

15 STEP SPIRITUAL GUIDE TO THE PASSOVER SEDER

Kadesh

A Toast to Freedom

...Zeman cheiruteinu - the season of our freedom...

The Freedom to Passover

Freedom is commonly perceived as the removal of all external constraints on a person's development and self-expression. Freedom is the natural state of man, this line of reasoning implies; free him of all outside forces that limit and inhibit him, and you have a free human being. Passover embodies a far more ambitious freedom.

The Exodus was but the first step of a seven-week journey, a forty-nine step climb in the conquest and transcendence of self that culminated in our receiving the Torah on the festival of Shavuot.

Nor does Shavuot represent the final realization of freedom: at Sinai, we were granted the potential and challenge to attain yet a deeper dimension of liberty and self-transcendence. Thus Shavuot is the only festival that has no calendar date—the Torah designates it not as a certain day of a certain month (as it does all other festivals) but as the day that follows a seven-week count from the festival of Passover. This is to emphasize that Shavuot is an outgrowth of Passover—that the significance of the Exodus came to light only on the day we stood at Sinai.

What is the significance of this liberating "service"? It means that man, no matter how free of external constraints, is a finite creature, ever subject to the limits of his own nature and character. That to attain true freedom he must therefore transcend his humanity—his emotional, intellectual, even spiritual self—and access the "spark of G-dliness" that is his infinite, supra-human self.

Version 2

When pressed to define this most basic human need and aspiration, we usually find ourselves explaining what freedom is not. Freedom is not slavery, it is not confinement, it is not inhibition. But is that all there is to freedom—the absence of subjugation? Or is there a positive dynamic to the state of freedom?

26 March | 12 Nissan

Parashat Tzav & Parashat HaGadol

Shabbat Begins: 6:09 pm

Shabbat Ends: 7:13 pm

29 March | 15 Nissan

Passover – 1st & 2nd Days

1st Day Passover Begins: 7:14 pm (29 March)

2nd Day Passover Ends: 8:20 pm (31 March)

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The hebrew word for "egypt," means "boundaries"; and the endeavor to free ourselves from yesterday's boundaries is a perpetual one. For freedom is more than the drive to escape foreign and negative inhibitors, because no matter how free of them we are, we remain defined by the boundaries of self and self-definition. Freedom is the incessant drive to "Passover" these boundaries, to draw on our divine, infinite potential to constantly reach beyond what we are

Urchatz

Washing Hands

...washing the hands causes the children to ask...

Passover Child



Passover is so much the festival of the child. For it is the child who evokes in us the realization that we, too, are children of G-d, and are thus inherently and eternally free. It is the child who opens our eyes to the ultimate significance of Passover: that in taking us out of Egypt to make us his chosen people, G-d has liberated us of all enslavement and subjugation for all time.

The child is thus the most important participant at the Passover seder. Many of the seder customs are specifically designed to mystify the child, to stimulate his curiosity, to compel him to ask: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" For the entire Haggadah, the "telling" of the story of our redemption from Egypt at the seder, is built around the concept of "When your child shall ask you... You shall tell your child." On Passover, we want to enter the child's mind, to view reality from his perspective. For how else could we taste freedom?

Karpas

The Appetizer

...as a memorial to the crushing labor we endured ...

From Egypt ...

Maimonides defines "crushing labor" as "an endless and purposeless work." The Egyptians, whose aim in enslaving the Jewish people was to destroy their nationhood and break their spirit, refused to impart any schedule, logic, efficiency or utility to their work.

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The Egyptian exile is the prototype for all exiles and the exodus from Egypt epitomizes all redemptions—beginning with the exile and redemption experience intrinsic to each individual's life.

Man is in essence a spiritual being, so his very birth and enmeshment in a material body and life is an exile. "Egypt" insists that our involvement with the mortar and bricks of the material be "an endless and purposeless work." Work that spills out from its five-day, forty-hour framework to invade every moment and thought of the week.

