

בראשית

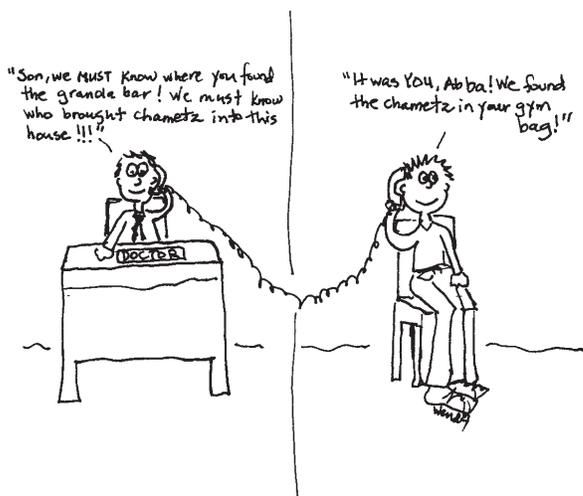
KEEPING THE PEACE DURING PASSOVER CLEANING

Shalom Rosenfeld

Ah, Passover cleaning. We all have friends who make heroic efforts to sanitize their homes top-to-bottom. Truth be told, some of what they do is required by Jewish law; a lot of it isn't. Yet many feel compelled to clean beyond their obligation, for a variety of reasons.

To followers of the *Kabbala* (mystic traditions), the cleaning is an introspective search for elements within themselves that are "inflated" and false, things they're sure don't exist, yet somehow they still show up. Others, I think, may simply enjoy this "spring cleaning" as a good way of sweeping winter out the door. In any case, it's important to remember that the same religion that gives us Passover, also reminds us that "*Deracheha darchei no'am*" - "the path of the Torah is one of pleasantness," and we must maintain civility as we perform the mitzvot. No matter how stressed we are in preparation, this is in fact supposed to be a joyous occasion. And so, despite the compulsion to clean, we must not lose sight of concepts like *Shalom Bayit* - familial harmony. In fact, this point was driven home to me by an incident that happened on Passover eve in my own family.

I had been attending college and yeshiva in New York, where, in one form or another, I had been studying the laws of Passover for a year and a half. Fortunately, my college was off for the holiday, and I was able to *(cont. on p. 3)*



PASSOVER IN GERMANY

Damon Kuzniar

Ever the adventurous type, I jumped at the opportunity to join my friend Noah at his father's Passover Seder in Germany. I was, to say the least, excited and eager to explore a new land, see a new culture, and to experience how Jews on "that side of the pond" celebrate Passover. More than that, I was also intrigued to be in a land where Jewish history stretched back for almost a thousand years--even given that only 65 or so years ago Germany perpetrated what was, unquestionably, one of the darkest and most horrific crimes in Jewish, indeed human, history--the Holocaust. How would the German people react to me walking down the street with my yarmulke? How many are still around who would even remember what life was like before the war? How would the history of two generations ago affect my experience?

This Passover adventure actually began in an Orthodox seminary in Monsey, New York, where I had been studying Judaism. Having become interested in spirituality in college, I wanted to first explore my Jewish roots before looking elsewhere. Noah, whom I met the day I arrived, was someone with whom I felt an immediate connection. In his early twenties, he had come from the south of France for very much the same reasons as I had, but he had already been at the school for *(cont. on p. 2)*

PASSOVER MEMORIES

Andrea Lieblein

My first memories of Passover...sitting underneath the Seder table at my grandparents' house in the Bronx. During the reading of the Haggadah, I proceeded to tie everyone's shoelaces together. I did, however, emerge from beneath the table long enough to take the *Afikomen* from beneath the cushion upon which my grandpa Morris sat. Of course, I also remember breaking the matzoh into little pieces and making a crumbly mess. I also remember skipping the homemade gefilte fish made by my Grandma Sadie, since my mother had given both my sister and me dinner before the Seder began.

Our Seder observances were divided between my grandparents in the Bronx and my grandparents in Far Rockaway. I remember that Seders in the Bronx began after sundown and continued until midnight. My Far Rockaway grandparents, on the other hand, were more lax about the Seders--they began earlier in the evening. My Grandpa Herman would hide the *Afikomen* and all the grandchildren would search the house looking for it. As a child, Passover was all about finding the *Afikomen* and exchanging it for financial gain.

