

Preparation

March - April 2010

הכנה

Nisan 5770

**Kehillat
Chovevei
Tzion**

**Kehillat Chovevei Tzion
Route 25A at Nicolls Road
P.O. Box 544
East Setauket, NY 11733
(631) 689-0257**

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***A Kehillah For Those
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***Celebrating The Start
Of Our Seventeenth Year!***



**Preparing
to
Celebrate
Pesach
at
Kehillat
Chovevei
Tzion**



5770

SCHEDULE
OF
PASSOVER
SERVICES

KEHILLAT
CHOVEVEI
TZION



12 NISAN

SHABBAT HaGADOL *

FRIDAY MARCH 26 6:00 PM 6:52 PM

SATURDAY MARCH 27 9:00 AM

Lunch 'n Learn: With Scholar-in-Residence Rabbi Moshe Edelman

* **Happy Anniversary to the entire Kehillah Mishpacha!**

14 NISAN

EREV PESACH

SUNDAY MARCH 28

After dark, *Bedikat Chometz* (Search for Chometz) is conducted

MONDAY MARCH 29

Siyyum HaBachor 6:45 AM

Dispose of all *Chometz* by 11:55 AM

15 NISAN

FIRST DAY PESACH

MONDAY MARCH 29 6:30 PM 6:55 PM

TUESDAY MARCH 30 9:00 AM

16 NISAN

SECOND DAY PESACH

TUESDAY MARCH 30 6:30 PM 7:55 PM

WEDNESDAY MARCH 31 9:00 AM

19 NISAN

SHABBAT CHOL HAMOED

FRIDAY APRIL 2 6:00 PM 7:00 PM

SATURDAY APRIL 3 9:00 AM

21 NISAN

SEVENTH DAY PESACH

SUNDAY APRIL 4 6:45 PM 7:02 PM

MONDAY APRIL 5 9:00 AM

22 NISAN

EIGHTH DAY PESACH

MONDAY APRIL 5 6:45 PM 8:02 PM

TUESDAY APRIL 6 9:00 AM

(INCLUDING YIZKOR)

PESACH ENDS TUESDAY EVENING AT 8:03 PM

26 NISAN

SHABBAT SHEMINI

FRIDAY APRIL 9 6:00 PM 7:07 PM

SATURDAY APRIL 10 9:00 AM

ROSH CHODESH IYAR

WEDNESDAY APRIL 14 - THURSDAY APRIL 15

*Celebrating, studying and growing together as a community of the committed, the extended member families of **Kehillat Chovevei Zion** will again come together this year, for its compelling sixteenth year, in its Setauket Beit Midrash for the Pesach holiday period. The KCT Ritual Committee is delighted to provide you with this compendium for self-study, for family and individual use, in preparation for the upcoming holiday.*

Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place. Shmot 13:3

Chag Sameach !

... Mechirat Chometz

No matter how hard you try to remove the *chometz*, the job isn't quite complete until the "paperwork" is done. Kehillat Chovevei Zion has arranged with Rabbi William Berman to serve as our *shaliach* in selling the *chometz* on the morning of Monday, March 29. Accordingly, the change in ownership takes effect at precisely 11:55 AM Monday morning. For your convenience, a form is included along with this booklet, which you may complete, attaching your donation for the *Ma'ot Chitim* Fund and send along to Charlie Mann at the address shown on the form, being sure to arrange for him to receive it **no later than Friday, March 26.** ~K~

... The KCT Memorial Wall

In the KCT Beit Midrash, the Memorial Wall represents the *Kehillah's* commemoration of our loved ones. Each plaque contains the name of the person recalled, in Hebrew and English, and the date of death in both the secular and Hebrew calendars. *Yahrzeit* lamps on each side of the plaque are lit during the week of the appropriate date and for *Yizkor*. New additions to the Memorial Panel are specially dedicated at the next *Yizkor* service following placement, and each is individually remembered at every *Yizkor* service that follows. Please let us know if you'd like to order a plaque or if you have any questions about the Memorial Wall. ~K~

... The Kehillah Remembers

The *Yizkor* service is recited on the morning of the the last day of Pesach, Tuesday April 6. The Kehillah remembers with great fondness and respect all the loved ones whom we have individually lost

over the years and those whose names have been inscribed in the Kehillah's Book of Remembrance, which will be available at services. *Yizkor* is at once both a collective experience and an individual one, and is the timeless prayer of personal memory of the Jewish people. *Yizkor* is recited on Yom Kippur, on Shmini Atzeret, and then again on the last day of each of Pesach and Shavuot. ~K~

... Tzedakah and Yizkor

Pesach offers two opportunities for tzedakah and gemillut chesed specifically associated with the spirit of this most unique of holiday celebrations . . . the Ma'ot Chitim donation to feed the hungry at the start of the holiday, and the yizkor donation associated with remembering and sanctifying the memories of departed family members.

