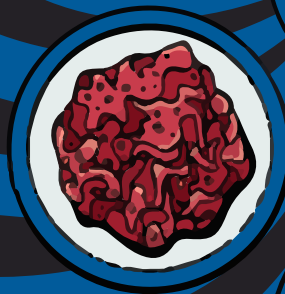


**פסח
תשפ"ד**



A TAKE ON PESACH

with Rabbi Manis Friedman

ב"ה

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FOR G-D'S SAKE!



There is joy that lasts a minute and there is joy that lasts a lifetime. Then there is a joy and pleasure of such intensity that it lasts for millennia. That is Passover.

The events of Passover occurred over 3,500 years ago, yet we still celebrate the holiday today. This is because Passover was much more than the story of a people's liberation. All those years ago in Egypt something happened that changed the world forever and still excites us today.

LOVING HIM AS HE LOVES US!

We live our lives with the knowledge that we are G-d's people. We know that He cares about us, that He wants us, and that He even needs us.

But it all started when G-d, Himself, came to our enslaved ancestors and took them unto Himself. That's when we became His, and He became the point of Passover is not about remembering the horrors and trauma of our enslavement three millennia ago, nor is it the celebration of the freedom we have today.



The point isn't that we were saved from slavery; the point is that He took us out. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson was the sixth Rebbe of Chabad.

Once, when he was a child, he heard his father reviewing the Parsha. On reading the words, "And G-d said to Abraham", his father was moved to tears of pleasure and "I saw his body dissolve into the sweetness of G-dliness."

What moved Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's father to tears of pleasure wasn't some deep and wise passage of the Torah; it was the simple words describing how G-d spoke to Abraham. It wasn't that what G-d said was so sweet; it was the fact that G-d Himself came to speak to our ancestor.

Why would G-d talk to a human being? What could we possibly do for Him? Why would He care about us? And yet, Abraham was sitting in the desert, and

G-d came to talk to him. G-d sought us out and initiated a dialogue and relationship with our grandfather, Avraham. It may have been thousands of years but the implications of that would still move anyone to sweet tears.

But then G-d Himself went beyond talking to us. He personally came to us in our suffering, He broke our chains and took us

to His land to become His people.

This is why even during the Holocaust Jews celebrated Passover. They weren't celebrating their freedom: they weren't free.

They were celebrating that G-d is our G-d and we are His people; they celebrated that even in the Concentration Camp they knew G-d was there, that He felt their pain and cried with them.

PASSOVER IS PERSONAL!

This is also why we celebrate and thank G-d for our redemption from Egypt even though G-d is the one who sent us into slavery in the first place. Nothing happens in this world without G-d's direction, and G-d even told Abraham that He would send his descendants into slavery in Egypt. But going into slavery and going out are very different things.

It's like our joy and celebration when we welcome the troops home from war. One might ask: we are the ones who sent them to war to begin with, why then celebrate when they return?

The answer, of course, is that when we send our sons and daughters off to fight, we aren't doing what we enjoy doing, but are doing it in the service of the greater good.

We get no pleasure sending our children to war, but we know that we must. But, when we welcome them home, that isn't for the greater good, that is personal. We go out of our way to greet them in a special way and shower them with our love because now





that the job is done, we can truly express ourselves and do what we really want to do.

Similarly, G-d sent us to Egypt because there was an essential cosmic job that needed to be done. Some part of the vast, eternal, divine plan of the universe needed us to be in Egypt, and so G-d sent us there. But G-d certainly took no pleasure in it. On the contrary, G-d felt our pain and suffered with us. But when the job was complete, G-d could finally do what He truly wanted.

As soon as the divine task that we needed to do in Egypt was complete, G-d Himself came to us and took us out of there; not through a messenger, not through an angel, but He Himself. He came and showered us with His love, with miracles that shook the world, and took us to be His. The miracles of the Exodus weren't payment for a job well done, they were what G-d wanted to do all along. It was personal.

We can get over the fact that we were slaves once and were liberated, but the depth of the connection between us and G-d is something we will never get over.

