



The Pesach Collection

A collection of articles by Harav Y Reuven Rubin
Shlita for Pesach

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Paeon to an old-fashioned Pesach

By Harav Y Reuven Rubin Shlita

I have Boruch Hashem come to that age where I can hold forth and schmooze about the “good old days” with some sense of validation. After all, to most youngsters my youth was spent somewhere in the misty days of yesteryear, long before rockets flew to the moon, or telephones were nestled in everyone’s pocket. Yes, those *were* the good old days, and lived in sepia tones that inhabit our memories.

Obviously though, it wasn’t always all *that* good and much of what we did then has now been shown to be unhealthy and downright dangerous. When I was fifteen years old I started smoking. A cigarette in hand was a passbook into the Beis Medrash of every yeshiva. I remember watching a cloud of smoke over a group of talmidim circling their Rosh Yeshiva, deep in learning. There was nothing I wouldn’t do to get accepted into that exalted club. No one told us this was harmful; in fact cigarettes were sold as healthy for the lungs. Now I sit typing these words with the knowledge that I ruined my lungs to the point that I just don’t have the capacity to breathe that I should, and asthma is now a companion that I have to live with.

“There should be things we just don’t do on this brilliant Yom Tov, not for any other reason but that it just doesn’t fit”

Pesach as well had its warm memories of actions that were later found to be dangerous. In my younger days, we all ate schmaltz (chicken fat) over Pesach. Who can forget the strong aroma of the fat being rendered on the stove for hours before Yom

Tov. Schmaltz on matzo, liberally salted. Ah, the *taam* of Gan Eden! If only we knew how close this was taking us expeditiously to that very destination!

There are other such indications of how things have changed for the better thanks to a clearer understanding of medical matters. This is all for the better, and I would be the last to say it is not so. My cardiologist would have something to say if I did.

However, there are changes that are not so good. In fact, they are a hazard to the health of our spirituality, especially at the Yom Tov of Pesach.

Many years ago I wrote a column about the then new fashion of jetting off to hotels to spend Pesach. I was, and am, against this fad for many reasons, and anyone wanting to read the column can find it in my first book: *A Rabbis Journal*, page 163. Part of the danger is that we have forgotten what Pesach is about and feel somehow deprived if we have to exert ourselves or otherwise do without. At the time I wrote the column I was criticised by some as being alarmist and that “heimishe” frum Yieden weren’t really the clientele that the promoters of these “Passover Programs” were looking for. I believe time has proven me right, and just a casual glance through any of the glossy weeklies aimed at our olam will prove my point. Everything is now non gebroks, cholov Yisroel, glatt by the standards of any hechsher you seek, with wall to wall shiurim plus chazanim aplenty. All this is not being put on as a quaint wink towards the “old ways.” It’s about getting the heimishe Yied out of his shtiebl and into their pre-warmed swimming pools.

But, I don’t want to rehash old columns, nor crow “I told you so.” Rather, I am setting the stage for what I see as the incipient encroachment into our very homes of products that speak of a foreign understanding of what Pesach is all about.

Pesach is not about Jewish Independence Day celebrations; it's not a huge dinner party to express our freedom as other nations have. Our leaving Mitzrayim is about becoming servants of Hashem. Our entire being revolves around our connection to Hashem and the central understanding that nothing happens without His Will. One of the reasons we abstain from chometz is because our sense of freedom must be built upon a foundation free from arrogance and false pride. Chometz is a metaphor for over-inflated egos, those that think they control their destiny.

So, the heimishe Pesach should be celebrated with understanding that we don’t need to have everything we have during the year. Yet, in heimishe stores we find Pesach

Pizza, pecan pie shells, pancakes and more. Is this all necessary? Is this how we teach our young that Pesach has a meaning beyond figuring out how to get around it? Slowly we are allowing the hotel attitude to creep into our homes. Chumras that once made each family's celebration unique in their own charm have become slowly discarded.

As a young talmud I remember the Bobover Rebbe Rav Shloma ztl telling me that we don't eat "Pesakdika" cake because it looks like chometz. There should be things we just don't do on this brilliant Yom Tov, not for any other reason but that it just doesn't fit.

There is no harm in letting youngsters know that on Pesach there are things we don't eat or do. Pesach is a Yom Tov specifically geared for teaching the young. They ask questions, and their answers take an entire meal to answer. What they experience today will be their memories tomorrow. What do we wish those cherished thoughts to be? Make-believe pizza dough and wannabe bread?

We are a generation that seeks answers to rapidly changing circumstances. We would be doing our young a huge favour by sharing with them the sense of sacredness within which we hold our kedusha, and we should do so with no excuses. Some of what we do should be old fashioned, and we should do this with pride and love.

Where are you going this Pesach?

By Harav Yitzchak Reuven Rubin

It happens to all of us: the yearly MOT that decides if your car is roadworthy or not. Actually I am surprised they don't give drivers a MOT. I guess there would be too many failures if they did. Anyway, the time had come, the appointment made and off I went to the local garage, confident that this would just be a formality. After much scrutiny under the bonnet, the psak was delivered: the car failed! The back brakes needed changing and I had fourteen days to sort it out. I was truly crestfallen. My car, my link to the wider world, was not worthy of a pass mark, Sheer chutzpah. Of course, this was all a blessing; it wouldn't be very clever if the said brakes chose to stop working whilst I was driving behind a large lorry. Obviously, this event awakened this writer's interest. One of my close friends sent me a message "I am thinking you are already writing a column that begins: unless you have an ability to stop and pause in this mad world you are not fit to function on the road of life." Brilliant! I wish I had said that! Truthfully, though, he is right. If we can't control ourselves we are just not roadworthy.

"Pesach is the source of emunah. If we sleep walk through it we have lost its true lessons"

Pesach is about leaving behind the Golus, whatever that Golus may be. The tzaddikim of Ger ztl explain that the goal of the Seder is to teach us emunah, and a primary aspect of this is the belief that everything that happens is for a reason. Rav Melech Biederman explains that with this idea in mind, we can explain why Chad Gadya is sung at the end of the Seder. The final phase of an event is often the climax, just as

Neilah is the climax of Yom Kippur. What's so special about this seemingly childish rhyme? It reinforces the theme that nothing happens without a reason. *A fire consumed a stick, which stick had earlier hit a dog.* There is nothing in the entire chain of events that doesn't have a reason. Anything taken out of context could seem random, but when presented with the full picture it all makes sense. Hashem has created things in His Wisdom and nothing is without a rationale.

We are often dumbstruck when faced with situations that just don't make any apparent sense. There are times when wonderful caring Yidden are stricken with terrible situations. I am often called upon to bring answers to the question why, but after all these years I have realized that without emunah there are no answers. With emunah, however, there are no real questions. Emunah is about accepting that we don't always have the answers, but Hashem is a loving Father who creates things for our ultimate good.