But the physical self is finite and pragmatic; how, then, is it capable of "endless and purposeless work"? Ultimately, the capacity for such labor can have only one source: the "spark of G-dliness" that is the essence of the human soul.

The soul of man is thus subjected to an exile within an exile: to be inserted into a physical self and world, and to suffer the usurpation of her quintessential powers to drive the physical self's mundane labors. To see her capacity for infinite and objectiveless commitment to G-d be distorted into an endless quest for material gain. (See "Rochtzoh" for remedy.)

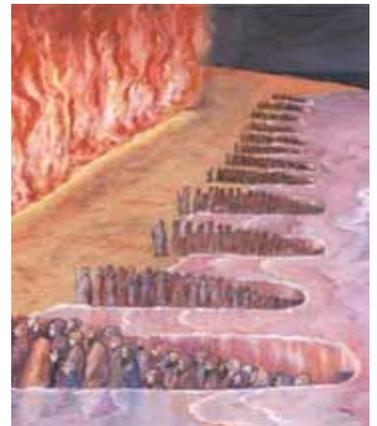
...splitting the matzah is a memorial to the splitting of the sea...

Yachatz

Break the Matzah

Amphibian Soul

Although land and sea creatures are equally dependent upon their environment, the land creature can forget about the nourishment it receives from the earth, whereas the sea creature is constantly aware of its obvious dependence upon the water.



Man possesses both a land and sea personality. There is a part of man that is disconnected from his purpose and source: a "land" self that is oblivious to the fact that his soul is a spark of G-d above; that he is granted life anew, every moment, by his Creator; that his existence has meaning only in the context of its role in the divine purpose.

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Man also possesses a "sea" persona. When this self is manifest, the person is like a fish in water, his every living moment is an attestation to his utter dependence upon, and devotion to, his source of nourishment and life.

The ultimate challenge for man is not only to be a fish, but to be a fish in the midst of the land.

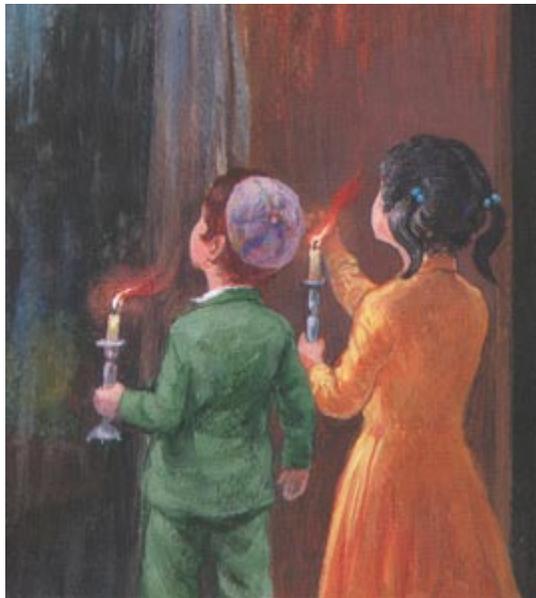
For when we submerge ourselves within the sea of the divine reality we can harness our ego and individuality to optimally realize our mission in life.

When the sea split, the Jews walked on dry land within the sea, a precedent that directs our quest for that perfect synthesis of land and sea which will be fully realized in the messianic age, when the land shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea.

Maggid

Retelling the Story

And it shall come to pass that your child will ask you, tomorrow, "What is this?" And you shall tell him: "With a mighty hand, G-d took us out of Egypt..."



"Your child shall ask you, tomorrow" - there is a "tomorrow" that is immediate, and there is a "tomorrow" that is a long way off. Rashi.

There are children who are of an immediate tomorrow. You both inhabit the same world, and your discourse is predicated on the same axioms.

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But there are also children who are of a far-off tomorrow. Children who inhabit a distant world, who speak a distant language and relate to distant values. Children, who a vast gulf separates their tomorrow from your today. Children whose questions are of a different nature entirely: challenging, alien, hostile. What is one to do with such a child, with such a questioner?

