

Pesach Stories

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The Stories Of Our Lives

Man is incapable of a sudden confrontation with his Creator. The overwhelming experience of such awareness is just too awesome. Truth, the stark Truth, must be camouflaged. Only then can the soul gradually absorb it.

God, so to speak, camouflaged Himself in stories. These are the stories of the Creation and of Adam and Eve; the stories of the Flood and of the Patriarchs; the stories of Jewish exile and redemption. God is hidden in all the stories of human history, and in the as yet untold stories of each and every human being—his trials, his tribulations, and his salvation.

At the Pesach Seder, we tell stories—*maggid*. We recount the stories of the exile in and the redemption from Egypt. These

represent the collective stories of mankind. They typify the individual stories of each and every one of us. As we relate the details of these stories, we must relate to them. Be aroused by them. See the Hand of God in the stories of our own lives.

Through the telling, we bring to life *their* stories. In turn, may God bring to life the story of *our* Redemption (LH, *Nedarim* 5:6-8) (*The Breslov Haggadah*, pp. 37-38).

Rebbe Nachman And Pesach

Once, on an intermediate day of Pesach, a young man came to Reb Avraham Sternhartz to speak to him about Rebbe Nachman's teachings. Because the young man had only recently become interested in Breslov Chassidut, Reb Avraham spoke with him at length. At the end of the conversation, he noticed how sad and troubled the young chassid appeared. The young man sensed this and began to relate all the difficulties and opposition he had encountered since becoming a Breslover chassid.

Reb Avraham said to him, "Nu! Today is Pesach, the time of our redemption," and started speaking to him about the greatness of Pesach, the Exodus, and the true meaning of freedom. He gave him much advice and encouragement to help him through these trying times. At the end of the conversation, Reb Avraham said, "*PeSaCh* has the same numerical value as Rebbe *NaChMaN* (148). How can we connect Rebbe Nachman and the concepts of Pesach? The Haggadah teaches us: 'This is what Hillel did: he took the Pesach, matzah and maror, and ate everything together.'"

Reb Avraham advised this young man to accept Hillel's teaching. We can partake of the Pesach—the true tzaddik—only by experi-encing bitterness and difficulty! Then we can fully appreciate these teachings. "Now," Reb Avraham said, "go home and have a very joyous Pesach!" (*Oral tradition*).

Longing For God At The Seder

Reb Noson would recite the Haggadah with great fervor and emotion. Often the members of his family were too afraid to look at him during the Seder, so great was the awe and fear visible upon Reb Noson's face. His grandson, Reb Avraham Sternhartz, related that the Seder night was a very trying time for Reb Noson's family. They were never sure that he would make it through the Seder without fainting. Once while reciting the words "The revelation of the Divine Presence!" he became so filled with emotion and a yearning for God that he actually did faint (*Oral tradition*).

The Bitter Herb

Rebbe Nachman told the following parable:

Once a Jew and a German gentile were traveling as hobo's together. The Jew told the German to make believe that he was a Jew (since his language was similar [to Yiddish]), and the Jews would have pity on him. Since Pesach was approaching, the Jew taught him how to act (when he is invited to a Seder). He told him that at every Seder, Kiddush is made and the hands are washed. However, he forgot to tell him about the bitter herb.

The German was invited to a house on the first night of Pesach and, being very hungry from all day, looked forward to the fine foods that had been described by the Jew. However, first they gave him a piece of celery dipped in salt water, and other things served at the Seder. They then began to recite the Haggadah and he sat there longing for the meal. When the matzah was served, he was very happy.

Then they gave him a piece of horseradish for the bitter herb. It was bitter to taste, and he thought that this was the entire meal. He ran from the house, bitter and hungry, saying to himself, "Cursed Jews! After all that ceremony, that's all they serve to eat!" He went to the synagogue where he had made up to meet his partner, and fell asleep.

After a while the Jew arrived, happy and full from a good meal. "How was your Seder?" he asked.

The other told him what had happened.

"Stupid German!" replied the Jew. "If you had waited just a little longer, you would have had a fine meal, as I had."

The same is true when one wants to come close to God. After all the effort to begin, one is given a little bitterness. This bitterness is needed to purify the body. But a person may think that this bitterness is all there is to serving God, so he runs away from it. But if he waited a short while and allowed his body to be purified, then he would feel every joy and delight in the world in his closeness to God (*Rabbi Nachman's Stories*, Parable #23).