The essence of *Yizkor* is an act of *tzedakah*, a contribution made on behalf of loved ones, of which the *Kodosh Baruchu* takes note, to earn merit for the deceased in His eyes. Our Kehillah has made a significant, ever-growing commitment to *tzedakah* over the years. We encourage you, as you plan your individual *tzedakot*, for whatever contributions are within your means and family custom, to consider **Kehillat Chovevei Zion** as a worthy beneficiary of your generosity and support at this time and throughout the year. ~K~

Special occasion coming up? Please ask us about sponsoring the Kiddush on a Shabbat or a Yom Tov morning.



.... Helping Hands for Pesach

M'YAD L'YAD was founded in 1998 to serve the poor, the disabled, the elderly, and others in need on Long Island and in the New York metropolitan area. Volunteer sponsors are paired with recipients to provide assistance beyond the basic necessities, to enhance the lives of those in need. In keeping with one of the highest ideals of charitable giving within Judaism, our donors' and recipients' identities remain anonymous, thus maintaining the privacy and dignity of those participating.



KCT is an organizational sponsor and many of our families and individuals have become sponsors as well. Coming into Pesach would be a wonderful time for you to join these families in becoming a sponsor yourself . . . easy enough to do, by contacting Amy Engelberg at 471-8414 for more information, or by e-mail to MyadLyad@KCT.org. Contributions may be sent to KCT for forwarding or directly to M'YAD L'YAD at 74 Hauppauge Road, Commack NY 11725. ~K~

.... The Spring Cleaning Ritual

Extracted from a poem by Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, the rabbi of Temple Beth Or of the Deaf in New York City

"Spring Cleaning Ritual on the Eve of the Full Moon Nisan" is a long and descriptive poem which concludes with these words:

Some destroy Hametz with fire
others throw it to the wind
others toss it to the sea.

Look deep for the Hametz
which still gives you pleasure
and cast it to the burning.

When all the looking is done we say:
All that rises up bitter
All that rises up prideful
All that rises up in old ways no longer fruitful
All Hametz still in my possession but unknown to me

which I have not seen nor disposed of
may it find common grave
with the dust of the earth

Amen, Amen Selah . . .

~K~



.... Preparation Through Study

Drawn from various sources, ancient, historic and modern, the following section of personal study materials is presented by the editors with a view toward stimulating thought, study, discussion, agreement and disagreement, and evaluation approaching and throughout the days of Pesach.

.... The Higher Meanings of Chametz

The Torah tells us that before the holiday of Pesach we are to remove all *Chametz* from our dwelling places - we are not to see *Chametz*, own *Chametz*, or derive benefit from *Chametz*.

The rabbis tell us that there are two ways by which we comply with these laws:

1st - by *byur* - destroying the *Chametz* by burning;
and

2nd by *bitul* - nullification - any *Chametz* that we have not found is nullified - considered as dust of the earth.

The rabbi also teach that the term *Chametz* has a higher meaning than just the physical leavened

products that must be removed before Pesach. Based on the verse in the Torah that says: - *you shall destroy [by burning] the evil that is in your midst* - the rabbis tell us that the removal of *Chametz* also involves the removal of evil from the Jewish heart and the Jewish people.

Specifically, the evil referred to is arrogance and pride. As leavened products have the ability to rise - to get puffed up, so does the human disposition. In preparation for Pesach we remove the physical *Chametz*. The rabbis teach is also the time to remove arrogance from our individual and collective souls.

How should this be done?? The rabbis teach that we should strive for *byur* total destruction of the evil inclination that resides in each of us. However, being realistic, it is clear that this will never be achieved - so we must settle for *bitul* the realization that arrogance and pride is part of each of us and humankind in general - and the attempt to nullify - to go to a higher level while accepting our human imperfections.

May each of us have a Pesach that is both *kasher* and *samach* and free from physical and spiritual *Chametz*.
~K~

.... What To Wear?

Excerpted from the "Guide to Jewish Religious Practice" by Rabbi Isaac Klein.

Whereas the rabbis normally discouraged displays of affluence, in the case of the Seder they urged that the table should be set lavishly with the finest silver and dishes at one's disposal (*O.H. 472:2; ibid. in Shneur Zalman of Lyady, Shulhan 'Arukh*). In many families it is customary for the chief celebrant to wear a white robe known as a Kittel (*sargenes* among German and Alsatian Jews). Many reasons have been given for this practice.

The Kittel is a festive garment that was worn in ancient times at all joyous celebrations. The High Priest wore white garments when officiating in the Temple of Jerusalem (*Lev. 16:4*), and wearing the Kittel gives the Seder the status of a sacred service in the Temple.