Rambling through life without being connected to this aspect of our belief is truly dangerous. Emunah is the marker that stops us from crashing into the abyss of despondency. Life throws so much at us, but with emunah we can absorb the pain and seek ways forward. Without it we are left in agony, feeling the searing pain without the balm of faith. Pesach is the source of emunah. If we sleep walk through it we have lost its true lessons.

Alexanderer Chassidim used to relate a story from the Baal Shem Tov. It seems the Tzaddik was once told from Shomayim that in such and such a village lives a Yied whose Seder was extolled in the heavens and brought great light to the world. The Baal Shem sought to find this jewel of a Yied and perhaps share his Seder night and learn what he did that made such an impact on high. After some searching the Rebbe found out where this Yied lived and arranged that on Erev Pesach he would be at the fellow's door. Came the day and the Baal Shem Tov put his plan into action. He found the hovel where this gentleman lived and knocked on the door. A decidedly poor looking soul answered and hearing that this stranger sought to share in his Seder he was overjoyed. He took the Baal Shem Tov for an itinerant peddler who sought somewhere to be for Pesach. Night fell and the Yied put on his threadbare kittel and started his Seder. The Baal Shem Tov was astounded; nothing he heard or saw was especially remarkable. He was left wondering what it was that set this sweet poor man's Seder apart from the many thousands that were being held throughout the world.

Just then they reached the passage "*Tam, mah hu omer?*" "What does the simple son say?", and with a great cry the man broke down and kept repeating these words... *Tam, mah hu omer*...again and again with tears streaming down his weatherworn face. After some time, the fellow gathered himself together and continued his Seder without further disruptions. Afterwards the Yied fell into a conversation with his guest. The Baal Shem Tov couldn't hold back and asked him what it was about that one passage that caused him to cry with such intensity. The Yied explained simply that he learned that the word "*tam*" can mean "there". "When I reach these words I stop and think: where am I? I am at the same place as I was last Pesach! Nothing has changed. I haven't really grown. Then I think: what will I say when I arrive "there" (at my final destination after 120 years) at the Beis Din Shel Maalah? I will be ashamed to have to admit that I didn't take the opportunity to become stronger in my emunah. I just remained firmly rooted to where I was".

All lives are complicated. We can opt to stay put, but we can also choose to move ahead. Life is an eternal gift. It is a shame when our brakes are unsafe, yet we remain frozen on the spot. My car's brakes can be repaired, but it is worth stopping a moment to ask: *Tam*, where am I going?

The modern plague of darkness

By Harav Yitzchak Reuven Rubin

One thing you learn in this life, at least hopefully so, is that the more you see, the more things are the same. Human nature is such that no matter where one comes from, those small human foibles are always there, ready to jump out and snap at your heels. As an example, I will give you a sneak preview of my Pesach message that will resonate through my community in Bowdon, South Manchester, this coming week.

“The most popular book found in any Jewish Home is the Hagadah. The story of the Exodus from Egypt and its many lessons are central to the Jewish experience. Each word has many levels of meaning and every generation can learn new and unique lessons. There are thousands of different commentaries on this cherished book, and one can learn from each one. The vital point is that we actualize the Exodus experience in our own lives, making its lessons part of our own reality. Pesach is not only about events thousands of years ago, it is about things that are happening in the here and now.

Our Heimishe world is populated with neshomos groping in darkness and alone

We are all enslaved by the trappings of a material world that often drags us away from what is positive and leads us into a quagmire of ego-driven want. Our children are taught to desire more and more, while the media with its messages of commercialism, seeps into the most private of places in our homes. It seems that the slavery to all this materialistic need becomes so pervasive, that we don't even realize

that we are indeed enslaved to it.

In the Hagadah we relate all the plagues that struck the Egyptians during the period that led up to our Exodus. The phase of darkness is very fascinating and deserves deeper understanding. We are told that the darkness had a material dimension, as the passage says, "One man did not see another....no one got up from his place." The Rebbe of Gur commented: a man who is so blinded by self-concern that he cannot see another neighbour will never get up from his place, will never be able to experience any spiritual growth." We must work, each in our own way, to learn to "see" one another and reach out to everyone. In this world of over- indulgence, we seem stricken with a blindness that doesn't allow for us to get up and touch others.

Our community has a well- earned reputation for being warm and caring. In fact we all strive to see ourselves as one large family. As such, we should learn to be sensitive and "see" each other. We should grow together and share our concerns, and in this way we can release ourselves from the bonds of our contemporary slavery and grow in true spirituality."

Now this message is equally vital to every Jew, no matter where his community is. There are some who will say that my words seem pointed towards those who are perhaps not yet as committed to a Torah lifestyle as they should be. It could be thought that such lessons need not be taught to a more committed community. Wrong and wrong again. Our Heimishe world is populated with neshomos groping in darkness and alone. No one seems able to reach out to them, and show them the light. There are children who are lost in the education system, married couples who live in a battle ground of hostility and anger. This is slavery in every sense of the word, and Pesach is our time for a true exodus. Rabbonim will tell you how desperate many are, how there are brethren who live in despair. Families argue, money seems to have become the sole source of respect and eminence, all this in just a generation or two after our people were slaves of the Nazi exterminators. We are merely 60 years from those darkest moments, yet we have allowed materialistic gain to become the yardstick by which so much of our lives is measured.

Those blessed with wealth seem to be able to glide through life "paying off" any problem that rears its head. Tragically, such behavior doesn't buy one any guarantee. Pain comes packaged in many ways, and all the money in the Royal Mint can't provide true happiness. The darkness that doesn't allow us to see others is created by our own ego and in the end will envelope us completely. The secrets of the Hagadah are

manifold, and the darkness of the plague must teach us to give light. Reaching out to others, feeling their pain, is the key to one's own deliverance.

Whilst we are engaging in the feverish preparations for Yom Tov, let us think about the real chometz that seems ensconced in our lives. We rub and wash, creating havoc whilst seeking to root out any small crumb, yet, how well do we relate this cleanliness to our inner thoughts? There are those near and dear who are carrying burdens of emotional chometz that no cleaning regime can ever remove.

Let us reach out, see one another and help them. If we don't rise up from our gloom, then we will remain in the darkest of slavery imaginable, the slavery of our own hearts

Life is real to those who live it

By Harav Yitzchak Reuven Rubin

We bought a clock. In fact, it's a large clock, white with bold black numbers. Now I am certain every shtiebl has such clocks, but this one is ours and it came with a story. (Seems everything I do becomes a story!) We had another clock, also large with visible numbers. However, it started to lose time, and in a shtiebl time isn't something one wants to lose. The mavinim checked it out-it was radio operated- yet it never kept proper time. It was something related to radio waves and positioning. Whatever the explanation, it was now slow.

So, I took it down because it was driving me to distraction.