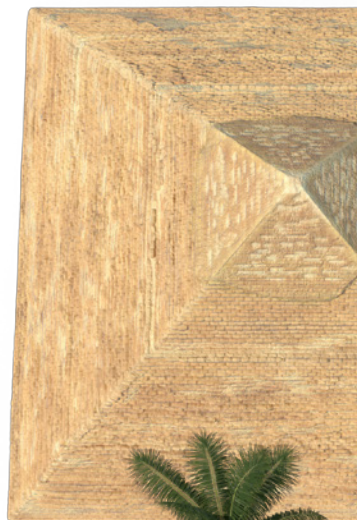
This is the pleasure so intense that it lasts forever. The romance of G-d and His people can melt the hearts of everyone. The connection is so deep and powerful,

we will keep celebrating even though we've celebrated it thousands of times before, and we will celebrate it a thousand times more.

But even in the most powerful relationship, there is the threat of one becoming callous and losing sight of the depth of the relationship. This is the ego. Even when we are completely opened to another, the ego creeps in and blinds us to the other person.

When this happens, we see the Passover story as purely transactional; as just about thanking G-d for getting us out of a bad situation. We lose the sensitivity to perceive what's really happening and hear what G-d is telling us about His relationship with us.

That's when we go from seeing the Exodus as a tremendous act of love and an expression of G-d's most intimate feelings, to seeing it as just a cool story with some whacky plagues. This egoism dulls our senses, and is represented in Chametz. That is why we make sure to rid ourselves and our homes of any crumb of Chametz. We go to extraordinary lengths to make sure we get it out of the way so that we can celebrate our relationship with G-d.



FOUR SONS ONE QUESTION

WHAT IS FREEDOM?



We read in the Haggadah about four kinds of people who sit at the Seder. There's the smart son, the wicked son, the simple son, and the son who does not know how to ask. Which one of them should we emulate? Which one should we avoid?

Some say that the who does not know how to ask is the worst of them all, because his inability to ask a question comes from indifference. Others say he is the most honest and sincere, since he believes with perfect faith and doesn't need to ask questions.

The truth is that the simple son is the wisest son, and the one we should emulate. It is he who teaches us how to think. The wisdom of the simple son's question answers the questions of the others: the smart son asks, "Why are there different kinds of Mitzvot,

some we do understand, some we do not understand?"

To this, the simple son answers, "What is this?" - What is a Mitzvah?

If you figure out what a Mitzvah is, then the question goes away. The same with the others: The wicked son asks, "Why do you do this service?" and the simple son answers, "What is this?" - What is "service"? If you know that, then your question goes away.

This is a very important lesson in how to think. Before we get caught up in the details of any subject, we need to ask ourselves what the definitions of the words are that we keep using: "What is this?"

Let's use this method to explore the Mitzvah of eating Matzah. Eating Matzah is one of the most important Mitzvot all year:

FOUR SONS ONE QUESTION

specifically, to eat Matzah after nightfall on the first night of Pesach. We have been doing this Mitzvah for thousands of years, ever since G-d told us to all those years ago in Egypt.

The Matzah commemorates our exodus from Egypt, as we say in the Haggadah, "This Matzah that we eat is because our fathers' dough did not have sufficient time to become leavened before G-d revealed Himself and redeemed them." But on a deeper level, Matzah means much more.

The Zohar tells us that Matzah is "the bread of faith", and that eating Matzah affects us by strengthening our faith.

After hundreds of years living in Egyptian society, some Jews had assimilated and become rather enamored with Egyptian ways. By the time of the Exodus, Jews had been so changed by Egypt that, had they stayed a moment longer, they would have dissolved as a nation into Egyptian culture. The one thing they held onto was faith. And that is represented in the Matzah. But now let's ask the question of the simple son: What is this? What is faith?

We generally think of faith as the acknowledgement of G-d's existence and

providence.

