

CyberTorah: Let all Who are Hungry Come and Eat

Passover Seder begins with a challenge. We lift the Matzah and say, “This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat...” For this opening paragraph, Matzah is the bread of poverty and oppression. It is the bread the poor eat because they cannot afford “rich” or leavened bread. Just as we are about to fill our tables with an incredible feast, we remind ourselves of poverty.

In my family, we strive to live up to the challenge of inviting all who are hungry to come and eat in two ways. Those two modes reflect a duality that pervades the entire Seder experience. At the Seder we ask: why is this night different than all other nights? And we answer in two ways. One is physical. We were brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. The second answer is spiritual. God brought us forth to Monotheism and service of God. Or as Jonathan Sacks puts it in his marvelous Hagaddah commentary, we are free from slavery and free to serve God.

We maintain this duality when we fulfill “let all who are hungry come and eat.” There is a long tradition at Pesach of giving “maot chitin,” literally flour money. Maot chitin is money given to the poor to enable everyone to have Matzah at Pesach. It is literally money for the flour that will then be used to make the matzahs.

Passover is about ending physical oppression. Hunger is a harsh taskmaster that narrows the soul. Just as the Jews found themselves spiritually constrained – kotzar ruach – because of Egyptian persecution, so also those who are hungry today find themselves constrained in their ability to imagine a better life. This is why my preparations of Seder include a donation to Second Harvest. I want to emulate God and help someone out of the grinding oppression of poverty.

As the economy slows, Second Harvest is more needed than ever. Food requests are up 15% this year. Further, they sent a lot of food and resources down to the fires in San Diego and are only now beginning to recover. Finally, most of their donations come in December. Our donations at this time make a big difference.

Pesach is also about ending spiritual oppression. We say, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” Yet there is more to hunger than an empty belly. Many of us are spiritually hungry. We are craving community and spiritual connections. In our isolated anomistic age we search for connections that touch our essence as a person, connections that speak to our soul.

Every year I invite a few people to my Seder who either have never been to a traditional Seder before or who are in need of a place. Every year I feel I gain more than I give because of how much our guests enrich everyone’s experience as new connections and friendships grow. After all, I too am hungry for connection and community.

Passover is a marvelous time of year to remind ourselves of what matters in our lives. God brought us out of Egypt and oppression to Sinai. That means hope exists and that our lives have

meaning. Our Passover celebration requires that we share with others the hopeful experience of redemption in which we rejoice at this time of year.

Let all who are hungry come and eat. As we eat and celebrate, let us make sure that others have full bellies as well. As we rejoice in community, let us open our homes and hearts so that all who are hungry for Seder come and eat.

I am accepting Maot Chittin donations to my discretionary fund. These funds will then be forwarded to Second Harvest. You can also donate directly to them as well.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi David Booth

If you would like to be added to the CyberTorah distribution list, please email Rabbi Booth at rabbibooth@kolemeth.org



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