During the week leading up to Passover, my sister and I would spend hours running up and down the stairs to the basement with various dishes and pots and pans as my *(cont. on p. 3)*

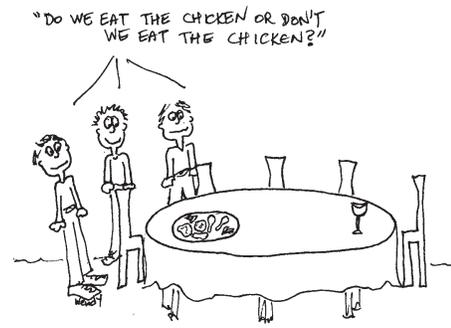
GERMANY (cont. from p. 1)...over a year. Noah's invitation to me and our friend Chaim, offered us the opportunity to not only see the Jewish community in Germany, but also to visit Noah's mother in the south of France for the last days of Passover. Along the way, we also planned to visit several historic sites in southern Germany where we would see thousand-year-old Jewish cemeteries wherein lie the graves of various Torah giants such as Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch in Frankfurt am Main and the synagogue/study hall of perhaps the most important medieval Torah scholar, Rabbi Shlomo Yizchaki (Rashi) in the city of Worms.

Our trip throughout Germany was very exciting. Meeting all of Noah's German relatives at the Seder and visiting the ancient places of Jewish residence was inspiring. And while people did look at us, it was more of a stare of wonderment than an insidious stare. In fact, the whole time we were in Germany we had no problems with anti-Semitism. Indeed, it seems that most Germans, not having experienced the past directly, regard religious Jews as mythical creatures out of a history book.

The same cannot be said of France, where we spent the last days of Passover. The leading French rabbis have recommended strongly that Jews not walk in the streets wearing yarmulkes. Consequently, my friends and I felt constrained to keep hats on our heads even when visiting tourist sites. The anti-Semitism I had worried about feeling in Germany was tangible, instead, in France.

Perhaps the most inspiring part of our trip, for me, however, was confronting the Jew I was becoming when amongst strangers. We arrived at Noah's father's house a few days before the holiday, which gave us plenty of time to prepare. While Noah's father, Benny, was observant of Jewish law, he did not have the benefit of a strong Jewish education. Assessing the situation, Noah concluded that we would not be able to eat the chicken because it was being cooked in an oven that had not been kashered for Passover. This would prove to be a great challenge, since I had always considered myself a nice, normal, polite guy. I was very uncomfortable with the idea of being a guest in someone's house and not eating their food on grounds that it was rendered non-kosher simply because it was cooked with vessels that were kosher throughout the rest of the year. After all, I had only been keeping kosher for a few months and did not have a deep understanding of why Jews keep kosher, and, all the more so, why things that are normally permissible fifty-one weeks a year (such as bread, crackers, and the average weekday cooking utensils) suddenly become prohibited during the week of Passover.

Being placed in such a situation, however, caused me to explore my understanding not just of Passover, but of the laws of keeping kosher in general. The institution of keeping kosher dates back thousands of years to the Revelation at Sinai. Tersely recorded in the written Torah, kashrut is elaborated on extensively in the Talmud, the Oral Law. What is the purpose of these dietary laws? Many answers have been given and often people who have not plumbed the vast depths of the Talmud have suggested that kashrut was instituted for health reasons. A basic reading of the Bible, however, shows that health is never given as a reason for not eating a certain animal or a particular combination of foods. The special dietary laws of Passover further illustrates that keeping kosher is a matter much larger than basic physical health. On Passover there are special stringencies that prohibit eating food that is normally permitted throughout the year. Obviously, if health were the issue, then those foods would be prohibited



"You SHALL BE HOLY!"

throughout the year as well.

After researching the concepts of "kosher," I concluded that the only compelling reason for these dietary laws is that G-d said so. These dietary instructions, if you will, teach us how to keep our souls in a state of holiness--purity--which is a tool to help us achieve the closest humanly-possible bond with the Al-mighty. One example of this relationship between food restrictions and holiness appears in Exodus 22:30: "And you shall be holy unto Me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs." This verse is just one of several places where Jews are exhorted to be holy and *therefore* not eat something that is not kosher.

When I was visiting Noah's father in Germany, however, I had not yet delved deeply into Jewish law and was as yet hesitant about where to draw the line between respecting one's host and being faithful to strict law. Noah, who also wished to respect his father and certainly did not wish to embarrass him, was hesitant to tell his father that we would not be able to eat the chicken that his wife was preparing. Noah, Chaim and I concluded, therefore, that we would just do our best to eat all the food that was permissible, and to be discrete about not eating the food that was not. In the end, because there were so many people at the table for the meals and plenty of other food that was not problematic, we were able to indulge and eat our fill without anyone noticing that we skipped the chicken.