But does acknowledging reality really matter? Whether we believe it or not, G-d will exist and control the world. And what does "acknowledge reality" even mean? What is the virtue in being convinced that something is in fact true?

FAITH MEANS THAT G-D MATTERS TO US IN AN INTIMATE WAY

Faith means to identify with something. The Hebrew word for faith – Emunah – comes from the word "Umanut", which means an expertise or specialty. There are those

skills that we have with which we seem to merge. There is that topic that makes our ears perk up when we hear people talking about it, we feel like they are talking about us. That is our expertise.

Faith means that G-d matters to us in an intimate way. When people speak about Judaism, we listen with our hearts, not just our minds, because they are talking about something that is one with who we are. Having faith means feeling that G-dliness is our



FOUR SONS ONE QUESTION

business, and what G-d says is our concern.

It's like the feeling we get coming home after a long day at work. We spend much of our time outside the home, in places that may even be nicer than our home, but when we come home, it's a whole other feeling.

There's no place like home. It is the place where we belong; it is where our true selves exist. At home we are in our element; we are in our place.

The richness of feeling at home surpasses all other pleasures, and the pain of feeling like an outsider in our own homes is unlike any other.

That feeling is faith: that feeling is true freedom. Freedom isn't when we are free to be anything; freedom is when we are free to be ourselves. Freedom is when we are in our own element; where we belong.

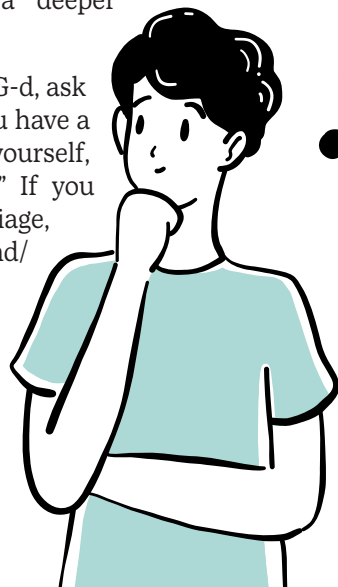
This is what we take in when we eat Matzah on Pesach. We are reminded that G-d and Torah is our element; it is the place where we belong.

G-d took us from a strange land and brought us home. We recline and celebrate the freedom of having an element where we belong.

Eating Matzah on Pesach is what a Jew does, and for a Jew to do what a Jew is expected to do is the ultimate freedom; the ultimate pleasure. By asking the question of the simple son, we gain a deeper knowledge of life.

If you have a question about G-d, ask yourself, "What is G-d?" If you have a question about parenting, ask yourself, "What is a father/mother?" If you have a question about marriage, ask yourself, "What is a husband/wife?"

And as the answer resonates that we are home, that we are at the table, and that above all here. We always have. And we become wise.



Due to current circumstances, many people who usually go out to friends or family for the Seder will be making a Seder at home. But unfortunately, lots of us don't know how to make a Seder. We prepare, and follow the instructions in the Haggadah, but still make mistakes.

However, we must remember, and remind each other, that G-d doesn't mind the mistakes that we make. G-d wants to be at our Seder. If we don't know how to do it, we still must try. Getting all the rituals exactly right is not what ultimately matters to G-d. The fact that we're making a Seder and inviting Him by doing the Mitzvah is what He enjoys. That's what He loves.

When we make a Seder, no matter how well or technically correct we do it, it means everything to G-d. When we ask the Four Questions, we preface by saying in Yiddish, "Tatteh, ich vil by dir fregen fir kashes" which means, "Father, I would like to ask you four questions." When we say this, even if our fathers have passed away, our fathers listen. No matter how well we do the Seder, the souls of our fathers come down from heaven to hear us ask them the Four Questions.

What happens on Pesach is an infinite event that takes place in both Heaven and Earth. Pesach is everywhere. That is why, no matter what, G-d will be at your Seder. Elijah the Prophet will come to your Seder. Your parents and grandparents who have passed will descend from their heavenly paradise to come to the Seder and be there with you so that you are not alone, and they will get immense pleasure hearing you ask the Four Questions.