Answer him, says the Torah, speak to him, for he is your child. He is a child of your people, and a child of your making - for perhaps, just perhaps, you share in the responsibility for the fact that this child is wandering in the time-warp of a disconnected tomorrow?

When, more than in our day, has this "far off tomorrow" been so painful a reality? How many Jewish children inhabit such alien tomorrows! How many Jewish children are mired in bizarre "Egypt," receding, with horrifying speed, to tomorrows of increasing distance and disconnection!

When such a Jewish child comes with his questions - the apathetic-bitter questions of a rootless generation - remember, he is your child.

Devote your heart, soul and life to him, and illuminate his way back to his holy source.

Rachtzah

Washing Hands

Before partaking of bread—a metaphor for man's involvement with the material—we prepare ourselves spiritually with the washing of the hands...

....to Sinai

The road out of Egypt leads through Sinai....

Torah regulates our involvement with the material. It commands that we may, and ought, to create, manufacture and deal six days a week; on the seventh day, however, not only must all work cease but we are to assume a mindset in which "all your work is concluded." On a daily basis, it tells us to set aside inviolable "islands in time" devoted to Torah study and prayer. At all times, a multitude of Torah laws define the permissible and the forbidden in business and pleasure.

The Torah also enjoins us to "eat of the toil of your hands"—to invest only our marginal faculties in the business of earning a living, leaving our choice talents free to pursue more spiritual goals. And it insists that all material pursuits be but a means to an end, but a vessel to receive G-d's blessings and a tool to aid us in our life's work to bring sanctity and G-dliness into our world.

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In so regulating our physical lives, Torah liberates our souls.

By defining the extent and the nature of our material involvements, Torah extricates our capacity for infinite and non-definitive commitment from its material exile and frees it to follow its natural course: to serve G-d in a manner of "endlessness and purposelessness," in a manner that transcends the parameters of self, self-gain and our very conceptions of "achievement."

Motzie Matzah

Thank G-d for Bread, Bless the Matzah

The zohar calls matzah "the bread of faith." Often our behavior is inconsistent with our faith. The Talmud speaks of the "Thief in the Burrow Syndrome": A thief is tunnelling under the walls of a home when he hears the sound of footsteps. "Please, G-d," he prays silently, "save me!" Here is a man who believes in G-d, and who undoubtedly knows that G-d commanded "Do not steal." Nevertheless, he is stealing and simultaneously beseeching the Al-mighty for help.

Faith, then, may hover in some neutral space above one's everyday self. The same is true of all "spiritual" elements of the human experience. They may move a person to eloquent pronouncements on Truth and Beauty, set his eyes aloft and his heart on fire. They may move him to a frenzy of action or even to a dramatic overhaul of his life. But nothing in him has changed. Soon his euphoria wanes to reveal just another thief in his burrow.

Matzah helps us overcome this inner dichotomy. Partaking of the "food of faith" makes us conscious of the need to internalize our faith and enables us to incorporate it into our daily lives.

The flat matzah is the antithesis of the inflated chometz—the symbol of ego. (In the Zohar, chometz is compared to idolatry—the idol of "self".) Hence matzah's double potency: the Zohar calls it both the "bread of faith" and the "bread of healing." And the faith precedes the healing so that it is not a faith that comes in the wake of a healing from illness, but rather a faith that generates a healing that prevents illness from occurring to begin with.

Maror

Bitter Herbs

Mind vs. Heart

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At the height of the bitter exile, Moses cries out to G-d: "My Lord! Why have You done bad to this nation?!"—a cry that reverberates through our tear-soaked history. G-d begins His response by saying: "I have revealed Myself to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob..." Why is G-d evoking the memory of the Patriarchs?



