

chosen words

Pesach Reflections

Making it Real

Pesach presents a tough challenge. We are directed to feel as if we—sitting before our gleaming wine glasses, catching the wafting scent of the dinner awaiting us, enjoying our families and friends—we, the most comfortable, well sustained generation in recent history, were slaves in Egypt.

Of course, Pesach presents many other tough challenges as well. It's phenomenally expensive. It requires weeks of arduous preparation—scrupulous cleaning, shopping, kashering. Running the Seder requires learning and review so that its many rituals can be properly discharged. Even in days of old, Pesach required a huge expenditure of time and toil, culminating in a pilgrimage to the Beis Hamikdash to eat the korban Pesach.

All of these requirements may start to feel excessive. In fact, Sefer Hachinuch, in delineating the mitzvos of Pesach, warns: "My son, do not object and ask: 'Why did Hashem command so many mitzvos to remember this miracle? Would not one remembrance be enough to place this thing in our minds and keep it from being forgotten by our children?' Your objection in this does not stem from wisdom...."

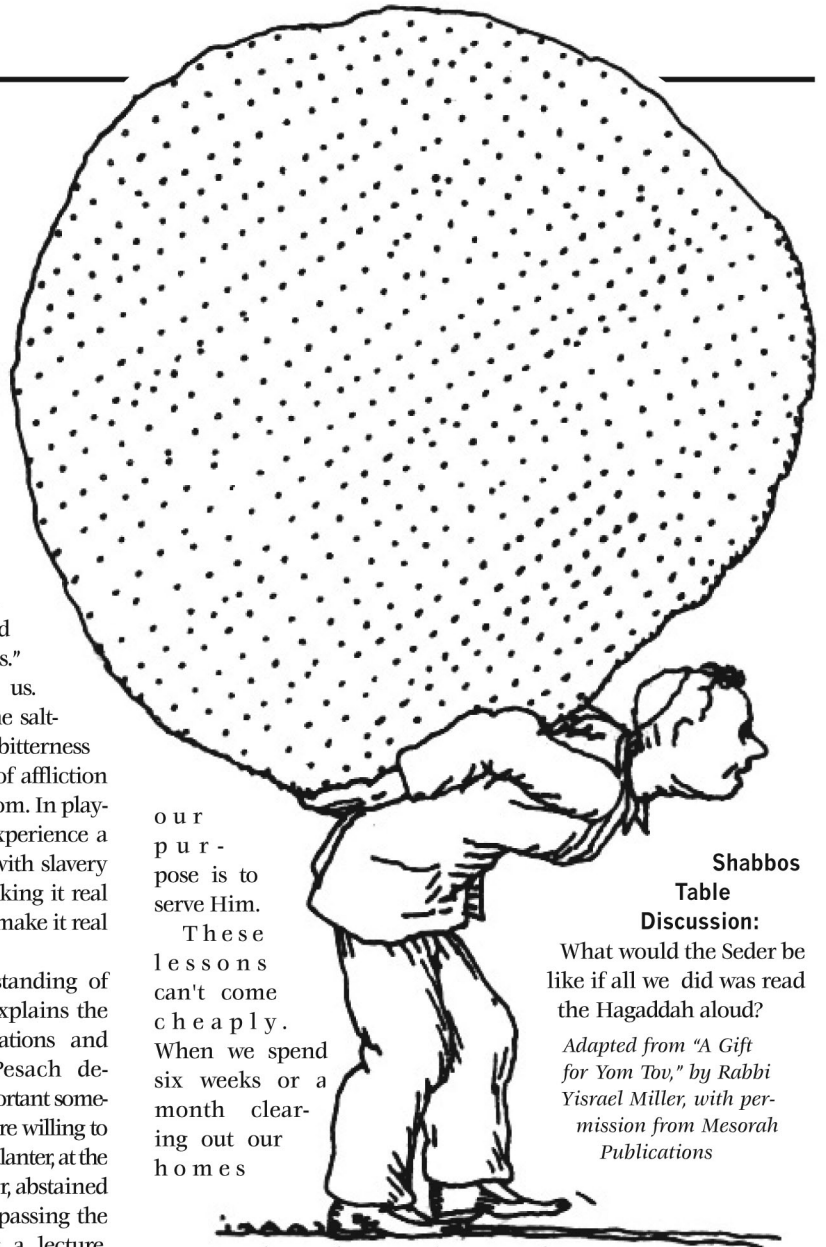
Where, then, is the wisdom in this plethora of Pesach obligations? The wisdom is in Hashem's perfect understanding of how we operate. The central purpose of Pesach is to imprint in our children's hearts the core of our belief in Hashem and His bond with Klal Yisrael. This lesson cannot be conveyed in words alone.

For us to succeed, we have to make ourselves feel the yoke of slavery and joy of redemption.

To achieve this, we follow the advice of Chazal: "Ha'adam nifal lefi pe'ulosav," "A human being is shaped by his own actions." Our actions change us. Therefore, we taste the salt-water of tears, the bitterness of slavery, the bread of affliction and the wine of freedom. In playing these roles, we experience a sensory connection with slavery and salvation. By making it real for ourselves, we can make it real for our children.

The same understanding of the human psyche explains the multitude of preparations and expenditures that Pesach demands. The more important something is, the more we are willing to pay for it. Rav Yisrael Salanter, at the beginning of his career, abstained from the custom of "passing the hat" after delivering a lecture. He felt it demeaned Torah. Later, however, he changed his mind, observing that when people pay to hear words of Torah, they value them more.

