

BERESHITH

"IN THE BEGINNING"

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by Beginners

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בראשית

FROM GOAT TO G-D: "CHAD GADYA" TELLS THE STORY OF THE JEWS

Rabbi Judah Dardik

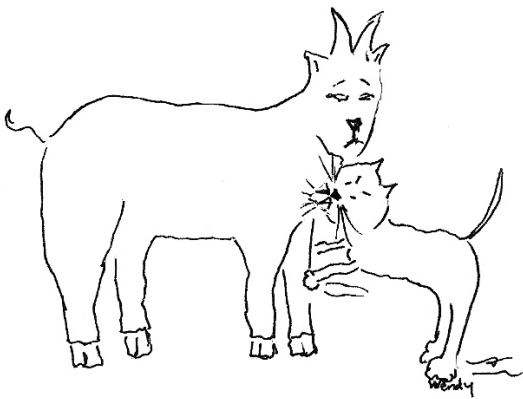
"CHAD GADYA"

The Passover seder can run quite late. As a child, I fought to stay up for the excitement that comes at the end: the hunt for the hidden afikomen matzah (with its accompanying prize) and the cheery songs at the very end. "Who Knows One?" You can bet we all did. And then there was the song about the little goat. What was the little goat doing at the end of our seder?

"Chad Gadya," or "One Little Goat," tells the story of a chain of events. There was a little goat that father bought for two coins. All was well, until a cat came along and ate the goat. The cat fell prey to a dog, the dog was beaten by a stick, and so on and so forth until G-d gets involved to polish off the Angel of Death at the back end of the series. Great story, but remind me again why I'm reading this on a stomach full of matzah and wine at one in the morning?

In the 18th century, Rav Yonatan Eibschitz ended up in a dispute with a fellow rabbi. In time, the people of the various communities in the area began to take sides in the disagreement, some siding with Rav Eibschitz and some against. As can be expected, this only fanned the flames and made things much worse. It is said that he offered the following insight into the "Chad Gadya" song at that time:

The song begins with a nice, sweet little goat. Along comes a vicious cat and eats it--bad cat. Then comes the dog that bites the cat--good dog. (cont. on p. 3)



WHEN OTHERS GET INVOLVED IN DISPUTES...THE
OUTCOME BECOMES DISTORTED!!

SEARCH ME!

S.R. Hewitt

When I was a small child, I was delighted when my school gave each of us a paper bag containing a feather, a candle and a wooden spoon. With these implements, we were armed to go home and help our parents search for chametz - only my parents didn't. Along with the majority of children who attended the Jewish day school in our small community, I did not come from a home that actively practiced Jewish observance. We had no Shabbat dinners, we had no hesitations about ordering 'pork lo mein' at the local Chinese restaurant, and we certainly didn't clean every nook and cranny of our house in preparation for Pesach.

Obviously, we were proud to be Jewish--after all, my parents had chosen to send their two children to the local Jewish day school. My mother was even a member of our synagogue a *capella* choir that sang at Friday night services. We were somewhat observant of the "major" Jewish holidays such as Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Chanukah and Pesach. We were aware of Sukkot and Purim and Shavuot, but not much more.

In my house, the idea of "turning over the kitchen" (as many say euphemistically to describe making the house (cont. on p. 2)

KEEPING PASSOVER IN A NON-JEWISH WORLD

Jean Herskowitz

It is not easy being an observant Jew, and there is no harder time to be observant than Pesach.

There is the vast amount of cleaning, the endless shopping and cooking, and for most of us, the employment issues.

As for the housework, I remember when I was young, my mom would go into the bedroom and start pulling out drawers, empty everything onto the bed, pull out the shelf liner, clean the drawers, and load everything back into them. I tagged around after her as she emptied out her purses, tossed stuff from drawers she no longer wanted and scoured the house.

Then there's the food. Kosher food is expensive enough; Passover food is a whole other ball game. Cooking, if you wish to add the traditional touch (thank heavens for ready-made), is one part delight and three parts headache with dishes attached. And forget about the afikoman--the real Pesach hunt is for the elusive kosher-for-Passover Coke.