G-d doesn't expect perfection. Trying to





THE
SOUL
OF THE
SURVIVOR

make a Seder alone is perfect to him. To G-d, if you follow the instructions to the

best of your ability because you want to do His Mitzvah, that is perfect. That is so infinite that if you forget a word, or if you mix up the order of things, it doesn't detract from the pleasure that it gives Him. Even one person sitting in a little apartment trying to make a Seder, and all they know is that there's Matzah and there's wine, it's perfect to G-d.

The past year has been very difficult. We have struggled with loneliness, sickness, and the loss of loved ones, and due to safety restrictions, most of us could not even say Kaddish before a Minyan for those who have passed. However, from the teachings of the Torah, we know that if we cannot do a Mitzvah, then G-d is telling us that it is not necessary.

Usually, a soul that passes needs its children on earth to say Kaddish to bring it to heaven. But the people who have passed during this pandemic were special souls. These souls went straight to heaven. The Kaddish was not necessary.

If this year we can't have a Seder like we used to, and can't follow all the customs and traditions perfectly, then G-d is telling us that it is not necessary this year.

All G-d wants is our presence at the Seder. That's what He asked for and that's what we will do to the best of our abilities.



SEA G-DLINESS

After leaving Egypt, we stood trapped between the sea and a hardened Pharaoh with his army. But just in the nick of time, Moses stretched out his staff and G-d split the sea. But there is much more to it than that.

The oceans are mysterious. Standing on dry land it is almost impossible to see what's going on underwater. Even when we get a glance below the surface, our perception is severely limited. Down in the depths of the sea there are wonderful creatures that most of us will never see.

This represents G-dliness. G-d hides from us the infinite mysteries of existence. We live in the dark, with little knowledge of G-dliness.

But when Pharaoh and his armies closed in on our ancestors, G-d opened up the sea. The veil was lifted, and the wonderful

mysteries were revealed. The Jews walked through the sea on dry land and observed the depths, not just of the sea, but of G-d.

Before G-d spoke to us at Mount Sinai, He wanted to make Himself known to us, and He did at the Red Sea. He showed Himself entirely and hid nothing. The Jews saw G-dliness and beheld the mysteries of existence, and every year, on the anniversary of the Splitting of the Sea, G-d makes Himself revealed in the same way.

The 7th day of Pesach is that anniversary, and we pray that we will fully experience this awesome day.

Then, there is the 8th day.

On the final day of Pesach we celebrate not the past, but the future. It's not about the redemption from Egypt but about the imminent coming of Moshiach.

The fifth Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Shalom Dovber, taught us to celebrate on the final day by having a special meal called "Moshiach's Feast," where we eat some Matzah and drink four cups of wine like at the Seders.

We celebrate because there is no doubt: Moshiach will be here presently.

But Moshiach is often misunderstood. As Maimonides points out, Moshiach will not be a time when the rules of nature are shattered and humanity will live in a magical land of miracles.

Moshiach means a time when the natural world itself is perfected. The G-dliness of this world as it is will come forth.

There was once a king who needed a hill removed, so he gathered his subjects and announced that beneath the hill there was great treasure to be found. Anyone who takes up a shovel will be allowed to keep whatever he finds. This caused great excitement, and the people began to dig enthusiastically, anticipating future riches. They dug until the hill was gone, yet they found no treasure. But the king was fair

and gave the diggers plenty of gold from his own treasury.

A human king would do that, and maybe even be considered a good king, but not G-d. G-d promised us that if we go down into this world and refine it, we will find G-dliness and holiness in abundance. Therefore, we can say with perfect confidence that this world as it is will be perfected, and will glow with holiness.

If G-d says there's treasure here, then there's treasure right here; not in miracles and unnatural occurrences.

When Moshiach comes, miracles will not be impressive. We will celebrate this world and what we made it become. We don't call the day of Moshiach's Feast "the 7th day of Pesach," we call it the "final day of Pesach." Because Moshiach will be final.

There will be no more mountains to climb, no more worlds to conquer, and no more painful missions for complete.