According to the kabbalists, white symbolizes the divine attributes of lovingkindness and mercy, *chesed v'rachamim*, and thus reminds us that the

Holy One showed lovingkindness and mercy to our ancestors in Egypt since not all of them were deserving of redemption. We should exhibit the same mercy and lovingkindness toward our fellow men. Hence the special emphasis on inviting guests who are in modest circumstances to the Seder (*Wahrman, Hagei Yisra'el Umo'adaw, pp. 147 f.*).

A strange interpretation of the practice maintains that the Kittel resembles a shroud and is donned as a precaution lest the celebration turn to revelry (*O.H. 472 in M.D. 3*).

Dr. Finkelstein, z"l, has suggested that the Kittel was an adaptation of the festive garment of Jerusalem in the days of the Second Temple. As a matter of fact, many of the practices connected with the Seder derive from the life of the Jews of that period, such as eating an egg and parsley, washing the hands before touching any food, and the reclining posture which becomes free men (copied from the Persians) (*Finkelstein, The Haggadah, p. iv*).
~K~

.... How Long is a Good Seder?

By Rabbi Barry Dov Lerner, a Conservative pulpit rabbi, currently President of the Foundation for Family Education

A "good" Seder is not measured by the amount of time spent reading the *Haggadah* and discussing the Exodus, or by the length of the meal. A "great" Seder is one in which everyone has a chance to participate, and using a good *Haggadah* will facilitate each member of your family and friends to take parts in the Seder appropriate to their age, Hebrew and English facility, interests, etc. It is also much easier to have "participatory" Seder when the *Haggadah* is more than just a text, even with an English translation. Select a *Haggadah* for the Seder that has a variety of options for participation, and then select additional materials from the many different *Haggadot*, which are being published with special themes, from a vegetarian *Haggadah*, a feminist *Haggadah* or a kibbutz *Haggadah*. Don't forget that there are magnificent art *Haggadot* that have illustrations and reproductions of great Passover art from the last 1000 years.

For those who would prefer "a Bare Bones Basic Seder", we can thank Noam Zion for the following suggestion (from the Shalom Hartman Institute *Haggadah: A Different Night*.) He claims sections 1-17 in the list below, before the meal, should take

about an hour. However, it often occurs that once people “get into” a Seder, it can take longer; don’t cut off the discussion and readings too early!

Before the Meal . . .

1. Signposts of the Seder: **Kadesh Urchatz**
2. First Cup: **Kiddush**
3. Dips: **Karpas**
4. Breaking the Matza: **Yachatz**
5. The Story of the Matza: **Ha Lachma**
6. Four Questions: **Ma Nishtana**
7. Storytelling: “We Were Slaves”:
Avadeem Hayeenu
8. Four Children
9. The Promise: **V’hee She-am-da**
10. The Tale of the Wandering Jew
11. Ten Plagues
12. **Dayeinu**
13. Explaining **Pesch, Matza** and **Maror**
14. “In Every Generation”
15. Psalm 114: **Hallel**
16. Second Cup of Wine
17. Eating **Matza, Maror** and **Korech**

After the Meal . . .

18. **Afikoman**
19. Blessing after eating: **Barech**
20. Third Cup of Wine
21. Elijah’s Cup and opening the door
22. Fourth Cup of Wine
23. Seder Songs traditional and new
24. Next Year in Jerusalem:

La-Shana Haba-a B’Yerushalayim!
A Chag Kasher v’Sameach!

~K~

Four Cups or Five?

Written by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of the British Commonwealth since 1991, adapted from “Covenant & Conversation”, a collection of Rabbi Sacks’ parshiyot hashavua essays.

As a child, I used to be fascinated by the cup of Elijah at the Seder table. Would the prophet come when we opened the door after the meal? Would he be visible or invisible? Did the level of the wine go down, however imperceptibly? The idea of the prophet who did not die, but went to heaven in a chariot of fire (II Kings 2:11), and who would one day return to bring the good news of redemption was intensely dramatic. Only later did I discover the real

significance of Elijah's cup, and found, as so often, that the truth is no less moving than the stories we learned as children.

The Mishnah in *Pesachim* speaks of four cups of wine. These are the basic requirements of the Seder, and the community must ensure that even the poorest person has sufficient wine to drink these cups. According to the Talmud Yerushalmi, they represent the four stages of redemption at the beginning of our sedra. God assures Moses that despite the fact that his intervention with Pharaoh has initially made things worse, liberation will indeed come.

"Therefore, say to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.' "

In the Babylonian Talmud, however, there is the following strange statement: "The fifth cup: over this one completes Hallel and says Hallel Hagadol (Psalm 136, 'Gives thanks to the Lord, His love endures forever'). These are the words of Rabbi Tarfon."