But for those of us who work, Pesach is definitely the holiday where we stand out the most. We have to clear leaving early (yes boss, it's not just Friday nights), miss a lot of days (cont. on p. 3)

SEARCH ME! (cont. from p. 1)... kosher for Passover) was non-existent. Looking back, I recall putting all of what we thought might be chametz into one cabinet and taping it closed, but we certainly didn't search out bread crumbs and cookie pieces under the couch. So each year, my little paper bag with its white candle, wooden spoon and soft feather was put on the table and, eventually, thrown out unused.

It was in college that I became more observant, and, for several years after, I was a bit of a transient. I lived with family or friends, so I didn't actually own a place to clean. More importantly, I always made plans for the entire week of the holiday so that I would not have to return to my abode, and therefore could simply sell my chametz space.

Learning to clean for Pesach was something of a rite of passage --but one I was gently eased into. The first apartment that I was required to clean was one I shared with two other women. In the four years or so that we shared that apartment we developed a ritual of sorts. Each of us was responsible for her own room, but one Sunday close to Pesach was designated as group-cleaning-day during which we would divide up the kitchen. Our camaraderie made the work fun, and, at the end of the day, we rewarded ourselves with dinner at a local burger joint.

Now that I am the mother of three small children, I don't expect the Pesach cleaning to be the work of camaraderie. My husband and I will most likely have to divide and conquer. His job will be to remove the children from the house. (Did I mention that my toddler has a fondness for sliced bread and could give Hansel and Gretel a run for their money on bread crumb trails?)

Let me take a moment to explain that I believe that some people are born with a predisposition to cleaning. They actually enjoy finding and destroying dirt. And I hope and pray to G-d that some of my children will soon feel this way, so I can off-load some cleaning on them!

I have never liked to clean, and at this point in my life I don't expect that to change. But there is something different about Pesach cleaning. I feel a tremor in my heart when people start talking about Pesach cleaning, and surprisingly, it isn't a tremor of fear!

The Jewish calendar is full of opportunities for one to start over. Rosh Hashana, the New Year, is a time of repentance. Purim is compared by the sages to Yom Kippur, as an opportunity for atonement, etc. Of course at those times I try to do *Teshuva* (repentance) and to inspire myself to be a better person in all ways. But, like cleaning, metaphysical soul-searching has never been one of my strengths--I am, without a doubt, a down-to-earth, pragmatic type of person who wants to *do* something.

Pesach cleaning gives me something to do to prepare. It gives me an activity through which to channel my spiritually focused mental energy.

The Passover cleaning is analogous to giving one's self a thorough check-up. We check in every drawer, move the dresser to seek out crumbs, thumb through the well-used books and even rifle through coat pockets, just in case there are any tucked away bits of pretzels, cookies or even bread. And as we do these seemingly hum-drum activities, we can think about how we have acted during the year, the *tzedakah* (charity) we did or did not give, the mitzvot that we might have overlooked. And, we look for these things not with the intention of beating ourselves up, but in order to make ourselves better.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Sounds like I'm a real saint! Hardly. While I do look forward to this process of spiritual improvement, I still dislike the physical act of cleaning. Therefore, I have decided to take proactive steps that can help me on my cleaning mission.

1) To overcome laziness! Laziness, *atzlanut*, is so tempting at this time of year. It is so easy to just assume that no Cheerios could possibly have been overlooked in the living room...but then I recall the story I heard of a family discovering a child's secret Cheerios stash when they turned on the air conditioner and the Cheerios came flying out!

2) To focus on *Teshuva* (repentance) and doing more to build my relationship with G-d. The *Haggadah* instructs us to have in mind that we too were redeemed from Egypt. At the time of their redemption, the Midrash explains, the spiritual level of the Children of Israel was less than stellar, but they cried out to G-d and He heard their cry. I too need to learn to cry out as they did, so that in the harried hustle and bustle I will remember who really runs the world.

3) To fight against my tendency toward anger. Anger is a symptom of arrogance, of thinking one is absolutely right without giving anyone else a chance to be judged favorably for their actions. In fact, Maimonides equates anger with idol worship because a person assumes that they know what should have been, even better than G-d does. At this time of year, with so much pressure to get everything done, it is hard to remain calm--especially when I find a three year old child sitting in a room that was just cleaned, innocently eating pretzels from a bag held slightly askew.