The Patriarchs are the "heart" of Israel, while Moses is the mind of Israel. The mind can come to understand that suffering refines man. That a person's finest abilities are unleashed only under conditions of challenge and trial. That without a free choice between good and evil nothing we do could possibly be of any significance.

But, ultimately, why must it be this way? You, G-d, could have ordered reality so that there is gain without pain, so that the highest peaks of life could be scaled also without the momentum of its lowest descents.

The mind of the believer will never accept the "necessity" for evil and pain. The heart, of course, also perceives the pain, but, unlike the mind, tolerates contradiction. Can you prove to a mother that her child is not deserving of love? Outrage and devotion, judgment and acceptance—a heart that loves has room for them all.

"Moses," said G-d, "you are the mind of My people. The mind that is the instrument for grasping My Truth and, with it, illuminating the world. But you, too, are a child of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You, too, have inherited from them the Jewish heart—the intrinsic bond with your G-d that the most terrible contradictions cannot shake."

Korech

Sandwich

We dip the marror that will fill the korech sandwich into Charoset, the paste—whose consistency is reminiscent of the clay our ancestors used in Egypt to manufacture bricks...

We were forged as a nation at the brick kilns of Egypt, and the manufacture of bricks remains the essence of our mission in life.

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Why bricks? There are two basic materials used in construction: stone and bricks. The "stone" represents those materials with which G-d provides us to build our lives. In our personal lives, these are the elements that are naturally qualified to serve as part of a home for G-d and readily lend themselves to this end: our positive character traits, the sacred times and places in creation, objects and forces designated for the performance of a mitzvah.

Then there are those elements that are as qualified a building material as raw clay: our selfish and animalistic instincts, and a material world that obscures the truth of its Creator. Elements that, by nature, are uncondusive, or even contrary, to anything good and G-dly.

To include these elements in the "dwelling for G-d" we make of our lives, we must forge bricks: knead and mold them into a shape they have never known, fire them in the kiln of self-sacrifice and love of G-d, until they become as solid and supportive as the sacred "stones" in our edifice.

Shulchan Orech

Festive Meal

...dip the egg in saltwater as a memorial to the destruction of the Temple...

"From the day the holy temple was destroyed," Say our sages, "It was decreed that the homes of the righteous should be in ruins... The servant need not be better off than the master." As long as G-d remains homeless, expelled from His manifest presence in the life of man, the Jew, too, is a stranger in the material world.

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In essence, matter is no less a creation of G-d, and no less capable of serving and expressing His truth, than spirit; but in times of dimmed divine presence, the substantiality of the physical all too readily obscures rather than reveals its G-dly essence.

The story is told of the visitor who, stopping by the home of Rabbi Dovber of Mezrich, was shocked by the poverty he encountered there. The Rebbe's home was bare of all furnishing, save for a few wooden boards and blocks.

"How can you live like this?" demanded the visitor. "I myself am far from wealthy, but at least in my home you will find the basic necessities: chairs, a table, beds for the children..."

"Indeed?" said the Rebbe. "But I don't see any of your furnishings. How do you manage without them?"

"What do you mean? Do you think that I carry all my possessions along with me wherever I go? When I travel, I make do with what's available. But at home - a person's home is a different matter altogether!"

"Ah, yes," said Rabbi DovBer. "At home, it's a different matter altogether..."

...the afikoman is wrapped reminiscent of the hasty escape made by our forefathers...

Tzafun

Out of Hiding

Then and Now

Exodus from Egypt: "You left Egypt in haste."

Messianic Exodus: "In leisure and serenity you will be redeemed."

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THEN: An opportunity had presented itself and we were on the run. Egypt had enslaved our bodies and infiltrated our souls. Then, at the stroke of midnight that first Passover eve, an overwhelming revelation of Divine truth neutralized the forces that imprisoned us both without and within.

Without, Pharaoh was humbled and consented to release us. Within, we were inspired to break free of the idolatry of Egypt, to shake off the grime of two centuries of subjugation to the most depraved society on earth. But revelations tend to come and go in a flash.

