



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

Rabbi Soloveitchik: A Night Of *Chesed*

At the Pesach seder we engage in the curious custom of *yachatz*, breaking the matzah into two parts. Why is this one of

the fifteen steps to freedom?

One well-known explanation is offered in the Talmud (Pesachim 115b): “Mah darko shel ani beprusa ... — just as a poor person eats a broken piece of a loaf, so matzah must be eaten as a broken piece.” The poor slave would break the flat crusty bread and hide away a piece for later, not knowing where his next meal would come from. The breaking of the matzah at the seder symbolizes the way we first ate matzah as slaves.

A Story

The Beis Halevi, Rabbi Joseph Baer Soloveitchik (1820–1892), the illustrious great-grandfather of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik is the subject of this touching Pesach story. A poor man came to the home of Rabbi Joseph Baer. The man said that he had come to ask a question regarding Pesach. He had a halachic question to ask. He told the rabbi that he could not afford to buy wine, so he wished to know if he could fulfill the obligation to drink the four cups of wine during the seder by drinking four cups of milk.

Rabbi Joseph Baer said to him important command by drink—give the man 25 rubles with which gone, Rabbi Joseph Baer’s wife question: “Why, when wine costs him twenty– five?” Rabbi Joseph poor that he cannot afford wine for the seder, I doubt that he has the money to buy chicken and matzah for the seder nights. And you know something, if he is asking about drinking milk, that means he has no meat or chicken because he would not be mixing it with milk! I want to give him enough money so that he can buy the proper food that he needs to fully enjoy the *yontif* of Pesach.” (‘The Night That Unites’ Haggadah)



that one cannot not fulfill this ing milk and then proceeded to to buy wine. After the man had approached her husband with this two or three rubles, did you give Baer smiled and said, “If he is so

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt”l suggested an inspiring insight regarding this custom: Although when we think of the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt, we usually think that all the Jews must have been equally burdened by it, in truth this was not so. There were various degrees of slavery. Some Jews lived under bitter conditions, some worse. According to our sages, one tribe, the tribe of Levi, was never enslaved. What this means is that some had access to food and some did not. Those that did, claims Rabbi Soloveitchik, broke their bread and shared it with other Jews who had less.

Even the Jews who were enslaved in Egypt, but may have been better off, would split their piece of matzah and share it with those who suffered and needed it more than they did, hence the term “poor man’s bread.” When we break the matzah and perform *yachatz* as our forefathers did, it is a symbol of the *chesed*, the loving-kindness and solidarity of Jew toward their fellow Jew, even under the harshest conditions.

Bearing in mind this unique explanation, the flow of the seder, which transitions from the breaking of the matzah to the invitation “*kol dichfin yese veyechol*” — all who are in need are invited to join in the Pesach meal, is poignant. Inviting those who are in need activates a key virtue that permeates the Jewish heart: namely, *chesed* expressed through the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*, hospitality.

The mitzvah of hospitality is most precious to the Jew. It is rooted in our collective souls from the beginning of our history, as early as Abraham and Sarah who distinguished themselves in opening their homes to strangers. ■

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