.



The synagogue had two communal ovens; one for baking bread, the other reserved for Passover matzos. Photo Credit - France Keyser for The New York Times

The community was decimated by influenza in 1918, and then again in World War II. Ms. Levy's grandparents survived, hidden from the Nazis in the nearby village of Bédoin, where they were protected by the mayor, local Communists and members of the Resistance.

Dr. Meyer Benzekrit, the synagogue's current president, believes that the ancient synagogue of Carpentras will once again become the heart of a vital Jewish community. Behind and beneath its unassuming exterior are a perfectly preserved

Baroque interior, the original ritual bath with fresh water from an underground stream, a slaughterhouse and the bread ovens. All are being excavated and renovated.



Gilberte Levy, who can trace her family tree here back to the 1600s, with a whole breast of kosher veal, a traditional Passover centerpiece. CreditFrance Keyser for The New York Times

Most traditional foods of the Provençal Jews have been forgotten, but a few live on. Some old-time bakeries here sell brassados, bagel-like rolls that are boiled and then baked. Lightly sweet and sometimes spiked with anise, orange flower water or orange peel, they were adopted by Christian bakers as a Lenten and Easter tradition. Ms. Levy makes her own crunchy brassados with matzo meal.

To start her Seder meal, Ms. Levy serves chicken soup with a mashed hard-boiled egg and crushed matzo. Then, the veal with its stuffing of chard, a vegetable that is in constant use in Provence. She sees her family's cuisine as part of French culinary tradition, not different or separate from it.

In this tiny enclave, she said, it has always been understood that Jewish dishes were simply adapted from the local food, according to the laws of kashrut.



Breast of veal, a traditional Provençal Passover dish, is stuffed with chard, a staple in the region. Credit France Keyser for The New York Times

“We didn’t have to prove anything or hide anything,” she said. “That is why Carpentras feels like home.”

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JEWISH THOUGHT

A Most Obscure Best-Selling Author: Dr. Philip Birnbaum

By David Olivestone



The Birnbaum Siddur, with nearly 800 pages, went through dozens of reprints. Birnbaum firmly kept the type all one size, because of his pedagogical belief that “children, trained in reading the larger type in the siddur, gradually develop a prejudice against whatever appears in the smaller print.” Courtesy of David Olivestone

The *New York Times* once aptly described him as one of the world’s “most obscure best-selling authors.” Yet for many decades, in synagogues and Jewish homes throughout North America and even around the world, his was a household name.

He was Dr. Philip Birnbaum, translator, editor and author of over twenty books of Judaica, chief among them *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem*, known everywhere as “The Birnbaum Siddur,” which was by far the most popular *siddur* used in Modern Orthodox congregations in the second half of the twentieth century. This year marked his thirtieth *yahrtzeit* since he passed away at age eighty-four.

Despite his one-time renown in the Jewish world, virtually nothing has ever been written about him, outside of a 1967 *Jewish Press* profile and a *New York Times* obituary.

I came to know Dr. Birnbaum in the 1970s, when for several years I was the editor at the venerable Hebrew Publishing Company (HPC) in New York, in its day one of the leading publishers of Judaica in America. The company was owned by the Werbelowsky family (later shortened to Werbel) and occupied an impressive former bank building on Delancey Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side.

In addition to the many hundreds of books it published, HPC produced an extensive line of greeting cards, as well as cantorial and Yiddish theater sheet music, all of which it sold in its retail store on the ground floor and distributed throughout the world.



Dr. Philip Birnbaum. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Publishing Jewish books is not usually a very lucrative pursuit, but Philip Birnbaum was almost unique in that his books sold so well that he was one of the very few Jewish authors able to sustain himself solely on his royalties. True, his needs were few, as he never married and he lived very simply, but once his books began to meet with success, he gave up his teaching positions and moved to Manhattan's Upper West Side.

What is perhaps even more remarkable is that a nineteen-year-old Polish immigrant attained such a high level of fluency in a language that was not his mother tongue, and produced felicitous, articulate, eloquent and sometimes even poetic translations of complex texts. Not only was he a master of the nuances of English vocabulary, syntax and phraseology, he was also a superb Hebraist, which added yet another invaluable dimension to his work.

When he was not occupied with his scholarly pursuits in one of Manhattan's several outstanding Jewish libraries, Birnbaum would write articles and book reviews for the Hebrew weekly *Hadoar*, published by the Histadrut Ivrit of America, of which he was a board member. Often, he would come into the HPC office to chat or to discuss possibilities for new editions of his works.



The Hebrew Publishing Company occupied this former bank building on Delancey Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side. As one observer wryly noted, "Since everything is more or less backward in a company that specializes in Hebrew and Yiddish, the building supports the columns instead of the columns supporting the building." It was later converted into apartments, offices and stores. Photo: Robert K. Chin/Alamy Stock Photo

Birnbaum had high expectations of other people's scholarship, which were not always met. Ira Kellman, a fellow congregant at The Jewish Center in Manhattan, remembers him as "very precise and scholarly. Rabbis were at peril if they made a mistake in their Hebrew or any other area of Birnbaum's expertise."

Attorney Lawrence Kobrin, who served as president of The Jewish Center, recalls that Birnbaum “was a very private person, immersed in his scholarship and publishing efforts. We invited him on several occasions to join us for a Shabbat meal, but I cannot recall his ever having accepted.”

Born in 1904 in Kielce, Poland, Philip (Paltiel) Birnbaum came to the United States in 1923. He attended Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham, Alabama, and in 1939 he received his PhD from Dropsie College (today the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at University of Pennsylvania). For several years he served as the principal of a Jewish day school in Wilmington, Delaware, and had also directed Jewish schools in Birmingham and in Camden, New Jersey, before moving to New York. His only known relative was a sister who lived in Tel Aviv.



A profile of Philip Birnbaum by Tovia Preschel ran in the Jewish Press on Friday, February 24, 1967. Courtesy of David Olivestone

As part of his educational endeavors, he set about selecting passages from Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and carefully vocalizing and punctuating the Hebrew text. With his explanatory notes in English on each page, it offered students an introductory glimpse into Maimonides' vast compendium of Jewish law. Birnbaum

submitted his manuscript to the Hebrew Publishing Company, which published it in 1944.

When the abridged *Mishneh Torah* met with success, HPC President Isidor Werbel suggested to Birnbaum that he translate the daily prayer book. Werbel's motive was purely commercial. The prayer book business was very competitive, and Werbel saw an opportunity to get ahead of the pack. Many of the existing translations, such as those by Philips, Singer and others, were replete with archaic language such as "Blessed be He who speaketh and doeth: blessed be He who decreeth and performeth." Most shul goers in those days had a minimal Jewish education, but this "Bible English" was probably almost as incomprehensible to them as the Hebrew itself.

