

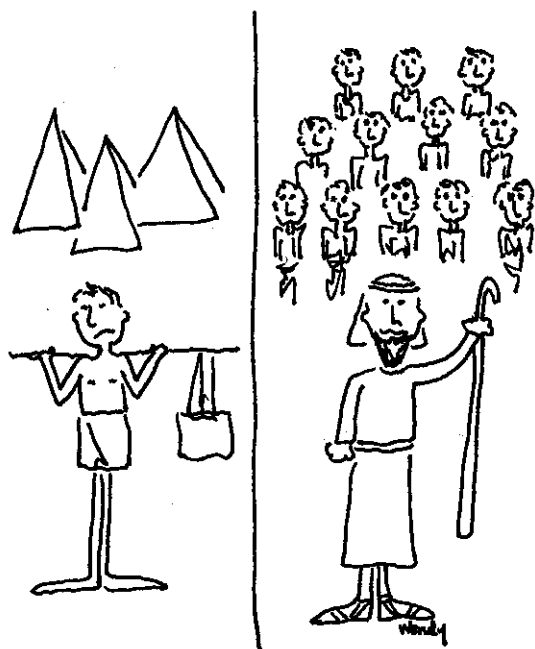
ברשת

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BERESHITH "IN THE BEGINNING"

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THE DUALITY OF PASSOVER



PASSOVER — A FESTIVAL OF ACTION

by Rabbi Jonathan A. Seidemann

The Passover Seder carries with it a seemingly endless collection of contradictions. We seat ourselves at a table, set in the most regal fashion, the silver glistening, the glassware and china sparkling, everybody attired in their holiday best. Jewish Law mandates many practices at the Seder which represent the nobility and luxury that are the province of the free man, which express the concept of *Chayrut*, liberty. We recline as we eat, and as we drink the four cups of wine, in a further show of having achieved the status of an emancipated, free individual.

The four cups themselves are extensions of this theme. They represent the four phrases found in the Torah concerning our redemption from Egypt, "V'Hotzalti, V'Hitzalti, V'Goalti, V'Lakabti -- And I will bring them out -- and I will save them -- and I will redeem them -- and I will take them." As representatives of this notion of liberty and

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PASSOVER — IT'S NOT OVER YET

by Marsha Joy Croland

This year, Passover begins on the night of April 3rd, but the events it commemorates are part of an ongoing process which has not been completed, even to this day.

Too many people think of Passover only in secular terms - almost like the Jewish 4th of July. The crossing of the Sea of Reeds, is like Washington's crossing of the Delaware. The non-traditional Haggadahs portray the Exodus as an historical event, with Moses as the focal point. This approach trivializes both the miracle of the Exodus and its pivotal role in the broad sweep of Jewish history. It reduces a miraculous act of

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GO FOR IT, MOM!!

Anonymous

Well, where shall I begin? I consider myself an average 47 year old woman. I have a wonderful husband, a lovely daughter and a great home. The work that I do outside of my home is very satisfying. I was born into a family that was mildly observant. We kept kosher, we didn't ride on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; and I absolutely hated Hebrew school.

Looking back, I think that I could have used a tutor for reading in English as well as Hebrew. But, back then, "who knew."

As the years passed I never stopped having the feeling of great pride in my Judaism. We sent

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freedom, redemption and salvation, luxury and personal security, these four cups, according to the Halachah, must be of actual wine. Substitutes are not ordinarily permitted, for only wine conveys this sense of *Chayrut*, of luxurious freedom.

On the other hand, and herein lie the contradictions, many of the Mitzvot of the Seder night exemplify a thought diametrically opposite to the aforementioned. The *Maror*, the bitter herb, recalls the bitterness of enslavement and forced labor, the grief for our newborns cast into the Nile to drown, and the beatings received under vicious taskmasters, all part of the Jew's daily routine under Pharaoh and his merciless minions. The salt water recalls our tears, and the *Charoset* mixture of wine and nuts evokes the image of the mortar our ancestors were forced to fashion into bricks at the behest of the Egyptians.

