

“Because that’s the law!” he answered. ‘For eight days, if you’re a Jew, no chametz (leaven) passes your lips. Vodka is chametz. If you can’t hold out for eight days, maybe go to Israel,’ he laughed, ‘there chametz is only forbidden seven days...’ “I was stunned. No vodka for eight days! I rushed home, took all the money I had, bought a big bottle of vodka, poured myself eight large cups one after the other, and drank them down... hoping that would help me make it through the holiday. “

The next thing I remember is that I’m sleeping soundly in my bed when suddenly my wife throws a bucket of water on me -- you saw how she does it -- and starts screaming, ‘Shmerl, you bum! You drunk! You good-for-nothing! All Jews all over the world are making the seder tonight, and you are lying there like a drunken ox. Wake up and make a seder!’ “So I staggered to my feet, put on some dry clothes and sat down at the beautifully set table. “The candles were shining brightly and making the plates and silverware sparkle so nicely. Everything was new, clean. I felt so different, almost holy. The wine and the matzos were on the table, the Haggadah was open in front of me. My wife had even set up the seder plate with all its things like she remembered from her father. She herself was sitting in her place opposite me like a queen, and was even smiling. Everything was so beautiful.

“But then -- I looked around me and didn’t know what to do. The vodka was still swirling in my head, but, to be honest, Rebbe, even sober I don’t know how to make a seder. “So I took a large bowl, and put everything in there. The three matzos, the bitter herbs, the dish of charoset, all those little items my wife had set up on the seder plate, I poured in the four cups of wine, and swirled it all together.

“Then I lifted up my seder bowl and started talking to G-d, just like I’m talking to you now. I started talking to G-d and I said, ‘G-d, listen... I don’t know You, but You know me. You know that after my father got killed I had to work all the time and I never had a chance to learn, right? So I don’t know how to read this book, in fact I can’t read anything! And I don’t know what I’m supposed to do with all this stuff either. But one thing I do know... I know that a long time ago You sent Moses to take us out of Egypt, and I’m sure that you will send Moshiach to take us out of all our troubles now!’

“And then I gulped down the whole thing.”

Dear Friend:

This year’s project, “Chai for Challah” is still in effect. The bread we eat for Passover is “Matzah-Bread of affliction”. Challah dough rises, the higher the better. Matzah is poor bread that does not contain any leaven. Matzah is flat and does not rise. A most basic factor in differentiating the two concerns the ego. Matzah represents humility and Challah, conceit. In light of the miracles at Passover may we stand humbly in the presence of Almighty G-d and be thankful for all our blessings, now and always.

Passover is our new reality. We will celebrate for 8 days transformed to live and appreciate the open miracles of the Exodus and our redemption, as well as those that are not obvious. Like then, we are promised, that we will be redeemed in one final redemption.

“May it be Your will, Lord, our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, to rebuild the Holy Temple speedily in our days, and show us our portion in Your Torah”.

Wishing you and yours a Sweet, Joyous and Redemptive Passover!

Sincerely,



Rochelle Kaplan

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Lesson 6
Passover 5776

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Chai for Challah

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The story of our Exodus is the story of the birth of the Jewish nation. It stands to reason that the mission and goal of the Jewish nation can be found within that story. Closeness to G-d, freedom from oppression, and the right to practice Torah and Mitzvot, are clearly ingrained into the vision of our people. What about the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb that is so integral to the very dawn of their nationhood?

“Speak to the entire community of Israel, saying, “On the tenth of this month, let each one take a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for each household....and you shall keep it for inspection until the fourteenth day of this month, and the entire congregation of the community of Israel shall slaughter it in the afternoon....and you shall extend to the lintel and to the two door posts the blood that is in the basin, and you shall not go out, any man from the entrance of his house, until morning. G-d will pass to smite the Egyptians, and He will see the blood on the lintel and on the two door posts and the Lord will pass over the entrance and He will not permit the Destroyer to enter your houses to smite [you].”(Exodus 12)

Why was G-d putting the people under a night-long curfew? The obvious you may recall was because the Angel of Death was outside slaying the Egyptian’s firstborn and the Jews were only guaranteed protection by remaining indoors with the paint of the blood of the Paschal Lamb on their door posts. Hence, the name Pesach-Pass-over.

