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2019 SEDER SUPPLEMENT

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The Many Meanings of Passover

The etymology of the word Passover seems obvious. Passover, the English translation of *pesach*, means that God *passed over* the houses of Hebrews marked with lamb's blood so that only Egyptian first-born would be killed. But like so much about the festival, it's not so simple.

This generally accepted meaning of the word is a "false etymology," one of many "attempts to connect ancient rituals with the historical narrative of the Bible," says David Biale, professor of Jewish history at the University of California at Davis. Those ancient rituals, scholars believe, existed before the biblically described liberation from Egypt. In fact, there were two spring festivals to celebrate the renewal of life: one to sacrifice an unblemished animal and one of unleavened bread. Exodus unites the two into one celebration.

The confusion over the English word Passover is sometimes attributed to a 16th century Christian, William Tyndale, who coined it. A Protestant during England's transition from Catholicism, Tyndale was beheaded in 1536 for his reformist ideas, including wanting to make both the Pentateuch and New Testament accessible to everyone, even, as he is quoted as saying, the "boy who drives the plow." His translation of the Pentateuch, printed in 1530, marked the first time that Hebrew Scriptures were made available in English.

In examining the biblical spring festival, Tyndale observed that two ancient Hebrew words were pronounced the same: the verb *pasach* or *possach*, meaning to skip or pass over, and the noun *pesach*, referring to the lamb sacrifice. He translated both as "Passover," thus giving English speakers one explanation for two biblical terms. Passover, as well as many other Tyndale formulations—for example, Jehovah, atonement and scapegoat—found

their way into the authoritative 1611 King James Bible, and from there into modern English.

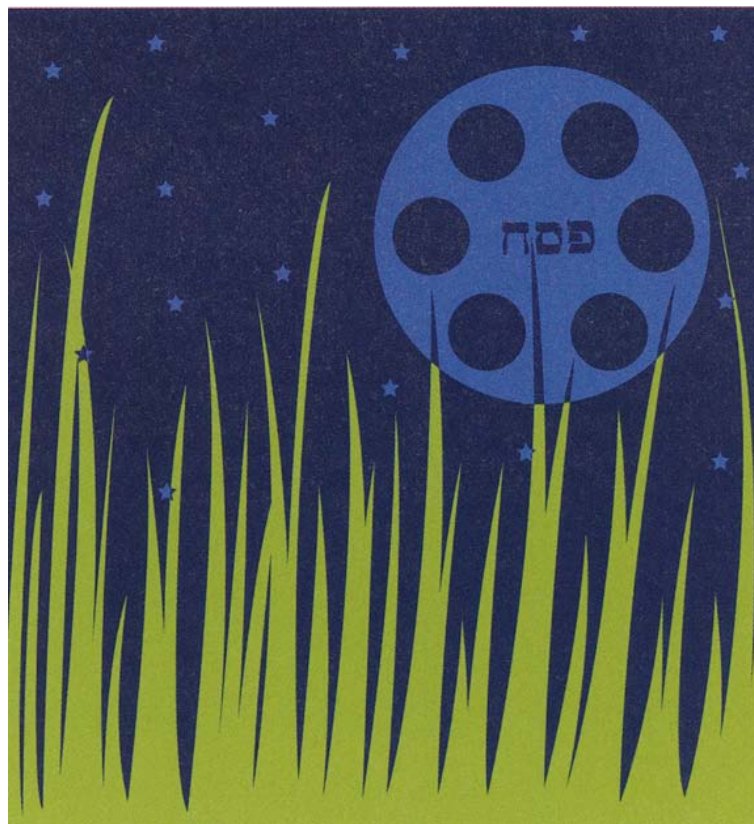
Scholars who hypothesize that the Torah had at least three writers (usually called J, E, and P) from different time periods add that the Hebrew words *pasach* and *pesach* have other meanings. Many think that "protection" is the best translation. *The Jewish Study Bible*

century CE legal commentary on the Torah, rabbis argue without conclusion over which version is correct: to pass over or to have compassion. By the Middle Ages, Zivotofsky says the meaning "pass over" had become predominant.

Looking at the Hebrew letters for *pesach* hints at another possibility. Several scholars have observed that these letters also form a different word, *piseach*, "to limp," and point to Deuteronomy, which forbids using a lame animal for the *pesach* sacrifice. Is this a coincidence? Or does this use of identical letters in the context of the *pesach* sacrifice link "limping" to Passover? Joseph Radinsky, rabbi emeritus of the United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston, Texas, explains the convergence: "When we look at the world we see G-d limping," because of the terrible events recalled at the Seder. Radinsky thinks that the Almighty's reply is: "Yes, you're right; it does look as if I'm limping, because I left you a job to do; you're supposed to do *mitzvah*....G-d's name has to be redeemed." The negative connotation of limping can thus motivate mankind to do the opposite—walk upright

to perform good deeds.

Another interpretation based on the Kabbalah starts with reading the Hebrew *pesach* as two words, *peh* and *sach*, which can be translated as "the mouth speaks." Haggadah means to tell or narrate; telling a story transforms internal ideas into reality. The Haggadah tells how "the Jewish people went from a nation in potential to actuality," says Max Weiman, rabbi and creator of the website KabbalahMadeEasy.com. God provided that passing over, a "supernatural jump," to make that possible. The essence of Passover's meaning is thus to achieve "spiritual growth" by using what Weiman calls God's "jumper cables."—Joan Alpert



published by the Oxford University Press says that in Exodus, the word *pesach* means that God protected the Israelites from a plague that harmed Egypt's first-born. "Passing over" is a more primitive translation, because it is associated with magically using an animal's sacrificial blood to prevent harm.

Ari Zivotofsky, professor of brain science at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, suggests another often cited meaning: "compassion or mercy." In translating the Torah into Aramaic, Onkelos (circa 100 BCE) was the first to interpret *pesach* as *ve'eychos*, meaning, "I will have compassion." In the Mechilta, the second

The Great *Hametz* Swap

"I am the Matzah Man," announces the amiable Hussein Jaber, quite chuffed with the nickname. Although, perhaps more accurately, he should be known as the "*Hametz* Man."

For it is Jaber, a 45-year-old Arab Muslim who, with the sweep of a ballpoint pen, signs a check at an official ceremony at Israel's Ministry of Finance every Passover eve to become the owner of every last scrap of leavened bread, i.e. *hametz*, in the country. "I always like to help and saw this as a nice way to help the state of Israel," he says. "I believe in co-existence. Our village is a model of cooperation with the state of Israel."

Jaber is referring to Abu Ghosh, where his family has lived for generations. A favorite destination for Israelis looking for good hummus restaurants and garden nurseries, the 5,700-person village is nestled in the foothills of Jerusalem. Its population is mostly Muslim and has a long history of friendly ties with Jews that predates Israeli statehood.

Jaber has been in the *hametz* business for 12 years. Through a legally binding agreement, he buys up the country's vast stores of leavened foodstuffs, including those belonging to supermarket chains, factories, food companies and even goods en route to Israel on cargo ships and airplanes. At a state ceremony on the eve of Passover every year, Jaber stands proudly surrounded by the finance minister, the two chief rabbis and television cameras who gather to watch him hand over a personal check for 20,000 shekels—about \$5,000. The real estimate for the country's *hametz* holdings is some \$150 million.

According to halacha, Jews are forbidden from consuming, let alone owning, *hametz* over Passover. "Today, people often send us records of the *hametz* they or their company own by fax and email," says Avi Blumenthal, an aide to Rabbi Yona Metzger, Israel's Ashkenazi chief rabbi. To get around the *hametz* prohibition, a convenient arrangement has been concocted with the sign-

ing over of Jewish stocks of bread, cereals, cakes, pizza dough and the rest to Israel's two chief rabbis, who in turn sell this vast carbohydrate kingdom to Jaber. "It's all mine during Passover," Jaber says with a laugh. "I'm the richest person in the whole country then."

So it's with a wink and a nod that Jaber follows a decades-long tradition and makes his down payment. Then, after Passover ends, he tells the rabbis that he does not



Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (right) and Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger (middle) signed over the *hametz* to Hussein Jaber (left) in 2006.

"It's all mine during Passover. I'm the richest person in the whole country then."

—Hussein Jaber

have the rest of the \$150 million. The deal is happily declared to be off, and the leavened riches officially return to their previous owners.

In the United States and elsewhere, similar arrangements take place on a smaller scale, with local Jews authorizing community rabbis to sell their *hametz* holdings to a non-Jew. Jaber's predecessors for this Passover mitzvah have also been Israeli Arabs.

Jaber is no stranger to the world of food or Jewish tradition. For over 20 years he has worked at the Ramada Renaissance, a large

Jerusalem hotel near the entrance of the city with a Glatt Kosher kitchen and a large Orthodox clientele. He has risen through the ranks from waiter to his current position of manager of food and beverages. "I know about all the holidays, the Torah and the Tanach, the various customs. Separate gender seating at weddings, washing hands before meals," which are similar to traditional Muslim practice, he notes. "You could say I've become an expert," says

Jaber, who keeps a supply of glasses wrapped in tinfoil for the ceremonial shoe crushing by Jewish grooms at weddings.

Jaber, wearing a pale blue oxford shirt and charcoal slacks, makes his way among cooks and waiters dodging one another as the sound of dishes clatters in the sprawling kitchen of the hotel. He then ducks into his office, a small rectangular room located just off the kitchen. Inside, almost every inch of wall is covered with framed photographs of Jaber with Israeli and world elites, from prime ministers, presidents

and cabinet members to chief rabbis and diplomats. "This is me with Ehud Barak," he says during a detailed guided tour of his *Where's Waldo?* walls of fame. "Here I am with the U.S. ambassador."

He says he's grown fond of the attention he receives as the master of the country's *hametz* reserve during Passover. And he's also not shy about his own love for the unleavened stuff. Like many of Israel's Arabs, his family is among those who buy large quantities of matzah during the holiday. Some Israeli Arab women consider it a good diet food, and children like to spread it with thick globs of chocolate spread, an Israeli favorite.

Along with his annual "job" comes an occasional misunderstanding. There are those who think Jaber really has access to all the *hametz* he symbolically owns during Passover. "People ask me to send them things like cake and flour," he says, shaking his head. "They think it's all mine to give away." —Dina Kraft

Guess Who's Coming to Seder?

Louie Kemp

It was 1975. I was sitting on a couch in a dimly lit room in Jack Nicholson's house. I was in Los Angeles on one of my rather frequent visits, when a close friend, an actress (who happened to be a guest in Mr. Nicholson's home), called to invite me over. My friend mentioned that she'd been telling one of Mr. Nicholson's neighbors about my fishing business and he'd asked to meet me. That Hollywood neighbor was Marlon Brando.