"We all live on so many different levels: confused, sometimes scared, always perplexed"

As a man of action, no sooner did it come down than I ordered a new battery-run model, without gimmicks; just a large old-fashioned timekeeper. At the same time a well-meaning anonymous donor bought another model. Where there was once no clock we now had more than we could handle. (I thank that unknown generous soul although we didn't get to use it). Things didn't end with this. Once the clock was placed on the wall we realized that the glare from the fluorescent lights hit the glass face and we just couldn't see its numbers. The mavinim sprang into action and soon one of our "in house" experts figured out a solution. He took off the glass. Voila! No

more glare. Now the clock's hands make their rounds throughout the day and night, silently counting out our lives.

The reason for telling this seemingly mundane story is because it brought home to me an important lesson. Time is a precious gift. Once squandered it can't be reclaimed. Yiddishkeit is time sensitive: Shabbos, Yom Tov, Shacharis, Mincha, Maariv and much else are all driven by time. We are now all pressed for time, Pesach is around the corner and heimishe homes are buzzing with the sound of hoovers and the pungent smell of chemical cleaners. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to stop for a moment in the midst of this often stressful time of the year and ask yourself: what is this Pesach Yom Tov all about? In fact, we should ask several greater questions like: are we in Golus now? What am I living for? What am I willing to die for? Do I appreciate what I have? Do I know what I have?

The Seder is created so that questions should be asked. Sadly, If we don't ask questions we won't really be interested in the answers. Too many of us are just coasting along, the hands of the clock sweep past but life isn't being realized. Instead, we waste our time because it actually it has no meaning.

This Golus is unique. We have more material trappings than any other generation, more ability to keep mitzvos, yet, young, and not so young, seem lost, with no direction. Pesach tells us to ask questions, so that we can become connected with the answers. There is a halocho that we don't eat matzo for a period before the Yom Tov. Why? So we can eat them at the Seder with an appetite. Matzo is symbolic of the duality of life: it is the "bread of affliction," yet also "the bread of freedom." We all live on so many different levels: confused, sometimes scared, always perplexed. Perhaps before Pesach we should stop and think about matters that go deeper than chumras and minhagim. First, we should workup an appetite to hear the answers, figure out in our own unique minds what it is we are here for and where we want to go.

As one who can be considered a senior citizen, I can well understand how one can be sucked into the rushing about, and forgetting, or not even thinking about, what this is all about. Reading your children's school Pesach workbooks won't connect them with what they have learned if we, their parents, aren't enthusiastic and willing to think through the personal meaning of this unique Yom Tov.

Techiyas Hameisim, the resurrection of the dead, which will take place at some point during the period of Moshiach's arrival (may it be soon) will take place in the month of

Nisan. One of the reasons cited for the white garment known as a kittel being worn at the Pesach Seder is to have a palpable reminder that Techiyas Hameisim will take place on Pesach. This should galvanize your thinking; time is of the essence; it knows no favourites.

Tell your story to your children; we have all had our own moments of redemption. Let them see Hashem's hand in your life. If you don't really see this, then sit down and sort yourself out! The clock is running, and life is real to those who live it.

Living with joy in turbulent times

By Harav Yitzchak Reuven Rubin

The news right now is monopolized by stories about international borders. The British voted for Brexit partially because of the border issue, Israel has its perennial battle over borders with their sworn enemies, and now the new American President has taken his first moments in office to scrawl his name on an executive order temporarily barring certain immigrants. Borders are meant to be sacred; porous ones make for problems.

Now, back in its day, Mitzrayim had almost impregnable borders. Chazal tell us that no slave had ever escaped over those borders. So how was it that an entire nation, our ancestors, just marched out in broad daylight? The Izhbitzer Rebbe, Rav Mordechai Yosef ztl shares an interesting insight. He explains that the borders were not demarcated by high walls or locks. In fact, it wasn't necessary. Life in Mitzrayim was the center of materialism and immorality. There wasn't anything that couldn't be had in that cesspool of filth, and the whole world sought to live and visit there. They had no need for fortifications; even the slaves chose to live there. The life experience of the lowest of slaves was perceived to be better than living anywhere else.

"One has to believe that Hashem is interested in him, and that he was created for a purpose"

So what happened with the Yidden? Why did they break the mold and march out? They were given the mitzvah of Korban Pesach. That first mitzvah introduced a new sweetness, something beyond all the material trinkets that the golus of Mitzrayim

offered.

The Rebbe elaborates: when the Yidden were blessed to bring that first sacrifice it was the first time they had the taste of true freedom. Accepting Hashem's rule far exceeded anything they could have experienced beforehand. The Rebbe explains further that the taste of Torah and mitzvos raises one above the material crassness and gives one a joyfulness of spirituality.

Today borders loom high, and people are agitated. In truth we are all swamped in an ocean of spiritual dirt and foulness. Oceans of meaninglessness surround us and threaten to engulf everyone. Countries scramble about trying to hold onto their identity but in reality borders are futile when everyone carries the whole world in their hands. Technology doesn't have borders, and fighting over yesterday's maps is like chasing mercury.

In Parshas Beshalach we learn how the Jews were faced with a natural border: the sea. They witnessed yet another miracle and walked through a sea bed that had turned dry. Upon reaching the other side and seeing the destruction wrought upon their erstwhile masters, the Egyptians, they broke out in song. This Shira has become part of our daily prayers and lends its name to this Shabbos. The Beis Aron writes about the great reward that one can earn by saying Oz Yashir. He writes "The Shira contains everything that happened in the past, and everything that will happen in the future, and everything that a person needs. All this is in the Shira." Towards its conclusion we declare: 'When Pharaoh's horse came with his chariots and horsemen into the sea and Hashem turned back the waters of the sea upon them, the Children of Israel walked on the dry land amid the sea.' The Yidden stood on dry land whilst surrounded by the turbulence of the sea. Currently, Klal Yisroel lies submerged in the ocean of today's crippling crassness, but we have the taste of mitzvos, and this illumination allows us to rise above it all. Torah Yidden throughout history have clung to the Shira and tasted the sweetness of a Torah life. Despite everything, we sang the song of the Yidden's freedom and connected with Hashem. That sweetness, derived from adherence to Hashem's Torah, is what keeps us going, allowing us to walk on dry land despite the worldly sea's turbulence.

The young among us who seem to be floundering, may have attended the right mosdos, and davened in fine shuls, but just maybe they never tasted the sweetness of our mitzvos. It's just possible that despite all efforts, the simcha of Torah life passed

them by. Why? Every soul is different; there are no black and white answers. However, the simchas hachaim of a Torah life is there for every neshoma. The Rebbe, Rav Tzaddok Hacohen of Lublin teaches that in addition to believing in Hashem one must believe in himself. One has to believe that Hashem is interested in him, and that he was created for a purpose. Instilling this realization in the young is no simple matter, but goes to the kernel of our existence. Every soul deserves to know this, and feel the taste of the mitzvos. To stand on dry land despite the storms around us, simchas hachaim is vital. Our young deserve the inner joy of mitzvos; it is the only way. How does this happen? By ourselves being connected and showing the next generation what it means to live with joy.