By the end of the ten or so days of traveling, we were ready to return to our seminary in New York. I came back inspired by the renewal of Jewish life in Germany, the bravery of the Jews of France, and the ancient history of my people. More than that, I was eager to begin delving deeper into my studies and learn more about an amazing religion that has survived and flourished because Jews throughout time have gone out of their way to "be holy," whether by keeping the laws of Kashrut, observing the Passover holiday, or just being proud of being Jewish.

Damon Kuzniar, originally from Lake Tahoe, CA, just moved to Toronto, Canada, where he lives with his new wife, Leat. Mazal Tov Damon and Leat (3/22/04)!

Passover Points To Ponder: A Reciprocal Relationship

Passover is unique in that it is the only festival that was celebrated by the Jews before they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Jews showed great faith in G-d by defying their Egyptian masters and slaughtering a lamb, one of the Egyptian deities, and placing the blood outside on their doorposts. This faith in G-d is the foundation of the Jewish nation and defines the reciprocity of the Jewish relationship with G-d. When Jews put their faith in G-d, G-d hears their prayers.

MEMORIES (cont. from p. 1)...mother began her cooking marathon for the holiday. At first she would bring food to my grandparents' homes, but eventually my parents took over making the first night Seder. My father's responsibility was--and still is to this day--to make the *Charoset*. The New York Times publishes several recipes each year, and each year my father prepares a different one. My father's other job was the *Afikomen*. Year after year, he put the *Afikomen* in his coat pocket and, when the meal was served, placed the jacket on the couch. Every child whether 5 or 35, received some Susan B. Anthony Silver dollars. The second night's Seder was taken over by my aunt and uncle to whose home we would come with the roasted egg, shank bone and home-made *charoset* in hand.

Once I was on my own and living in my own apartment, Passover did not seem so important to me. Of course, I participated in the Seders, but, as for kashering my home as my mother did...well, I didn't. Beyond staying away from *chametz* (leavened grains), I didn't do much else. Several years ago, however, I became romantically involved with a man more observant than myself and I began to attend synagogue on a more regular basis and participated in a Beginners Service. When David and I set up our own home, I called a rabbi to assist me in kashering our home and was slightly anxious when he showed up with a blow torch and propane gas tank and proceeded to attack my stove and oven!

Since then, my observance of Passover has also changed. I have begun to celebrate Passover in a more observant manner, more similar to the one in my mother's home. With my newfound commitment, I now go on a marathon shopping spree and fill my shopping cart with Kosher for Passover everything. Little did I know that even dishwashing soap must be certified Kosher for Passover! A few days before Passover, I take out my "How to Kosher Your Kitchen for Passover" instruction manual and follow it step by step. Since we live in an apartment, we do not have to run up and down the stairs with pots and pans, but we still must move all the regular dishes out of the kitchen and take the Passover pots and pans out of storage. The refrigerator must be cleaned, the oven scoured, and the burners turned on high to burn any remaining *chametz*.

David has introduced me to the beautiful ritual of *Bedikatz Chametz* (searching for leaven/*chametz*). At sundown, prior to the first night, I hide a few symbolic crumbs of *chametz* around the apartment. We shut off the lights, light a candle and "search" the house for the crumbs. The following morning, David puts the crumbs in a brown paper bag and goes outside to burn those last remnants of *chametz*.

In the past few years, I have experienced many firsts – including making my first Seder. I accomplished this with a lot of telephonic support from my mother who walked me through the step-by-step process of roasting an egg and preparing a turkey. What



can I tell you – cooking isn't my forte. Although the egg didn't look quite roasted and the *charoset* did not come out quite as good as my father's, there was a lot of love and good-spirit in the air as we took turns reading the Haggadah and listening for the "whoosh" of wings as Elijah came to drink the fifth cup of wine.

Passover has thus become much more meaningful to me. I no longer sit under the table tying shoelaces together. Instead, I listen to the words of the Haggadah and, in my mind, accompany Moses as he leads the Jews from Egypt. The journey that began in the wilderness, I now realize, continues to this day. Passover is a beautiful holiday, and one in which I am proud to prepare for and to participate.

Andrea Lieblein, currently of Manhattan, is the director at a large Medicaid managed care plan. In her spare time, she enjoys competing in both road races and triathlons, reading, traveling and learning more about Judaism.

KEEPING THE PEACE (cont. from p. 1)...come home the night before the Seder night--the night of the search for *chametz* (leavened products). My father, who is a doctor, was on call, so I was expected to do the *bedikat chametz*, the final search across the darkened house with the solitary light of a candle revealing any last lurking leavened material. While I had had a few days of rest before returning home, my mother had been cleaning for a solid week-and-a-half beforehand, ensuring that our house would be spanking clean. Naturally, she was well beyond exhaustion.