I was, for various reasons, accustomed to spending time around celebrities, but on that day, I found myself waiting with an unfamiliar mix of excitement and anticipation. This, after all, was Don Corleone. Brando was at a high point in his career, having just famously declined the Oscar for his performance in *The Godfather*. But he entered the room and sat down across from me without show or ceremony. No longer a young man, he stood a little broader, the creases on his face running deep when he smiled. Still, he was handsome with a trim beard around his mouth and shaggy hair falling misguided across his forehead, over those dark, penetrating eyes. He was at once disarmingly down to earth and magnetic, powerful—exuding a quiet charisma. As soon as he began to talk, his friendly manner put me at ease. It took only moments for me to forget that I was in the presence of a living legend.

"So, I understand you have a fish business in Alaska," he began. I nodded and told him, yes, I'd taken over the family business and expanded the operation from Minnesota to Alaska, dividing my time between both places.



CORBIS

"I want to get my son out of Los Angeles, away from the Hollywood crowd. I want him to be with normal people, have a real job, doing real work." He paused, and I could feel his intense eyes on my face. "Louie," he said leaning forward, "Would you give my son a job?"

I looked at him, his expression serious and sure. Was it "an offer I couldn't refuse"? I warned him the labor would be hard, sliming fish, working in freezers at 30 degrees below zero, heavy lifting and more. There would be 16-hour workdays when the salmon were running, and mosquitoes the size of meatballs.

Marlon shook his head insistent. "No, it'll be good for him."

"All right," I told him. "He can have a job, but the only way he's going to keep it is by his own hard work."

"Don't worry," he told me. "I promise you won't be sorry."

He was right. I never once regretted hiring Christian. He was a hard worker who did his job and did it well, earning the respect of his coworkers, no small feat. When the guys figured out who he was, they didn't go easy on him. Rather they made him prove himself. I kept my eye on Christian when I could, making sure to ask, "How're you doing Christian, you all right?" His response was always the same. "Just fine Mr. Kemp," he'd say. He could be knee deep in salmon or have icicles forming at his

He was at once disarmingly down to earth and magnetic, powerful—exuding a quiet charisma....

He paused and I could feel his intense eyes on my face. "Louie," he said leaning forward...

temples, but he never once complained. Christian worked on my fisheries for three years. And for a long while whenever someone would ask me, "How's Brando?" they weren't referring to the actor.

Marlon proved to be a concerned father, showing the same kind of dedication I saw in his son. He phoned often to see how Christian was faring in his new environment. Was his boy getting enough to eat? Was he getting to work on time, holding his own? I would reassure him that Christian was doing well and over the course of these talks we became true friends.

We kept in touch throughout the years, and when I would visit Los Angeles, sometimes we'd get together for dinner. The gratitude he expressed went beyond matching the simple favor I had once done for him. During the period in my life when I was becoming more invested in my Judaism and working to become more observant, Marlon offered a supportive ear. He loved to tell stories of when he first went to New York City to become an actor, barely 20 years old. While he was getting on his feet he lived with his acting instructor, the renowned Stella Adler. He spoke fondly of the time he spent with her family, and was especially proud that he could still converse in Yiddish, having learned it in the Adler household.

One spring a few years after I met Marlon, I was in Los Angeles again, this time during Passover. I made plans to go with my sister to a seder at Temple Israel of Hollywood. Marlon called that very same day with an invitation to dinner. When I explained why I had to decline, his voice rose with excitement.

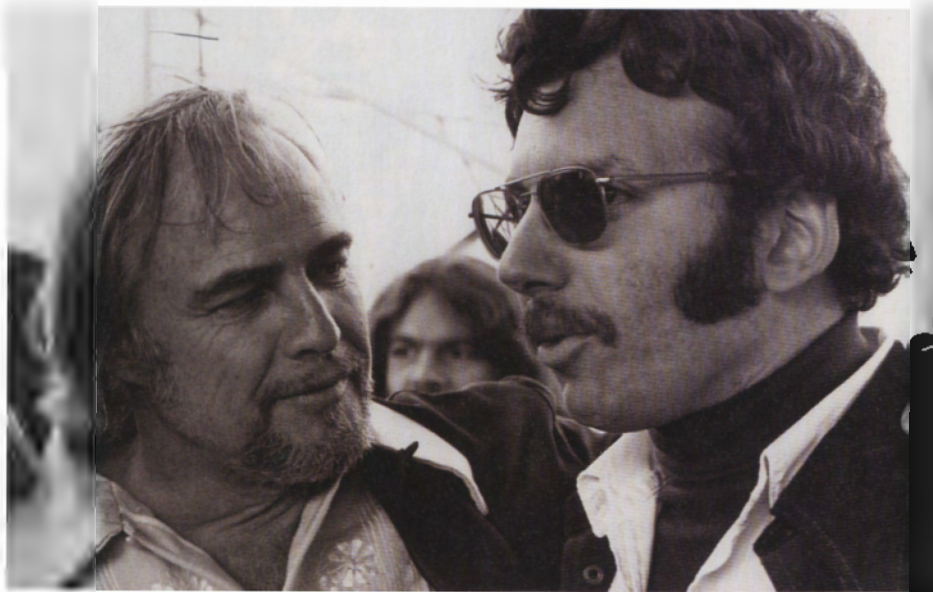
"A Passover seder? I've always wanted to attend a seder. May I come along?" For the second time he'd made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

I received yet another phone call that afternoon. This time it was an old friend, someone I'd grown-up with and known long before he found fame and success. When he heard that I'd be spending my evening at a seder he asked, being Jewish, if there was any way he and his

were too busy bustling around at their own tables to notice the extraordinary guests at ours. But that wasn't to last. We'd just finished the first cup of wine when I heard gasping sounds coming from Marlon. I turned to him and saw that his wide, striking face was turning a deep shade of

Marlon hesitated for a moment, but then smiled broadly. "Rabbi it would be my pleasure."

And then he rose from his seat, standing before the entire synagogue. The 300 seder participants ceased following along in their Haggadahs. Marlon



Marlon Brando with Louie Kemp at a benefit concert in San Francisco, California, in 1976.

wife could attend. Though our seder table was getting full, I invited them to join us.

I'll never forget the scene at that night's seder table. Sitting among my sister, our friends and myself was Marlon Brando and his guest, Dennis Banks, a Native American activist best known for his involvement in the 1973 militant occupation of Wounded Knee, his long braids dangling from a beaded headband. Dennis sat next to Marlon, who was on my left, and sitting to my right was my childhood friend, Bob Zimmerman, better known as Bob Dylan.

The seder began with little fanfare—the Temple members

red and his eyes were watering. Alarmed, I asked him if he was okay, but he couldn't speak. He pointed wordlessly to a bowl on the table. As he gulped down the glass of water I gave him, Marlon explained that without knowing how hot it was, he'd heaped an entrée-sized portion of horseradish onto a piece of matzah and had eaten it all.

This small commotion brought the rabbi's eyes to our table and he quickly realized that ours was a table unlike all other tables. A few minutes later he turned in our direction and asked, "Mr. Brando, would you kindly do us the honor of reading the next passage from the Haggadah?"

read with such fervor that mouths gaped and 600 eyes tracked his every move. But he wasn't performing. Among the many causes he gave his time and attention to, Israel was one to which he was most fervently committed. Although few people know this, he had donated two years of proceeds from his play *A Flag is Born* to Irgun, the Zionist political group dedicated to rescuing European Jews and the establishment of Israel as an independent state. I knew that Marlon had a true and vested interest in Jewish freedom. It was why he'd so wanted to be with us on this night. When he finished reading, the room was silent, and I knew all of us had

PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUIE KEMP

to restrain ourselves from applauding.

Towards the end of the seder, the rabbi pulled out an acoustic guitar and said "Mr. Dylan, would you honor us with a song?" I waited to hear Bob's polite decline, but he accepted the guitar and gave an impromptu and touching rendition of "Blowin' in the Wind." I almost fainted. Bob is a man who likes his privacy, but I think like the rest of us, he'd been infected with the magic of the seder.

At the end of the night there was a mile-long line of people who wanted to shake hands with Marlon and Bob, to thank them.

Both were happy to remain after the seder, graciously giving the time it took.


A lot of people have questions about who Bob is, but I often feel that Marlon is even more misunderstood. I got to know Marlon after he'd become a film legend and gained a reputation as a controversial figure. I found him to be remarkably generous and without ego, a passionate man who gave himself freely—almost religiously—to his craft and the causes in which he so deeply believed. He was deeply affected by the trials his family suffered—Christian's arrest and his daughter's

suicide. Ultimately he was plagued with a sadness that would never leave him.

There were many people who didn't quite know what to make of his flamboyance and creative approach to life. There are even some who misperceived his attitudes about Jews. But as an observant Jew myself, and someone who knew him well, I never found reason to question his commitment to the Jewish people. His admiration for our culture was real and sincere. He was a loyal friend to the Native Americans, the Jewish people, and all those oppressed and victim-

ized. May the Oscar he refused in this world be waiting for him in heaven.

A few years before he died in July of 2004, Marlon called me in Minnesota, out of the blue. "Louie Kemp," he said. "I've been thinking about you. Twenty years ago you took me to a Passover seder. I want you to know that I still think about it to this very day. In fact, I was thinking about it today and that's why I called."

I, too, have never forgotten that special seder, a night when two icons of modern culture, my friends, rose to the occasion to help us celebrate freedom. 

What the Sheik Really Said About Jews, Monkeys and Swine

Ben Birnbaum

Late last year, The New York Times reported the following:

"A statement on a Web site by a Muslim cleric from Vancouver calling Jews 'the brothers of monkeys and swine' was perceived as particularly disturbing [by Canadian authorities]. The cleric, Sheik Younus Katbrada, of the Darul-Madinah Islamic Society, posted a clarification on his web site this week, saying that his comments had been taken out of context."

Ben Birnbaum, a writer, has been wondering ever since what the ameliorating "context" might have been. He offers these possibilities.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but you really can't do better if you need an orthodontist or a tax lawyer.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but

when Streisand sings "The Second Time Around," I always lose my composure. And don't talk to me about Barry Manilow. I wear the man out. *Singin' with the Big Bands* is a very underrated album.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but you could say that about many monkeys and swine as well.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but chocolate-covered matzah is an unexpected and refreshing delight.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but how can you argue with what *Arrested Development* has done for Fox?

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but there's no point in avoiding a Kaplan Center if you want to get into Harvard.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* makes their story come alive in a fresh way that leaves you hungry for more.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but handy if you need a coconut truffle.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but Mel Brooks's turn as a Yiddish-speaking Indian in *Blazing Saddles* makes me laugh so hard that my Missus has to hang up the phone on her mother for a minute and

bring me a bromo. And I don't want to neglect the classic lobster scene in Woody Allen's brilliant *Annie Hall*.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but *zaftig* is a concept that all men applaud.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but Herman Wouk can't catch a break from the critics. What's wrong with a good yarn? Not everyone has to be DeLillo, or worse, Pynchon.