The contradictions of the Seder become even more apparent when we ponder the items of the Seder which, in and of themselves, represent both the best of freedom and the harshness of slavery, all at the same time. The white *kittel*, worn by the Seder leader, connotes purity and luxury, yet also symbolizes the *Tachrichim*, the burial shrouds of the dead. The Matzah, recalling our ancestors'

quick dash to freedom, was the result of such a hasty redemption that the bread had no time to rise. And yet, the Matzah is also *Lechem Oni*, bread of affliction, the staple of a slave's diet. It somehow has the capacity to at once express both the beauty of freedom and the wretched agony of oppression.

We might be tempted to reconcile the conflicting messages the Seder sends forth by answering that the Seder is ultimately a celebration of our liberation. In order to understand the sweetness of freedom, we have to relive the bitterness of the slavery. But this begs the following question. It is logical that we would be required to undertake actions at the Seder that simulate bondage, for we have no such personal experience and thus are unable to imagine it without a concrete, tangible symbol. But why is it required that we have those items which represent freedom? We do not need a concrete visualization of such an experience, we know what freedom is, we enjoy its fruits on a daily continual basis.

The answer can be found in an axiom of Jewish philosophy. Man is formed by his actions. We act, therefore we are. If we go through the motions, if we perform the Mitzvot of the Seder

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Divine redemption to a political act, like the Russian Revolution.

G-d's original covenant with Abraham foretold exile and bondage and promised a redemption which would restore the descendants of Abraham to their Promised Land (Genesis 15:13-20). The traditional Hagaddah portrays the Exodus as the fulfillment of G-d's promise to Abraham, and does not even mention Moses as a participant in the process.

The secular interpretation of Passover is one in which Moses says to Pharaoh "Let my people go." In the Torah, Moses repeats G-d's words to Pharaoh saying "Let my people go so that they may serve Me" (Exodus 7:26). We have seen in our own time how a revolution often substitutes one brand of slavery for another. The fulfillment of G-d's promise of redemption was clearly for a higher purpose - not physical freedom, but the service of G-d.

The first manifestation of the purpose of the Exodus was G-d's revealing His Law, which we celebrate on Shavout. This revelation process started in Egypt when we were given the commandment of *Rosh Chodesh*, the new month (Exodus 12:1-2), the obligation to establish a calendar to fix the times for the public testimony of G-d's role in our history.

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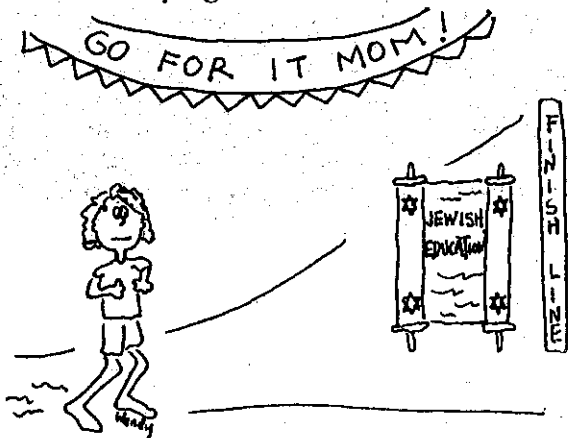


GO FOR IT MOM! (cont. from p. 1)

our daughter to a Jewish day school and my husband became respectably learned in Judaism. He is a Bar/BatMitzvah teacher and derives a great deal of satisfaction from it.

I myself kept a kosher home and always entertained for many of the holidays. However, I could not follow along once I walked into a shul. It gave me a very disconnected feeling. If I picked up a Chumash (Bible), it made absolutely no sense to me.

The shul that we belong to started offering many classes for people like me and for those who are disconnected from their Judaism. On a whim, I started to go to the Rebbitzin's class, "Women in Judaism." I was welcomed by everyone in the class and really enjoyed the discussions. A new branch of my life was beginning to sprout, but, I didn't realize it at the time. A basic class in Judaism was offered and I attended that class also. I would sometimes get home as late as 11 p.m. on a weekday night and felt like I was flying on a cloud.



I knew how to keep kosher, but now I understand *why* I do it and how the idea began. I certainly knew what a *bris* was, but now I understand why we have them, and how they got started.