Rashi is puzzled by these words. Thus far, the discussion has been about four cups, not five. He is therefore driven to the conclusion that the text is a scribal error. It should say, "the fourth cup." Rambam, however, accepts the text as it stands. After drinking the four cups and completing Hallel, he writes, "One may pour a fifth cup and say over it Hallel Hagadol This cup is not obligatory, unlike the four cups."

Ravad (Rabbi Avraham ibn Daud), a contemporary of Rambam, takes a slightly different view. For him it is a *mitzvah* to drink a fifth cup. There is a difference between *mitzvah* and *chovah*. The latter is an obligation, the former an act that, though not obligatory, constitutes a positive religious deed.

Two questions arise on the views of Rambam and Ravad. The first is: why does the Mishnah speak about four cups if there are in fact five? To this the answer is straightforward: The four cups are obligatory, unlike the fifth. That is why the community must provide the poor with the means of fulfilling their obligation, but they do not have to make

provisions for the fifth cup, which according to Rambam is optional, and according to Ravad is desirable but not absolutely necessary.

The second question seems stronger. When God speaks to Moses, He uses four expressions of deliverance, not five. Hence, the four cups. Asking this question, however, takes us back to the text at the beginning of our *sedra*. It is then that we discover, to our surprise, that there is in fact a fifth expression of deliverance. "And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord."

The drama of the fifth cup now becomes apparent. Pesach represents the start of the great journey of Jewish history - from slavery to freedom, Egypt to the Promised Land. What then became of it after the destruction of the Second Temple, the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion, the Hadrianic persecutions, and the long, tragic series of events that led to the greatest exile in Jewish history? Could Jews celebrate freedom under such circumstances?

The pathos of this question is evident in the opening words of the Seder: "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt." The very festival that spoke of liberty gained became - for almost 2,000 years - a poignant reminder of what the Jewish people had lost: freedom, a land, a home. A new phrase was born: next year. "This year we are slaves; next year we will be free. This year we are here; next year in Israel." The past became the future. Memory was transfigured into hope. It is not too much to call the Jewish people "the people of hope." What had happened once would happen again. As the prophets of exile - Jeremiah and Ezekiel - said: there would be a second exodus. The loss was only temporary. The Divine promise was forever.

It was in this context that the debate over the fifth cup arose. Jews could speak about the four preliminary stages of redemption - but could they celebrate the fifth, "I will bring you to the land"? That is the debate between Rashi, Rambam and Ravad. Rashi says one should not drink a fifth cup; Rambam says one may; Ravad says one should.

Hence the extra cup at the Seder table. Out of respect for Rambam and Ravad, we pour it. Out of respect for Rashi, we do not drink it. According to

the sages, unresolved halachic disputes will one day be resolved by Elijah. (The word *Teyku*, "Let it stand [undecided]," refers to Elijah: "The Tishbite [Elijah] will come and answer questions and problems.") Hence the fifth cup became known as "the cup of Elijah."

In our times, the Jewish people have returned to the land. According to one sage (the late Rabbi Menahem Kasher), we should now drink the fifth cup. Be that as it may, it is no less moving to think back to the 11th and 12th centuries - the age of Rashi, Rambam and Ravad - and know that in the darkest night of exile, the only question was: how far, in the present, do we celebrate hope for the future? Four-fifths, or all five? The promise G-d gave Moses at the beginning of our *sedra* spoke not just to that time, but to all time.

Pesach kept hope alive. Hope kept the Jewish people alive. ~K~

.... Korban Pesach

The following is a series of excerpts drawn from the Jewish Encyclopedia, providing a biblical historic perspective on the Pesach offering at the Temple, now such an integral component of the seder.

When the Temple was standing, the focus of the Passover festival was the "*Korban Pesach*" (lit. "Pesach sacrifice," also known as the "Paschal Lamb"). Every family (or, if the family was too small to finish eating the entire offering in one sitting, group of families) was required to offer a young lamb or kid at the Temple on the afternoon of the 14th day of Nisan, and eat it that night, which was the 15th of Nisan (Exodus 12:6). The offering could not be slaughtered while one was in possession of leaven (Exodus 23:18). It had to be roasted (Exodus 12:9) and eaten together with matzah and maror (Exodus 12:8). One had to be careful not to break any bones from the offering (Exodus 12:46). None of the meat could be left over until morning (Exodus 12:10, 23:18).

Because of the "*Korban Pesach*"'s status as a sacred offering, the only people allowed to eat it are those who have the obligation to bring the offering. Among those who can not offer or eat the "*Korban Pesach*" are: An apostate (Exodus 12:43), a servant (Exodus 12:45), an uncircumcised man (Exodus 12:48), or a person in a state of ritual impurity,

except when a majority of Jews are in such a state ("Pesachim" 66b). The offering must be made before a quorum of 30 ("Pesachim" 64b).