This year my children will bring home their own paper bags with a wooden spoon, a candle, and a feather. And perhaps I will look at that wooden spoon and think with joy of all the pleasure that others will savor from the delicious foods I will cook. And perhaps that candle will remind me that my own *Pintele Yid* (Jewish spark within) needs to be allowed to shine. And perhaps I will use that feather to tickle my children so that their laughter echoes through the house instead of the stern sounds of rebuke. This year, that bag will not go unused.

(Oh yes, the paper bag will be for me to use when hyperventilating when I think about the work I have yet to do!)

Sarah Rochel Hewitt lives in Montreal and works for the National Jewish Outreach Program.



FROM GOAT TO G-D (cont. from p. 1)...But then the stick hits the perfectly nice canine that had come to the scene--bad stick. The fire that burns the stick? We're all in favor of that fire. We then jeer the water that puts out the fire but love the ox that drinks up the water (that'll show 'em!). Along comes the *shochet* (butcher) that slaughters the ox--very bad *shochet* indeed.

But where does that leave us? Cheering the Angel of Death who brings the demise of the *shochet*, and booing G-d for taking away the Angel of Death? That cannot be!

The moral of the story, according to Rav Eibschitz, is clear. A cat and a goat were having a dispute. These things happen in nature. But when all the others got involved, the outcome became distorted. No one else should have interfered in his disagreement, and the consequences of the buildup of sides without cause proved destructive.

His words ring true for so many interpersonal disputes. In many cases, those who intervene don't belong there.

Perhaps though, we sing this song on Passover to reach out to the one that we hope will intervene on our behalf: G-d. Commentators have suggested that the little goat is a symbol for the Jewish people, whose loving Father in Heaven "acquired" us with two coins--the two tablets on which were engraved the Ten Commandments.

History has witnessed this gentle little goat being beaten up by many an aggressive cat. It has also seen those cats themselves bitten by other animals and fading from the scene. On these nights we remember that we were there as the Egyptians met their demise. The Babylonians are gone, as are the Greeks of old and the Romans. We are not always in a position to see the chain all the way to the top, but we hope and pray that G-d is looking out for us from above.

The closing portions of the seder shift the focus from the past, to the present and future. We move from remembering our affliction at the hands of the Egyptians to considering where we are today and where we dream to be. Jews have for thousands of years opened the door to welcome Eliyahu, the harbinger of redemption, in the hope that this would be the last Passover on which we had anything to fear. May G-d intervene on our behalf whenever we are in need.

Rabbi Judah Dardik is the Rabbi of Beth Jacob Congregation in Oakland, California. This article first appeared on jweekly.com in April 2006.

KEEPING PASSOVER (cont. from p. 1)...and explain that it's for another Jewish holiday, and hear our co-workers naively whine, "I wish I were Jewish."

We have to sit in meetings with our matzahs (crackly, crumbly and large, they might as well glow fluorescent green) on plates separate and different than those of the other employees--who are eating the company-provided lunch.

Today, of course, it is a lot easier to keep Pesach than back in the old days; now the stores sell everything you need to keep your food looking normal, for the most part.

It was different when I was growing up in McKeesport, PA, a small steel mill city with a nice-sized Jewish community, where the closest kosher supermarket was in Pittsburgh--a 35-minute drive away. I still remember drinking my iced tea out of a Pesachdik small jar in the school cafeteria in junior high. One of the hoodlums who was friendly to me, yelled to me from the next table, "Hey Jean, is that a urine sample?" "Yes," I responded. Then I smiled broadly, picked up the jar as though making a toast, took a swig, and said, "Delicious!" I was so brazen about it, she giggled in spite of herself--and shut up. After that I got a few curious stares, but everyone left me alone.

There is another improvement over the way things used to be: there are seders everywhere open to the Jewish public. They serve delicious food and offer relaxed, beautiful Passover ambiance.