A Learners Minyan was started and I thought, that perhaps, I'll have the opportunity to learn more about the prayer service. So, I started to attend. Our very first Shabbat, the teacher asked if anyone would like to do a D'var Torah for next week. No one raised his/her hand. I remembered an orange and black book on the weekly Torah Portion that my husband has for his students. So I said, "I'll do it. But, I can't do it every week."

My first D'var Torah was about two paragraphs long, and, as the audience wasn't judgemental at all, I felt somewhat good about it. So good, in fact, that I volunteered to do it again the following week. When we didn't have the Learners Minyan I

obviously didn't prepare one. I remember thinking, "Well, I don't have to do one this week."

As the Shabbatot passed, I actually started looking forward to "learning" what the week's Torah portion was about. I began doing a D'var Torah whether the Learner's Minyan met or not. I told my husband and daughter that I wanted to read the D'var Torah after our Shabbos meal, and now, my husband and I discuss it frequently.

I'm very proud of myself. I can look at our Jewish calendar and find out what Torah portion will be read this week, and I am able to turn to the correct page in the Chumash before it is announced. I've "graduated" from the Learner's Minyan and am a regular in the Main Sanctuary where I can follow along with the service. I still have to ask my husband for the correct page before I walk into the sanctuary, but, as my Rabbi told me, "Even I don't know everything yet!"

I owe a great debt of thanks to my Rabbi and his wife as well as my teacher, my husband, my daughter and my friends for their interest. They never criticized me. The only feeling that I ever picked up from them, was, as my daughter says, GO FOR IT, MOM!

And I am!

Anonymous is a graduate of the Learner's Minyan at Beth Shalom Congregation in Potomac, MD. Her daughter attends the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington.

PASSOVER — A FESTIVAL (cont. from p 2)

which are synonymous with freedom, then, and only then, are we, in reality, free. We cannot reach the goal of Passover, to achieve a sense of freedom, unless we drink the cups of redemption, unless we recline at the Seder as one who lives as a master.

The paragon of ethical behavior and thought, the late great Rabbi Israel Salanter, known for his boundless kindness, once confided that his natural tendency was to be selfish, which he combated through unlimited acts of benevolence to his fellow human beings. As we ponder our own spiritual standing during this season, how encouraging it is to realize that we need not be inherently perfect. Who we are, is defined by the actions we undertake. Our actions, our Mitzvot, will recreate us bit by bit. As we gather around the Seder table, let the Mitzvot of freedom create within us the ultimate liberation, the freedom to grow.

Rabbi Jonathan A. Seidemann is Director of Community Services at Ner Israel Rabbinical College, and is the Rabbi of the Beginners High Holiday Service at Etz Chaim in Baltimore, MD.

PASSOVER-IT'S NOT OVER YET (cont. from p.2)

G-d then commanded the Jews to count seven weeks of seven days from the day of the Exodus, to establish another festival. The number seven is the signature of G-d which alludes to the creation of the universe in seven periods called days. Seven signifies completion, and seven-times-seven affirms completion. This counting of seven weeks (or seven creations) called the *Sefirab*, concludes on the fiftieth day with Shavout, which commemorates G-d's revealing the Ten Commandments to Moses and the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Shavout is a partial completion of the work of the Exodus which is celebrated on Passover. The process of receiving *Mitzvot* transformed the Jews from servants of men (Egyptians) to servants of their Eternal Master, again.

However, the process of the Exodus did not end at Mt. Sinai. Receiving the Revelation did not by itself guarantee its performance. The familiar Seder song

Dayenu builds on the succession of miracles connected with the Exodus and the Revelation of the Torah at Mt. Sinai to show that the ultimate purpose of the redemption from Egypt was, and is, the establishment of a Jewish nation in the Land of Israel ruled by G-d's Law, the re-establishment of worship the Temple of Jerusalem, and the inauguration of the Messianic era described by our prophets.

As we sit down to our Seders, we must see Passover not as a secular celebration of liberation, but as the beginning of the ongoing process of our ultimate redemption which will restore us to our Holy Land and to our Temple, where we can live under G-d's revealed Law. This is our highest spiritual aspiration and the reason that for nearly two thousand years we have ended our Seder with the words: Next year in Jerusalem!

Marsha Joy Croland is a lawyer and attended the LSS Beginners Service. This article first appeared in Hadassah Highlights.

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