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but who else has found a good use for the Malaga grape?

- Jews are the brothers of monkeys and swine, but that's why I love those guys.

The Sweet Story of Charoset



Charoset, that aromatic ensemble of fruits, nuts, spices and wine, may be the tastiest traditional food on the Seder plate, but why it is there is a matter of debate. The Torah does not command us to eat it, and, in fact, never mentions charoset at all. Nor is there a blessing for it in the Haggadah. Yet its connection to Passover is ancient.

Charoset first comes up in the Mishnah, the authoritative transcription of oral laws written around 200 CE, when describing items on the Passover table: “unleavened bread and lettuce and charoset, even though the charoset is not a commandment.” David Arnow, author of *Creating Lively Passover Seders*, and others believe that charoset may have come to the Passover ritual through the influence of ancient Greek civilization. The Greeks held symposiums during which free men consumed large quantities of wine while discussing philosophical issues and “dipping” food in mixtures of pounded nuts and spices—key ingredients in charoset.

Talmudic sages, of course, sought religious reasons to explain the presence

of charoset on the Seder table. The symbolic meaning most often mentioned is that charoset reminds us of the mortar Hebrew slaves used to build clay bricks. The fact that Hebrew for clay is *charsis* or *ceres* is frequently given as proof for this interpretation. In his 11th century *Mishneh Torah*, Moses Maimonides gives one of the first written recipes for charoset in which it is said to look like clay mixed with straw: Crush “dates, dried figs, or raisins and the like...add vinegar, and mix them with spices,” because, before being ground, spices are long and stringy like straw.

The clay interpretation saw its most extreme expression in 1862 when some 20 Jewish-American Union soldiers in an Ohio regiment put a brick on their Seder plate. One of them, Joseph Joel, recalled the experience in the March 30, 1866, *Jewish Messenger*, a New York weekly. He writes that although stranded in the “wilds of West Virginia,” the men in his regiment were able to obtain matzos and Haggadahs and successfully foraged for a weed “whose bitterness...exceeded anything

our forefathers enjoyed,” as well as lamb, chicken and eggs. But they could find no suitable ingredients for charoset. “So, we got a brick,” Joel wrote, “which rather hard to digest, reminded us, by looking at it, for what purposes it was intended.”

Although the Union soldiers’ brick made an excellent stand-in, properly prepared charoset tastes sweet so that it can soften the harshness of maror, the bitter herb. Reasons for dipping charoset in maror are explained by Rabbi Akiva: According to this second century CE Talmudic scholar, charoset is a reminder of the Egyptian apple orchards where Hebrew women secretly made love to their husbands and bore children, thus defying the pharaoh’s ban on procreation. Akiva says that Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt because of these “righteous women’s deeds.” His inspiration is the verse from the Song of Songs recited on the Sabbath of Passover week: “Under the apple trees, I roused you. It was there your mother conceived you.”

Another Talmudic Midrash adds a different twist. Egyptians, it says, found and tried to kill some of the newborn male babies, but the earth swallowed them. After the Egyptians left, the babies emerged from the ground like fresh green plants. Some believe this story represents how God brought forth the new generation that would grow in freedom; others say that the Midrash symbolizes spring rebirth out of apparent death.

These various Talmudic commentaries can be linked, says Jill Hammer, rabbi and director of spiritual education at the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York. Charoset, she explains, is “a dual symbol of birth and death, freedom and oppression,” the remembrance of what binds “the Jewish story with the story of all living things...a kind of mortar after all.” —Joan Alpert

Find charoset recipes from around the world at **momentmag.com**



THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

Notes on the Passover Seder

**ARTHUR
WASKOW**

The explicit message, the content, the "Telling" of the Passover Haggadah is a teaching about liberation from slavery. What is the *implicit* teaching of the seder itself—of the form, the medium, in which the Telling proceeds? Is the seder itself a teaching about liberation, redemption?

The seder in the basic form in which we know it—the dinner, the wine, the four questions, the debates and meetings of the rabbis—dates not from the moment of the Exodus from Egypt, or even from the biblical celebration of that event at the Holy Temple. Although elements were already in place very early, most of what we have today dates from the time of the reshaping of Jewish life after the destruction of the Temple. Indeed, one telling paragraph in the Haggadah—the one about the time Rabbi Akiba and his friends had a seder that lasted all night, in B'nai Brak—reminds us that the Haggadah comes to us from the period after the defeat of Bar Kochba's revolt and the Romans' savage decimation of the Jewish population of Eretz Yisrael. For Akiba was one of the rabbis who supported Bar Kochba—indeed, may have thought he was the Messiah—and at that seder in B'nai Brak, he might easily have been debating with his friends how to resist the Roman Empire.

Perhaps this paragraph is the seder's hint to us about the nature of the Haggadah and the seder. For it points to a question we rarely address: *What did it mean to the rabbis to shape a ceremony that would celebrate God's liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt when they themselves had just been enslaved by the Imperial Roman "pharaoh"?* For remember that it is in the Mishna (in *Pesachim*) that our version of the seder is encoded, and the Mishna was compiled shortly after the defeat of Bar Kochba.

I want to suggest that the seder as we have it—the *form* of the seder—is itself a miniature version of the rabbis' answer to the entire question. How to preserve the people of Israel and its relationship with God, in the wake of the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion from the Land? In the place

of the Land, language; in the place of the Temple, a table.

Nor were the rabbis satisfied merely with our preservation, our survival. They wanted to go beyond survival, to liberation; beyond preservation, to redemption. How do we know that this is what they intended when they shaped the form of the seder? Because they wrote in the Haggadah, and required that everyone say *at the seder*, that "in all generations, all human beings must look upon themselves"—not their forebears only—"as having been liberated from Mitzrayim, the Tight Spot, the Narrow Place." The seder was to be, is to be, a moment of *experiencing*, not merely memorializing, liberation.

So what is it in the seder that *makes us free*? There is an extraordinary irony in its form, for the form of the seder is that of a Hellenistic/Roman banquet, with two cups of wine before the meal and two afterward, with a time set aside for discussion of some philosophical issue. (Compare, for example, Plato's *Symposium*.) So the Jews borrow the Romans' form to proclaim and experience their own liberation.

And they ruefully, sardonically note the very moment when Akiba is pursuing the *old* form of liberation—when Akiba is seeking for Bar Kochba to be Moses, for God to strike the Roman legions dead as once God had drowned Pharaoh's chariots and their riders. This they do to draw our attention to the *new* form they have created—a form that is quieter, more private, more "in here" than "out there," a form more available in our new circumstances, a form that speaks to experiencing freedom in the interstices of the Roman system rather than to the overthrow of that system.

The form of the seder embodies this message: *Feel free. Be free.* Using the very kind of symposium dinner our oppressors use, experience how free we really are. Let the ritual become the reality.

This message-in-the-medium is an authentic echo of the original liberating Pesach. For if we look back at the book of Exodus (chapters 12-13), we see that the text introduces a deliberate confusion, a deliberate intertwining, between the original moment of liberation and its memorializing through

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the celebration of Pesach afterward. *Three times* the text moves back and forth, as if to say that this real life event is a "ritual" and the ritual is to be, not merely "stand for," real life.

And indeed, the real-life liberation was itself a ritual. It happens at a precise time—the full moon nearest the spring equinox—unlike most rough-and-ready political liberations, which may happen in the spring, but not quite with such precision. It happens as the climax of a stately ritual procession of the plagues—three sets of three, arising in crescendo towards an ultimate act that finally triggers the Exodus itself. It is as if the real-life Redemption moves according to a ritual laid out in God's own Haggadah, as if God were following a script. So, of course, from then on the "remembering" and the "experiencing" become intertwined, irrevocably connected. We are unable to tell which is the one, which the other—and that becomes the point.

When the Pesach celebration was the coming together of the whole people, family by family, each with its own Pesach lamb for offering up, then this sea of people bringing the holy produce of this holy land to its holy place was itself the experience of liberation. For the Pesach experience had begun with the demand of the people that they be allowed to bring such sacrifices. Ultimately, what the people wanted from Pharaoh, they got despite Pharaoh—and Pesach was annually the visible renewal of it.

Did the rabbis, then, think we had gotten from Rome what we wanted despite Rome, and that the seder was the renewal of it, the experiencing of it? But Rome had won, its legions were not cast into the sea.

Perhaps the rabbis knew that the crucial aspect of the Roman "victory" was not the expulsion of the Jews from the Land and the destruction of the Temple, but rather the attempt to destroy Jewish culture, religion and memory. Perhaps the seder itself is the means whereby we preserve culture, religion, memory—hence experience victory.

It is obvious that the seder is a form suitable for Diaspora. For it is far more portable than the old celebration at the Temple. It is based on words,

which are exceedingly portable. Yet the words are not disembodied. Instead, they are connected to "body" elements, to foods like matzah, the bitter herb, the wine, that become part of our bodies, that carry into the body itself the meanings of slavery, liberation, joy. These foods, which do not require the Temple or the Land, replace the Pesach lamb as the symbol of redemption.

If the seder is the way redemption can be experienced after defeat and in the Diaspora, there may even be a hint in its text that it does not depend on a fixed geographic place. For the text of the Haggadah over and over again refers to God as *Hamakom*, The Place, as if to say that the real place is Infinite and Portable. Moreover, the Haggadah's recitation of history reminds us that our forebears were sojourners who moved around and around, and it goes out of its way to note that it is Esau, not we, who settles down and gets one land as his inheritance.

What does all this say to us? If Pesach is supposed to be a moment when ritual and real life fuse so that a moment of remembering liberation becomes a moment of experiencing liberation—if, therefore, the experience of Pesach must be quite different after the Roman victory than it had been before—what should that experience be like today?

For today is different. Certainly we remember today a Pharaoh who was worse than the Pharaoh of old. Yet today, this day, there is no immediate physical threat to the survival of the Jewish people—as such. For all the dangers, no one this day seeks to destroy us, and there is, at last, a self-governing Jewish people in the Land of Israel. That is hardly a minor element in the saga of liberation. Nor is it a trivial thing that at least in the American Diaspora, we are under no physical or even economic pressure to abandon our culture, religion, history. If that is what some of us nonetheless choose to do, it is because we prefer it that way, not because of the pressure of others.

We know that the seder itself speaks to more American Jews than does any other element of our liturgy. The question is whether it speaks as the Hagga-

dah wants it to—as present experience of present liberation. Or does it speak merely to our nostalgia, to our sense of the past? For if that is so, then we are participants in a *chillul*, in a hollowing-out, of history, of the Haggadah.

Who or what is the Pharaoh of our generation? Perhaps Soviet Jews are the last major community for which the model of Rome as Pharaoh, the model the rabbis had in mind, still fits, for which the seder, therefore, is still a near-literal moment of liberation. For the rest of us, the overwhelming Pharaoh of the day is the danger of war and universal holocaust. (The Haggadah tells us that every human being must see him/herself as if he, she, were a slave, were redeemed. Every person, everywhere. Because of the threat that now hangs over us all, the universal threat, that is now for the first time a plausible injunction.)