To understand the message of the Paschal Lamb we will take a closer look at some further details. Since there was no Temple at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, the Paschal Lamb was sacrificed by each family in their home. The concept of bama (altar) was permitted when no Temple was present. Naturally efforts would be vested in finding an appropriate place for the offering. We see for example, Yaakov Avinu (Jacob), built an altar in a place, El Beth El, for there G-d was revealed to him when he fled from his brother Esau (Genesis 35). He sought out a most fitting place, which was previously designated by G-d.

However, the Paschal Lamb was different. They were specifically commanded to individually offer their personal sacrifice in their own home. Also, what is this about ‘blood on the door posts’ that is particularly significant? The most important act of any sacrifice was actually “sprinkling the blood on the altar”. Whereas, with the Paschal Lamb, it was on the door posts!

Rabbi Zera asked: “Where did they burn the innards of the Passover offering in Egypt?” Abaye replied, “They were roasted with the rest, and eaten.” This is supported by the teaching of Rabbi Joseph: There were three altars [for the Paschal Lamb in Egypt]-on the lintel and two door posts. This indicated that an- other altar was required. Not doing so would cause the sacrifice to be invalid.

Essentially, with any regular Passover sacrifice a) every Jew must eat and spend the night in Jerusalem, 2) slaughter in the Temple 3) and offer blood on the altar. With the first Paschal Lamb in Egypt, 1) one must eat and spend the night at home 2) slaughter at home and 3) place blood on the door of the home. (Tosefta, Pesachim 7)

This leads us to a fascinating conclusion: something truly unique took place in the original, trend-setting Paschal sacrifice—a Jew’s home became Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, and even the altar itself! Herein lays the true importance to transform the Jewish home into a holy abode. The Temple is not limited to a palatial structure in Jerusalem, rather it exist in the home of every Jew, at the kitchen table.

Almighty G-d wanted his people to take all the energy entailed in the sacrifice and embed it within the very fabric of their homes, to the extent that no one was allowed to leave their house until morning.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains: Because the Paschal Lamb in Egypt came at the birth of the Jewish nation, it was important that it clearly demonstrate the mission and purpose of all the Jewish people, namely, the goal of making a dwelling place for G-d within each and every Jew, to the extent that his or her own home becomes a place where G-d is at home.

The ultimate goal of creation and of Torah and mitzvot and the Temple itself is to make our personal homes, and the world around us, into a temple-holy place. This includes even our most mundane affairs. Specifically, in the home and in a child’s room or special corner; Holy Torah books, a charity box, mezuzot, etc., will create this atmosphere.

Content of this lesson was culled from JLI Torah Studies taught throughout the year at Aleph Learning Institute of Baltimore

A Story

Shmerl’s Seder

by Tuvia Bolton (reprinted from Chabad.org)

It was well past midnight on the first night of Passover, and the great Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev had just concluded enacting the Passover Seder in the presence of his disciples. They had recited the Haggadah, recounting the story of the Exodus and discussing the deeper meanings implicit in each of its passages; they drank the four cups of wine, dipped the karpas in the salt water and the bitter herbs in charoset, ate the matzah, the korech and the afikoman, sang the psalms of praise and gratitude -- all in accordance with the letter of the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) and the esoteric principles found in the awesome mystical works of the saintly “Ari”.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s disciples had participated in many of their Rebbe’s seders in the past, but this one surpassed them all. The Rebbe and all those present felt transported into a different world, as though they had risen above their bodily limitations and into a world of pure G-dliness.

