

עדת אש קודש Adass Aish Kodesh

When it all Comes Together

Harav Y. R. Rubin

There are times, fleeting but real, when things seem to make perfect sense. Usually, we walk through life with a bit of a fog running through our minds. We try to be focused, but often as not, there are just too many voices jangling for attention. Events come and go at a dizzying speed, and we just aim to get through them safely while hoping we are doing the right thing. This is what passes for everyday survival.

But then there are those magic moments that stay within you forever. They are there to remind you who you can be and what you should aspire to.

Torah Yidden have lofty expectations. We work on polishing and perfecting our path to Hashem and try our best to be worthy of our name. Unfortunately, in the reality of our world, which is full of bank overdrafts, disappointments and angry letdowns, we can't always remember how holy we are. At such times, we should search through our memory bank of special times and reactivate our souls.

As a youngster, I had the merit to be at the seder of the Bobover Rebbe, zt"l, many times. Being so young, well, it was important, and yes, it gave me spiritual uplift, but I was immature and therefore didn't really understand how much I was witnessing. This is the nature of man; young people are meant to soak up experiences and only later can they truly weigh them for what they are.

We were all so far from that table in Brooklyn as we sang dayeinu, again and again, catching a glimpse of how Hashem showers us with so much love.

To say that the Bobover seder table was regal would be an understatement. Royalty in Torah terms goes beyond mere lustre. Yes, the Rav's table shone with its white tablecloths and sparkling silver. There was even one huge cup that was used for the Cup of Eliyahu that purportedly once sat on the table of the Emperor Franz Joseph. Nevertheless, there were jewels far beyond the worth of the silver and white cloths that made up that table.



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First and foremost was the Rav himself, whose bearing carried the majesty of holy generations of Torah scholars. Then there were his children, the next link of leaders who, from birth, were taught by example what it means to give oneself over to one's brethren. There were the hundreds of students, mostly children of holocaust survivors, who had become proud carriers of Torah traditions as taught by their Rebbe. They were the first ones to bring these lessons to new vistas - the streets of America, England and Israel, to places that had not seen these living lessons and were not always accepting of their unique message.

But like all gatherings, it was not just one facet that made it what it was. Rather, it was the combination of all its parts that created an atmosphere so unique that it was truly otherworldly.

Before the seder, the Rav would closet himself in to his office to prepare which matzos he would use for the seder. All these matzos had been baked during the hours before Yom Tov, under his strict yet joyous supervision. They were placed in a high cabinet in small piles, and it was from there that the Rav chose which would be used on this holy night. He would hum an ancient niggun as he went through the piles. Nobody was in the room except the few students who were charged with carrying the matzos to the table. I was fortunate to have had this opportunity, and as the Rav hummed, we sensed we were hearing something so special that we felt inadequate and not worthy to be there at all.

The Rav would then set out toward the beis medrash where the seder was held, streimel on his head and wearing two kittels, one his own, the other one that had been worn by his holy grandfather. As he entered the hall, a silence overtook the many guests. He walked (or rather strode, since the Rav always walked quickly) to the head of the table, took off the streimel, covered his head with his tallis, and soon we were all transported to a place where kedusha, joy and higher aspirations join hands.

I will never be able to recount how we felt at that seder, and its taste is indescribable. It is beyond the vocabulary of olam hazeh. The atmosphere was not merely sensed by one or two of our senses. It took over the entirety of each and every participant, hitting us at every level, totally enveloping us.

I remember one special moment that has never really left me, although it must have been well over sixty-five years ago.

Like all fathers, the Rav invited each of his children to ask the four questions that begin the haggada recital. His children were then all very young (except for HaRav Naftali Ztl, who had been born before the Churban). He asked his small daughter to come forward to give her rendition. The child was very young, hardly able to read. The Rav placed her on his lap, and with his holy finger pointed at each word in the haggada, said the questions with his child. Except, well, except that from the Rav's holy mouth, the questions took on a different meaning. He was asking why this galus, this long, difficult night, was different from all other nights. Why was the galus we were living in so much darker, longer and bitterer? In all other times, our galus was limited to a certain time. Here it seems to go on forever.

Tears were now rolling down the Rav's silver beard, and he wept with the memories of all that he had seen and witnessed. Yet, his child was in his arms, and this was the answer to everything.

Later, as he would sing Dayeinu, it felt as if all the shackles of the galus were thrown away. He flung his arms apart with joy, "And if we came to Mount Sinai and did not receive the Torah....dayeinu, it would be enough to thank You!" Verse followed verse, we were going out of the Egyptian bondage that we each carried, we were striding through the Red Sea, dayeinu, again and again.

The Rav swooped and swayed; his son, Rav Naftulsha Ztl, seemed to be transported to another world. We were all so far from that table in Brooklyn as we sang dayeinu, again and again, catching a glimpse of how Hashem showers us with so much love.

Well, years fly by, faster than we ever thought possible and once I was visiting Eretz Yisrael to attend a family chasanah. My Rebbetzin AH sent word that someone wanted very much to talk to me.

I went out to the reception area to find her with a stranger. She introduced herself as the Bobover Rebbe's daughter and said that she wanted to thank me for something I had written about the Rav.

I was humbled by her remarks, but then she said something that opened up a special door in my mind. This daughter of the Rav is a well-known rebbetzin who has brought up generations of Torah teachers. Unfortunately, she has seen much pain and tragedy as well. She has taken those painful experiences and used them to give chizuk to thousands of others, so I am not divulging anything private here. She told me that what gave her strength during those difficulties was the stories and living faith she saw from her holy father. He would tell his children faith-enduring stories for hours on end, stories of Torah greatness, Jewish strength, and Hashem's love for his people. This was what gave her the ability to weather all of life's hardships – stories told from the heart to the heart, tales that went beyond all simple plot lines or fancy endings.

I remember some of those stories too. They did give so much to those who listened, and became the foundation stone for much of what I feel today. And as I heard her saying this, I remembered something she couldn't have recalled. She was that young child on her father's knee. It was to her that he wept about the galus, and to her that he sang about Hashem's ultimate gifts that are showered upon us to this very day.

So you see, dear readers, stories are always being written, and we are the scribes of those that will be told tomorrow. Let them be stories of wonder, of joyous faith. Let Dayeinu be the stepping-stone for our acceptance, and let the galus finally end with our glorious song.