In the Temple, the Levites sang Hallel while the Kohanim performed the sacrificial service. Men and women are equally obligated regarding the "Korban Pesach" ("Pesachim" 91b).

If someone missed the opportunity to eat the sacrifice, he or she could make it up one month later on the night of the 15th of Iyar (Numbers 9:11), a day which is known as "Pesach Sheini" ("Second Pesach"). Just as on the first Pesach night, one must not break any bones from the second Paschal offering (Numbers 9:12) or leave meat over until morning (*ibid*).

Today, in the absence of the Temple, the mitzvah of the "Korban Pesach" is memorialized in the form of a symbolic food placed on the Passover Seder Plate, which is usually a roasted shankbone. Ashkenazic Jews have a custom of not eating lamb or goat during the Seder in deference to the absence of the Temple. Many Sephardic Jews, however, have the opposite custom of eating lamb or goat meat during the Seder in memory of the "Korban Pesach".

~K~

... The Holiday of Believing in God

By Rabbi Yehuda Henkin of the Jeanie Schottenstein Center for Advanced Torah Study for Women in Jerusalem.

Pesach is the holiday of belief in God.

Sometimes we forget that. After all, isn't Pesach called *zeman cheiruteinu*—"the time of our freedom"? Yes, but Succoth is called *zeman simchateinu*, and no one claims that the essence of Succot is simply our joy.

Instead, the three pilgrimage festivals represent different aspects of our relationship with God. Succot marks God's ongoing providence; Shavuot reaffirms the truth of the Torah; while Pesach is the holiday of belief in God Himself.

God's existence was proven by the miracles of the Exodus. This is explicit in Devarim: "Or has a god attempted to come and take a nation to him from the midst of another nation, by trials, signs and wonders...all of which haShem, your God, did for you

in Egypt before your eyes. You were shown, in order to know that haShem is God; there is none besides Him" (4:34-35).

Other verses make the same point. When the Egyptians drowned in the sea, Israel "believed in haShem and his servant, Moshe" (Shemot 14:31). And the Ten Commandments begin, "I am haShem, your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the abode of slaves" (20:2). In twenty places in the Torah, God is identified as having taken Israel out of Egypt; nowhere, by contrast, does the Torah say, "I am haShem, your God, who gave you the Torah on Mount Sinai."

We say at the Passover seder, "Even if we're all learned, all wise, all elders and all knowledgeable in the Torah, it is incumbent on us to recount the Exodus, and the more one recounts the Exodus the more praiseworthy it is." If one already knows the story, why retell it over and over? The answer is that the Exodus is not simply history, but the source of belief in God. Retelling it is not a matter of increasing knowledge, but of strengthening our faith.

Moreover, *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* encompasses, not only the Exodus from Egypt, but subsequent redemptions and salvations wrought by God throughout history. We read this in the Haggadah. Referring to God's promise to Abraham in Bereishit chapter 15, "*Vehi she'amdah...*, [the promise] has stood by our ancestors and ourselves. Not merely one adversary has loomed over us to [attempt to] destroy us. Rather, in every generation they loom over us to destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, delivers us from their hands." The promise ostensibly refers to the Exodus, but the Sages saw Egypt and the Exodus as paradigms for all persecutions and deliverances.

On this basis we can understand the remarkable statement in Jeremiah: "No longer will it be said, 'Chai haShem who brought Israel up from the land of Egypt,' but rather 'Chai haShem who brought Israel up from the northern land and from all the lands where He had driven them' " (16:14-15). "Chai haShem" means "God lives." God exists! The indisputable proof of this will no longer be the historical Exodus, but our direct experience of redemption from exile.³

Around the seder table, we can recount persecution and deliverance, and confirm our belief in God from the witness of our own eyes. "We will sing a new song before Him, praise the Lord!"

~K~

.... "From Moses to Moses, No Other"

Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204, the "Rambam") was born on Erev Pesach. His father, Rabbi Maimon, was the Dayan (chief rabbinic authority) of Cordova and a descendent of King David. This section describes a brief history and a view of his lasting legacy.

The following commentary is extracted from Joseph Telushkin's book, "Jewish Literacy" (1991).

The Rambam was born in Spain shortly before the fanatical Muslim Almohades came to power there. To avoid persecution by the Muslim sect — which was wont to offer Jews and Christians the choice of conversion to Islam or death — Maimonides fled with his family, first to Morocco, later to Israel, and finally to Egypt. He apparently hoped to continue his studies for several years more, but when his brother David, a jewelry merchant, perished in the Indian Ocean with much of the family's fortune, he had to begin earning money. He probably started practicing medicine at this time.