For Birnbaum, it was also an opportunity to combat those elements in the Conservative and Reform movements which he saw as distorting traditional Judaism. In his introduction to the new Siddur, he railed against those who "... take liberties with the original, eliminating a phrase here and adding one there, each according to his own beliefs."

Werbel queried Birnbaum as to why the dozens of editions of the *siddur* that HPC published were awash with so many different fonts and type sizes, even on the same page. "Why can't the text of the *siddur* all be in one size," he asked, "like any other book?" Birnbaum embraced the idea, and wrote about it in his introduction. "For no sound reason the pages of the *siddur* are broken up by several type sizes which have a confusing effect on the eyes of the reader. Those who learn the contents of the prayers soon discover that the emphasis suggested by the larger type is in most cases no emphasis at all." And in a pedagogical insight which certainly rings true, he added, "Children, trained in reading the larger type in the *siddur*, gradually develop a prejudice against whatever appears in the smaller print."

What is perhaps even more remarkable is that a 19-year-old Polish immigrant attained such a high level of fluency in a language which was not his mother tongue, and produced felicitous, articulate, eloquent and sometimes even poetic translations of complex texts.

Other innovations included his use of modern punctuation marks to indicate the breakup of sentences and clauses in the Hebrew text. He also made a point of including all the necessary component prayers within the pages of each service, "so that the worshipper is not called upon to search from page to page and to commute from reference to reference."

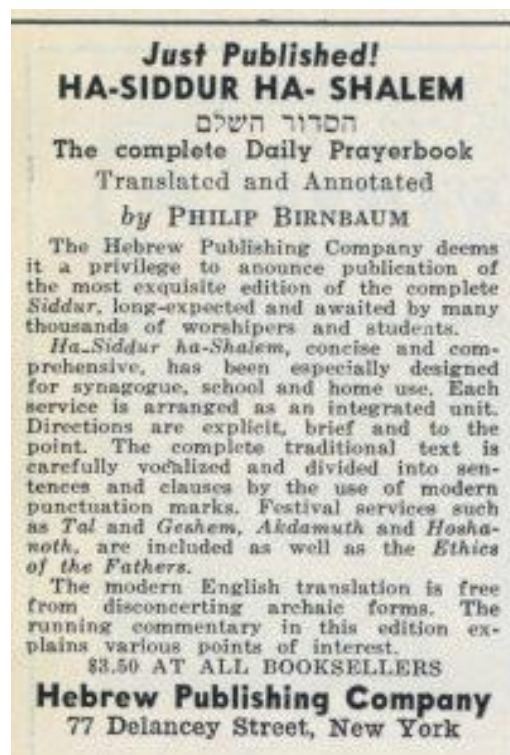
At the foot of each page, Birnbaum added source references, halachic information, historical insights and a brief commentary. Heaping criticism on other editions of the *siddur*, he gave many examples of poorly worded instructions that

misled instead of leading. “What do [they] all mean?” he asked, and answered, “In one word: confusion.”

Dr. Avi Shmidman, liturgy scholar and member of the Academy of the Hebrew Language who lectures in the Hebrew Literature Department at Bar-Ilan University, grew up in Teaneck, New Jersey using the Birnbaum Siddur. “Birnbaum set the standard,” he says. “His impact was huge because of his insistence on precision in *nikud* [punctuation] and *nusach* [accuracy of the text].

The care that he gave to linguistic precision really affected the way entire generations *davened*.”

Based on careful research, Birnbaum corrected obvious, and not-so-obvious, errors in the Hebrew text of earlier *siddurim*, whether grammatical mistakes or misplaced words. When challenged, he was always able to back up his emendations with authoritative rabbinic sources.



Ad for the new Birnbaum Siddur that appeared in April 1949 in the OU's Jewish Life magazine, the forerunner of Jewish Action.

All this made the new *siddur* very usable. But its crowning achievement was the translation. In order to preserve the sense of reverence that he felt the prayer book demanded, Birnbaum retained the use of “Thee” and “Thou” when referring to G-d. “The diction has not been allowed to reach the level of everyday English,” he wrote, “in view of the exalted literary tone of the *siddur*.” But in stark contrast to the archaic style of previous translations, his version was intelligible and

readable. According to Birnbaum, “The fault of some translations is their literalness. . . . Words should be translated according to their context.” Birnbaum’s genius was in choosing the most germane word, the most apposite turn of phrase.

Chazzanim welcomed the Birnbaum Siddur. “Whenever I was leading the *davening* in a congregation that was using the Birnbaum Siddur,” says Cantor Bernard Beer, director emeritus of Yeshiva University’s Belz School of Jewish Music. “I felt it helped those around me focus on what they were saying. The text was clear and easy to read, the translation was lucid and intelligent, and there was no need to turn pages back and forth.”

After the Siddur was published in 1949, it was followed by equally popular Birnbaum editions of the *machzor* for the High Holidays and the other festivals. His talent for translation and popularization soon led him to explore texts beyond the liturgy. In *A Treasury of Judaism* he set out “to acquaint the average reader with the ethical teachings of some seventy Jewish classics covering a period of thirty centuries.” Demonstrating an encyclopedic knowledge of rabbinic literature, he abridged and translated selections from the Tanach (later published in a separate volume as *The Concise Jewish Bible*), the Talmud, Midrash, Zohar and the medieval Jewish philosophers. He even translated the writings of some contemporary rabbinic figures.

A Book of Jewish Concepts was another acclaimed and popular work which differed from his previous books in that it was not a translation but Birnbaum’s own exposition of hundreds of essential Jewish ideas and practices, in dictionary form. He also published a Hebrew language textbook, *Fluent Hebrew*; a popular *Haggadah*; a Chumash; and the all-Hebrew *Siddur Am Yisrael*.

HPC continued to publish these and similar liturgical and reference works by Birnbaum in multiple editions for several decades. But tastes and styles change, and just as the Birnbaum Siddur replaced the editions that came before it, so, inevitably, did the *siddurim* of a new generation edge the Birnbaum off the synagogue shelves.

“The *siddur*,” wrote Birnbaum, “has never been sufficiently appreciated as a vehicle of Jewish knowledge.” The same might perhaps be said of Dr. Birnbaum himself.

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David Olivestone edited and translated The NCSY Bencher and is the translator of the forthcoming Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel. A member of the Jewish Action Editorial Committee, he lives in Jerusalem.

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A Conspiracy of Goodness Saved Thousands

By Debbie Maimon



Jews living at a children's home in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France, with their director, Juliette Usach, 1941. The people of Le Chambon and surrounding villages hid nearly 5,000 people fleeing Nazi occupation.