And so I imagine a seder, pleasant people at a pleasant dinner table, busy remembering. And suddenly I see a flash of fire near the doorway, a fire the others do not see. What am I to do?

These others, my family, my friends, my people, have not come together in order to speak of flames and of danger. They have come to remember. But because they have also come to experience, I must tell them of the fire, or else they will not live. They might wish it otherwise, but the fire means that they can no longer be merely guests at a dinner, even a ritual dinner; they are, willy-nilly, a committee on their own survival.

Every human group is dining at just such a table. We, the Jews, have been at such a table before; we know how rapidly the fire can spread, we know the smell of burning flesh. We have memories to draw on—memories of horror, but also memories of resistance. Memories, and some stories.

Among them: the Haggadah.

I believe the rabbis who gave us the form for our remembering/experiencing would understand if today we pledged ourselves to see the fire, to stop cooperating in our own extermination, to make the guests at the seder table actors as well as storytellers, to hasten our liberation, ours, everyone's, from the bitterness of the slavery that threatens us all. ★

THE FOUR SONS OF PASSOVER

JONATHAN MARK

The Torah, when speaking of the Passover, refers to four types of children: one wise, one wicked, one simple and one who doesn't even know how to ask.

—The Haggadah

The Wise

Rabbi Noah Winkler enters his ramshackle barn-house. The house is weather-beaten, the color of a storm. Over the mantle in the dining room is a photo of Noah with Surry, his 28-year-old wife, and their five children in front of a white-washed desert bungalow. Nine years ago, when Noah and Surry were introduced, when they sat in a cocktail lounge and shared their dreams, Surry said she never wanted to be a rebbetzin. She wanted to work for her doctorate in psychology instead of working for the Ladies Auxiliary. Like the young Al Pacino in *The Godfather*, Noah swore his career would turn out differently. He said he wanted a non-traditional wife, in an Orthodox society that still thought of feminine independence as absurd.

Noah looks into his children's rooms. The five are asleep in knobbed cribs and narrow beds. Noah looks into his own bedroom. His wife sleeps, turned to the wall. He wanders through the house and enters a room so filled with books that no more than two people can fit into the space. A three-legged table covered with contact paper leans against a cabinet. In the cabinet are rabbinic tracts from seven centuries, Lurianic Kabbalism, books on archaeology and love stories. Noah pulls out a volume of the Talmud, its brittle pages held together by electrical tape.

Whistling a tune he learned as a child, Noah opens to *Gemara Sanhedrin*. He taps his sandaled feet, moves

rhythmically back and forth from the waist, strokes his cropped beard and lets his fingers flow through the ritual strings that hang outside his shirt.

"Marriage could not assuage his passion," says the Talmud. "Since the destruction of the Temple, sexual pleasure has been taken from those who practice it lawfully, and given to sinners. As it is written: 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.'"

In the Talmud, which is a commentary upon commentaries, and in a talmudist's life, one word implies twenty, and doors open to reveal not rooms, but galaxies.

"What do we mean by marriage?" asks Noah in his clipped talmudic accent. We mean all the ideologies, causes, careers, people, yeshivas that Noah has wed himself to, feeling that none returned his passion in equal measure. He feels he's never reached the point where he could let his soul unpack.

He was born in Salerno, after the war, to refugees who were "wandering the world, looking for a place to land safely." In 1951 they landed in Brooklyn where the neighbors understood what war was. The War and it never had to be further explained.

It was a joyless home. Noah's parents bought a television to watch the Eichmann trial, news and wrestling. Joy and romance were seen as just another gentile ruse.

"I was sent," remembers Noah, "to a succession of yeshivas that were choking me." Noah's words quickly spill out. "The excitement of the sixties, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the Kennedys, the Beatles and Dylan," seemed to Noah conductors of messianic electricity. "That the yeshiva world wasn't joining forces with the sixties was tearing me apart. Compared to Dylan, the Rosh Yeshiva—the chief

rabbi of the seminary—seemed so pale, so tame. There was something so dynamic going on outside. I had to tap it. I saw that the goyish world was not just dandruff. I had to wed the potency of Torah to the outside dynamics." His days were spent in increasingly sophisticated yeshivas, learning under the personal tutelage of Rabbi J. B. Soloveichik, among the most respected rabbis of our generation. His nights were spent with the SDS, listening to Leonard Cohen and rock 'n' roll. "After twenty years of just learning Torah I was like a kid in a candy store."

Noah goes back to the Talmud and reads in the ancient sing-song. "Rav Yitzchak says: 'Since the destruction of the Temple, sexual pleasure has been taken from those who practice it lawfully, and given to the sinners.'" Noah looks away from the Talmud. The galaxies of commentary roll through his mind.

He remembers how in 1975, while still in his 20s, he was hired to be a rabbi of a Young Israel, a middle-class, modern Orthodox congregation housed in a white brick building. As he sat before the Young Israel's Board of Directors Noah said, "When Moses built the Tabernacle, he made it portable. So Torah has to be portable from Europe to America, from Brooklyn to California, from one language to another, from one generation to another, from middle-class families to single parents and the unmarried." He asked the shul to care about people that others didn't care about, to awaken the complacent.

As rabbi, Noah organized a benefit for Hopi Indians, on the grounds that if we can't recognize the "promised land" of others, we can't expect help for ourselves. "I spoiled the Shabbos afternoon kugel by putting questions on the table that weren't there be-

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fore." He attracted to the congregation free-spirited Jews from the counter-culture. He ran the shul with a shoes-off spontaneity rather than the formality and precision that the shul was looking for. In 1979 Noah Winkler was fired.

The "smoking gun" was a speech Noah made at a Berkeley university. "The most incredible thing about modern Judaism," he said, "almost as incredible as the Holocaust and the State of Israel, is our rediscovery and reclamation of sexual and romantic love. It says in the Talmud that "since the destruction of the Temple, sexual pleasure has been taken from the lawful and given to the sinners." Secular Jews were the first Jews to rediscover the road back to Zion, and they're the first to discover the road back to romance. Rav Kook said the last great Jewish frontier was the realization of our bodies. If there's any sure sign of the restoration of the Holy Temple, if there can be any harbinger of the messiah according to the Talmud, this is it: the rediscovery of love. If I'm committed to romantic love, I'm committed to trial and error, within the talmudic confines. Why does God send so many false messiahs? Because our desires and passions can't remain idle until the 'love of our life' shows up. The constant sparks of messianism, even if often false, lift us up and keep us going."

The young and the elderly sought to retain Noah as rabbi, but they didn't have the wealth or savvy to succeed.

Students who work in the Hillel at Oakland College, where he is the rabbi, come into Noah's office with logistical problems about a concert by a singing rabbi, a Shabbaton, cases of frozen knishes and Israeli malt soda. The movie *10* is playing on the Betamax downstairs. A pretty Israeli dancer enters Noah's office and dances acapella while he talks on the phone. An Ichabod Crane wearing a yarmulke, a gangly, pimply freshman whose arms fall past his sleeves, whose legs propel him like a pair of pogo sticks, walks in, disregards the pretty dancer and delivers to Noah a convoluted message from his own private hell. The freshman warns about the collapse of civility, the end of the world, of people jumping from win-

dows. Noah whistles softly, in harmony with all the voices in his office.

The Israeli dancer tells Noah that she's getting more interested in Judaism—could he recommend a book? "The Song of Songs," he says. "What did you think I'd say?" laughs Noah. "Herman Wouk?"

The Israeli dancer inquires about a synagogue to go to. Noah tells her about a *minyan* he founded for chassidim, *baalei teshuvah*, Young Israel refugees and drifters, in a



community room of the Alameda Savings & Loan. The *minyan* has classes for women to learn Torah on all levels. Some husbands in the community went to rabbinical court to stop the classes, but failed.

"Can you imagine," says Noah, "Jews trying to stop other Jews from learning? On Passover we learn about the Four Sons of the seder table: the wise son, the antagonistic son, the simple child and the totally uneducated. When I was a yeshiva student I looked down at the other

three sons. But the 'wise' son may not be so wise anymore. In the Haggadah the wise son asks relevant questions. But in the yeshivas the wise son is no longer questioning, no longer challenging. The wise son can argue for hours about a woman's bloody impurity, but today's rabbis have to deal with the blood on the tracks, the blood of a broken heart.

"Many of the wise sons don't want to deal with me. They think I'm too far out. And the other three sons aren't used to speaking with a rabbi. They think I'm an anachronism.

"There's a piece of me in all the sons. The antagonistic son is not necessarily the 'wicked' son that everyone makes him out to be. He's not the old-time hedonist. He may be the most sensitive of all. To what extent did the Jewish establishment drive him away? Rav Kook said that in the old days the non-religious Jews didn't want religion at all; while today they're asking, 'Is that all there is?' This isn't enough."

"In the Haggadah everything is neatly slotted, but life isn't so simple. Everyone is lost and everyone has a piece of the map. The 'simple' son might not have the foundation to ask anything but touristy questions, but he might be sophisticated and intelligent in other areas we need. The son who 'doesn't even know how to ask' might have the most possibilities of all, for he has no negative memories to erase.

"There's such a loneliness in the world. An embrace, a conversation, a kiss can break it down. Yiddishkeit has so many realms of the unknowable; we must be willing to live with it. We have to hang in there for the keys to the ultimate mystery."

On the brick stoop of his Alameda home, Noah strums the guitar, at first producing melancholy tunes, then faster and faster melodies as the unknowable seems clearer than ever.

Noah looks up into the Pacific night and sings "Turn us to You, and we'll be returned, renew our days as of old." The sound of a bird at dawn, the cry of a baby from inside the house, the rumble of distant traffic as the sky begins to lighten, seems an answer that Noah expected.

The Wicked

The wicked child asks: "What is the meaning of this service to you?" Saying "you," he excludes himself, and because he excludes himself from the group, he denies a basic principle. You may therefore tell him: "Because of what the Lord did for me when I came forth from Egypt I do this." For "me" and not for "him"; had he been there, he would not have been released.

—The Haggadah

*My parents raised me tenderly
I was their only son
My mind got mixed with ramblin'
When I was all so young
And I left my home the first time
When I was twelve and one
I'm a long time a-comin', Ma,
And I'll be a long time gone*
—Bob Dylan

When I was "twelve and one" Dylan was one of the few people who mattered. It was a time of ethnic nationalism, and while other Jews were trying to convince the world of our liberal credentials, while Leonard Bernstein was opening his home and his checkbook to the Black Panthers, Dylan was saying it's time for Jews to be Jewish.