Maimonides's major contribution to Jewish life remains the Mishneh Torah, his code of Jewish law. His intention was to compose a book that would guide Jews on how to behave in all situations just by reading the Torah and his code, without having to expend large amounts of time searching through the Talmud. Needless to say, this provocative rationale did not endear Maimonides to many traditional Jews, who feared that people would rely on his code and no longer study the Talmud. Despite sometimes intense opposition, the Mishneh Torah became a standard guide to Jewish practice: It later served as the model for the Shulkhan Arukh, the sixteenth-century code of Jewish law that is still regarded as authoritative by Orthodox Jews.

Philosophically, Maimonides was a religious rationalist. His damning attacks on people who held ideas he regarded as primitive — those, for example, who understood literally such biblical expressions as "the finger of God" so infuriated his opponents that they proscribed parts of his code and all of The Guide to the Perplexed. Other, more liberal, spirits forbade study of the Guide to anyone not of mature years. An old joke has it that these rabbis feared that a Jew would start reading a section in the Guide in which Maimonides summarizes a rationalist attack on religion, and fall asleep before reading Maimonides's counterattack—thereby spending the night as a heretic.

How Maimonides's opponents reacted to his works was no joke, however. Three leading rabbis in France denounced his books to the Dominicans, who headed the French Inquisition. The Inquisitors were only too happy to intervene and burn the books. Eight years later, when the Dominicans started burning the Talmud, one of the rabbis involved, Jonah Gerondi, concluded that God was punishing him and French Jewry for their unjust condemnation of Maimonides. He resolved to travel to Maimonides's grave in Tiberias, in Israel, to request forgiveness.

Throughout most of the Jewish world, Maimonides remained a hero, of course. When he died, Egyptian Jews observed three full days of mourning, and applied to his death the biblical verse "The ark of the Lord has been taken" (I Samuel 4:11).

To this day, Maimonides and the French-Jewish sage Rashi are the most widely studied Jewish scholars. Contemporary yeshiva students generally focus on the Mishneh Torah, and his Book of Commandments (Sefer ha-Mitzvot) a compilation of the Torah's 613 commandments. Maimonides also formulated a credo of Judaism expressed in thirteen articles of faith, a popular reworking of which (the Yigdal prayer) appears in most Jewish prayerbooks. Among other things, this credo affirms belief in the oneness of God, the divine origins of the Torah, and the afterlife. Its twelfth statement of faith — "I believe with a full heart in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may tarry I will still wait for him" — was often among the last words said by Jews being marched into Nazi gas chambers.

Maimonides was one of the few Jewish thinkers whose teachings also influenced the non-Jewish world; much of his philosophical writings in the Guide were about God and other theological issues of general, not exclusively Jewish, interest. Thomas Aquinas refers in his writings to "Rabbi Moses," and shows considerable familiarity with the Guide. In 1985, on the 850th anniversary of Maimonides's birth, Pakistan and Cuba — which do not recognize Israel — were among the co-sponsors of a UNESCO conference in Paris on Maimonides. Vitali Naumkin, a Soviet scholar, observed on this occasion: "Maimonides is perhaps the only philosopher in the Middle Ages, perhaps even now, who symbolizes a confluence of four cultures: Greco-Roman, Arab, Jewish, and Western." More remarkably, Abderrahmane Badawi, a Muslim professor from

Kuwait University, declared: "I regard him first and foremost as an Arab thinker." This sentiment was echoed by Saudi Arabian professor Huseyin Atay, who claimed that "if you didn't know he was Jewish, you might easily make the mistake of saying that a Muslim was writing." That is, if you didn't read any of his Jewish writings. Maimonides scholar Shlomo Pines delivered perhaps the most accurate assessment at the conference: "Maimonides is the most influential Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages, and quite possibly of all time" (Time magazine, December 23, 1985). As a popular Jewish expression of the Middle Ages declares: "From Moses [of the Torah] to Moses [Maimonides] there was none like Moses." ~K~

... "The Famous Four Children"

By Rabbi Josh Snyder, director of Goucher College Hillel.

My absolute favorite part of the Haggadah is the four children. I could spend all night just talking about it, looking at the different depictions of the four (Noam Zion's A Different Night has a wonderful collection, many of which you can find online), thinking about the roles each of us takes on in relation to the Passover story.

There are so many different interpretations about the four sons. For example, the 19th-century Sefat Emet (R. Yehuda Leb Alter of Ger) taught that the four sons represent four stages of redemption. The Lubavitcher rebbe taught that the four children represent four successive generations of American immigrants; the one we really need to be concerned about is the fifth son, who is not even at our table. Some kabbalistic interpretations reverse the hierarchy, claiming that the son who does not know how to ask a question is actually spiritually closest to God, as his yearning for closeness to divinity exceeds the boundaries of language.