If Pesach were nothing more than a family dinner with a few glasses of wine, its impact would eventually dwindle to become commensurate with that minor expenditure. But Pesach can't be so quickly discharged, because it forms the central theme of a Jew's life. It's everything to us; testimony that Hashem chose Klal Yisrael as His own people, that He loves us and rescues us from distress, that



our purpose is to serve Him.

These lessons can't come cheaply. When we spend six weeks or a month clearing out our homes

Shabbos Table Discussion:

What would the Seder be like if all we did was read the Hagaddah aloud?

Adapted from "A Gift for Yom Tov," by Rabbi Yisrael Miller, with permission from Mesorah Publications

"The work we put into Pesach is what makes Pesach work."

and our lives, making a place for Pesach, we teach ourselves just how important Pesach really is. Through the preparations and the rituals together, we create a force that has the power to guarantee our posterity. This Yom Tov is a lot of work. It has to be, because this Yom Tov is our best chance to accomplish our essential task: to forge our children into links in the chain, to impress upon their souls a living, vital comprehension of the eternal bond between Hashem and Klal Yisrael.



Published by

The Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation

The Seder—New and Improved

Of all the timeless rituals, the Seder is certainly near the top of the list for Jewish families everywhere. Many people who are generations removed from traditional observances still conduct a Seder, using the tunes and traditions they learned at their grandparents' table.

For those who adhere to the halachic guidelines of the Seder, there is also a strong sense of tradition. Do you use potatoes for carpas, or parsley? How do you set up your Seder plate? The desire to uphold family traditions is strong.

Surprisingly, however, the very structure of the Seder sends us a different message. The Seder is designed for awakenings and surprises. The question-and-answer format illustrates this most eloquently. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz maintains that over-familiarity with the story of the

Exodus can eventually deflate the teaching power of the Seder.

The Torah recognizes this danger in many areas. For instance, in a verse in Yechezkel that describes visiting the Third Beis Hamikdash, we are told that people will be required to exit from the gate opposite the one from

which they entered. The reason, according to Rav Yaakov Emden, is that they shouldn't, through over-familiarity, lose their sense of awe. Rav Chaim adds that even manna, the most sublime of foods, became disgusting to the Jews when they received it each and every day.

To prevent boredom and detachment from infecting the Seder, Chazal determined that we must ask, not tell; show, not lecture. The Hagaddah and the Seder rituals are indeed set down for us and not subject to revision. But the four questions

teach us to keep the atmosphere open for discussion. Even if you serve the same boiled chicken your grandmother served, and sing the same Chad Gadya your zaidy sang, each Seder can be new.

By adopting this approach, we can develop in ourselves the kind of awareness that keeps all our learning, davening and mitzvos fresh and alive. Each is inherently precious, like a dia-

mond. But like a diamond, we only appreciate the full beauty when we study it from different angles, relishing the distinct light that emanates from each new facet.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

What are some ways to keep your Seder interesting?

Adapted from "The Hagaddah of the Roshei Yeshivah," with permission from Mesorah Publications

Better Relationships Much Obligated

When someone rescues us from a desperate situation, our normal reaction is one of gratitude. So, it's logical that the Seder includes Hallel, a series of prayers expressing our love and gratitude toward Hashem. "Therefore it is incumbent upon us to give thanks and praise to the One who did all these wonders for us," we recite.

Yet gratitude is not an easy emotion for many people to find within themselves. Our parents pour their souls into raising us, and we think, "It's their responsibility." Our employers or customers put bread on our table and we think, "They're getting what they pay for." And that's just on the human level. How often do we consider the gift of a functioning body, an intelligent mind, a universe that sustains life?

Gratitude's downside is that it creates a sense of obligation. Acknowledging the benefits we receive entails a sense of obligation to our benefactor. And that, for many people, is a feeling to be avoided.

On Pesach, however, we are prodded to bring that sense of obligation to the very forefront of our consciousness. "Look at what Hashem has done for us!" Hallel urges us. But this sense of obligation is more than just thank you. It's the foundation of the freedom that Pesach celebrates. Hashem set us free because we were willing to accept our obligations to Him. He took us out of Egypt to become His nation. For the Jewish people, freedom, gratitude and obligation are all intertwined, creating a three-ply cord that connects us firmly to Hashem.

Shabbos Table Discussion:

What is the result of freedom without obligation?

Adapted from "Living Each Day," by Rabbi Avraham J. Twerski, with permission from Mesorah Publications

Index Reference 443



Chosen Words is a biweekly publication of the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation

HaRav Shmuel Kamenetsky, shlita, Chairman Rabbinical Board
Rav Naftoli Jaeger, shlita, Rabbinical Editorial Supervisor
Michael Rothschild, Director
361 Spook Rock Road
Suffern, NY 10901

Chosen Words
Editor: Shaindy Appelbaum
Writer: Chana Nestlebaum
Graphic Artist: Heidi Ort
Illustrator: Giora Carmi

Dedications

לע"נ
ששנה וויטא בת
ר' ישראל הלוי ע"ה
Mrs. Shoshana Appelbaum a"h
נלב"ע כא' ניסן
שביעי של פסח תשנ"א
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

We gratefully acknowledge our generous sponsors for making this publication possible.

This year, Make Sefirah Count!

What does it take to change oneself? This dynamic tape series, delivered in a dynamic and highly motivational style, gives listeners a potent catalyst for embarking upon their own 49-day journey. Get a glimpse of the heights you can reach, and the inspiration to start your climb.

Volumes I and II of "Learning Holiness" are available now!

Don't Delay, Order today!
Call (800) 352-3505 Ext.116