We will live with G-d and it will be perfect.



SEA
G-DLINESS



PHAROAH HAD A POINT

Pharaoh was no ordinary villain. Indeed, if he were just one of the many petty tyrants that litter the history books, Pharaoh would not be honored with direct quotes in the Bible, nor would G-d bother to explain Himself and try to change Pharaoh's mind.

There was a specific message G-d wanted Pharaoh to understand. G-d wanted Pharaoh to admit that he was wrong and that G-d was right. Indeed, the reason G-d "hardened Pharaoh's heart" was not to force Pharaoh to keep the Jews enslaved against his will, but to ensure that Pharaoh would not be intimidated by the spectacle of the Ten Plagues. G-d wanted to convince Pharaoh to let the Jews go, not scare him into it.

Pharaoh may be the villain, but more than wanting to destroy him, G-d wanted to destroy his principles.

But what did Pharaoh believe in? What were Pharaoh's principles?

The great confrontation scene in Pharaoh's throne room, with Moses demanding, "Let my people go!" is one of the most famous in history.

On one side is the king, the tyrant, the bad guy, the mortal who thought he was a G-d – Pharaoh. On the other side is Moses, who stood as the personal emissary of the Creator of heaven and earth. The scene was tense and terrifying. The Elders of Israel, who were supposed to accompany Moses,



couldn't bear to go through with it and fled in fear. Moses and Aaron stood alone.

Moses then relayed the message G-d himself had sent specifically for Pharaoh. "Send out My people, and let them sacrifice to Me in the desert."

But Pharaoh was not intimidated or impressed, and when Moses pushed, Pharaoh shockingly reprimanded him and Aaron: "Why, Moses and Aaron, do you disturb the people from their work? Go to your own labors!"

Pharaoh wasn't just being stubborn. He claimed the moral high ground. To him, the Jews were working on something important and big. Pharaoh was building a civilization, an empire! And the Jews had the "honor" of helping him do it. How dare the Jews talk about quitting this awesome project?! And for what? To go out in the desert for some kind of religious experience??

To Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron were being childish. Sure, the work was brutally difficult, but the Jews were accomplishing something major. To prefer wandering

in the desert over building something historic, just because the work was hard, seemed immature and lazy to Pharaoh.

However, Pharaoh didn't fully comprehend what Moses was telling him.

Moses didn't say the Jews wanted to go find G-d in the desert. Moses said that G-d was waiting for the Jews in the desert.

Pharaoh's project may have been important in his own mind, but G-d was summoning the Jews for an infinitely more important assignment: for the Jews to accept G-d as their G-d, for G-d to take the Jews as His nation, and together they would bring G-dliness into the world.

Once Pharaoh realized this, there was no hesitation. Indeed, he demanded the Jews leave immediately.

Thousands of years later, Pharaoh's project of history and civilization is long dead. What's left is just history books, tourist attractions, and trivia. Meanwhile, the Jews are still very much alive, and our relationship with G-d is strong as ever.

DID MOSES LIE?

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh the Jews only wanted to leave for three days?

It seems a bit bizarre. Why would Moses lie?

Let's dig in a little deeper.

The Exodus was not just a historical event. The redemption from Egypt was a dress rehearsal and model for our future redemption from the present exile.

Just as G-d took us out of exile then, He will do the same again very soon!

But there are some important differences between the past and future redemptions.