This year I am spending a little more time thinking through the interpretation of Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (AKA Rashbatz), a 14th century sage from Majorca. He uses the little piece of liturgy just prior (Baruch HaMakom, in which we acknowledge and bless God) as a lens for viewing the four children text:

The Haggadah text is about to continue with the interpretation of various Biblical verses relating to the obligation to tell the story of the exodus. This

verse (Baruch HaMakom) serves as a blessing prior to study Torah. ... The four children about whom the Haggadah speaks are all dealing with the same question: whether the world is controlled by one God or by two separate forces – one for good and one for evil. The wise child knows that God created everything and guides the world with benevolent providence. The wicked child believes there are two competing forces in the world. The naïve child asks: What is this? Why do we have a righteous person who suffers and a wicked person who prospers? This is a question for which he has no answer. The child unable to ask believes that everything in the world is random, so that no questions on the subject of God's power are relevant.

I find it interesting that Rashbatz is willing to completely ignore the context of the Passover Seder in order to focus on an existential question. This is itself an important teaching: we cannot expect our Seder attendees to have the themes of Passover on their minds when they sit down with us. More often, they are still bringing a bit of the world they have been experiencing with them to the table.

The Seder may provide them with an opportunity to reflect on life's meaning in general. Not everyone will be able to relate and find a redemptive, Exodus-type moment at the beginning.

If we take a closer look, we see that Rashbatz pays homage to the traditional notion of an ordered, God-centered universe by locating this belief with the wise son, and identifies the wicked son with the relatively archaic heretical belief in two powers. But Rashbatz does not discount the opinions of the last sons.

It is entirely appropriate to come to the frustrating answers of God's powerlessness or absence in the world. Embedded in the rubric of the four children is the understanding that the question of each is appropriate, even necessary as a part of the whole, and that we should feel empowered to voice these questions, recognize them, and attempt to address them with understanding.

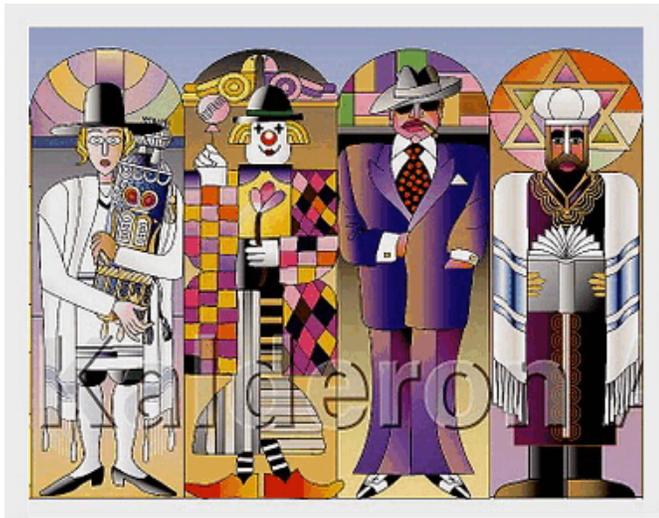
So too with faith development - each of us will go through different stages in being able to answer life's big questions, such as "Where is God in the universe?" The least that we can do (and sometimes the most) is to recognize where someone is at and attempt to be present to their experience and the way they create meaning. ~K~

... The Four Children: Annual Guests

Written for the Spring 2010 issue of *Voices of Conservative Judaism*, by Rabbi Robert Dobrusin, rabbi of Beth Israel Congregation in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

We welcome them to our seder table every year. Our holiday would not be complete without them.

They are fascinating creations, with their roots in the Torah and their identities crafted by talmudic rabbis who were perceptive about human nature. They run the gamut: one is wise, one is rebellious or perhaps wicked, one is simple, one doesn't even know how to ask. They have been portrayed in many different ways; you can see them wherever you look, across the history of Jewish art and interpretation.



From Asher Kalderon's *New Passover Haggadah*, appearing on picasaweb.google.com/akalderonarts

They don't talk to each other, but they definitely talk to us. They demand our attention and inspire us to talk back to them with our own commentary and our own conclusions. They appear at our table and demand that we recognize them and identify with them.

And we do identify with them. Each year we ask ourselves: Which one of these am I? As so many commentaries have suggested, each of us really is composed of all four, rolled into one complex person. We have our moments of wisdom. We can be rebellious. We have a need to confront the world with basic simplicity. We often don't even know where to begin to ask. Yes, that is what the commentaries say. But deep in our hearts, each year

– depending on what has happened in our own lives or in the world at large – we identify more closely with one or the other.

These four children who are wise, rebellious, simple, and unable to ask represent us, and we know it.

But there is one thing about them that is not like us. Unlike us, they can never change. Each and every year, each asks or doesn't ask the same question; and the question each asks or doesn't ask is written in stone, taken directly from the Torah's verses describing a father teaching his child about the Exodus.