With the recent surge in hate speech and attacks on Jews in France, French President Emmanuel Macron has vowed a crackdown, noting that “anti-Semitism is deeply embedded in French society” and alluding to its long history in France, especially during World War II.

In view of this dark history, it is striking that one of the largest rescue operations for Jews in the whole of Nazi-occupied Europe took place in this country.

The little-known rescue saga unfolded from 1941-1944 in a tiny mountain village in south-central France known as Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon, whose French inhabitants saved about 5000 Jews from deportation and death.

Through an extraordinary campaign of nonviolent resistance, the townspeople of Le Chambon and nearby villages banded together to defy the Nazis and provide a safe haven for thousands of total strangers who would otherwise have died.

There are numerous stories of individuals in occupied France sheltering Jews, but this one tells of an entire community taking unified action, guided by a courageous pastor and his wife, Andre and Magda Trocmé.

Le Chambon was an island of human kindness in a sea of inhumanity. “Nobody asked questions, nobody demanded money. Villagers lied, covered up and concealed but most importantly, they welcomed,” wrote Peter Grose in “A Good Place To Hide,” a war-time history of the region.

“I’m alive thanks to the inhabitants of Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon,” affirmed Ruth Golan, who lives in Israel. “They risked their lives to save us. No one can describe how much they sacrificed and how much they gave us.”

Today a museum-memorial, *Lieu de Mémoire* (Place of Memory), in the village center testifies to the shining deeds of “ordinary” people. A plaque on the building contains an inscription by the “Jewish Refugees of Le Chambon,” beginning with a verse from *Tehillim*, “*Lezeicher olam yiyeh tzadik*,” the righteous will be an eternal remembrance.

The French text below it extols the compassionate inhabitants of the Protestant community of Le Chambon and surrounding villages “who during the Nazi occupation, defied the authorities and hid and sheltered thousands of Jews at the peril of their lives.”

Heroes Who Shunned Publicity

The museum was erected just six years ago and it took years of persuasion to convince the villagers and their children to come forward with the personal testimonials that comprise the exhibits. Golan, who was hidden in a home near the village’s municipal building for four years, says this is not surprising.

“They were opposed to any public recognition... it was out of modesty. They say they were doing G-d’s bidding in protecting His chosen people, nothing that deserves publicity. Even when Yad Vashem named them Righteous among the Nations, not everyone wanted to come to receive the honor,” he said.

The villagers of Le Chambon (not to be confused with Chabannes in a different region where hundreds of Jewish children were saved in a chateau) were followers of the Huguenot religion, a Protestant sect that broke away from the Catholic church in the 16th Century.

In the 1940s, the Huguenots were a minority group in a France that was 95 percent Catholic. Their predecessors had been subject to bitter religious persecution by the French kings and Catholic clergy over a span of two hundred years.

Once numbering in the millions, the Huguenot ranks had been slowly decimated by periodic massacres, forcing almost a half million of them to flee France in the 18th century. Today they comprise only a tiny proportion of France's population.

For the inhabitants of Le Chambon, the legacy of persecution their people suffered fostered a spirit of compassion toward other victims of oppression. When villagers led Jews through dangerous treks across the Swiss border to freedom, the guides were conscious that they were following the same route their persecuted Huguenot brothers had traveled centuries earlier.

The Huguenot experience of cruelty at the hands of the Catholic church shaped their descendants' abhorrence for the armistice that France, after being invaded by Nazi Germany, had signed with the occupiers. Under the terms of the armistice, Vichy leader Marshal Petain had pledged to uphold Nazi policies including the surrender of all refugees. In particular, Jews were to be isolated and hunted down.

Petaín, who enjoyed widespread support and was hailed as a savior of the French nation, signed the armistice with Nazi Germany on June 22nd, 1940. The next day was a Sunday. That morning, during church services, Pastors Andre Trocmé and Edouard Theis outlined the new political situation to their congregation. They urged their members to use the "weapons of the spirit" to refuse compliance with any government orders that went against the dictates of their conscience.

Inspired by Trocmé's example of non-violent resistance, the people of Chambon refused to take the mandated oath of allegiance to the anti-Semitic Petain.

Vichy Imposes "Jewish Laws"

Conditions for Jews in France rapidly worsened after the collaborationist government set in motion the *Statut des Juifs* (Jewish Laws) in 1940. The new regulations demanded that all Jews register themselves and imposed heavy restrictions on their ability to earn a living, attend school, own property and move freely about.

The Vichy government began the arrests and internment of all “foreign” Jews into dreadful French-run internment camps. The roundups were carried out by French police in broad daylight in the streets of Paris. 3,000 Jews died in these filthy, disease-ridden camps, even before the Nazis began deporting the prisoners to the death camps in the east. Then began the mass arrests of the Jews of Paris and their internment in the notorious Vel D’Hive stadium in 1942.

Andre Trocmé and his wife, Magda began working to hide Jews in the homes of members of their community, at great risk to themselves. The Trocmés rallied their neighbors and friends, starting with their own congregation, in a bold plan to shelter Jewish refugees in attics, barns, hotels, cellars, orphanages and boarding houses across the Chambon region.

Its isolated geographic location proved providential to Jews fleeing the Nazis, as it had for the Huguenots escaping religious persecution during the 17th Century. The region is still referred to as ‘La Montagne Protestante’ (the Protestant Mountain). Nestled among hills, surrounded by forests, with villages few and far between, it was an ideal place to hide people.

Many of the hidden Jews were children who had been interned in the French camps with their refugee families, and through the intervention of humanitarian organizations had been removed from the camps and spirited away to hiding places.

Le Chambon Welcomes the Hunted and Destitute

Rumors began to spread among refugees about a village in the hilly regions of Loire where the hunted and destitute might find shelter. In her memoirs, Magda Trocmé would later recall her first encounter with a Jewish refugee. During a frigid winter night in 1940, a German Jewish woman arrived half-frozen at the parish door. She had fled Nazi Germany and blindly made her way through occupied France until she arrived exhausted at Le Chambon.

Organized efforts by humanitarian organizations soon brought many others to the village. Pastor Andre Trocmé approached a Quaker organization, the American Friends Service Committee, who planned to smuggle children to safety but needed a hiding place. Trocmé volunteered remote Chambon as their place of refuge.

Trocmé urged his congregation to give shelter to any Jew who asked for it. Between 1942 and 1944, a civil resistance mushroomed across the region with all the inhabitants taking part in fostering help for refugees. Pastors, civil servants, teachers, farmers, railway employees, doctors, boardinghouse owners, and local police officers of Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon all joined in the rescue effort and in resisting the regime.

Magda, the pastor's wife, and other women located families willing to accommodate Jewish refugees and prepared the town's many residential schools for increased enrollment. Many others assisted in this work. Community activists reported to the railroad station to receive the arriving refugees; they would then be taken in by the villagers or taken to safe places on small farms in the region. There they were given false identities, forged identity papers and ration cards, so that they were entitled to food allotments.