Broken and depressed youngsters don't believe Hashem cares; they are mired in the coldness that surrounds them. We must find the point of entry into their hearts and fill it with the true happiness that is Jewishness. This will raise them above the grasp of today's Mitzrayim and allow them to join in the singing of our nation's Shira.

Handing over the torch of Yiddishkeit

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Sadly, as the last boxes of Pesachdik pots return to their usual home in the garage, the feeling of Yom Tov seeps away and the daily hustle of the everyday regains its residence in our reality. All those wondrous shared moments seem as distant as another planet, and one can barely remember that uplifting vort heard from a Rav or perhaps a loved one.

Personally, over the Yom Tov period I cherish the opportunity to hear what the youngsters are talking about, and despite the fact that Boruch Hashem the youngsters seem younger as I must seem older, with each passing year, I still am intrigued at what they are thinking. There are certain subjects that can always spark energetic discussion and which bridge the generational divide, none more so than the state of “todays” society. Having lived through several “todays”, I sense that each “today” is just yesterday’s wearing a new coat of whatever passes for current trends. The nucleus of all human endeavour is the stuff of what humans have always been. We are all prone to the same foibles and have been so since Odom Harishon left Gan Eden.

“Transmitting to the next generation must come with the fire of emotional attachment, not just the cold ticking of scholastic boxes”

I have mentioned before that the Piaseczna Rebbe ztl wrote in one of his holy seforim: “The soul of a person loves to feel. It yearns not only for feelings of happiness but even for melancholy and tearful feelings. A person will listen to horror stories and watch violent horrifying scenes which actually bring him to tears, just so he will be able to

feel. Emotion is the food of the soul; it is as much a need of the soul as food is to the body. A person who fulfills this need with emotional tefillah and study is nourishing the soul correctly. Prayer and study without emotion will leave a vacuum that will force the soul to search for emotion anywhere, even in sinful behaviour.” (Tzav VeZiruz)

I sense that the crux of much that we are seeing as “children going off the derech” can be found in the Rebbe’s profound understanding. His was another generation, one facing its own challenges, witnessing thousands leaving the hallowed halls of our traditions for pastures thought to be greener. Yet, he touches on the nub of the problem: youth (and the not so youthful) who are empty of any real enthusiastic Torah life are living with an aching void in their hearts which can soon be filled with the excitement of the street. In my conversations with youngsters I sense this malaise. Kids can go to cheder and then on to yeshivas and sadly never feel the fire of what it is to be an Oved Hashem. Without that fire the young mind becomes a tinderbox waiting to be ignited by any passing madness making the rounds.

Over Yom Tov I came across this vort from Rav Yaakov Haber which illustrates this aspect: The Eastern gates to the Courtyard of the Beis Hamikdosh in Yerushalayim were called Shaarei Nikanor- the gates of Nikanor. They were beautiful, bronze structures that greeted the guests as they arrived from all over the Land.

Why are they called “Gates of Nikanor”? Nikanor was a Greek general during the Chashmonoim era. When Antiochus’s nephew decided to remodel the Beis Hamikdosh, he used his resources to import artifacts from the best craftsmen in the known world. He commissioned his general Nikanor to travel to Alexandria in Egypt to have these bronze gates custom-made. Nikanor decided to transport the cumbersome gates by ship, and while out on his Mediterranean voyage he encountered a life-threatening storm.

The general, seeing that the weight of the ship was too much to survive the storm, ordered one of the doors be thrown overboard. The storm, however, continued, and the boat rocked even more. The crew were ready to throw the next gate into the sea. Nikanor watched as the group hoisted the heavy bronze door into the air – and something happened. Nikanor ran to the gate and began to hug it. “If this gate goes into the sea, so do I.” The storm immediately subsided. Realizing what had just taken place, Nikanor began to cry over the first door that he had thrown overboard. When they finally reached the port of Acco and docked their ship, they found the missing door – under the ship – and promptly hung both doors in the Beis Hamikdosh. To

remember this miracle the gates were called Shaarei Nikanor. (Talmud Yoma 38).

What stopped the storm? The fact that the future gates to holiness were on board was not enough to ward off the storm. The doors needed to be hugged!

Yiddishkeit starts with such hugging! Transmitting to the next generation must come with the fire of emotional attachment, not just the cold ticking of scholastic boxes.

The initial reaction to the storm affecting the boat was to throw the doors to Yerusholayim overboard. Lives are at stake – don't rock the boat! But that didn't help; Yerusholayim works on a different level: if we love the doors, if we express our passion for them, they remain with us, even if it takes a miracle.

I was captivated by some of my conversations with young men who are on fire with Yiddishkeit. They will argue their point with all the animated verve of those fabled Chassidim of old.

The Beis Yisroel zt"l would often quip that in today's world, if a young man walks in the streets of Tel Aviv and keeps his focus on Hashem, he is a greater Chassid than those of the previous generations.

The task of today is to fill our hearts with the genuine fire that should be our love for Hashem. It will be this fire that will ignite the hearts of our young, and create the torches that will illuminate our tomorrows.

Tehillim: Rhythm of the Heart | Chapter 118

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

It is all in the smell. There is nothing more evocative than the smell of something attached to one's memories. As anyone can attest, one whiff of Shabbos kugel brings to mind an untold number of wonderful kiddeishim spent with friends. But when it comes to the aroma arena, there is only one real champion, and that is Pesach.

No other time of the year carries so many unique fragrances, and with each of them such loving memories. You can buy *chrain* a whole year and eat Pesach foods in the winter, but it just won't be the same. When it comes to Pesach, it seems the time, place and recipe have to be just perfect, and when it is, well, then it is so very special.

I have thought about this and have come up with a hypothesis, which I named "The Direct Aroma Path-To-Belief Theory." It seems to me that those wonderful smells of *Yom Tov* are stored away in a section of our brain that lies close to the spiritual nerve center. When a warm Pesach aroma comes wafting into the brain, the spiritual bit gets a boost as well, and bingo, memories of warm loving *sedarim* come into view, followed by a strengthening of one's core belief in Hashem and His Torah.

Now this may not be all that scientific, and I would not be surprised if some foggy-headed academic would try to prove me wrong. However, I defy any such scientist to taste a fried *chremsel* or even a bowl of *Yom Tov* chicken soup and tell me it is not truly the stuff of heaven.

Every Yid is a fervent believer, but sometimes this nugget of truth gets buried.

Pesach is the one *Yom Tov* where that most basic of needs, eating, is set on its head. What we consider a whole year long the staple of our diet becomes taboo on Pesach, and instead we take “the poor man’s bread” and elevate it to the “bread of our freedom.” The Yidden went through such a transformation at the time of the exodus. They had to become totally separated from what was previously considered the norm. Plagues wreaked havoc; the whole of nature was convulsed, and out of all this strode a new nation with the dough of a new life resting on their backs. That dough was yet unformed, but it was pure in its simplicity and became the symbol of our unvarnished, simple, yet total belief.