In yeshiva we whispered every rumor: Dylan was studying Hebrew, Dylan was hanging out with a radical Jewish collective called The Brooklyn Bridge, Dylan was giving money to JDL, Dylan was learning in a yeshiva like we were.

We identified with Dylan in a way we never could with Elvis, Jagger or a hundred other less cerebral "heroes." Dylan symbolized the Jewish renaissance of the sixties, an American acceptance that a Yid could be a hipster, without neologizing "Jewish" as Lenny Bruce had to.

We'd stand in front of our hi-fis and pantomime Dylan's guitar-playing, lip synching, blowing into harmonicas that were strapped on to our necks, spitting out, "She fakes just like a little girl." On Saturday nights we'd walk by what we thought was Dylan's house on MacDougal Street. We told each other that Dylan was changing his name back to

Zimmerman. It was, for many awkward and confused yeshiva boys, a vindication.

The rumors were confirmed by *Time* magazine, which ran a picture of Dylan at the Wailing Wall, adjusting the stapled black crepe yarmulke given to bareheaded worshipers. He enrolled in a Far Rockaway yeshiva, Sha'ar Yashuv, taught by a rabbi who wore the same kind of round black hat that Dylan wore on the dust jacket of *Nashville Skyline*.



In 1973, shortly after the Yom Kippur War, Dylan announced a hurried tour. The money from the tour was reputedly going to the Israel Emergency Fund. Mimi Farina, Joan Baez's sister, published an open letter to Dylan in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "There is an important question concerning the profits of your tour. Rumor has it that a portion of the five million dollars to be grossed by the tour is going to Israel. In a time of war, when God is on neither side . . . to financially encourage

one side or another is to encourage war itself, regardless of who starts it."

The anti-Israel backlash that had been dormant during the Ari Ben Canaan days and the Six Day War was suddenly in full swing everywhere. It became acceptable, if not downright chic, in many circles to portray the Jews as the new Nazis, the new Fascists, the moral rest-and-recuperation home for the rest of society. And it seemed that Dylan accepted this thinking. In an epilogue to the Anthony Scaduto biography, Dylan began to place distance between himself and the Jewish community. He was quoted as saying he was disappointed in Israel, it's just like any other place, it's no big deal. As America turned to fundamentalists, Dylan announced that he was now a "Born-Again Christian." His album covers were full of Christian imagery. He wrote lyrics about Christian theology, about "all those who killed Christ," and "born already ruined, stone cold dead as I stepped outside the womb."

A new generation of yeshiva kids, barely "twelve and one," wrote letters to Dylan, trying to convince him, using his own lyrics, "not to go mistaking Paradise for that home across the road." They wrote that if only Dylan could've learned with *their* rebbe, if only Dylan could have learned at *their* yeshiva, if only Dylan had waited a little longer before conversion. . . .

*Right now I can't read too good
Don't send me no more letters no
Not unless you mail them
From Desolation Row.*
—Bob Dylan

The Simple

*What does the simple child say?—
"What is this?"—And you should say
to the child: "With a strong hand did
God bring us out of Egypt, out of the
land of slaves.""*
—The Haggadah

Taible was a peasant girl. Over a century ago she lived with her parents in the dense forests of Eastern Europe. While her parents prepared for Passover, Taible ran with the children of the Christians that she met in the tall grass. They were preparing an effigy

for Easter—a witch made of straw with eyes of colored eggs. At night Taible heard the gypsies in their camp in the forest clearing; their fiddles and singing carried in the wind.

Her father was a crude man from a crude family and he didn't care who knew it. They lived in the forest for generations past memory. On Passover, dozens of relatives would gather for the seder, more intent on taking stock of the family than adhering to the religious nature of the night. As soon as the vodka and the home brew flowed, the seder was forgotten.

There were fewer and fewer relatives every year. The members of the family who desired something more delicate, more spiritual, couldn't stomach the pagan crudity of their kin. The young marrieds in the clan preferred to be with their in-laws, or with each other in Warsaw, where many of them moved. Taible was too young to move. She only understood that in the time of the thaw her neighbors in the forest built witches from straw, the gypsies started fires and at the seder you got drunk and cracked jokes.

When Taible moved to New York City in the wave of immigration in the early 1900s, she worked seven days a week, and married one of her cousins, who courted her at the meetings of her old town's "society," which gathered once a month.

Taible lit candles on Friday nights, and spent the holidays with her family. Her children were sent to school in the local synagogue, and to please Taible, who aged into the family matriarch, her grandchildren were sent to Hebrew school as well. Taible's theology was based on memory and superstition. When Taible's granddaughter Linda asked why candles were lit, why does the family gather for the seder, Taible answered, "That's the way we've always done it."

Linda was sent to the Hebrew school where for six years she was taught, over and over, the alphabet and Bible stories. Her classmates were restless, indoors while the other children were in the street, and the restlessness led to spitball fights and wild games of salugi, right in the middle of class. Linda was taught that before you eat you wash your hands.

After you eat you say grace. When her parents took her out to eat at the Hunan Palace Chinese Restaurant, Linda got up to wash. She was laughed back to her seat.

Taible lived with Linda's family in a flat semi-circle housing development in the marshland of Queens. In the winter the streets were laced with Christmas lights and the doors and windows of the development were filled with illuminated Santas, reindeer and mangers. In the spring the public schools taught Linda to paint



Easter eggs. She wrote a composition about her grandmother and the straw witch with painted eggs for eyes. On Friday nights her grandfather blessed the wine, and the family ate together. When the grandfather died, her father blessed the wine. That was the way the family did things in the forest, and that was how they did them in Queens.

One summer, when Linda was fifteen, she was sent to a sleep-away camp in the Catskills. It was a Jewish camp, with tribal orientations rather

than religious ones. On Friday nights the teenagers had an evening activity of Israeli dancing on the outdoor basketball court. Speakers, suspended from the trees, played tinny Israeli music and the boys stood behind the girls and held them by the hips. Within 45 minutes most of the dancers were in the woods, making out, smoking. But Linda's crowd took dancing seriously.

They listened to the counselor explain the meanings of the songs, the Leon Uris origins of simplistic horas. They learned about the pioneers who planted citrus groves and built the State of Israel; historical, mythical tales on the level of "Young Abe Lincoln—Rail Splitter."

In the bunks at night the girls talked about what they heard in the *Oneg Shabbat*: the danger of assimilation, the rate of intermarriage, the story of the Holocaust, the miracle of Israel. The girls were inspired to be defenders of the faith. But what faith? The faith itself, Judaism, was never discussed. The problem of anti-Semitism, which was built up by the counselors, seemed to be, with the passing of time, nothing more than a cat and mouse cartoon for grown-ups.

There was a feeling in Linda when she danced that let her sense the possibilities of the spirit. She was able to express with her swirling, graceful body what her words could only hint at. After the summer she never went to synagogue, but went religiously to Israeli folk dancing sessions wherever she could find them in New York. The exhaustion, the ecstasy in the act of a Jewish activity thrilled her in a chassidic fashion, but she understood no context with which she could connect.

The waterfalls near Binghamton, where Linda moved, froze solid over the winter. The whitecaps hang almost unconnected, iced in mid-flight. Passover fell early this particular year. Linda's grandma Taible died and the family no longer gathered for the seder. Linda wanted a seder but she didn't want to bother with the Jewish organization at the local university. They had an arrogance that she didn't care to penetrate. She didn't even Israeli dance anymore. There were

picayune battles at the university as to who would "run" the Israeli dancing. Her summer camp Zionism had little staying power. Linda joined a class for jazz dance.

Linda met Buzzie in the dance class. He wasn't Jewish, and she never told her parents. When Taible died, Buzzie comforted her. "My grandmother was a very religious woman," Linda said. "She lit candles every Sabbath. She brought the family together for big meals on holidays. In Europe some of my relatives were rabbis and ritual slaughterers."

And now, this Passover, Linda wanted a seder. Buzzie invited another couple over on the seder night. Linda set the paper plates. She remembered the changing of the dishes, and she decorated the table according to a sketch in her Haggadah.

No one else at the table knew anything at all. When they came to the tale of the four sons, they kidded Linda that she was the smart son and they were the wicked.

Linda's reading of the Haggadah was halting and the other three participants were getting bored. They took turns reading paragraphs in English. When the meal was served, the conversation turned to other things.

Linda jumped ahead in the Haggadah to the songs at the end. She couldn't match her pronunciation of the Hebrew with the melody. She tried matching the English to the tune. The other three stared at her, waiting for her to finish. The words in English hardly fit the music.

*"My father bought for two zuzim,
An only kid, an only kid."*

The One Who Doesn't Even Know How to Ask

As for the child who doesn't know how to ask, you must open up for the child, for the Torah says: "And thou shalt tell thy child on that day, saying: This is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt."

—The Haggadah

After leaving the yeshiva, hitching away into the American night, I found myself sleeping by the sides of the highway, in moving cars, in airless

nights, till I found a job on a fishing trawler that sailed the New England coast. In late afternoons, as the nets brimmed with fish, the sun melted into the Sound, and we sailed back to shore; towards the church bells muffled in the darkness, towards the candlelight from docked houseboats, towards an outdoor café on the sand by the coves.

In a café the fishermen talked crudely about women. They were anxious to fix me up with women whose voices were throaty and raw from



years of cigarettes and whiskey.

When the fishermen left, and blue and red lanterns lit the café, I introduced myself to a waitress who was attractive in an accessible way. She was a student named Eva. Although she was told she was Jewish, the product of a mixed marriage, her religious training was absolutely nil. I was able to present my vision of Judaism to Eva and she accepted it and cherished it as did the biblical Ruth.

We lived privately, keeping each other company. As we sat on the ve-

randa during the Friday twilight, we blessed the candles and I taught her the evening prayers. I read to her stories from Sholom Aleichem about the forthcoming Passover holidays.

"In an instant the world was transformed. Our yard is a king's court. Our house is a palace. I am a prince and my love is a princess. The logs of wood piled by the door are the cedars and cypresses of the Song of Songs. The cat that lies sunning herself in the doorway is the young deer from the Song of Songs; the women and the girls who are working outdoors, washing and cleaning and getting ready for Passover, are the daughters of Jerusalem. Everything is biblical."

Together we learn the Haggadah. I tell her about Elijah who redeems the rebbetzin's dress from the pawn shop on Passover eve. Elijah's cup of wine at the seder table is for strangers, and the door to our home will be opened during the seder to see if anyone in the street is in need of a seder meal. Elijah will bear the news of the messianic redemption. According to tradition Elijah is more likely to be found on the Bowery than on a board of directors: Our kindness must be indiscriminate.

Eva reads the Song of Songs. She walks through the house with a candle. I walk beside her with a feather and a plate. As Rabbi Noah Winkler said of the one who doesn't know how to ask, she's "void of negative memories." We walk through the house, feathering away the forbidden crumbs and my own conflicting memories. I returned with Eva to New York for the seder.