From Le Chambon, many refugees were smuggled across the mountains into Switzerland, where they would be met by other resisters in the tight-knit Protestant network. The resistance movement soon grew beyond the Protestant communities – not only in Chambon but neighboring villages like Tence and Fay-Sur-Lignon.

Finding Homes for Refugee Children

Madeleine Dreyfus, a French Jew, joined OSE, a Jewish children's aid organization. She recalled in "Weapons of the Spirit," a documentary by Pierre Sauvage about Le Chambon, how she would make the rounds of the farms in and around Le Chambon looking for hiding places for the children. Madeleine herself was later arrested and shipped to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp toward the end of the war. She miraculously survived.

"The farmers knew the children were Jewish," Madeleine Dreyfus recalled. "But we wouldn't say it to them. It was a way of protecting the farmers not to spell it out. The smaller ones were always easier to place. Small children are sweet, don't eat much and don't talk back. We always had much more trouble placing the older kids."

Since the villagers and farmers were poor, taking in refugees meant sharing their daily bread or giving food that otherwise they could have sold. "They lived very near to the bone. Very, very simply," the former OSE worker said. "They asked for very little money and made no profit on the children."

Mrs. Dreyfus recalled visiting an elderly couple in an effort to place two 14-year old Jewish children.

"Nobody wanted them. They had valid reasons. They talk back. They're not easy to handle. They eat a lot. And I remember saying, 'Look, I'll be honest with you. These children are Jewish, they're being hunted. Their parents have been arrested.' The couple was dumbfounded. They said, 'Why didn't you say so earlier?' And they took in my two kids."

We Don't Know Any Jews. We Only Know Human Beings.

"Under the leadership of Pastor André Trocmé, the village of Le Chambon was the nerve center and the symbol of the spiritual resistance of the area," notes Pierre Sauvage in "Weapons of the Spirit," a stirring documentary that recounts the town's story. "But refugees were sheltered throughout this Protestant enclave,

which stretched a dozen miles around Le Chambon in all directions and encompassed a dozen parishes.”

All the pastors in this Protestant region, and a few Chatholic ones, played key roles in providing a safe haven for the refugees, said Sauvage, who interviewed dozens of rescuers as well as many of the “hidden Jews.” But throughout the Plateau and in Le Chambon itself, he noted, “the conspiracy of goodness that developed was both collective and individualistic. And it was largely unspoken. People didn’t talk about what they were doing.”

It was, above all, a matter of one’s own conscience, Magda Trocmé, widow of the pastor of Le Chambon, remarked in the documentary. “I am often asked, ‘How were you organized?’ The answer is, we weren’t. If we’d had an organization, we would have failed!”

On August 10, 1942, Georges Lamirand, Vichy’s Minister for Youth and a spokesman for Marshal Petain, visited Le Chambon accompanied by Chief of Police Robert Bach. Trocmé and his colleague Edouard Theis arranged for a group of students from the nearby New Cévenole School to read a letter to Lamirand.

In blunt language, the letter denounced the appalling “Vel d’Hiv” roundup of thousands of Jews, conducted by the Vichy authorities in Paris on July 16, 1942.

“Minister,” it began, “we have been informed of the scenes of terror which took place three weeks ago in Paris when the French police...arrested all the Jewish families of Paris and dumped them into the Vel d’Hiv.”

The letter declared that the young people of Le Chambon refused to make distinctions between Jews and non-Jews and would seek to hide any Jews the French government attempted to identify or deport.

The Vichy authorities already suspected what was taking place in Le Chambon and surrounding villages; it was impossible over many months to hide such wide-scale rescue activities. A few days after Lamirand’s visit, the alert was given to hide “foreign” Jews because Vichy police were organizing raids in the unoccupied zone to hunt for them. Police arrived with empty buses to carry away the Jews they expected to be turned in.

Not a single Jew was betrayed. The authorities then summoned Andre Trocmé and ordered him to give the names and whereabouts of the fugitives.

“I don’t have such a list and if I did, I wouldn’t give it to you,” he responded, as recounted by his colleague Edouard Theis. “We don’t know which are Jews. We only know human beings.” Issuing ominous threats of reprisals, the police withdrew.

Operation Torch

In November 1942, after the Allies landed in North Africa as part of “Operation Torch,” the German army swept across France’s demarcation line and

occupied the southern zone. The people of Le Chambon and their Jewish friends were now directly under the Nazi swastika. As the noose began to tighten, German distinctions between “foreign” and French Jews were discarded and the Nazis and their Vichy henchmen grabbed whoever they could.

The French Resistance now became more active, and Nazi retaliation in turn grew more vicious. One French village, Oradur-Sur-Glane, was burned to the ground in a military reprisal, its men were shot and its women and children herded into the church where they were machine-gunned and set on fire.

In February 1943, shockwaves spread through Le Chambon. Trocmé and two colleagues – Edouard Theis and a teacher, Roger Darcissac – were arrested and interned at the Saint-Paul d’Eyjeaux camp near Limoges, hundreds of miles from their homes.

After a month of captivity, the men were called into the camp commandant’s office and ordered to take an oath of loyalty to the Vichy government or be deported. They refused.

Excerpts from Weapons of The Spirit, A Documentary About Le Chambon

In the mid 1970s, a Jewish filmmaker named Pierre Sauvage arrived in Le Chambon to make a documentary about the town’s wartime courage in defying the Nazi occupation and providing a safe haven for thousands of Jews.

Using interviews with Le Chambon villagers, the Jews they saved, and wartime photographs and footage, the film tells a gripping story about one community’s capacity for goodness in the darkest hours.

Sauvage had been born in Le Chambon in 1944 to Jews who had fled the Nazis after the slaughter of their families. Little Pierre and his parents were sheltered by a village couple named Roche. They survived the war in the mountain village and afterwards emigrated to the United States. Pierre reached adulthood never having heard the story from his war-traumatized parents of how or why they were saved in Le Chambon—or even that he was Jewish.

Discovering his Jewish roots as a young man, Sauvage was obsessed with finding the missing pieces to his background. He returned to Le Chambon in his early 30s to finally hear the story from the rescuers themselves. He wanted to unravel the mystery of why here? Why here in Le Chambon, of all Nazi-occupied lands, did an entire community continuously endanger itself to save the lives of total strangers?

Throughout Europe as the Holocaust raged, Jews were hunted down and betrayed by those they turned to for help. In so many places, bystanders watched indifferently as their Jewish neighbors were tortured and killed. In so many places, non-Jews participated in the slaughter or cheered and gloated at Jewish suffering.