No matter how many generations have since gone by, each has touched that dough of belief and worked it in its own way. As we grow and mature, we often lose sight of this simple strength. We become encrusted with the *chametz* of the everyday, and our belief becomes calcified and dormant. Then the days become warmer, the dishes are changed, and the smells rise up from the kitchen. It is Pesach, and the whiff of true belief is awoken. Yes, you are a Yid, and yes, you do believe! The Lechovitzer Rebbe once said, “A Yid is obligated to believe that he is a believer.” This is so true. Every Yid is a fervent believer, but sometimes this nugget of truth gets buried. The one way to dig it out needs no strong tools, no powerful shovels. It needs only the aroma of holy food, of sweet *Pesachdika* delicacies.

One of the highlights of the seder night is when the seder is almost done, and Yidden unleash some of the fervor they have absorbed by saying *Hallel*. *Kapitel* 118 has a central position, and *minhagim* abound about how to say it in different countries and different families. One thing they all have in common is that it is said with lots of joy and inspiration. Look at its words with me and remind yourself of its *Pesachdika* recitation. Well? I bet you can already smell the sweet fish.

HODU LAHASHEM KI TOV KI LE’OLAM CHASDO... “Thank Hashem for He is good, for His kindness endures forever. Let Israel declare, ‘For His kindness endures forever.’ Let the house of Aharon declare, ‘For His kindness endures forever.’ Let those who fear Hashem declare, ‘For His kindness endures forever.’”

The Rebbe Reb Mordechai of Chernobyl comments on this verse that in truth, Hashem's mercy fills every occurrence of everyone's life. The reality that is Hashem should be realized and witnessed by all the world's inhabitants. However, the mist of

materialism causes this view to be obscured. There may even be times when Yidden lose sight of this, but there will always be those who fear Hashem, and it will be they who will remind us all of the truth.

Therefore the psalmist begins that everyone should “thank Hashem for He is good, and His kindness endures forever.” But if the kindness is not perceived by all, “let Israel declare.” If the children of Israel do not see it, “let the house of Aharon” say so, and if even they do not observe it, “let those who fear Hashem” say it.

On Pesach we all become “those who fear Hashem.” We work so hard and are so diligent with our preparations. The love and fear of Hashem comes into our homes with every package, with every *hechsher*. When all this is mixed together with the sweet care our mothers provide in the seder preparations, then we all can sing out, “For His kindness endures forever.”

The Yiddishe nerve center within us knows what is real. Pesach frees us from the restraints we are lumbered with through the materialistic hubris of this world.

MIN HAMEITZAR KARASI KAH..., “From the narrowness I called to Hashem, He answered me with the breadth of Divine relief.” The Baal Hatanya explains that when a Yid feels difficulty and is moved to call Hashem from the depths of his heart, he establishes contact with his essential G-dly essence. This motivates Hashem to “answer with the breadth of Divine relief.”

The seder night is just such a magical moment. Everyone feels just that much closer to Hashem. At such a moment we sing out that even when we are at our lowest point, we want to reach out to that *pintela* that is always within ourselves. When we do, when we really let all the barriers fall, then Hashem showers us with His wonderful grace.

A bit further in our kapitel, the Rebbe Reb Bunim points out that one must always implore Hashem to aid himself to attain goodness, and He will surely come to his assistance. The psalmist tells us if we cry out *PISCHU LI SHAAREI TZEDEK...*, “Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will enter into them; I will give thanks to Hashem,” we will surely receive a reply.

ZEH HASHAAR LAHASHEM..., “This is the gate of Hashem; the righteous may enter into it.” Pesach is replete with opportunities to energize our spirituality. The entire exodus from Mitzrayim is a blueprint for all generations that follow. My aroma theory wasn’t

necessarily meant as a metaphor or a cute expression. I firmly believe that we are stimulated by the fragrances and memories of special times we have lived in our lives. Hashem has given us this calendar of experiences so we can reactivate the root will that is in our hearts. This will is to be close to Hashem, for without such closeness we are never truly at peace.

All this comes with a warning, which we can sense toward the end of this very same kapitel.

KEL HASHEM VAYA'ER LANU..., "Alm-ghty, Hashem, He gave us light, bind the festival sacrifices with ropes to the corners of the altar." On the night of the seder we all feel so close. We can do anything, we really can. We can bring back that warmth and closeness we shared while doing Hashem's mitzvos, and we can reclaim our awareness and faith. But we must tie them to us with ropes of focus, for if not, they will slide back into the deepness that is our daily despair.

The Alexanderer Rebbe explained this with one of his gentle parables. "If the tailor does not knot the thread, his labor is in vain. Likewise, if we do not strive to secure in our minds the lessons learned during Yom Tov, all the wonder of the day is for naught." So take a deep breath, smell the Yomtovdike delicacies, and chap the feelings of Hashem's love as it lays its softness over you and yours. But please, don't let it stay at just a momentary smack of heaven. Tie it to your heart and carry it into your daily life.

Keeping the fire burning

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Early memories, cherished and interestingly still vibrant, are the stuff that lives on, even decades later. When I was young, one of the most wondrous moments of excitement was going to the Polisher matzah bakery before Pesach. The place seemed from another world, located in a dilapidated building off a main street. Sweet Yidden could be found there totally animated with the mitzvah of baking hand matzos. The Sadinover Rav ztl was the focal point of the proceedings. A Polisher Rav, scion of a noble Chassidic dynasty, he never compromised for the sake of the new golus of America. He was alive with the mitzvah at hand and his fire was contagious. The air shimmered with excitement, screams of "Matzahs in oven arien" pierced the walls and rose to the heavens. The Rav, his peyos long and wild, would scamper about, urging the workers to work faster. Calling out, "Leshem Matzos Mitzvah!" All were caught up in this eternal bren to create matzahs truly worthy of bringing us all closer to our geulah.

These snapshots of remembrance go back over half a century ago, yet I still recall the aroma of the heated oven, and sense the love that those firedika Yidden put into the baking. The Rav would take time out to encourage youngsters; he would look you in the eye and in his impeccably broken English urge you into joining the vortex of holy excitement. Everything seemed to running on overdrive, the clambering for a shtickel (piece) of dough, the switching for fresh rolling pins, faster, faster. Time was of the essence, every moment ignited with kedushah.