[. . .] I am troubled by the fact that we don't let them change. Throughout history, they will always be wise or rebellious or simple or unquestioning. They are never allowed to be any different. How can we do this? How we can set them in stone the way we do? There is one simple reason. They don't change because they each have been given a name: wise, rebellious, simple, unquestioning. And once someone has a name, that name becomes his or her identity.

The wise child will never rebel; she will always be wise. The rebellious child will never conform; he will always be the *rasha*. The simple child will never understand; he will never grow. The fourth will never speak; she will forever be silent.

The rabbis usually were so on target in their educational technique, but here they have misled us. How much wiser would it have been had they introduced these four children as the one who asked a wise question, the one who asked a rebellious question, the one who asked a simple question, the one who did not ask at all?

It would have been a subtle difference, but it would have been instructive. For instead of labeling them, it would have been their question that would have been labeled, and there would have been the possibility of change. We would have freed them from their reputations and focused on action instead of personality. The high holy day machzor teaches us the same lesson. In the Yom Kippur Selichot prayers, we first say *anu k'shay oref*, we are obstinate. But a few paragraphs later, in the *Ashamnu*, we read *kishinu oref*, we have acted obstinately. This is the thought with which we are left, and it is a subtle reminder that it is our actions, not our labels, that truly count.

When we label ourselves or attach a label to someone else, it is nearly impossible to shake it. How many children have suffered because they have been labeled? How many adults have found the road to desired *teshuvah*, repentance, blocked because society has labeled them as a burden that cannot be shed? How many of us struggle to escape the labels we have internalized and allowed to dominate our lives?

[. . .] Of course, once we have acted in a certain way often enough, it does become difficult to break out of that pattern. Our rabbis taught, *sichar mitzvah mitzvah sichar avayrah avayrah*, the result of doing a mitzvah is doing another mitzvah, the result of sinning is sinning again. Our actions do become ingrained. But that is what *teshuvah* is meant to correct, breaking away from patterns. As difficult as it is, it is infinitely more difficult when our actions become identified with our very being.

Think back to those four guests at the seder table, and how horrible their lives have become because we've never let them be any different than they were at the one moment they opened up their mouths or sat silently. What a terrible injustice we have done to them and to so many of God's children who came after them.

This Pesach, let us resolve to change. ~K~

. . . Speaking to the Dry Bones

By Rabbi Menachem Raab, former dean of the Hillel Day School in North Miami Beach, now retired living in Israel. His divre Torah are posted on-line in a blog maintained by his grandson, at torahportion.wordpress.com.

In the Haftorah of Shabbat Chol Hamo'ed Pesach we read the prophesy of Yechezkel known as the "valley of the dry bones". Hashem tells the prophet to speak to these dead dry bones and they will come back to life. The Talmud discusses this incident and comes up with three different opinions of what happened.

One Rabbi says that the bones actually came back to life miraculously; they stood up and sang praises to Hashem and then died again. Another opinion was that this entire episode was merely a *mashal* or a parable. A third opinion says that these resurrected bones migrated to Israel, married and raised children. (San. 92b)

The story of the restoration of these bones in reality can represent the rebirth of the State of Israel in modern times after centuries of the Diaspora. The three opinions found in the Talmud can well describe the three different attitudes of Jews with reference to Israel today.

When Israel was founded in our days many Jews reacted similarly to the action described in the first opinion. These Jews stood up and praised the great accomplishment of the Jewish people and were proud of what happened. They soon returned to their lethargy and have nothing to do with Israel.

A second Jewish type looked at the establishment of Israel as a parable. It is great; it is wonderful; it is the realization of a dream of two thousand years. But it is only a dream and does not relate to them.

The third type of Jew sees in the establishment of the state the fulfillment of the promise of Hashem to His people and takes it seriously. To him it is a reality for which our people has prayed for centuries. Some took it so seriously that they moved to Israel and changed their entire life style. Others who can not do that support the state in whatever manner they can. But they see Israel as a real fact and as the restoration of the "dry bones". ~K~

. . . The Prayer for Dew

By Rabbi Ronald H. Isaacs, the spiritual leader of Temple Sholom in Bridgewater, NJ, who has served as the publications committee chair of the Rabbinical Assembly.

Israel's rainy season formally ends on Passover. The forthcoming dry season is long and hot, but it is lessened by breezes that come in from the Mediterranean Sea and bring dew at night. This bit of moisture is very important, and so Jews say this prayer, wherever they are. Because dew appears at night and helps plants to grow though there is no rain, it is a symbol of revival, and thus the prayer for dew also speaks of the hopes for a fully rebuilt Jerusalem and Land of Israel.

The special prayer for dew (*Tefillat Tal*) injects into the festive mood of the Passover liturgy a mood of solemnity, normally associated with a period of judgment. Passover, according to the Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah 16a*), is the time when God blesses the crops. In keeping with the spirit, it is customary for the Cantor to don a white robe for the Musaf service of the First Day of Passover.

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