

**BERESHITH**  
"IN THE BEGINNING"

A Newsletter  
for Beginners,  
by Beginners

Vol. XXXVII No. 3  
Nissan 5784 / April 2024



# בראשית

"This is the essence of the Passover seder: wherever you are, you are talking to the same Hashem who took us out of Egypt!"



## REMEMBER THE FORGOTTEN

Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

The Exodus from Egypt! So many of our mitzvot are based on remembering the Exodus from Egypt. Every Friday night Kiddush we mention that Shabbat is “*zacher l’yetziat Mitzrayim*”—a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. And, of course, *Pesach*, the seder night, is to remember and to re-live the Exodus from Egypt. But how can we be asked to focus on remembering something that we don’t actually remember?

When I was a young father, I was pushing our 5-year-old son on a swing at a park. We were having a great time together and I was thinking of how those first five years of his life had created such a rich, deep and loving relationship. I then had a thought that would seem to be very depressing, but for me it was actually very comforting. I thought that ...if I would pass away right then, he wouldn’t really remember (cont. on p. 2)

## PESACH REFLECTIONS FROM ISRAEL

David Disenhouse

As my wife Irene (a Jewish Argentine Princess) and I plan our 32nd seder in our home in Karmiel here in the Galil in the north of Israel, I am taking some time to reflect on our move to Israel from the Upper West Side (UWS) in December of 1991.

Irene and I met in 1987, and started dating while we were both living on the UWS not far from Lincoln Square Synagogue. It was there that Irene became a member of the “Beginners Service” where we met Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald.

After a romantic courtship, we decided to get married in 1988. We wanted it to be a very meaningful ceremony, so we decided to wed in *Eretz Yisrael*. Our “problem” now, was to find a rabbi to perform the wedding in Israel. After consulting with Rabbi Saul Berman, he recommended his brother-in-law, Rabbi Rafi Weinberg, who was living in Haifa at the time. And so it was, we married in his apartment in Haifa and had a lovely simple ceremony with friends and family.

After the wedding, we returned to our home on the UWS. In 1989, Irene was pregnant, and we hoped to spend our first *Pesach* together as a family. Well, that was not to be. Two days before *Pesach*, Irene’s mother, Sara, passed away. The next day, Irene gave birth to Sarita. In addition to this shock and joy, Irene had to remain in the hospital over *Pesach*. I didn’t know where to turn or what to do. We had invited friends and family to (cont. on p. 3)

## THE SPECIAL MEANING OF PESACH FOR ME

Mordechai Beilis

It was only the second *Pesach* since the Exodus from Egypt, and already there's trouble brewing in the wilderness. The Children of Israel who lived through the first *Pesach*, didn’t really understand the meaning of what happened to them. The Haggadah therefore describes the four different kinds of children.

The wise son may not understand but asks questions to create a relationship with *Hashem*. The wicked son wants no part of *Hashem* and prefers to watch tonight’s baseball game. The simple son asks: “What’s this?” and returns to his daydreaming. The fourth child who doesn't have the capacity to ask, is either bored, or is too young to ask the proper questions, and needs to be taught.

When I was three years old my mother sat me down and taught me to sing the Four Questions (the *Ma Nishtana*). We practiced every day for two months. At my paternal grandparents’ seder, I sang them without a mistake. I wanted my grandfather to be proud of me. At some point during my recitation, I saw my grandfather look at my mother and nod his approval. Every year when it comes to the time of reading the Four Questions, I get a little nostalgic and shed a tear remembering my first seder, and how much I miss my mother and my grandparents. (cont. on p. 2)

me...

You see, I lost my mother at the tender age of five and have spent my adult life trying to identify my memories. Invariably, I have been disappointed as I've found that most of my "memories" were actually stories that my older brothers related that I had incorporated into my own memories. But then I had this realization with my own son. I knew how much love there was between us during those five years. I knew how many wonderful experiences we had shared. I knew there was a mountain of memories that were there, regardless of the ability to recall them. I knew that my not remembering the memories of my mother was in no way an indication that they hadn't happened. I felt a tremendous sense of peace.