"Golus is like a seed in the ground. We feel alone and removed from everything we thought was true and wholesome"

Pesach is built with a sense of urgency, and in that holy running about lay great secrets of Torah. The holy tzaddik, the Ishbitzer Rebbe ztl has left us a treasure trove of Torah that can ignite the coldest of souls, and when the subject is Pesach his words rush forth with even more energy. He explains that the reason we eat matzah on Pesach quickly is because we had to leave Mitzrayim in a rush. In fact, the Rebbe points out that everything about this pivotal Yom Tov has to be done with a certain sense of quickness. Everything is in a hurry; the eating of the Korban Pesach had a time limit. Its meat was roasted, not cooked. Why? Because cooking in a pot is a process, something that takes a lot of time, whereas roasting over an open fire is quicker with no added ingredients. Cooking takes what is called *yishuv vedaas*, considered thoughtfulness and contemplation, whereas over a spit cooking takes on the feeling of immediacy.

At the first Seder Yidden were dressed to leave. There was no time for the dough to rise; we had to hurry. Baking matzahs must be done in a rush. The Gemoro stresses that it is not permitted to interrupt the process. Even at the Seder, we are mindful to eat the matzah within a short time; again the hint of quickness enters what is a stately meal.

So, what is all this rushing about? Sometimes Hashem makes His will so clear, His involvement so apparent, that things happen with a feeling of rushed energy. It's like water coming from a tap. When the water flows from the mountains it cascades with unhindered power, with purity teeming with life, but then it slows down through pipes and faucets until it reaches us with much less power.

When Hashem's shefa-influence- starts at its origin, it flows hot and with power, without any distractions. We don't even have time to comprehend what is happening; its flow is alive and vibrant.

As a Zeidy I can share an example all will understand. The first kiss you give a baby grandchild you haven't seen in a long while is on fire, without thought or reckoning. Only later do you start to think about your reactions. Grasping the primordial immediacy of Hashem's mitzvos, without any interceding human involvement is what Pesach is about. It is the origin of all that flows into our lives; nothing can interrupt the current of Hashem's love that flows from His wellsprings in untarnished purity.

The Rebbe tells us that the sense of Hashem's giving becomes compromised with each human intervention. The closer one is to the reservoir of kedusha, the more

heated it is, the more real and alive. The fire losses its bren when we allow in human sophistry.

When baking matzah, as long as you are working the dough it doesn't become chometz, but once you relent then the ability to become chometz becomes a danger; the stillness can rise to swollen emptiness. The original energy continues as long as you are feeling the warmth of doing the mitzvah, therefore you remain connected with Hashem. Once the energy dissipates and lays dormant, then the connection is severed.

This then is the secret of matzahs: don't let them become the product of *yishuv*, of man's understanding; just roll them out and throw them into the fire; make them with a bren.

The Rebbe tells us that this golus is like a seed in the ground. We feel alone and removed from everything we thought was true and wholesome.

A seed belongs to a great tree; then he finds himself in the dark cold earth all alone. There is nothing more lost than that seed. He wonders what happened. I was with that great tree and now all is lost, but in truth he is the start of a new tree.

This is a metaphor for the Yid in golus. He sometimes feels so alone, wondering why he is here without the protection of the previous tree branches. Hashem knows this; it is the secret of our eternity, for within us is that original birth, the clarity of Hashem's warmth, and if we but hold on, we will thrive, soon becoming the next tree. Keeping the old bren alive will nurture this growth.

May we all see a leibedige Pesach with true fire and love for all Hashem has granted us.

The remedy for stiff necks

By Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

Some will say it comes with age, others will tell you that it can happen to anyone. No matter; when it hurts, it hurts big time. I am talking of the neck. If you are like me, (and I hope in this regard no one is!) you might have experienced exactly how painful a stiff neck can be. You will wake up in the middle of the night, or it can sometimes happen during the day; there is a sudden excruciating pain that words are powerless to describe. I am not talking of a simple pain in the neck (a title many a parent will bestow upon their offspring, bless them). No, this takes pain to a new level, one that encompasses your whole being. You can't just stand up and take a few pills; you can't stand, period! Every fibre of your mind is throbbing incessantly. There is actually a simple way out of this physical impasse. If you just take a breath, sit down, and slowly, very slowly allow your head to move down,

Sometimes in the chaos that passes for Yom Tov preparations we lose sight of what it's all about.

then to the side, you will experience a miracle. Because as you move you will feel the grasp of the pain is abating; within minutes all that harrowing anguish will be just a fading memory. The secret is that you have to relax enough to let your tense muscles calm down. When first struck, you become even tenser. This merely exacerbates your pain, so the only way out of this cycle is to relax those muscles. Breathing in slowly and moving very calmly all helps to restore one to the status quo ante. You can sing a brocha to Hashem for releasing you out from the tension that had just moments before enveloped your whole being.

Such tension is endemic in our world; we have so much on our minds, and as age

creeps up, our bodies begin to rebel. I share these medical asides because we are all in the throes of Pesach preparations. Surely a recipe for tension! However, there is more to it than a quick fix to any stiff neck.

Pesach is about removing the spiritual walls we build around us. We often fill our space with so much pain and difficulty that we can't seem to flee from the anguish. The Egyptian redemption didn't occur in a one-off vacuum of time; it's happening today as well. Every neshomah experiences moments of bondage; if we keep our focus, we can find personal deliverance.

The first step is to calm down and catch one's breath. There is a cacophony of noise that sometimes monopolises our minds. We can't think straight, the pain of our circumstances seems overpowering. The bills are coming through the door, the kids are having problems in school and we can't seem to find the right friends. All this builds up, we lose the words to articulate our situation and often as not, we fear to burden those we love. The intensity of the pain grabs our soul, and there is a searing sense of hurt that rushes over us.

Then we are given a gift from Hashem, a moment in time which offers us hope. Pesach is such a huge bequest from on high, we just need to realize it. Sometimes in the chaos that passes for Yom Tov preparations, we lose sight of what it's all about. As we clean what we have just finished cleaning, for what seems to be the hundredth time, we should think of all the recesses of our souls that need a similar operation. As the plans for Yom Tov crystallize and new plans are set in motion, perhaps we can learn to accept that in our inner lives there may well be a need to change certain fixtures as well.

When I was a Bochor I had the merit to spend every Pesach at the table of the Bobover Rebbe Rav Shloma Ztl. His every move in those days before the Sedorim offered one a passport out of the confines of one's personal Egypt. His ability to bring life to each nuance of Yom Tov preparations is legendary. As we baked Matzos Erev Yom Tov you could actually sense how spiritual hope was being breathed into our hearts. The singing and the intense pace were instrumental in freeing us from the confines of the everyday problems with which were beset. I often watched his son, The Rebbe Rav Naftali Ztl, as he swept into Yom Tov. His was a huge neshomah, one that we will never begin to understand. Single handedly he carried the entire burden of what was then a fledgling community soaked in debt and untold problems. His daily experience was filled with the worry of how the Mosdos would survive, and each

day brought new- and huge- dilemmas. Yet his was a service to Hashem that was beyond any normal understanding. It seemed that with each added problem his spiritual strength became more profound. What would have crushed any other person seemed to just gently rest on his slight but holy shoulders. It wasn't that he didn't realize the enormity of what he carried, but he saw it all as Hashem's special task that was granted him after the horrors of the Holocaust. Part of his preparation for Pesach was the facilitation of the selling of Chometz. People from all strata of the community would come to make him their agent in this halachic task. I was amongst those throngs of individuals; even as a Rav of a community I would turn to him to act for me in this way. I always felt that visiting him so close to Yom Tov was integral to the observance of the festival. His sweet smile was always there for me, and his advice cherished. In those days I was involved in running a yeshiva that was the first to offer special education for Heimishe adolescent boys and our debts were huge. I always felt that just by selling my chometz through Rav Naftali I unloaded the worry that came with my position. His voice just made one feel better, and after all, his burdens dwarfed mine. Alas, I no longer have his calming brochas to help me through these stiff-necked times, but I have his memory. It is from such holy souls that we can learn so much.