The first day of spring was passing. The holiday is about to begin. I can spot the pedestrians in the street who are walking to synagogue. They walk assuredly, slowly, confident of their destination. The sun, like a dying fire, passes below the horizon.

As I leave to go to shul I stop. I want to read to her more from the Song of Songs, from the Haggadah, from Sholom Aleichem: "She keeps pushing me ahead. Slowly I start to go, and I look back just once at the bewitched princess who has now merged with the strange Passover twilight. . . ." We all are lost. We all hold a piece of the map. ★

O L A M

T H E J E W I S H W O R L D

My Pal Elijah

NADINE EPSTEIN

MY BROTHERS AND SISTER and I still cringe at the memory of endless family seders. We tried not to knock our wine goblets over onto the freshly ironed white tablecloth as Grandpa Charlie, round-headed and grown short with age, muttered tortuously long Hebrew passages from the haggadah, never looking up or making eye contact. Passover was obviously a holiday for grown-ups, created to bore children out of their brains. Knowing this, my siblings and I kept ourselves busy pretending to be acceptably polite while expertly making faces at one another, rolling eyes, and screaming inside, "Help! When can we eat? I saw you kick her under the table. I'm going to tell." Eventually we fell into a stupor deepened by dark, syrupy concord grape wine and a feast of wild carbs—matzah and margarine, kugel, potatoes, and matzah balls.

There were moments, of course, of self-induced hilarity like the annual horseradish-eating contest where my brothers and I, eyes bulging, spooned the fiery red or white root straight out of delicate cut glass bowls into our mouths, yelling at each other, "I ate more than you, I won," as our mom, an only child

and a little merry from all the wine announced, "I can't believe you're my children." At the end of the seder, we threw ourselves into the equally endless hunt for afikomen, hidden again and again so that it delightfully filled the

rest of the night. In our house afikomans had a way of dividing and multiplying so that more than one could be hidden at once, keeping each child intently occupied as our mother washed every goblet, silver fork,

An old man entered

and stumbled to the

dining room table.

As the children

watched, he sat down

in Elijah's chair and

took a gulp of wine

from Elijah's cup.



The Warning

My father's imposing steel-gray Chrysler and his chauffeur

MOMENT OF TRUTH

were the symbols of success in the 1930s. He was a successful

salesman for a small company in Dresden, and had just been appointed its financial officer. My mom had devoted the prior few years to raising my brother and me. My parents' life was happy and comfortable. Fears that were general in the Jewish population must have swirled around us, but didn't come home—until one appalling moment.

My father's devoted chauffeur asked if he could talk to himself as they were driving to the office.

"Talk to yourself? Of course," my father answered, smiling, bemused.

The chauffeur said, "You don't have to listen but you may, if you wish." He began talking quietly, but so that my father could hear. His one-sided conversation described a meeting held the night before where a list of "undesirable people" was presented to the assembled group.

My father's name was on the list. The chauffeur was a part-time SS trooper. His warning made my father see the overwhelming danger, and by the time he got out of the car, he knew he had to take his family to safety—and quickly. He did.—**Lud Gutmann**

Do you have a Moment of Truth, a small experience that changed the way you look at the world? Please send it, in 150 words or less, to Moment Editorial, 4710 41st St., NW, Washington, DC 20016; or email it to editor@momentmag.com.

and china plate by hand. Just a few years ago, at least 30 years after the fact, my parents discovered a piece of matzah, carefully wrapped in a dinner napkin, lodged behind the mirror in the foyer, an ancient afikoman that had somehow managed to evade our generation of grubby hands.

The substance of the seder rarely permeated our brains, even the famous Four Questions, which we each clamored to sing in Hebrew, were meaningless. Who cared about the sons of long ago? The story of the haggadah made little sense when you tried to follow it. There were no easy-to-discern heroes or heroines, only God and he was clearly in a vengeful mood.

There was one exception, a minor yet powerful character out of the haggadah, the mystery man of the seder, whose presence we kept careful tabs on. Following the tradition created by our medieval Ashkenazi ancestors, my siblings and I made sure to leave the front door wide open for him. All during dinner, we raced back and forth from the table to see if he might be dilly-dallying on the porch, and kept one eye trained on the level of wine in his glass: It stayed steady except in later years when I took it upon myself to swallow a few surreptitious sips in order to confuse my younger siblings. Who was this masked man who represented the hope that the Messiah would someday come? Why did he himself never show?

Fast forward three decades. I have a child and a seder of my own, a tablecloth that I iron, and cut glass bowls for red and white horseradish. With one big difference. To me, Passover is a children's holiday, a time to pass down history, true or not, and tradition, the message of freedom and the condemnation of slavery.

It was when our son Noah

was three that our seder evolved into a children's seder, the children drawn from our neighborhood and pre-school. Georgia, Evan and Rebecca showed up. None of them happened to be Jewish but they were thrilled to be there, their parents too. I read picture books to the kids, taught them the words of The Frog Song—*One morning when Pharaoh woke in his bed, There were frogs on his bed and frogs on his head*—and provided them with haggadah coloring books. Amid happy chaos, they sat at the table coloring in Moses, Miriam, and Pharaoh and his daughter, along with the whole crowd as I read a few quick prayers and served the festive meal.

The next year, the same children took turns sounding out simple sentences from the coloring book haggadah. Each child was bursting with pride, thrilled to show that he or she could read. They couldn't wait to sing the frog song and Dayenu. By the next year they were leading the seder—in English—with the help of the coloring book haggadah.

As we finished up the tsimmes, brisket and lamb stew that year, I pulled our friend David aside, and persuaded him to let me wrap him in a Mexican blanket, tape a long bunch of white, scraggly pillow fill on to his face, and sneak him out the back door. The front doorbell rang. The children raced to answer it. An old man entered and stumbled to the dining room table. As the children watched in amazement, he sat down in Elijah's chair and took a gulp of wine from Elijah's cup. A magical thing had happened: Elijah had shown up for Passover.

Elijah returned again the next year. This year David couldn't make it, so our dear friend Jan, who happens to be very knowledgeable about Judaism, took his

place. Warm, generous to a fault, and gentle-hearted, Jan expanded Elijah's role, schmoozing individually with each child about the meanings of Passover. Sometimes he read storybooks about the elusive prophet who was so beloved by God that when he died "a fiery chariot with fiery horses suddenly appeared and Elijah went up to Heaven in a whirlwind."

The ritual continued every year. Towards the end of dinner, Jan would excuse himself, complaining loudly of a belly ache. A few minutes later, Elijah would appear at the door, always wearing the same robe and beard. The children would surround him instantly. "Oy, my children, you are here again this year in the same place and the same time," he whined in a Yiddish accent. "Let me sit down and take a load off my feet. Where's my food? And my wine?"

After a few years, I fully expected the ritual to wear thin. Eventually, I figured, the kids would stop asking, "Are you really Prophet Elijah," and announce, "You are not Prophet Elijah." For a couple of years they seemed a little unsure: maybe our guest was Elijah, maybe he was Jan. Then an odd thing happened: They tactfully let us know that they knew, but did everything not to blow his cover. In different words, they playfully tugged at his beard but never pulled it off.

Now our "Passover children" range from 11 through 13 and they still love the seder. Every year they remind me to schedule the seder and to invite the prophet. By now they are reading a more advanced haggadah, they know the stories by heart, and they love to sing Dayenu, even at Hanukkah. Noah as well as Evan and Rebecca know the Hebrew blessings by heart and

compete for opportunities to say them. "Please, please let ME say the Kiddush over the wine." "No, please let ME say the Kiddush." At Noah's request I prepare vegetarian matzah ball soup since he doesn't eat meat. It is against his principles.

These are thoughtful kids. The table is full of talk. Religion. Politics. About our era, of the times that came before. Our children's seder is slowly beginning to resemble that which the seder was modeled on: a Greek symposium, where participants enjoyed a banquet amid serious intellectual discourse.

Slavery is always a hot topic. Elijah is not only our honored guest. For many years, Mr. Bronson, 83 and African-American, has joined us at our seder table. He has lived his life under the shadow of slavery, never quite escaping from its legacy. Every year he tells us about the tough existence of his hardworking mother and what life was and is like for African-Americans in the United States. Mr. Bronson and Elijah often lead the

discussion, engaging the children in the Passover story.

So who is this prophet, wrapped in his blanket, his face mostly hidden by a beard? This year we are going to find out. We aren't going to unmask him literally; why should we spoil the fun? But it is time to let the children know that as a young man, our dear prophet was an unlikely hero for a fun, off-beat seder made up of mostly non-Jews. Concerned more about God than compassion, he didn't have much in common with our kind-hearted Elijah. According to the first and second books of Kings, he zealously prevented King Ahab's Phoenician wife, Queen Jezebel, from praying to her God, Baal, while in the land of Israel. Some scholars believe that he visits homes on Passovers and other occasions as penance for this zealotry. Fortunately for all, as Elijah aged he matured into a peace-loving, generous sage who would have embraced the joy that begets true learning, and truly been at home at our seder. ☺



PESACH IN KATMAN— WHO?

Twenty-nine
"Jewish dinners"
and a bottle of
Manischewitz wine
in the Himalayas

SHULA
BEYER

You can get almost anything in Katmandu. Just name it. Even though the Himalayan kingdom, wedged between India and Tibet, has been open to westerners only since the 1950s, you can find everything from pizza to tinned paté.

But a bottle of Manischewitz wine, kosher for Passover?

We arrived in Katmandu on Friday, March 23, 1983, in time, we thought, to get an invitation to the seder at the Israeli consulate the following Monday evening. My husband, Wayne, and I were six months into our year-long trip around the world, and thus far it had been 189 days, 10 countries, 95 beds (mostly clean) and nine awful days.

Two of those awful days had been spent trying to get from Darjeeling, India, high in the Himalayas east of Nepal, in time for Passover. We made our way to Nepal by local buses, vintage 1940s, a jeep that broke down several times and even a bicycle rickshaw. We spent the night at the Nepalese border in a room with no electricity or running water. The bus trip to Katmandu from the border took over 19 hours.

During Chanukah, we had lit candles in an improvised menorah in a small Balinese village. Tu B'shvat passed unnoticed in Malaysia. We celebrated Purim in a remote hamlet in northern Thailand. But Passover—a time to connect with other Jews in a night of common ancestral memory—is an important holiday to us, and we had carefully planned ahead to celebrate it in Katmandu.

"Avi" at the Israeli consulate was apologetic, but firm. The first night seder was only for Jews who work for the United Nations and other international organizations, and who live in Katmandu year-round. He invited us to a party planned for the second night for the Israeli travellers in town.

I was disappointed, even bitter. The invitation is explicit in the Haggadah: "Whoever is hungry shall come and eat." A party was not what I had in

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mind. I wanted a seder.

Our mood improved at the post office, where we found waiting for us a box of matzah and a Haggadah sent by thoughtful friends from our havurah in Miami. At least we now had the makings for a seder of our own.