On *Pesach*, we are called upon to remember the Exodus. We don't remember, but we were there! And the fact that we don't remember in no way indicates that it didn't happen. But how, you might ask, were we there when none of us are 3,000+ years old?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) explains that when we look at our baby pictures, we say: "That's me!" Even though the cells that appear in that picture are gone, long replaced by new ones, that is still me. The cells have changed but the person is the same. We are part of an incredible people that began its nationhood at the Exodus from Egypt. That nation still lives, and we are the representatives of that nation. Generations have come and gone, cells have died and have been replaced, but that being, that nation, still exists. That was us. We were there, even without the ability to recall personal experiences.

Especially in our post-October 7th world, we must recognize that the people who came out of Egypt was us, and that Hashem who performed all of those miracles has never changed. The story is told of a Jewish peasant who lived with his family in a small shack out in the forest. He supported himself by chopping and supplying wood to other Jews of that area. Leading into *Pesach* he was very busy and by the time the seder night arrived, our poor friend was utterly exhausted. He limped his way home and went to take a nap before the seder. His sweet wife tried repeatedly to wake him so he could lead the seder for the children, but this poor fellow was dead to the world. He couldn't move! Finally, late into the night, his wife succeeded to wake him, telling him that if he wouldn't lead the seder now, the children would fall asleep without having had a *Pesach* seder. He managed to pull himself into a sitting position and asked his wife to send in the children. Peering into their eyes, he said: "My dear sweet children, realize that whenever you make a *bracha*, whenever you daven, you are talking to that same *Hashem* who performed the miracles for us in Egypt." And with that, he fell back asleep!

A few weeks later he went to visit his Rebbe who asked him how the seder had gone. Embarrassed to tell what had

actually happened, he began to stammer a bit. Looking into his eyes, his Rebbe told him: "I know all about your seder. And you should know, the heavens opened with your words! You touched the very essence of *Pesach*..."

In our morning *tefillah* we say: Save Your people, bless Your portion, tend them, elevate them. Hashem, show us Your kindness, grant us Your salvation, redeem us with Your kindness. "I am Hashem your G-d, who brought you up from the Land of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it!" Fortunate is the People for whom this is so, fortunate is the people whose G-d is *Hashem*...

The Talmud teaches that in a leap year we celebrate Purim in the second month of Adar in order to have back-to-back, Purim-*Pesach* redemptions. We are now in between these two times of redemption. This *Pesach*, let's remember from where we have come, the opportunity we now have and the glorious future that awaits us.

*Rabbi Yisroel Ciner is the Rabbi of Beth Jacob Irvine, in Irvine, California, in addition to being a well-known teacher and writer.*

## THE SPECIAL MEANING OF PESACH FOR ME

(cont. from p. 1)



There is another reason why *Pesach* is especially meaningful to me. As I got older, I learned about the accusation of "Blood Libel" against my great-grandfather's first cousin, Mendel Beilis.

Here's the story in a nutshell. Mendel Beilis was living in Poland and was offered a job as the superintendent of a brick factory in Kiev, Russia. The owner of this factory was very generous and dedicated the profits from this factory to support a local hospital. As a result of working in this factory, Mendel was much admired.

One of the ironies of this whole libel was a compliment given to Mendel by the local Russian Orthodox Priest, saying, "Look at Mr. Beilis, he isn't Christian, yet he allows us to take a short cut, and go through the yard of the factory to the cemetery while our own parishioners won't allow us to do that."

(cont. on p. 4)

our first family *Pesach* seder and Irene couldn't be there. If I left her in the hospital by herself, who would comfort her, and if I stayed with her, who would conduct the seder?