The Torah speaks of Hashem calling us "a stiff necked people." This can mean that we are sometimes so racked with pain that we can't lift our heads to see what possibilities await us. Our Tzadikim give us an eternal lesson, that with calm hope the discomfort can disappear

Smoothing over the cracks

By Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita

Pesach is built on memories, both individual and communal. We are meant to remember so we can direct our future, but sometimes it seems we get caught in life's headlights and are blinded by the oncoming traffic.

Many wonderful Yidden have shared with me a sense of despair whilst preparing for this special Yom Tov. There is so much to learn, so many ideas to absorb. Haggados fly off the shelves, all speaking wonderful truths. That's before the children come home with their thick handwritten volumes of Pesach notes that must all be read out loud, and rightfully complemented.

All this can cause a severe case of brain freeze; too much information can make for zero absorption. I have eaten a fair share of Afikomen in my time and have picked up a few pointers. My advice is usually the same to all, and that includes myself!

Each Pesach we should focus on one aspect of this wondrous time, and just work on that which speaks about that concept. We mere mortals can't always multitask spiritually; our minds aren't able to traverse too many concepts at once. If we find one main theme that resonates with our neshoma at a particular time and place, then we should take advantage of this message and internalise a new aspect in our avodas Hashem.

"Permit me to share some personal remembrances that are my own present focus for this year's Pesach."

"Gluzpapier." Now that's a word to conjure with. Let it slide around in your mouth, get

it to trip off your tongue. Gluzpapier is a word that has its own rasping dignity. What on earth is it? In its definition lies a story. Many years ago, it must have been in the early sixties, I was learning in the Bobover Yeshiva which was then located in Crown Heights. Two days after Purim the Rav zt'l called in a few of us for an important mission. Out of the Rav's drawer came a list; it was the famous Pesach list. I say "famous" because on it was enumerated all the tasks that had to be completed before Yom Tov, and just such a list had been made for generations. Given that in Bobov most of the Bochurim stayed with the Rav for the Sedorim, and that all the cleaning, cooking and matzo baking took place under the yeshiva's auspices, you can begin to understand how long, yet vital, this list was. I was in charge of procuring necessary supplies. This was basically because I was the only native English speaker at the time. So in his usual detailed manner the Rav started reading off the shopping list. Rubin would note down everything in English and so we would soon have a bilingual set of orders. The Rav then came to the very important item that was almost at the top of his paper, "Gluzpapier". Right, thought I, but what in the world is gluzpapier? I cleared my voice "Uh Rebbe, vos is dus Gluzpapier?" "Rebbe, what is this Gluzpapier?" This was said with great timidity, I wasn't all that keen on letting everyone find out that I wasn't the all-knowing Yankee prodigy everyone thought I was. The Rav looked up at me with his kind smile. "Gluzpapier" he then went into a sort of demonstration of what the said item was.

My mind was now frozen. I couldn't even tell you my name. Gluzpapier you know? Sure I do, but I didn't. Others were called into the room. Gluzpapier... Gluzpapier... On it went, everyone looking at me as if I had descended from Mars. Who doesn't know what gluzpapier is? Rubin for one! All this time the Rav looked embarrassed for me. His poor Americana Talmid (student) was catching it from all sides. Finally, one youngster came onto the scene, he listened for but a moment and then took a deep self-important breath and announced: "Gluzpapier is sandpaper!" Silence hung in the room, Rubin bowed his head in defeat. It was obvious; gluzpapier was sandpaper. How simple.

Now you may ask why sandpaper was so vital for the Pesachdika experience. Its main role was to smoothen out the rolling pins used during the baking of the matzos. For those who are even poorer D.I.Y experts than me, the sandpaper rubs away any trace of embedded dough during the process, and so the rolling pins become as smooth as new after every such cleaning. Why am I going on so much about sandpaper? Well it got me to thinking about the entire Pesach and its preparations.

We are experiencing a time where some of our young are being lost, getting caught up in the creeping lure of darkness that is served up through the ether of the technological explosion that is all around us.

Approaching these youngsters must be done with deftness and love. Our generation just doesn't respond to abrasiveness. There was a time when people were living in a different environment, and slapping a child was part of growing up. We are a weakened generation, and our children need a different approach.

When I went to the shop to buy that sandpaper way back then, I was asked for what purpose it was going to be used. I was shown a whole array of samples, some coarse and others fine. When hearing what my purpose was, I was told to buy a fine grade paper, one that would be gentle. The rolling pins we were using weren't rough; they just needed a gentle cleansing.

A Yiddishe neshoma is a very precious creation; abrasiveness just tears it, instead of softly cleansing it. So many of us are encrusted with crumbs of insecurity and self-doubt. Our young are caught in a vortex of negativity. Pesach is the time when we each can redefine our goals, retrace where we come from. Shared family moments are brought to new heights when we create an ambience of inclusiveness and love.

Don't make this moment of opportunity into a harsh reminder of past mistakes. Let the story of the Haggadah flow, let the food and drink bring back the warmth that abides in every soul, and in time the small crevices that need smoothing will find the correct Gluzpapier that will offer a healing balm.

The gain from the pain

By Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita

It happened again, just last night, and if it wasn't that I said we should sort this out last year, well I wouldn't be upset. But I did say something, or I think I did, yet the moment came and everything was just as it has always been. I am talking about the Pesachdik counter tops that are taken out of the garage once a year and never seem to fit where we think they were last year. These laminated boards once fitted perfectly, and still would if we only remembered where they go. Of course, we never do remember, and so a strange ballet takes place in the kitchen with family participants walking about with their boards trying to place them in their correct place. We try this without Bubbie's attendance; after all she has been working so hard and now is the time for us boys to shine. Sadly, we always mess up, and in the end it's her perfect eye that sorts things out amidst the chaos.

We are living in difficult times; pieces of life seem to be out of place and no matter how much we try nothing seems to fit. It just doesn't make sense, we are trying so hard, sending our young to the best schools, davening in good shuls, learning the Daf, and so much more, yet, we are weighed down with so much that doesn't fit.