Next morning, Wayne cycled to the nearby Kopan Buddhist monastery, where Jonathan Wolfson, a Berkeley philosopher/carpenter we had met on the train from Malaysia to Thailand, was studying Tibetan Buddhism. We had made tentative plans to hold a seder together.

Jonathan was not the only Jew in the monastery. Wayne returned five hours later with the names of four others who jumped at the chance to exchange Buddhist solitude for Jewish fellowship.

That same morning I also got ambitious and advertised the seder on the bulletin board of the Katmandu Guest House, our \$4-a-night hostel. I then reserved a small room at a nearby restaurant called Le Bistro, which didn't serve anything even remotely French. The room would hold 12 people comfortably but wouldn't be too massive if it turned out to be just the seven of us. I was optimistic: I told the owner to expect 12 people for dinner.

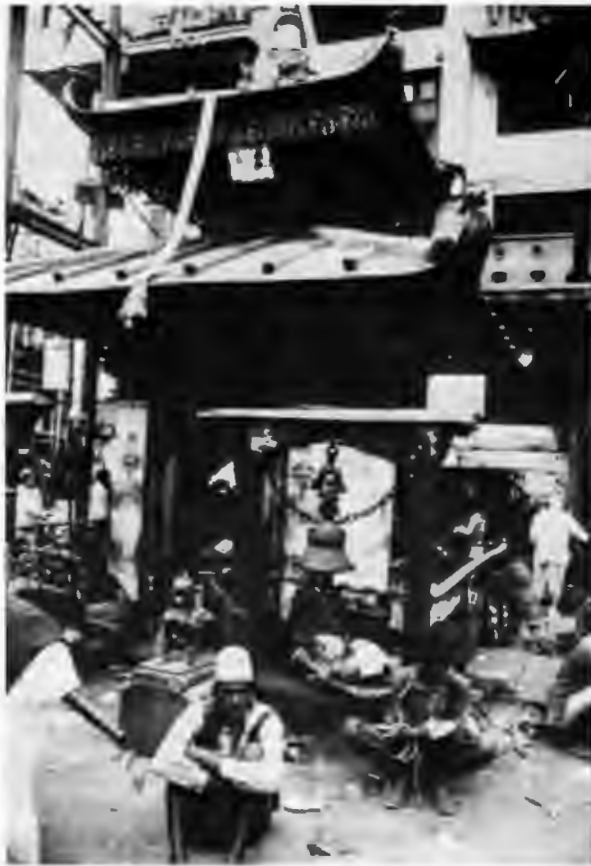
It was still before the monsoon season; rhododendrons covered the hillsides, and Katmandu was filled with travellers who had come to catch the end of the Himalayan trekking season. We soon received the first response to my sign, a note from a Larry Bornstein and a Phyl Levine who said they were interested in participating. They asked if Wayne Beyer was the same fellow who attended the Bronx High School of Science.

"Sure I know him," Wayne said. "We had geometry together." In a further twist of Jewish geography, it turned out that Larry and I attended the same yeshiva day school.

Now there were nine of us.

During lunch a young traveller entered the restaurant. Wayne decided he looked Jewish. I agreed. I worked up some courage, went to his table and asked, "Excuse me. Do you have any plans for the Passover seder?"

His immediate shock at such an unexpected question turned to delight. He had forgotten about the holiday but



Bill No 4299

LE BISTRO

RESTAURANT

Thamel, Kathmandu

Table No. 11 Date 24/2-77

K. O. T. No. _____ No. of Guest _____

Unit	Particular	Amount	
		Rs	Pi
	1.74		00
	1074		00
	1083		00
	-45		00
	Total	9	00
	1040		00

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would be thrilled to join us. He was David Rydell, an 18-year-old traveling in Asia before beginning his freshman year at the University of Maryland. He volunteered to ask the four questions and to find a shank bone for the seder plate.

Sunday morning I sat in the garden of the guesthouse talking to a steady stream of Jews who had read the notice or had heard about the seder. There was Adam Stern, a DC environmentalist conducting a study on erosion in Nepal. Josh Plout, a Californian, turned out to be the nephew of a Miami dance teacher I know. Many Israelis dropped by, including a beautiful Yemenite woman named Ilana, who promised to bring a flute. Two former Israeli army buddies held an emotional reunion in the garden.

"Normally I don't like to go to a seder," one American confided. "I do it just to please my mother. But here, halfway around the world, it's important. I'm not sure why."

I returned to the restaurant and excitedly told the owner to prepare 23 roast chicken dinners. The cost per person would be \$3. He offered to throw in bread and butter for no extra charge. I explained why that wasn't a good idea.

So far, there was something almost magical about the way things were falling into place. I had even found a special cup for Elijah—silver colored, long-stemmed with four stars of David, a common symbol in Nepal, carved along the rim. I saw it in a souvenir shop and explained to the owner that I needed it for one night and would like to rent it from him.

"Just take it and bring it back the next day," he said.

"I'll give you a deposit."

"No. No. Just take it."

Still, I had awakened that morning worried, wondering where we would find wine. We scoured the markets. The liquor stores in Katmandu carry rum, whiskey, brandy and beer, but no wine. Sunday afternoon we found a bottle of French wine at the exclusive Yak and Yeti Hotel, but it cost \$18, much too expensive for us. Finally, on the other side of town, in a small hole-in-the-wall shop, we found two bottles of California cabernet sauvignon for \$10 each. Manischewitz it was not,

but it would have to do. Wayne immediately took out his pen and wrote, in Hebrew, on the label: "Kosher for Passover." He smiled sadly.

Monday morning, the Nepalese holiday of Holi was in full, boisterous swing. Since the Nepalese follow a lunar calendar, their holiday coincides with ours—although their way of celebrating is a bit different. Holi, a Hindu spring festival, is celebrated with a giant water fight. Water balloons are thrown at passersby from rooftops, windows and balconies. Crowds of teenagers roam the streets drenching each other. I put on a raincoat, pulled the canvas rickshaw over my head and asked the driver to take me to the Israeli consulate.

The consul's wife was expecting me. I had told her about my burgeoning seder and she had promised 10 haggadot and matzah. She also graciously offered real horseradish from her garden, and flowers. On my return trip, I managed to protect the matzah from the water fights by covering it with my raincoat. I, however, got drenched.

By four, the chicken soup was done, the chaharoseet made and the tables set.

I rushed back to the guesthouse to shower and change. By the time I was finished it was almost five. We had told everyone to arrive at six.

A knock on the door. Two young, bearded travellers stood side by side. If my heart sank at the sight of them I hope I didn't show it. I had already increased the number of participants from 12 to 23. The owner had moved us to the main dining room, but even there I wasn't sure any more people could fit.

Still in my mind was the memory of the disappointment I had felt being turned away from the seder at the Israeli consulate. "Welcome," I said, and smiled.

If this story were an ancient tale, the author might have you believe that one of the visitors was really Elijah in disguise.

"Do you have wine for the seder?" asked one of the newcomers.

"We found some California wine," I said.

"Kosher for Passover?"

"Of course not."

He reached into his shoulder bag and pulled out a bottle of Manischewitz. It was kosher for Passover. It was red. It was wonderful.

He had just arrived in Katmandu for a trek in the Himalayas and had brought the wine, a box of matzah and a Haggadah, thinking he would hold a seder alone in his hotel room.

By the time we sat down an hour later, there were 29 of us, Americans, Israelis and Canadians, all strangers, all Jews tied together by a bond, re-enacting an ancient drama. Outside we could hear the laughter and revelry of Holi dying down as the sun set. It was time now to celebrate our own holiday on this night of Passover, a night of memory and liturgy, an acting out of the event "as if I were there."

David, the youngest, asked the four questions. We read and sang the entire Haggadah without leaving out a single word. It was so strange for all of us to be going through this familiar ritual in Katmandu, the Hidden Kingdom, the Roof of the World. Some of those assembled had come to Nepal hoping to find inner peace and spirituality in the monasteries and the silence of the Himalayas. The last thing they thought they would discover was a yearning for Jewish connections. We asked questions, we discussed, we debated; as it says, "the more one tells about the Exodus, the more praiseworthy."

Nepalese children, attracted by our singing, stood outside the restaurant, faces pressed into the window to see what we were doing. The king and queen of Nepal looked at us from their portrait on the restaurant wall.

We opened the door for Elijah. Surely he would come, even to Katmandu. ★

Talk of the Table

The Foods of Passovers Past



My great-grandmother, Sophie, fled Russia at 16. But for the rest of her life, she cooked dishes from the old country, and her grandchildren—my dad, his sisters and their cousins—remember her preparing foods like borscht and schav. “The great aunts and uncles who came from Russia regarded these as Old World delicacies,” explains my dad’s cousin Paul. “We kids (who ate in the kitchen while the adults ate in the dining room) found them disgusting.” On Passover, she served homemade gefilte fish, which she would skin, fillet, grind in a meat grinder and then use the bones to make stock. She also served chopped liver, which my Aunt Barb remembers her preparing with a metal hand grinder resting on the countertop, and then mixing with hard-boiled eggs, chopped onions and schmaltz.

My relatives still love gefilte fish, but these days they almost always experience it as a dish that comes from a jar. And while my Aunt Barb remembers enjoying Sophie’s handmade chopped liver on

matzah, she has never made it herself and concedes that it “may die off with your generation.” In my family, she is right. “I have heard of chopped liver,” my brother says, “but I couldn’t tell you what it is.”

Younger generations’ cluelessness is easy fodder for the outraged defenders of beloved Passover dishes. But it’s always been true that, as tastes change and new ingredients proliferate, popular holiday recipes fade into obscurity. When I asked Paula Shoyer, a Jewish cookbook author, about Passover foods that are going out of style, homemade gefilte fish was the first dish that came to mind. The reason: These days, making gefilte fish by hand—rather than purchasing it in a jar or doctoring up frozen loaves—is seen as a massive undertaking. “People think gefilte fish is a big fuss,” Shoyer says. “It smells up your house, and ‘Where am I going to buy the fish? It has to be really fresh.’”

But while gefilte fish and chopped liver are still widely known, many other dishes have largely disappeared from Ashkenazi Jewish collective consciousness. (It’s worth noting

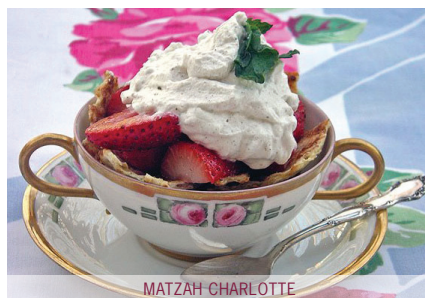
that these are Ashkenazi holiday staples; Sephardic Jews have different memories of their family’s food traditions.) In particular, there is a whole class of Passover foods that have gone out of style because they’re heavy or unhealthy. Take farfel, an egg noodle dish, though the Passover version is made with broken pieces of matzah. For years, farfel was served as a popular side dish, says Shoyer. But these days, modern chefs are more likely to choose a healthier alternative, like quinoa.