Any moment, Pharaoh may change his mind for the nth time and give chase. Any moment, the pagan mores and slave mentality which still pervaded our minds and hearts may re-assert themselves. We were escaping Pharaoh, and we were escaping ourselves.

NOW: For thirty-three centuries we have been seeking G-d, and finding Him. For 33 centuries we have been studying His wisdom and imparting it to the world, making the outlook, ethos and ideals of Torah an integral part of human thinking and behavior.

For 33 centuries we have been doing, thinking and feeling G-d's mitzvos, implementing His will in our daily lives. In doing so, we have molded our nature in accordance with His desire. We have developed the world in accordance to His blueprint for creation.

THEN: We had a spiritual experience.

NOW: We are ready / We're there.

Beirach

Grace after the Meal

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..the cup of Elijah is filled and the door is opened...

The Fifth Cup

The four cups of wine correspond to the four distinct redemptions incorporated in the Exodus: our physical removal from the geographical boundaries of Egypt; our delivery from Egyptian bondage; the creation of an inherently free people, immune to any future possibility of enslavement; and our election as G-d's chosen people at Sinai seven weeks later on the festival of Shavuot.

In truth, there is also a fifth element of redemption, the promise that "I will bring you into the land"—corresponding to the fifth cup of wine, the Cup of Elijah.

The first four elements of the redemption are something that we are to "drink"—to actively pursue and realize ourselves. It is within our power to overcome all that limits and enslaves us, both physically and spiritually, both without and within; to develop our potential for freedom, and to exercise this freedom as the freedom to fulfill our mission as G-d's people as communicated to us at Sinai.



But the culminating level of redemption—its "I will bring you into the land" element, which shall be fully realized only in the era of Moshiach—transcends human efforts.

This is not a cup we can drink on our own. We can only bring ourselves to the threshold of this perfect world, through our active realization of the first four "expressions of redemption." The drinking of the fifth cup, awaits Elijah, herald of the ultimate redemption.

Opening doors

G-d is not a Do-as-I say-not-as-I-do type of being. So if He says open the door on this night, that means He's opening His doors; doors that may have been impenetrable throughout the year, owing to the individual's misdeeds and shortcomings. Tonight, G-d opens all the "doors" for every Jew without exception, regardless of his or her spiritual standing. Tonight, we are given the opportunity to "pass over" the usual constraints, and leap toward unprecedented heights.

Hallel

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Songs of Praise

"... Who split the Red Sea into sections; His kindness is everlasting! ..."

Singing in the Sea

When the sea split, trees grew from the sea bed; the children fed the fruits of these trees to the birds, who joined the Jewish people in their singing of praise.



Why did G-d defy the rules of nature for this seemingly indulgent miracle?

Crossing the Red Sea was an important step in our journey from Egypt to Sinai, where we received the Torah—the document to define our mandate in G-d's world. So in this crossing, the nature of our role in developing our environment was demonstrated to us.

The earth has been imbued by the Creator with the power to germinate a seed and nurture it from seedling to fruit-yielding tree. Yet here was a piece of land that, for thousands of years prior to this moment and for thousands of years to follow, would have no opportunity to realize this potential.

And for the brief while that the sea parted, this narrow strip of land came to life, sprouting trees and yielding fruit—all so that birds should be fed and chirp, beautifying a Jew's song of praise to the Almighty.

This was to establish a most powerful precedent in how we are to relate to the resources that have been placed at our disposal. No potential, no matter how fleeting or peripheral, should be discounted. For this may very well be the moment that a significant part of G-d's creation will realize its Divine essence and purpose through its contact with your life.

Nirtzah

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Acceptance

The steps of the Seder have been integrated into our consciousness and accepted. Now we pause, take a deep breath, and reflect on our experience: We examined our personal challenges through the slavery of our ancestors, and we achieved a personal freedom by reliving the Exodus. We completed our part in good faith; the rest is up to you-know-Who.