About thirty-five years ago we lived in Flatbush Brooklyn, on Bedford Avenue. I was then the Rav of a small Beis Medrash and every day I walked down Bedford Avenue from my home to the shteibl. I passed the house where last Shabbos seven sweet holy neshomas were taken from us in a fire. Obviously, all those years ago that family didn't live there, but as all Yidden, I feel bound to them in their tzores. Seven kinderlach, smiles that will never be seen again, nachas lost for all eternity. I can't stop thinking of them. How can this have happened? How much more pain can Klal Yisroel endure?

We have lived in Golus for thousands of years and have endured every sort of

hardship, yet Moshiach has not yet arrived; the pain keeps on building.

I recently learnt something from the Kedushas Tzion of Bobov ztl. He writes on the Haggadah that when we come to the wicked son it tells us:

“What does the wicked son say? "What is this service to you?" "To you and not to him. He has excluded himself, demonstrating his heresy. You too - set his teeth on edge - and say to him, "It is because of this that Hashem did this to me when I left Egypt." "To me," and not to him; were he there, he would not have been redeemed.”

The Rebbe asks several questions on this, firstly where does it say he doesn't believe in Hashem? He seems to be saying that he doesn't want to take part in the evening's celebration, and if he is in fact wicked, why is not being redeemed such a big problem?

It seems he would have been happy to stay in Egypt and enjoy the material life.

In answer the Rebbe tells us in part that long before Mitzrayim Avrohom Avinu had been told that his children would be enslaved for four hundred years. The situation changed when the Egyptians went beyond the call of duty and endeavoured to break the Yidden in spirit by ruthless disregard. They cast their children into the Nile, bathed in their blood and more. This wasn't part of the decree, so why did Hashem allow it?

Some of the Mefarshim explain that the original decree was for an exile of 400 years. In the end, the Jews were in Egypt for only 210 years.

It was actually the intensity of their suffering that facilitated their premature emancipation. Chazal tell us that one punishes a loved one a little at a time; upon an enemy one brings to bear the full force of his misdeed in one fell swoop.

The plan was for the Yidden to be in Mitzrayim for 400 years, but their suffering would have been much less harsh. However, because the Jews in Egypt descended quickly into pagan worship it was calculated that if they stayed any longer they would be beyond all help.

There was no choice but to save them and hasten their departure. Unfortunately, this meant that the suffering, although for a shorter time, would have to be harsher.

The wicked son at the seder is actually saying, “Listen, I had no problem with worshipping idols, so why did I have to suffer harsher times just to save my

spirituality? It was not something that bothered me. After all, the Golus had become my persona; it had overtaken my inner self-image.”

From all this we learn one vital lesson: Yidden suffered greatly because they needed to get out of the Egyptian Golus as fast as possible. They accepted the pain to save their neshomas.

It’s been more than 2000 years that we have been in Golus; we have remained faithful to Hashem and accepted our lot with love. Yet, we have seen every nuance of torture and pain being inflicted upon us. The horror of those seven children is yet one more link in this history of anguish. No matter how we try, the pieces don’t seem to fit; the pain just does not stop; we can’t seem to cover all the hurt.

We can only pray that Hashem will free us from our present Golus quicker than first intended, so that we can come home to a rebuilt Yerusholayim and celebrate our true freedom without the cries of mothers who have lost their young, or brethren being beaten and abused.

May that time come speedily!

A leaven-sent pathway to Redemption

By Harav Rubin Shlita

It's started already, the hoovering at all hours, the throwing away of papers, the general pre-Pesach manic clean-out that touches every Yiddishe home. My main job is to stay out of the way and "do my room".

I recently heard how one particular fellow was asked to help in the cleaning and went on to create havoc through his ineptitude. His long-suffering wife requested that if he really wanted to help he should just leave the house. An hour later he returned and when asked why he came back so soon answered, "How long do you think I could help?" Most men feel like a fifth wheel in the Pesach cleaning campaign, and really should just stay out of trouble. Someone once said that if Chazal ruled that men make Pesach and women the Succah, they both would start Erev Pesach!

One positive outcome of this "clean your room" maneuver is that I discover scraps of articles that I have cut out for future reference. I love storing these things away but can never find them later. I came across just such a nugget this week and want to share it with you. It was published anonymously in one of those popular self-help columns:

"A young lady confidently walked around the room while explaining stress management to an audience with a raised glass of water. Everyone knew she was going to ask the ultimate question: 'half empty or half full?!'... She fooled them all "How heavy is this glass of water?" she inquired with a smile. Answers called out ranged from 8 oz. to 20 oz. She replied: "The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it

for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I hold it for a day, you'll have to call an ambulance. In each case it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes." She continued, "and that's the way it is with stress. If we carry our burdens all the time, sooner or later, as the burdens become increasingly heavy, we won't be able to carry on."

As with the glass of water, you have to put it down for a while and rest before holding it again. When we're refreshed, we can carry on with the burden - holding stress longer and better each time practiced."

It is no easy task to carry life's baggage without it weighing you down to nothing. Torah Yidden have a window of opportunity that offers hope in this respect if we would only grasp it.

All the rushing about before Pesach, the scrubbing and cleaning, is perhaps meant to remind ourselves that we need to learn to let go of some of the stress that life throws our way. You may ask, how do you figure I can learn to de-stress when all Yom Tov seems to bring us is just that?

Guta Yidden used to teach that Pesach is the Rosh Hashanah of Emunah: the New Year of Klal Yisroel's ability to have faith in Hashem. As we became a nation through the miracles shown at Yetzias Mitzrayim, we were invested with a new and eternal faith in Hashem. This belief is now in our spiritual DNA and Pesach is the time to refuel our emunah cells. With this renewed faith in Hashem, much of the stress of life can be eliminated. If we don't take advantage of this moment, we face the danger that the stress will become the chometz that suffocates our future. Chometz is born from any substance that is allowed to stand unworked upon for too long. So much of what we see as life's burdens comes from allowing extraneous matter to gather in our hearts, festering there until it blocks all our emotions. Pesach is the moment to realise once again that we have the ability to cast off all this surplus material, and learn to have faith in Hashem's complete plan for us all.

No matter how much we run around before Yom Tov, and despite the difficulties involved, the night will arrive when we will all sit together, proclaiming the eternal truth "That Hashem is our Redeemer."

I believe that one of the greatest obstacles we face is that we have no faith in ourselves! We are convinced that we can't attain such spiritual heights given our daily

mundane reality, nor can we ever really be free of the human hypocrisy that often makes up much of our existence. Pesach saw a disparate group of slaves reach the highest level of holiness; that is their bequest to us!

We can leave behind the darkness of the stresses that drag us down and illuminate our inner souls with the candle of bedikas chometz. The only hindrance to achieving that goal is the self-imposed chometz of doubting ourselves.



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