Suddenly the room filled with the sound of a deep rumbling like thunder, and from within the thunder an awesome voice announced: “Levi Yitzchak’s seder was pleasing to G-d, but there is a Jew in Berdichev called Shmerl the Tailor whose seder reached even higher!” The Rebbe looked around him. It was obvious that only he had heard the heavenly announcement. “Has anyone heard of a tzaddik (righteous person) called Shmerl the Tailor?” he asked his Chassidim. No one had.

After several minutes of silence one of the elderly Chassidim offered: “There is one Shmerl here in Berdichev that I know of, and he used to be a tailor about thirty years ago, but he’s certainly no tzaddik. In fact he’s pretty far from that. They call him now ‘Shmerl the Shikker’ (drunkard) and he lives with his wife on the edge of town.” But Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was thinking to himself, “Ahah! this must be one of the hidden tzaddikim. And he lives right here, in Berdichev, while I knew nothing about him!”

It was two o’clock in the morning when the Rebbe stood at the door of old Shmerl’s hovel. An old Jewish woman answered his soft knock. “Good Yom Tov!” said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak quietly. “Please excuse me for the late hour. Is your husband Shmerl at home?” “Good Yom Tov,” She answered. “Just wait one minute please, Rebbe, wait right here.” She disappeared into the house, and the unmistakable sound of a bucket being filled

with water was heard from inside. Then a minute or two of silence and suddenly... SPLASH! She threw the bucket of water on her sleeping husband.

“Aaahh! Oyyy! Where am I? Ooiy vai!” he screamed, and then his wife was heard shouting, “Get up you drunk! The Rebbe has come to punish you! Wake up, you good-for-nothing! “Poor Shmerl staggered, sopping wet, to the door. When he saw that it really was the Rebbe standing there at his door in the middle of the night, he fell at Rabbi Levi Yitzchak’s feet and began weeping, “Please, Rebbe don’t punish me. It’s not my fault... I didn’t know any better... Please, have mercy...”The Rebbe of Berdichev was completely astounded at this bizarre scene. Could it be that this man’s seder was loftier than his own? He bent down, lifted poor Shmerl to his feet and said, “Listen, Shmerl, I didn’t come to punish you. In fact I don’t even know what you are talking about. Please let me in, let’s sit down and talk. I only want to ask you something. Go put on a dry shirt and we’ll talk.”

Minutes later they sat facing each other over Shmerl’s small table. The Rebbe looked at him kindly and said: “Shmerl, listen. I want you to tell me how you conducted your seder last night. Don’t worry, I promise that I’m not going to punish you, I promise.”“Oy!” moaned Shmerl and began weeping again. “My seder! But Rebbe, I really didn’t know any better... Oooy!”Gradually he calmed down and began speaking. “Early this morning, that is... yesterday morning, I’m walking in the street and suddenly I notice that people are rushing about. This one has a broom over his shoulder, that one is carrying a box, the other one something else, everyone is scurrying about -- except me. “So I stopped someone I recognized and asked him, ‘What is everyone rushing for? Where are they all going?’ “So he answers me, ‘Oy Shmerl, are you so drunk that you forgot that tonight is Pesach? Tonight is Pesach! Do you remember what Pesach is?’

“I tried thinking but my mind wouldn’t work. Pesach, Pesach, I... I can’t remember. It sounds very important though; I remember something about Matzos... and Egypt. ‘Please,’ I begged the man, ‘do me a favor and tell me what it is again.’ “The man looked at me in a strange way, and answered ‘Listen, Shmerl, tonight you have to make a seder. You know, recite the Haggadah, eat three matzos, bitter herbs, four cups of wine. You’ll enjoy the wine Shmerl,’ he said with a sad smile, ‘though I guess you won’t enjoy abstaining from your foul vodka for eight days...’ ““Eight days!’ I cried. ‘Why? Why can’t I drink for eight days?’ I was trembling and beginning to remember a little.

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