What was different about Le Chambon? Sauvage interviewed dozens of Le Chambon villagers as well as some of the Jews they saved in an effort to understand the miracle that unfolded here. His documentary explores this mystery but it remains elusive.

One of the “hidden Jews” he interviewed was Joseph Atlas from Poland who as a young boy was interned for several months in one of the most dreadful French camps.

“At the age of 14, I suddenly found myself flanked by two gendarmes and put into the French internment camp of Gurs,” recounted Joseph Atlas. “After a terrible ordeal there, I was suddenly taken out and brought to Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon. Before I knew what was happening, I found myself in a little house, surrounded by trees, in a village I never heard of....

“The extraordinary thing about Le Chambon is that in the course of four years, nobody there ever asked me the question, “Are you Jewish?” I was a young Jewish refugee who had suffered vicious anti-Semitism... and here I was being protected by a Protestant community.”

They Respected My Faith

Mrs. Marguerite Kohn and her family, Orthodox Jews, kept kosher throughout their stay in the area. She remembers the kindness and respect with which her Christian neighbors treated her. Sometimes she worried that her religious conduct and laws she observed might appear offensive.

“It happened that one day I was invited by a family to attend Protestant services,” Mrs. Kohn reminisced in the documentary. “I didn’t refuse. But they knew that I was attending as a Jew. The villagers were very pleased that I attended these services, but I explained to them that I would not be coming regularly, as these services did not meet my own needs.”

To her relief, the townspeople accepted her explanation and were not offended.

“The people in the village were always extremely kind to me and my children,” Mrs. Kohn recalled. “My children attended school with the village children but wouldn’t go to classes on Saturdays. And nobody ever made any comments about it, neither the teacher nor the parents. They knew we were observant Jews.”

“And they respected your faith?” inquired Sauvage.

“They respected it greatly.”

Mrs. Kohn added that although their hosts tried to make them feel safe, they lived in fear of being caught by the Germans as had so many of family members.

“When I left the area in December 1944, I was still hoping that my husband would come back,” Mrs. Kohn reminisced. “He died in the gas chambers on

January 25, 1944. But I only learned that much later. A brother was also deported in 1943, a father of three children. A sister-in-law was deported in January 1944 with four children and her husband. Cousins I felt very close to, who were deported with their husbands and children. Aunts. Uncles. A large part of my family.”

“How many came back?” inquired Sauvage.

“None.”

Secret Center for Forging Papers

“Not only were we accepted in Le Chambon despite our differences, but there was a feeling of affection,” recalled Oskar Rosowsky in “Weapons of the Spirit”.

Rosowsky had arrived in Le Chambon in 1942 as a teenager with a knack with typewriters who trained himself to become an expert forger. False identity cards and ration cards were essential for life in hiding under the Nazi occupation, and Rosowsky was immediately enlisted in this life-saving mission. Soon Le Chambon became a center for the manufacture and distribution of false papers.

“We produced false papers for about fifty people a week. New refugees were arriving constantly in Le Chambon. We would spend our days making them and our nights distributing them,” recalled Rosowsky whose remarkable story is also told by author Peter Grose in “A Good Place to Hide.”

This clandestine activity took place in the home of Henri and Emma Héritier who had taken in young Oskar, never imagining their houseguest would involve them in forgery—under Vichy laws one of the most dangerous crimes.

“When did you realize he was forging documents?” Sauvage questions the now elderly couple in the documentary.

“Very soon,” Henri Hertier answers. “Because he told me he had some things to hide; he couldn’t leave the papers lying around. The Germans were in Le Chambon. There might be a search.”

“So what did you do?”

“We put them in my beehives, in the woods. And when they needed papers for someone, they would just go over there and get it.”

“Was it difficult? You had to reach into the bee hives?”

“Yes, but there were no bees in those hives,” Mr. Heritier laughs. “The Gendarmes didn’t know that.”

“And weren’t you concerned about the danger in all this?”

“We never had any problems,” Mrs. Heritier responds.

“Did you know Oskar was Jewish?”

“He never mentioned it but yes, we realized.”

Paul Majola, then a very young shepherd, helped in the distribution of the false papers.

“Did you know what you were distributing?” Sauvage questions Majola.

“Not the first two times. Then Monsieur told me it was for refugees, for people who were being hunted and really needed to hide.”

“He told that to you, a young boy? He must have trusted you,” Sauvage remarks.

“Yes, he had complete trust in me.”

“What impression did these refugees make on you at the time?”

“Oh, a really sad one,” the Chambon farmer responded. “Most of them were really lost. Without money, without family. Absolutely lost.”

Historians say the inhabitants of Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon and the surrounding area, totaling about 5,000 people, saved an equal number of Jews during the war. Almost every farmer and villager in Le Chambon harbored at least one refugee, and many sheltered multiple Jews in their homes, despite the danger of arrest, deportation or death.

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Rebbetzin Shula Kazen, 96, The ‘Queen of Cleveland’

By Menachem Posner

*During her youth, she upheld
Jewish life in the Soviet Union*



Rebbetzin Shula Kazen

Revered for her fiery personality and rock-solid faith forged during a childhood in the former Soviet Union, Rebbetzin Shula Shifra Kazen nourished, guided and inspired thousands during decades of communal leadership in Cleveland, Ohio. She passed away on March 24 in New York at the age of 96.

She was born in 1922 in Gomel, Belarus, then part of the newly-created Soviet Union.¹ The eldest of seven children born to Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan and Maryasha (Garelik) Shagalov, her life began in difficult circumstances. Russia had been devastated by the terrible civil war that birthed the Bolshevik revolution, and thousands were dying of starvation.

When the family dreamed of bread, Maryasha Shagalov told Shula to recite Psalms with concentration, and the day would come when they would have more than enough food. Shula prized saying Psalms, something that would sustain and encourage her for the rest of her long life.

By law, all children were required to attend public school, where Communist ideals were taught. Determined to raise their family according to Jewish law and tradition, the Shagalovs refused to send their children to the public schools. Eventually, the large family became known to the government, which revoked their rations of food and fuel, and even had them evicted from their home onto the frozen streets.

The Shagalovs moved into the local synagogue, where Elchanan continued battling for Jewish life, which included serving as *mohel* (circumcisor). He was often accompanied by Shula, who assisted him in his sacred (and illegal) task.

In 1937, he was arrested for illegal activities in support of Judaism for the last time. Years later it was learned that he was executed three months after his arrest, but his widow and orphans were left wondering about his fate for decades. Facing an unrelenting barrage of pressure from the Communist government, Maryasha had no choice but to send her children into hiding. As the eldest, 14-year-old Shula took a 12-hour trip to the home of Rabbi Bentzion (Bentche) and Esther Golda Shemtov, pillars of the underground Chabad-Lubavitch network of Jewish life.