Another Passover favorite that has gone MIA is stuffed veal. For centuries, it was a favorite special-occasion dish, particularly in Europe, says Joan Nathan, cookbook author and expert on Jewish cooking. But these days, “veal is out of fashion,” she says. “It’s very, very fatty and people just don’t like that.” But health concerns aren’t the whole story, and veal is a fitting example of how a collection of cultural forces can take down a popular dish. Soon after the Civil War, because of changes in the meat industry, “brisket took over,” Nathan says, and it supplanted veal in many American diets. Veal is also expensive,

and securing kosher veal can be difficult in some areas. And then there are ethical issues: “It’s something that’s not correct to eat anymore,” Nathan says. “Nobody wants to eat a veal, a young calf. A lot of people will not eat it because they think it’s cruel.”

Another old Passover stalwart is russell, a fermented beet juice, which often serves as a base for borscht. “Russell was eaten in Eastern Europe when there was nothing else around for Passover,” says Nathan. It also required a lot of planning, as it takes four to six weeks to prepare. In the weeks before Passover, Eastern European Jews would place beets “into large earthenware crocks to ferment,” writes the late Gil Marks in *The World of Jewish Cooking*. “By Passover, the mixture had been transformed into *russel* [sic] (the Slavic word for ‘brine’),” which could be used “to flavor soups, drinks, preserves, horseradish, kugels, and other traditional dishes, while the liquid was used as a vinegar.” The timing makes sense: Beets were one of the few items capable of surviving Eastern European winters, according to Marks’s *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, and by winter’s end, enough remained to provide “a note of brightness and sweetness for the Passover holiday.”

Russell was widespread until the 19th century, when potatoes became a popular alternative. Many Jews from Eastern Europe, like my great-grandmother, brought beet-based recipes with them to America. But these days, Nathan says, “people are not so excited about beets anymore, except for maybe in salads.” That’s too bad, because fermented foods like russell or pickles are actually quite healthy, providing the probiotics that help us digest rich holiday meals, says Jeffrey Yoskowitz, cofounder of Gefilteria, a Brooklyn-based company aimed at revitalizing Old World



Ashkenazi Jewish cuisine. Back in the day, these dishes spoke to this priority, as well as to “how beautiful it is to think half the year about how to make this one week special.”

Looking through mid-century cookbooks, Nora Rubel, a Jewish studies professor at the University of Rochester, discovered recipes for several Passover desserts, such as chremslach, a fried matzah pancake (or “glorified latkes,” as one of the recipes describes them) and charlotte. A European dish, charlotte is a type of Passover cake, “often lumped in the same category as a kugel,” although it looks more like a trifle, says Rubel. “That’s one thing that shows up everywhere that I don’t think anyone I know has ever made—or had.” She has found recipes for matzah charlotte, farfel charlotte, apple charlotte and was particularly intrigued by fruit meringue charlotte, made of matzah farfel, prune or apple juice, lemon juice, grated lemon rind, melted shortening, eggs, salt, sugar, chopped nuts and sliced bananas or apples.

Many other Passover desserts are becoming obsolete simply because tastier alternatives are replacing them. Shoyer is happy to say goodbye to the “cake meal-y cakes and cookies that have that pasty taste. You know what I’m talking about?” she says. “That Passover taste.” For many decades, “if you

wanted to make a cake for Passover, you were using cake meal and potato starch.” But Shoyer is confident these kinds of Passover desserts—a category that also includes sponge cakes, Passover brownies, macaroons—are on their way out.

Today we’re much more aware of ingredients like almond flour, coconut flour and tapioca. This is partly due to the proliferation of tasty gluten-free recipes. While not all gluten-free foods are kosher for Passover—and not all Passover foods are gluten-free—there is a great deal of overlap. “The gluten-free world has opened up the eyes of the Passover bakers and the Passover cooks to a whole new range of possibilities,” says Shoyer.

Some foods, however, are unlikely to fade without a fight. Perhaps the most controversial Passover paradigm shift? Kugel, a casserole made with eggs, a fat and a starch—usually potatoes or noodles. “I don’t think people are making them as much at Passover,” Nathan says. “It’s just too much.” Shoyer agrees, though she often runs into passionate kugel fans. “I get abused sometimes at events where I criticize kugel,” she says. “People get very upset.”

But preserving culinary traditions doesn’t mean never changing them. “I don’t necessarily want to go back to exactly how people were eating in Poland in the 1890s,” says Yoskowitz. At the same time, he hopes Passover cooks will return to preparing dishes from scratch. When we stick to “the same Manischewitz gefilte fish and the same store-bought foods,” he says, “we’re losing those flavors—both metaphorical and actual flavors—that make us who we are.”—Ellen Wexler

How have your family’s Passover meals changed? Let us know at editor@momentmag.com

Matzah Charlotte

Michael Wex, author of *Rhapsody in Schmaltz*, shares his late friend Libby Sklamberg’s recipe on his website.

INGREDIENTS

3 large eggs, separated | 4 matzahs | 1/2 cup sugar or more (to taste) | 1/2 cup raisins | 1 tsp. kosher-for-Pesach vanilla
1 tbsp. lemon juice | 1 tsp. grated zest | 1/4 tsp. salt | 1 can Comstock apples or 3 large fresh apples—peeled, cored and sliced thin
Topping: 1/2 cup brown sugar | 1/2 tsp. cinnamon | 1/4 cup finely chopped nuts | 1 tbsp. butter
Mix all together and sprinkle on top of the apple mixture.

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees fahrenheit.
2. Beat the egg whites until stiff and set them aside. Break the matzahs into pieces and soak them in hot water for a few minutes. Drain.
3. Add the sugar, egg yolks, raisins, vanilla, lemon and salt. Mix well.
4. Add the apples, folding them in so as not to break the slices. Fold in the beaten egg whites. Pour the mixture into a greased casserole dish.
5. Sprinkle with the topping. Bake for one hour. This dessert may be served warm with whipped cream (for a dairy meal).

Great Seder Films

Marjorie Morningstar, 1958
Crimes & Misdemeanors, 1989
It Runs in the Family, 2003
When Do We Eat?, 2005

Passover works for movies the way Christmas does: Through the lens of the Seder, souls are bared, family secrets revealed, and sometimes, insight is gained.

One of the first modern films to include a Seder scene was the 1958 classic *Marjorie Morningstar*, director Irving Rapper's exploration of women and love in the 1950s based on the novel by Herman Wouk. The beautiful Marjorie Morgenstern (Natalie Wood) falls for Noel Airman (Gene Kelly), the social director at a summer resort. Talented but tortured, Noel is not suitable husband material for a girl from the Upper West Side. Determined to wed him nevertheless, Marjorie brings him home for Passover. The Seder at the Morgenstern apartment is quintessentially perfect and reflective of the era, down to the table decorated with candelabras and stylized floral arrangements. Her family is loving and traditional: Marjorie's father, draped in his white robe and donning a kippah, leads the family in prayer. Noel clearly doesn't fit in: He fidgets throughout the ritual dinner and fails to impress Marjorie's mother. Still, Marjorie refuses to give him up, even though all can see the relationship is doomed.

Woody Allen employs the memory of a Seder in his 1989 psychological drama *Crimes & Misdemeanors*. Judah (Martin Landau) has had his blackmailing mistress (Anjelica Huston) killed. He is a man who long ago left God behind, but flashes of memory from his childhood begin torturing him, driving him to return to the home where he grew up and to ask the current owner if he can walk around the house. While standing in the doorway of the dining room, he remembers his father Saul—a man of faith—mother and aunts and uncles as they bickered around the Seder table. Saul's sister May wants him to hurry through the Seder. "Are you afraid if you don't follow the rules that God's going to punish you?" she asks, to which her brother replies, "He won't punish me, May. He punishes the wicked." She retorts: "Is that how Hitler got away with killing

six million Jews?" The present-day Judah addresses his father and asks what happens to a man who kills. His father tells him that one way or another, that man will be punished. Other family members chime in to insist that a killer will not suffer as long as he is never caught or troubled by ethical considerations. Judah, however, can't escape his moral feelings.

Real kin, members of the Douglas dynasty, play another combative clan in the 2003 dramedy *It Runs in the Family*. Mitchell (Kirk Douglas) is at the head of the table and all seems well until it comes time for his grandson Eli (Rory Culkin) to ask the four questions. At this moment, Eli's father Alex (Michael Douglas) takes a call on his cell phone, igniting an argument between Mitchell and Alex. Their wives try to stop them from arguing while Eli just tries to steamroll ahead. To add to the chaos, Alex's eldest son Asher (Cameron Douglas) strolls in, to which his father remarks, "At least you got here before Elijah did." The squabbling continues through the Seder until finally Alex's wife Rebecca (Bernadette Peters) declares it time for her sons to look for the afikomen. With the exception of Hollywood-sized afikomen prizes—each son scores \$1,000—this Seder looks like many a modern gathering: fairly short with much eating of brisket. One second, family members are yelling at each other, the next they're laughing together. No one has a problem expressing exactly what's on his or her mind, except when it comes to the real root of their *mishugas*...but that's what the rest of the movie is for.

The most over-the-top dysfunctional family Seder film of all time, however, is *When Do We Eat?* (2005)? It tells the story of yet another family trying to make it through the obligatory holiday meal. Ira Stuckman (Michael Lerner) is a patriarch perpetually plagued by acid reflux, presiding over a group that includes his second wife and their four self-centered children, his gay daughter from his first marriage plus her girlfriend and his cantankerous father, played by the inimitable Jack Klugman. Ira's attempt to conduct the world's fastest Seder goes awry when his teenage stoner son slips a tab of Ecstasy into his antacid. In his drugged state, Ira recounts to his family his wild visions of past and present Seders, including a heart-breaking meal



Marjorie Morgenstern, played by Natalie Wood, falls for Noel Airman (Gene Kelly) in the 1958 classic *Marjorie Morningstar* and brings him home for Passover.

with just him and his father eating from cartons of Chinese food: "It's all here and now," he rambles. "The Seder. Pop's Seder. The sages' Seder... Listen, we're in the desert. We just left Egypt, we don't know where we're going, but we're here now and God is near." Ira's oldest son, an overly pious recent convert to Orthodox Judaism, tries to find meaning in the situation and says, "Tonight...Dad is Moses, and he's finally feeling God." The Seder scene takes up most of the movie, but the hallucinations and outbursts are enough to keep it interesting, especially when we discover...well, stick with the film for a sweet surprise ending plus a family that finally learns to get along. That doesn't happen at every Seder, but it makes for a great conclusion to a super-schmaltzy holiday flick.—Maxine Springer

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