To the rescue came Rabbi Buchwald and the rabbis from Lincoln Square Synagogue. They gave me the following unforgettable instructions. I was to worry about the seder and they would worry about Irene. They arranged to have members of the Jewish community near her hospital visit her throughout *Pesach* to comfort and congratulate her.

After the birth of our second daughter, Ariela, we decided to make the move to live in *Eretz Yisrael*. We rented a small house in Karmiel, a small development town in the north of Israel, with the intention of looking for a suitable permanent home, once we were already living there.

This was to be the most hectic year of our lives. We both had to find employment, Irene had to learn Hebrew in an Ulpan immersive learning center, the children had to be placed in pre-kindergarten and in addition, it was the coldest winter in Karmiel's history. To say it was a "cakewalk," would be a lie, but we survived.

Irene attended Ulpan and I started work as a consultant in asbestos abatement, a new field here in Israel. The city had a most wonderful pre-Gan program and we enrolled the girls and they adapted easily to their new environment. Our new neighbors were very helpful and kept a watchful eye on us. When our lift, packed full with our house items from America, was late in arriving, they lent us heaters, beds and furniture until it finally arrived. This was our welcome to Israel.

Irene, in the meantime, completed the first Ulpan and began looking for work. She found employment as a systems' analyst and programmer.

We now had to find a permanent place to live so that we could get into a more normal family routine. We drove about the country looking for just the right place, but as time went by, we were received so warmly by the community that we decided to stay right here in Karmiel.

Karmiel was a very well-run municipality, with lovely parks and a very good religious Zionist school system. The mountain scenery was exquisite and we developed a close group of friends in the town. We found a lovely house with a large garden. We bought it, and after thirty-two years, we still live and enjoy the same beautiful home.

Our girls grew up in this house, they played in the garden and had their friends come to sleep over with them. They found tortoises in the wild and made a home for them in the front garden, and they have been our garden guests ever since.

The girls graduated the local schools and went on to study at Bar-Ilan University. In addition to successfully completing their studies, they each found husbands there. Our seders have grown proportionally. Today each of the girls has three lovely children, which makes our large house feel rather small on *Pesach* and Shabbatot.

My daughters from my previous marriage and their families, with whom we are very close, continue to come and stay with us every summer. Their children, my lovely older grandchildren, have been attracted to Israel and are studying or have studied here or have completed the military service. Two of them are even planning their Aliyah.

We have lived in Karmiel for over thirty-two years. Irene and I are now both retired and spend our time running after all our grandchildren both here and in the States, all eleven of them. Since the start of the Simchat Torah war, Irene has been volunteering picking fruits and vegetables to help the local farmers.

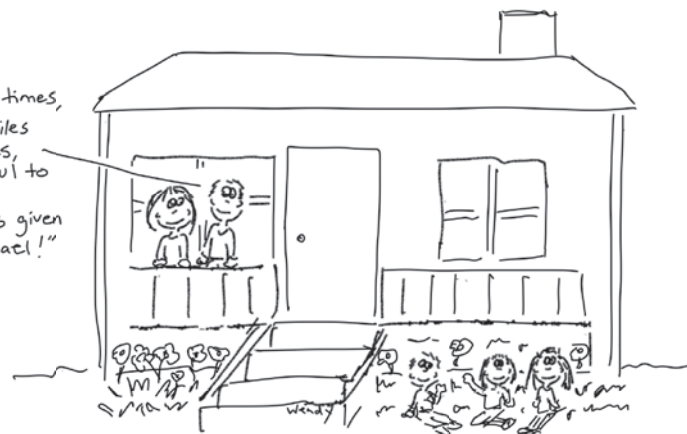
Over the years, there have also been trying times, wars, missiles and mistakes. On October 7th, our daughter Ariela and her family had to abandon their new home in the north of the country, due to the cruel war on the Lebanese border that we are still fighting. But our large house in Karmiel was

there to welcome them when they were forced to leave their home in Ya'arit neighborhood in the town of Shlomi. Today they are living temporarily with her sister Sarita in Zichron Yaacov.

