

# Rebbe Nachman's Stories: The Bitter Herb

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Once two hobos, a Jew and a German gentile, traveled together. The Jew told the German to pretend he was a Jew (which he could do since their language is similar [to Yiddish]), and the Jews would have pity on him. Since Pesach was approaching, the Jew taught him how to behave (at a Seder). He outlined the stages of the Seder: Kiddush is made, the hands are washed, etc. However, he forgot to tell him about the bitter herb.

They went to the synagogue the first night of Pesach, and they were invited to different homes. The German was very hungry and 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; he sat there longing for the meal. When the matzah was served, he was very happy—that was the sign the main meal was about to begin! But they gave him the bitter herb—a piece of horseradish. It was so bitter, and he thought that this was the entire meal. He bolted from the table, 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 would wait a short while, and allow his body to be purified, he would feel every joy and delight in the world in his closeness to God.