Beginning the search, I went from room to room. I've always enjoyed *bedikat chametz*. It's a bit spooky with the whole house dark, and I can see why it's often viewed introspectively. Just as I was finishing the inspection, my mother returned from some errands. Proud of her cleaning efforts, yet curious to know the results, she inevitably asked me, "Well, did you find anything?"

At this point, the correct answer would have been: "No, I didn't find anything." Unfortunately, I related the factually accurate account.

"Well, just one granola bar."

"WHAT?! A granola bar?! Where! Who! How?"

"It was in somebody's bag."

"WHAT?! WHOSE BAG?"

"I can't say."

"Just tell me already."

"I'm sorry. I can't say."

"Come on, tell me."

"No, I'm sorry. I can't say."

"I'm your mother! Tell me already, which kid's bag was it in?!"

Was it Aaron's?! Esther's?!" (I'm the oldest of six, thank G-d.)

"I told you I'm sorry, but I can't say."

(She grins.)

"It was in yours, wasn't it?!"

"I'm sorry. I can't say."

(She's not grinning anymore.)

"TELL ME ALREADY!!! WHOSE BAG WAS IT IN!!!!!!!"

"AHH!!! I CLEAN THIS WHOLE HOUSE TOP TO BOTTOM, AND SOME KID HAS TO MESS IT ALL UP, AND . . ."

"No. I'm sorry. And that's why the rabbis of the Talmud say you have to go around with a flashlight. Something is going to slip through, that's just how it goes."

"THAT DOES IT!! I'm going to page *Abba* (father), and he's going to tell you to tell me!"

(cont. on p. 4)

KEEPING THE PEACE (cont. from p. 3)...

"Fine. Could I speak to *Abba* please?"

Mother gets on the phone with father, sounding quite frantic and explaining the episode to him. Meanwhile, I'm waiting across the kitchen and asking, "Could I please speak to *Abba* now?" After about five minutes, my mother hands me the phone.

"*Abba* said I shouldn't take it so seriously, because ultimately it's his responsibility. But he also said that you were WRONG to not tell me which kid it was, because I need to know!"

"Fine."

I take the phone. Preferring that my mother not hear, I go down to the basement. But wait; is she still listening on the other phone? Do I talk in code or something? Hmm . . . her Yiddish is better than mine; ditto on French; my father doesn't speak Spanish . . . -ah. Aramaic, that cousin of Hebrew, the language of the Talmud, there we go!

"Shalom?"

"Yes, *Abba*?"

"I know you've gone through *Chafetz Chaim*, the laws of slander and gossipmongering several times, but I want you to understand that we're not going to excessively punish the kid whose *chametz* it is. We just need to know as parents so the kid can understand in the future that. . ."

"*Abba*?"

"Yes?"

"*Didach Hava* (It was yours)."

"What?"

"*Didach Hava*."

"Huh?"

"It was in your gym bag."

"What? Which one?"

"The blue one, in the closet by the playroom."

"What? I checked that one."

"Yes. But there was a zippered compartment within a zippered compartment."

"Ohh."

"Ohhh."

"Shalom, so you mean that. . ."

"Yes *Abba*, if it was one of the kids, I would have told Ima right away. But I didn't think it was in my place to get her mad at you."

"Ohhhhhhhh. . . now I see. Could you please put me back on the phone with *Ima*?"

"Hello? What? Yours? Oh! Ha ha ha. Okay. Have a good night. Bye." (She hangs up.) "Shalom, you're off the hook."

-Phew!

There is a Medieval Jewish saying: "The deliverance of G-d happens like the blink of an eye." What to make of this story, I leave to you. I can say that my mother and father weren't terribly embarrassed by it. I know that because when things were a lot more relaxed, they were telling the story to everybody they knew over the holiday meals. And somehow, life went on.

With that in mind, I wish you all a happy, kosher, and above all, a *peaceful* Passover.

Shalom Rosenfeld has been running a new Beginners Service in Silver Spring. He is a native of Indianapolis and currently a graduate student at the University of Maryland.

Illustrations by Wendy Dunn

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*Bereshith: "In the Beginning" is edited under the direction of Sarah Rochel Hewitt, Rabbi Yitzchak Rosenbaum, and Beryl Levenson of the **National Jewish Outreach Program, Inc.** Special Beginners Services are conducted at synagogues throughout the United States to introduce those with limited backgrounds to the beauty of the traditional Hebrew service. For more information regarding the Beginners Service closest to your home, to establish a local Beginners Service, or to learn more about NJOP programs, please write or call: 989 Sixth Avenue, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10018, (646) 871-4444, e-mail info@njop.org.*

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