The last song of the Seder echoes our hope and that of our ancestors that G-d heals our broken world, and that His promise for a world of peace and wisdom become a reality. "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor study war anymore," and the entire world will dwell "in a city built where all are united as one."

Next Year In Jerusalem!!

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi did not include the passage "The order of Pesach is concluded" in his Haggadah, for indeed, the Seder never concludes. Its message endures throughout the year. A Jew leaves Egypt every day by transcending his limitations, reaching ever-higher levels of holiness.

Story – Elijah the Prophet

A Chassid went to the Baal Shem Tov in Medzibuz and said, "Rebbe, I want to see Elijah the Prophet."

"It's simple," said the Baal Shem. "I'll tell you what to do. Get two boxes and fill one with food and the other with children's clothes. Then, before Rosh Hashanah, travel to Minsk. On the outskirts of town, right before where the forest begins, is a rundown house. Find that house, but don't knock on the door immediately; stand there for a while and listen. Then, shortly before candle lighting time at sunset, knock on the door and ask for hospitality."

The Chassid went home and told his wife he would be away for the holiday. "How can you leave your family?" she said. "The children want their father to take them to the synagogue!" He told her, "I have a once in a lifetime chance to see Elijah the Prophet!" Finally, she agreed that it was something that he could not pass up.

So he went and did as the Baal Shem Tov told him. He filled the parcels with food and clothing and went to Minsk, where he found the broken-down house at the edge of town. He arrived shortly before evening and stood in front of the door, listening. Inside, he heard children crying, "Mommy, we're hungry. Its Yom tov and we don't even have decent clothes to wear!" He heard the mother answer, "Children, trust in G-d. He'll send Elijah the Prophet to bring you everything you need!"

Then the Chassid knocked on the door. When the woman opened it, he asked if he could stay with them for the holiday. "How can I welcome you when I don't have any food in the house!" she said. "Don't worry," he said, "I have enough food for all of us." He came in, opened the box, gave the children the food, and they ate. Then he opened the other box and the children all took clothes for themselves, this one a shirt, that one a

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jacket, the other one a hat. He was there for two days, waiting to see Elijah the Prophet. He did not even sleep. How could he sleep? How often do you get a chance to see Elijah the Prophet? But he saw no one.

So he returned to the Baal Shem Tov and said, "Master, I did not see Elijah the Prophet!" "Did you do everything I told you?" asked the Baal Shem Tov. "I did!" he said. "And you didn't see him?" "No, Rebbe." "Are you sure?" "Yes, Rebbe! I didn't see him!" "Then you'll have to return for Yom Kippur," said the Baal Shem Tov. "Go back before Yom Kippur, with a box of food, to the same house. Again, be sure to arrive an hour before sunset, and don't knock immediately. Wait for a while and just stand in front of the door, listening."

The Chassid went back to his wife and told her he would be away for Yom Kippur. "How can you leave your children again?" she asked. "But the Baal Shem Tov says I'll be able to see Elijah the Prophet, like one of the great tzaddikim!" he said, "How can I not go?" His wife agreed that it was worth going away for two or three days if he could see Elijah the Prophet.

So he went back to Minsk before Yom Kippur. This time, he went earlier and stood in front of the door, listening. Inside he heard children crying, "Mommy, we're hungry! We haven't eaten the whole day! How can we fast for Yom Kippur?" "Children!" said the mother. "Do you remember you were crying before Rosh Hashanah that you had no food or clothes? And I told you, 'Trust in G-d! He'll send Elijah the Prophet, who'll bring you food and clothing and everything else you need!' Wasn't I right? Didn't Elijah come and bring you food and clothing? He stayed with us for two days! Now you're crying again that you're hungry. I promise you that Elijah will come now, too, and bring you food!" Then the Chassid understood what his master, the Baal Shem Tov had meant. And he knocked on the door.

Chag Sameach

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