The Shemtovs sent her to Moscow, where she found work in a knitting factory that Bentzion Shemtov had arranged. It was one of the few places where people could find legal employment that did not require them to work on Shabbat. Her job was to carry hundred-pound bags of material on her back from the supplier to the factory. After the material was made into scarves or other headgear, Shula would carry it to the buyer, who would pay her. Shula helped support her mother and younger siblings with her earnings.

Shortly after she turned 18, Shula was introduced to her future husband, Zalman Katzenelenbogen (later shortened to Kazen). Like her, he had also lost his father to the Communists in the dreadful purge of the fall of 1937. Shula did not have a single decent outfit in which to meet her future husband. One friend loaned her stockings, another a shawl, a third one a coat, and somehow she was able to obtain boots. The only clothing she owned was a dress and a coat that “grew” with her. She received the coat at age ten, refitted it countless times, and

wore it up to her wedding. For her wedding, a friend sewed her a white dress made of inexpensive fabric.

The wedding was held on 12 Elul, 1940, in a forest at the edge of Malachovka, outside of Moscow. Any religious ceremony was punishable by imprisonment or death, including a traditional Jewish wedding, so it had to take place in complete secrecy. After their wedding, Shula and Zalman Kazen settled in Leningrad.



The Kazens raised a Chassidic family in Cleveland, Ohio.

Fleeing to the East

As the Nazis advanced toward Leningrad in the fall of 1941, Shula convinced her husband and many other families to flee. Those who left had a chance at survival, but many who remained died of starvation during the Nazi siege of the city.



Five generations light Shabbat candles.

The Kazens traveled in an open cargo train for a month until they reached Tashkent, Uzbekistan, more than 4,000 kilometers southwest of Leningrad. Shula was pregnant with her oldest child and was grateful that she and the baby survived. Shortly after reaching Tashkent, they had to escape from the watchful eyes of the KGB and fled further south to Samarkand.

As soon as the war ended in 1945, Shula insisted that the family must escape Russia. By that time they had three daughters, Esther, Dvonya (Devorah), and Henya. The family traveled from Samarkand to Moscow, and from there to Lviv, where they crossed the border into Poland using black-market Polish passports.

Shula's mother-in-law, Mumme Sarah Katzenelenbogen, was one of the stalwarts of the underground operation.

Mumme Sarah had Rebbetzin Chana Schneerson, the mother of the future seventh Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—join the family as their “grandmother.” Mumme Sarah was arrested by the Communists for her activities and died in prison.



The rapidly growing Kazen clan at a family wedding

While on the train to freedom, Shula left her sleeping children with her husband and walked to the next car. Upon her return, she saw her husband frozen with fear and the conductor yelling, “These are forged passports!” The conductor had noticed that their daughter Esther’s hair was red, and on the passport she was listed as brunette. Approaching her sleeping daughter and wagging a finger at her, she said, “I told her not to play with dye! Now look what happened to her hair!” The conductor accepted the answer.

The family reached a refugee camp in Poking, Germany, where Zalman Kazen studied *shechitah* (kosher ritual slaughtering) on the advice of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe.



Deep into their retirement years, the Kazens tirelessly led their community of mostly Russian immigrants.

Along with many other *Chassidim*, the Kazens settled into a chateau on the outskirts of Paris that had been converted into a communal residence. Every Shabbat, the women would sit in the yard while the girls sang and entertained them. There was a sickly woman with a few children who never joined them. Shula would talk to her, help her dress her children and walk her down the steps, telling her that the children needed fresh air.

Another woman gave birth to twins. Shula was told that the twin girls were lying naked on the floor because the family had no money to buy clothing. At that time Shula had five daughters and was quite weak herself. She dragged herself to a flea market, bought material, and sewed undershirts, sweaters and hats for the infants.

A New Life in Cleveland

In 1953, after seven years in Paris, with the assistance of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the family arrived in New York. HIAS had arranged housing for them in Cleveland, Ohio.

After years of travel and uncertainty, the couple wanted to settle in New York and raise their children near the Rebbe, but the Rebbe told them that they were needed in Cleveland, and they gladly prepared to move.



The "Queen of Cleveland" receives a dollar from the Rebbe.

Before they left, the Rebbe asked Reb Zalman what he planned to do once he arrived in Cleveland. He responded that he planned to continue the watch business he had started, but the Rebbe suggested that he work as a *shochet*, a *chazzan* (cantor), or a congregational rabbi.

He would end up doing all three, and he and his wife would have a profound effect on the Jewish community there.

Soon after the move, the Rebbe instructed them to work with local Jewish families and strengthen their connection to Judaism. The Kazens knocked on doors and invited neighbors to join study groups on Shabbat.



Rabbi Zalman Kazen leads a joyous Purim celebration.

Later Rabbi Kazen was appointed as the rabbi of the Tzemach Tzedek shul. The Kazen girls used to host Shabbat gatherings in their home. They would pick girls up, bring them to their home, serve refreshments and tell them inspiring Jewish stories.

Since her husband worked full-time as a *shochet*, Mrs. Kazen did most of the outreach work. She was appointed president of N'shei Chabad, which was mostly for older European-born women. At the Rebbe's behest, she opened another organization for younger women.

With the Rebbe's encouragement, the Kazens arranged that *chalav Yisrael* kosher milk become commercially available in Cleveland. At the time, they

spent more than half of their meager income on the endeavor, but they were determined, and their efforts bore fruits. Following the Rebbe's advice, they arranged that the day school, Hebrew Academy, serve *chalav Yisrael*, which inspired families to procure the milk for their homes as well.



At the most recent International Conference of Chabad Lubavitch Women Emmiseries, with some of her daughters, granddaughters and great-granddaughters, who serve communities around the globe.

Together with her daughters, Mrs. Kazen ran weekly Mesibos Shabbos gatherings for local girls—many of whom were inspired to transfer to Hebrew Academy and are now grandmothers of observant Jewish families.

The Kazens' synagogue was the center of their activities, often full of clothing and foodstuffs Mrs. Kazen collected for needy families in Ohio as well as for her other “pet” causes in Israel. As guided by the Rebbe, after a terrorist killed

five students in 1956 at the vocational school in Kfar Chabad, Israel, she collected funds, equipment and other supplies to furnish their new facility.

It didn't matter that she was a mother of a large brood and that she had barely a penny of her own. There were people who needed help, and she would do what it took to help them.

"Together with her husband, Rebbetzin Kazen contributed to every facet of Jewish life in Cleveland," said Rabbi Simcha Dessler, a Cleveland native who now serves as educational director of Hebrew Academy. "She had an intense love for Judaism, a love for Jewish people, and a sparkling personality. No one could say no to her."



Mrs. Kazen blesses the bride at a family wedding.