As for the upside, there is nothing like the feeling of completing the work, clearing out all the chametz, finishing the food preparations, and having everything done in time for Pesach. Being able to sit back at the seder - finally! - and relax and enjoy.

And surely no food compares to traditional Jewish food. Passover food is worth waiting a year for (with the exception of the cake, but even that tastes far better than in years gone by). If you've grown up with particular traditional foods in your family - my mom made strawberry-pineapple-banana fruit cocktail every Pesach - it brings back memories and a sense of continuity; a feeling of belonging to something larger than yourself.

And anyone who has spent time being observant knows there are other rewards. I personally have seen non-Jewish people and non-affiliated Jews all my life, who have apparently suffered greatly trying to find themselves, trying to find where they fit in. When you have cleaned an entire dwelling for Pesach, spent hours preparing food, and then spend at least three hours in shul each day of Pesach, you know who you are. Your sense of being is not in flux.

But in the end, it comes down to one thing. Faith. As unoriginal as it sounds. Believing is hard work, every day. It takes sacrifice and it's not like we're handed a reward for it on a daily basis.

In spite of this, we can see proof of G-d everyday. After all that has happened to us, the Jews are still here. Israel, surrounded as it is, is still here--respected and strong. I see everyday how people who claim to not like Jews, still evidence, unbeknownst to them, a respect for us.

Even the little things. It is always a wonder to me that the Jews I meet from other countries, who speak different languages, listen to the same Torah being read on Shabbat as I do. As did our parents and grandparents. We all keep Pesach.

Keeping Passover boldly emphasizes what it is like being a Jew in a non-Jewish world. It makes our differences more obvious when we have to go the extra mile. We can only attempt to be a light to the nations, knowing that the Guy upstairs knows, cares, sees all, and ultimately will judge us according to our merits.

Jean Herskowitz is a freelance journalist living in Manhattan. Jean is currently volunteering at the offices of the National Jewish Outreach Program.



INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMS

From NJOP.ORG

Throughout the 2000 years of exile, the Jewish nation has dwelled in almost every corner of the world. England, Syria, Russia or China, no matter the country, Passover has been a sacred time for all Jews. Whether from an Ashkenazi or a Sephardi background, the matzah, the maror and the text of the Haggadah unify the Jewish nation. But differences between communities have spiced the flavor of every Seder.

Charoset: This tasty dish represents the mortar that the Jewish slaves used to build Pharaoh's cities. The recipe varies between communities. Most Ashkenazic communities make their charoset based on walnuts, apples and wine. The Persian community mixes spices with such fruit and nuts as bananas, oranges, pistachios, pomegranates and dates. Another Sephardic charoset recipe is made by boiling dates into a thick liquid, straining it and adding chopped walnuts. Venetian Jews blend chestnut paste and apricots.

Yachatz (The Breaking of the Middle Matzah): In some Sephardi communities, the Seder leader attempts to break the middle matzah into the shape of letters. Syrians break the matzah in the shape of the Hebrew letters *dalet* and *vav*. North African Jews break it so as to form the 2 components of the Hebrew letter *hey*. (Hiding and stealing the afikoman is an Ashkenazi, not a Sephardi, tradition.)

Re-enacting the Exodus: A pervasive custom throughout Sephardi communities is to dramatize the Exodus. Generally this takes place immediately following *Yachatz*, the breaking of the middle matzah, or after *Ha Lachma Anya*, the first paragraph of the *Maggid* section.

The basic script for this dramatization is as follows:

Person holding the afikoman: "Their remaining possessions were tied up in their bags on their shoulders and the children of Israel did as Moses commanded."

Other Seder Participants: "From where are you coming?"

Afikoman holder: "From Egypt."

Participants: "Where are you going to?"

Afikoman holder: "To Jerusalem."

Participants: "What are your supplies?"

Afikoman holder: "Matzah and Maror."

This ceremony varies not only as to when it is said, but who says it (sometimes only the leader, sometimes one child gets up and knocks on door before the dialogue begins, and sometimes each participant of the Seder holds the afikoman in turn), and how the afikoman is wrapped and held (in a napkin or a bag, held on the right shoulder or thrown over the shoulder).

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