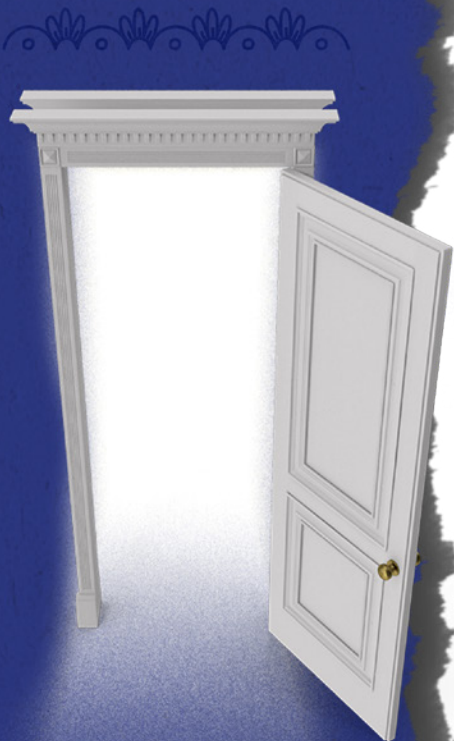
Interestingly, the "Three days" claim reflects one of those differences.

While in Egypt, the Jews had fallen into a deep state of mental and spiritual slavery. This was why many Jews, unfortunately, couldn't even bear the thought of redemption and chose to stay in Egypt. The grip of evil was so tight that Moses had to resort to a form of trickery to get the Jews out.

The highest form of redemption is when the evil is thoroughly defeated, and the good guys emerge proudly with their heads held high. This is much preferable to a redemption that is more like an escape, where the evil is still strong and the good guys must resort to fooling evil to get out.

On some level, the exodus from Egypt was a bit of an escape. But the future redemption will be total and complete. Evil will disappear forever, and we will walk out proudly.

There will be no shade or hint of evil or pain remaining. It will disappear, completely defeated.



RABBI MANIS FRIEDMAN

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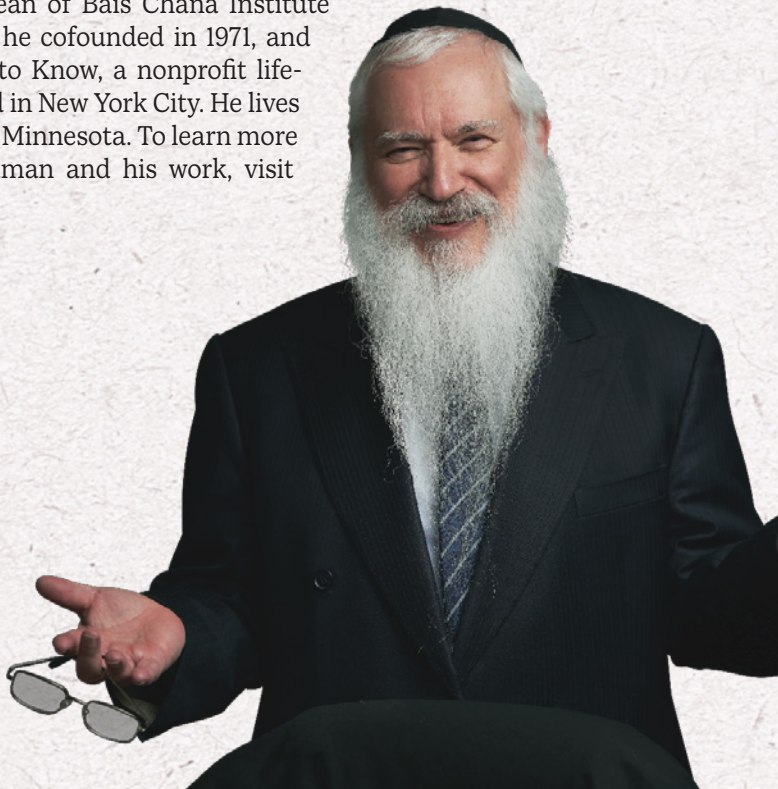
Rabbi Friedman is the dean of Bais Chana Institute of Jewish Studies, which he cofounded in 1971, and the founder of *It's Good to Know*, a nonprofit life-learning foundation based in New York City. He lives with his family in St. Paul, Minnesota. To learn more about Rabbi Manis Friedman and his work, visit www.ItsGoodToKnow.org

A TAKE ON PESACH

2023 | 5783

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*In loving memory of Zisel bat
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*In remembrance of the souls of our
parents: Nikolay and Flora Shmat and
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**WISHING YOU
A HAPPY & KOSHER
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