'The Queen of Cleveland'

When Rabbi Kazen would pass by the Rebbe to receive a dollar and a blessing, the Rebbe would ask if his wife was waiting in line as well. If not, he would give him a dollar for her, too. On one occasion, the Rebbe referred to her as *di malka fun Cleveland*, "the queen of Cleveland."

Indeed, Mrs. Kazen had a regal aura about her. However, unlike a queen, she was never afraid to get her hands dirty.

She would spend days and nights cooking meals for people in need and always kept a pot bubbling on the stove, ready to serve whomever might wander in.

When the Iron Curtain began to part, Russian immigrants started to stream to Cleveland. Mrs. Kazen would meet new arrivals at the airport, find them employment and lodging, and supply them with furniture and clothes. At times, she would take in families to stay in her own home—sometimes for weeks or months at a time—until they found a place of their own.



Rabbi and Mrs. Kazen

She would encourage the new immigrants to register their children in the Hebrew Academy. Week after week, she would come to the school with students, who spoke no English, had no prior Judaic education, and could offer nothing in the way of tuition.

According to Rabbi Dessler, the “scores of families” Mrs. Kazen brought to Hebrew Academy resulted in generations that have adopted an observant lifestyle and have been absorbed into the Cleveland Jewish community.

4 At a certain point, the demand became so great that the school opened a special New American Division, with an enrollment of 120.

She was also active in encouraging Russian men and boys to undergo *brit milah* (circumcision), the very mitzvah for which her father had given his life. All told, she arranged 500 circumcisions. In the days and weeks following the procedure, she would don a white nurse's coat and change the bandages herself, caring for every "patient" as her own son.



Mrs. Kazen with some of her grandchildren

In 1971, Mrs. Kazen was asked if Cleveland would host the Mid-Winter N'shei Chabad Convention. Knowing that the lion's share of the burden would fall on her shoulders, Mrs. Kazen told the Rebbe that her plate was too full and she could not do it. The Rebbe encouraged her, saying that her children would help. She cooked and baked for days on end to prepare for the massive gathering, and the convention turned out to be a great success. At the Motzei Shabbat session, couples were invited.

The guest speaker was Dr. Velvl Greene, who also spoke for students at nearby Case Western University. The gathering gave birth to the first Chabad House in Cleveland, which was subsequently run by her daughter, Devorah, and her husband, Rabbi Leibel Alevsky.



At the International Conference of Chabad Lubavitch Women Emmiseries, where she was often accompanied by her daughters and granddaughters, who serve communities around the globe.

Mrs. Kazen encouraged many young men and women to study at the Chabad yeshivahs on the East Coast.

At one point a young man told her that he was planning to drop out of yeshivah in Morristown, N.J. Immediately, she drove from Cleveland to Morristown, a distance of 450 miles. When she arrived, she found the student all packed and ready to leave. She convinced him to write to the Rebbe. The Rebbe

told him to learn for a year and then ask again. Today he is the father of a large religious family.

On another occasion, she hosted a group of yeshivah students who had come from New York to attend the wedding of a friend. Upon seeing their stained and rumpled suits, she had them dress in her husband's clothing while she washed and ironed their suits. Only then did she allow them to go to the wedding hall.



Shula Kazen sits between her mother and husband, with their seven children behind them.

Mrs. Kazen's wise and incisive advice helped smooth out many a tiff between spouses. One piece of advice, which a woman credited with saving her marriage: "When he talks nicely, he is talking to you. When he is yelling, he is yelling at the wall behind you."

Continuing to Serve into Their 90s

Even as they aged, the Kazens continued to serve their community with the energy of a young couple.

Mussi Alpern, a great-granddaughter, recalls visiting the Kazens when the couple was already deep into their 80s.

“We arrived at 6 a.m. Friday morning and went straight to the shul. Outside we met Zaidy, then 88, shoveling snow around the shul, while Bubby was already in the kitchen cooking. After a few minutes, Zaidy was in the car, driving to pick up people who could not come by themselves to shul. This was a daily pickup. All Friday, they did not stop for a second until all the food was cooked, the table was set and the place was spotlessly clean.

“It was less than an hour to Shabbos and I thought we were finally done. Then Bubby said with all her energy, ‘We still have time to make banana cake!’ For the Friday night meal, there were ‘only’ 20 guests. (At the Shabbos day meal, there were 150 guests!) Sitting at the Shabbos table was a pleasure, between Zaidy’s singing and *divrei Torah*, and Bubby’s delicious food.

“When we finally went to sleep it was past 1 a.m. I couldn’t believe it when I saw Bubby and Zaidy lie down to sleep on the hard wooden benches in shul. They would sleep there every Shabbos, as it was too far for them to walk home.

“When we woke up in the morning Bubby and Zaidy were already up. We asked Bubby, ‘So when do you rest?’ She answered, ‘I was educated that we rest after 120.’ After davening, everybody sat down for a full Shabbos meal with Zaidy’s *niggunim* and *divrei Torah*.

“On Motzoei Shabbos they prepared a big *melaveh malkah* meal for the community, which ended after midnight. But they still were not ready to sleep. They had to prepare for Sunday. We went out to the bakery to pick up the leftover bread and cakes, and prepared boxes of food for over 100 needy families who would come to the shul each Sunday morning for their food packages. While we were preparing the boxes, a snowstorm started, so they spent another night on hard benches.

“In the morning when we woke up, Zaidy was again shoveling the sidewalks around the shul. Right after Shacharis, people started to come to pick up their packages. While Bubby spoke and sang with the ladies, Zaidy approached the men, with simplicity and love, to put on *tefillin*. By then it was time for us to leave to the airport.

This was their routine for decades, which the couple stuck to until Rabbi Kazen passed away in the summer of 2011 at the age of 92.

Mrs. Kazen was predeceased by her son, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Kazen, pioneer of Judaism on the internet and founder of Chabad.org, and daughter Esther Alpern, Chabad-Lubavitch emissary to Brazil.

She is survived by her children, Devorah Alevsky, Cleveland; Henya Laine, Brooklyn; Blumah Wineberg, Kansas City; Rivka Kotlarsky, Brooklyn; Rochel Goldman, Johannesburg, South Africa; and hundreds of grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren across the world.

She is survived by her sisters, Rosa Marosov and Rochel Levin, both of Brooklyn.



With her sisters, Rosa Morosov (left) and Rochel Levin (right).

Donations can be made to the food bank the Kazens ran (kosherfb.org) or go towards the Torah being written in their memory (mail to: 4481 University Parkway, Cleveland, OH 44118). The family asks that memories be shared via email to: KazenFamily@gmail.com.

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Baruch Dayan Haemes – Skulener Rebbe Zy’’a

By Hamodia Staff



(Hamodia Archives)

NEW YORK -

The Skulener Rebbe, Harav Yisrael Avrohom Portugal was niftar this afternoon in Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, Maryland.