As we prepare to celebrate *Pesach* once again in these most trying times, we feel that we made the right move and have never been happier. We are very thankful to *Hashem* for the opportunity He has given us to build our homes and live as Jews in our reborn Jewish homeland.

*David Disenhouse is father to five lovely daughters, fabulous sons-in-law, eleven grandchildren, husband to the most wonderful woman I could ever have imagined and living in Eretz Yisrael. Hodu LaShem Ki Tov.*

"Despite the trying times, the wars, the missiles and the mistakes, we are thankful to Hashem for the opportunity He has given us to live in Israel!"



**BERYL LEVENSON, Z"l**

**Beryl Levenson, one of the visionary founders of NJOP, served for over 25 years as Associate Director of NJOP, until her retirement to Israel. An extraordinary talented administrator and creative leader, Beryl tirelessly worked to design and implement the many programs and marketing techniques that generated much acclaim for NJOP worldwide. She was truly one of the contemporary heroes of Jewish engagement.**

**May her memory be blessed.**



1345 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, 2<sup>nd</sup> FLOOR  
 NEW YORK, NY 10105-0014  
 1-800-44-HEBRE(W)  
 www.njop.org

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
 U.S. POSTAGE  
 PAID  
 New York, NY  
 PERMIT #5047



In partnership with  
 Lincoln Square Synagogue

**DATED MATERIAL**

THE SPECIAL MEANING OF PESACH FOR ME (cont.  
 from p. 2)

One night, a Christian boy from Kiev stayed over at his friend's house. The boy woke up in the middle of the night looking for a glass of water. Apparently, he overheard his friend's mother and another man planning a robbery. When the friend's mother saw the boy listening, she and her accomplice murdered the child and hid his body in a cave. When his body was discovered, the woman blamed Mendel for the murder, adding that Mendel Beilis used the blood of the boy for his matzah.

His trial eventually centered around the attempt to prove that Jews use the blood of non-Jewish children for matzah. Even the Tsar attended the trial, attempting to fix the verdict against the Jews. The trial became a world-wide sensation attended by journalists from every country. Witnesses, who knew nothing about the Talmud, testified as experts claiming that Jews use Christian blood in their religious rituals.

With world-wide condemnation for the trial, it finally ended in Mendel's exoneration. The woman and the man were found guilty of murder, and Mendel Beilis was released. He spent some time in France and Israel, but he was unhappy being treated like a celebrity, wanting no part of it. He eventually moved to the United States and lived on the Upper East Side of Manhattan until his death in 1934.

I'm sure many readers have reasons to feel special on Passover. But now you understand why *Pesach* is particularly special for me, especially since my family name is Beilis.

*Mordechai Beilis is a computer programmer for 311 (OTI) of New York City. He already has his hands full of complaints. Please do not direct any complaints to him, just dial 311.*

**Words of Torah for everyone!** To receive Rabbi Buchwald's exciting and provocative weekly e-mail message, please send an e-mail to: [ezbuchwald@njop.org](mailto:ezbuchwald@njop.org)

To receive a juicy bit of Judaism, daily, from *Jewish Treats*, please send an e-mail to: [jewishtreats@njop.org](mailto:jewishtreats@njop.org)



*Bereshit: "In the Beginning" is edited under the direction of Larry Greenman and Rivka Bornstein of NJOP. Special Beginners Services are conducted at synagogues throughout the United States to introduce those with limited backgrounds to the beauty of the traditional Hebrew service. For more information regarding the Beginners Service closest to your home, to establish a local Beginners Service, or to learn more about NJOP programs, please contact us: 1345 Avenue of the Americas, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10105-0014, 646-871-4444, e-mail [info@njop.org](mailto:info@njop.org) or visit [www.njop.org](http://www.njop.org).*

Readers: This is your newsletter and we'd like to hear from you. Article contributions are always welcome.

Illustrations by Wendy Dunn