The Rebbe, who was the *Zkan Ha'Admorim*, had been ill for an extended period of time, during which Yidden worldwide stormed the heavens begging that the Rebbe should be granted a *refuah sheleimah*. Over the last few weeks, as the

Rebbes health had its ups and downs, Yidden poured out their hearts with Tehillim. This afternoon, *nitzchu ere-lim es hametzukim venishba aron hakodesh*.



(Hamodia Archives)

Yet somehow, news of the loss of a Rebbe who embodied the very image of a tzaddik, who seemed like nearly the only remnant of tzaddikim from a bygone era, still came not only with heartbreak, but shock.

At 95, the Rebbe had served Hashem with all his being for years amid health challenges that would have left any normal human being homebound. A loving father to every Jew that sought his advice and blessing, just as much as he and his saintly father had been to countless lost souls in post-war Europe, for many, to think of a world without the Skulener Rebbe leaves upon them a feeling of being left orphaned.

The Rebbe succeeded his father, Harav Eliezer Zusia Portugal Zy”a, to lead his *chassidim* after his father’s *petirah* on Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5742 (1982). During the 36 years of his leadership, he was revered for his *kedushah* and his dedication to his *chassidim* and the myriad Yidden who came for his *hadrachah*, *brachos*, and to be inspired by his *avodas Hashem*.



(Hamodia Archives)

At all hours of the day and night, Yidden flocked to the Rebbe for *brochos* and *eitzos*. He was a *tzaddik* who existed so many worlds above any political camps, that no matter what camp or *kehillah* a Yid belonged to, there was never a second thought to beseech the Skulener Rebbe for a *yeshuah*, a *brachah*, to ask for *chizuk* or to have him share in one’s *simchah*.

He continued the work of his father in bearing the responsibility for Chessed L’Avrohom, the organization which his father built to help immigrant children in Eretz Yisrael remain *ehrllicher Yidden*. The Rebbe travelled extensively worldwide to raise funds for Chessed L’Avraham.

The Skulener Rebbe’s *avodah* always seemed unstoppable. How was it that a human being in his 80’s and 90’s was able to spend his nights counseling Jews in

need, and his days engrossed in lengthy preparations for *tefillah*, all while carrying the burden of a multi-million dollar *chessed* organization, Chessed I'Avraham?

The Rebbe was detached from *gashmius*, spending little time engaged in sleep and eating, with no more than one meal a day. He was known for his humble nature.

While few if anyone could truly understand the depth of the Rebbe's *avodas Hashem*, and seemed to exist in a world of holiness all his own, he was a *tzaddik* who was uniquely in touch with the challenges of the Jewish People in his generation. A long-time warrior for the purity of Klal Yisrael, for more than the last 15 years of his life, he was one of the leading generals in the war against the dangers of internet and other technological innovations to the *kedushah* and *mesorah* of Torah Jewry. Together with *ybcl*"c Harav Mattisyahu Solomon *shlita*, it was the Rebbe who was the driving force behind the Kinnus Klal Yisrael held at Citi Field Stadium on Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan, 5772 (2012).

Following in the path of his father, he composed numerous *chassidische niggunim*, and a handful of them have become classics in the Torah community. Several Skulener niggunim are world-renowned niggunim, like the popular "*Yomim al yemei melech*", "*Chasdei Hashem ki lo samnu*", and the classical "*Oy, oy, oy Shabbos*", which the Rebbe composed a few years ago and is today sung by thousands of Jews at their Shabbos tables. The Rebbe danced to this tune at *simchos*, even in the middle of the week.

The Rebbe was the son of Harav Eliezer Zusia Portugal Zy"a, the previous Rebbe (1896-1982). Rav Eliezer Zusia was the Rov of the town of Skulyany (Skulen), in Bessarabia, where he focused on increasing the spiritual level of the Yidden in his town. He wrote booklets in Yiddish specifically tailored to their needs. When the Sadigorer Rebbe, Zy"a, visited Skulen and saw Rav Eliezer Zusia's accomplishments, he urged him to move to Chernowitz, where he could serve a larger community. Rav Eliezer Zusia moved, and before long was accepted by the residents of that city.

After WWII, a new chapter in the Rav Eliezer Zusia's life began as he became the father of hundreds of war orphans, even formally adopting scores of them. He eventually smuggled his "family" into Rumania, and settled in the city of Bucharest, where he founded institutions for the orphans of the Holocaust. He personally cared for some three hundred orphans, who referred to him "*Tatteh*". Most of them settled in Eretz Yisrael and remained *frum* Yidden.

Due to his religious activities, the Rebbe was persecuted, as governmental authorities viewed his spiritual work as a challenge to Communism. Two weeks before Pesach 5719/1959, the Rebbe and his son were imprisoned in a notorious prison together with dangerous criminals. They were isolated from one another to

prevent them from conspiring with one another. They were jailed for five months on the charges of smuggling children to Eretz Yisrael and spying for the U.S. and Israel.

Despite the danger, the previous Skulener Rebbe and his son remained in Romania until 5720 (1960). He refused to leave Romania until the last of his “children” had reached safety. Finally, when they felt their work was done, they agreed to emigrate. With the tremendous efforts of Harav Eliezer Silver *Zt”l* of Cincinnati and other *askonim*, they were able to secure the intervention of United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold and officials at the U.S. State Department, and the Skulener Rebbe and his son were freed, emigrating immediately.

In the spring of 1960, they entered the United States, and the Rebbe explained that he chose America over Eretz Yisrael so he could better help those who remained in Rumania.

When he was encouraged to open a *yeshiva* in his new country, his response was, “What would my yeshiva add to all the others? A person who wants to do a mitzva must ask how he can give the most *nachas ruach* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.” Instead, he founded the “*Chessed L’Avraham*“, a network of schools in Eretz Yisrael for the children of immigrants to that country, to compete with leftist schools in Israel.

They resided in Crown Heights in Brooklyn, New York. Eventually, when the majority of his followers had moved to Williamsburgh and Boro Park, the Rebbe and son moved as well.

The Rebbe Rav Yisroel Avrohom divided his time between his Beis Medrash in the Boro Park and Williamsburg, and would usually spend some of the Yomim Tovim in Williamsburgh where his father lived.

The Rebbe’s Rebbitzen, Reizel (daughter of Rabbi Menachem Ze’ev Stern of Oberwischau), passed away in 2005.

The *levayah* is scheduled for Tuesday morning at 11:00 am at the Skulener Bais Medrash in Boro Park at 1315 54th Street. Kevurah will be in the Viznitz Bais Olam in Monsey next to his father, *Zy”a*.

Yehi zichro baruch.

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