



IT HAPPENED ONCE

PESACH IN SIBERIA

By Eliezer Naness

Excerpted from his book *Subota*, which details his experiences in a Russian labor camp where he was imprisoned for nearly two decades.

Just before Passover in 1938, I was summoned to the camp office. The commandant's aide informed me that my wife had sent a package containing warm clothing, a hundred rubles and a packet of matzot. He gave me everything except the matzot. "Because you do not work on Saturday, you will be having enough troubles. I advise you, for your own welfare, not to take the matzot. Ask the commandant to return them to your wife. Then there can be the possibility of discussing transferring you, and maybe your friend too, to some lighter work."

I thanked him for his advice and good intentions, and asked him to give me the matzot because I would not eat chametz (leaven) on Passover.

The representative apologized and added, "I can only warn you that you are doing yourself, and especially your young friend [Shmuel], a grave disservice. There is talk in camp already that you are demoralizing the other prisoners of your brigade. You know that there are plenty of ways of eliminating undesirable elements here. They'll send you off some place. On the way 'something' will happen. Your bones will never be found."

He gave me the matzot and said no more. I walked off delighted that we had matzot for Passover. The day prior to Passover, we went out to work as usual.

In the evening, when all the prisoners went to eat, Shmuel and I prayed the Passover evening service. Then we spread out a sack on the shelf where we slept at night and set the seder on it. We put out three matzot for both of us. We didn't have maror (bitter herbs) but we didn't lack bitter experiences. We had no wine either, but we had it in our thoughts, and we began the seder. First we recited the Kiddush. Then Shmuel asked me the four questions.

Shmuel and I spoke of our relatives. I thought of how my wife and my mother were now sitting in their houses alone, and that they were surely shedding tears over my condition in this brutal camp. Shmuel's thoughts were of his parents, also sitting at the seder without him. We decided then, that whatever awaited us the next day, on the holiday of Passover, we would not work. Just as the nation of Israel believed that G-d would redeem them from Egypt, so we believed that G-d would save us from this camp and that He would take all the Jews from Russia and bring them to Israel; just as the Jews could not escape from Egypt, so the Jews could not escape from Russia. Only G-d could take them from Russia and bring them to the Land of Israel.

Late that night we presented our brigadier with some matzot. He was very grateful and promised to help me. "You'll have to go out with the rest of the brigade. Otherwise I'll have to report you. Out there we'll find a way to keep you from working on the holiday."

On the first day of Passover, Shmuel and I evaded the brigade. The brigadier pretended not to notice our disappearance as we went wandering around the area. We found a tiny abandoned, unheated room, where we huddled in the intolerable cold. In the evening, when the brigade finished its work, we came out. Our reception was unfriendly.

After roll-call, everyone went to the mess hall while we prayed, conducted the second seder, and lay down to sleep. The following morning, the brigadier had a paternal conversation with us. "You know that there are no secrets in camp. The commandant has already been informed that you did not appear for work yesterday because of your holiday. The rumor is that you will be tried for 'collective refusal to work.' You are well aware that your reward for this can be a rope. I won't force you to work on your holy days, but I will not suffer along with you. Do as you wish without involving me. I want nothing to do with the whole thing."

Avoiding work that day was much more difficult than the first day, but we managed. Frozen and famished, we wandered around the work area. When night finally fell, we davened and then returned to our brigade and started working. Returning to the zone, we found our supervisor waiting for us.

"Look here," he said to me. "If you want to destroy your life, that's your affair. I don't wish you any evil, G-d forbid. The commandant isn't the least interested in your trial,

because this can cast a shadow on his whole career. He can send you to the other world without any trial, and he has done exactly that more than once to others. Consider very carefully how to get out of this danger."

In the commandant's office we found an NKVD colonel. The colonel spoke calmly and patiently, as though he counted his words. "What is the nature of your refusal to work on Saturdays and Jewish holidays?" "Only religious."

"We have taken a particular interest in this matter. We are informed that, according to Jewish law, work is permitted on Saturday if danger to life is involved. Hence, it is clear to us that your refusal to work, especially in a collective manner, is of an absolutely political nature. Crimes of this sort may be punished by execution. We shall grant you one more chance. If you assure us that henceforth you will work honestly and diligently every day of the week, as do the others, we will give you your proper sentence. In addition, if your conduct is good, we might transfer you to lighter work."

He paused for our answer. "Well, what do you say?"

"I will not work on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays under any condition," I answered categorically. Shmuel said the same.

"I believe you will reconsider this," the colonel answered in a mixture of anger and exasperation. "In the meantime, go to sleep." Despite threats, beatings, and torture, Eliezer Naness never "reconsidered" when it came to the observe of mitzvot.

In 1965, ten years after he was released, Eliezer Naness and his wife were finally allowed to leave and settle in Israel, where he lived until his passing last year.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah Portion

Passover - "the Festival of Spring"

The Exodus from Egypt took place in the springtime (the 15th of Nisan), as the Torah states (Ex. 13:4), "Today you are going out, in the month of spring." At that time of year the forces of nature are most manifest and the natural world is at its peak of beauty. To the Egyptians, who worshipped nature, it seemed as if their deity was ascendant. G-d took the Jewish people out of Egypt in the spring to demonstrate that nature has no power or existence of its own and is completely subservient to G-d. *(The Rebbe)*

The Passover seder

One of the reasons it is called seder, literally order or arrangement, is that it alludes to the order or sequence of all of Jewish history in macrocosm. Everything that has ever befallen the Jewish people is part of G-d's plan and is guided by Divine Providence. *(The Maharal of Prague)*

Matza

When a Jew eats matza and introduces it into his body, it sanctifies all his limbs and makes them holy. It is therefore appropriate that we prepare ourselves before performing this great mitzva and ensure that our mouths and bodies are worthy, as it states, "You shall eat matzot in a holy place." *(Tiferet Shlomo)*

7:13 Candle Lighting Time
 NY Metro Area
13 Nissan // April 11
 Torah portion Tzav // Shabbat HaGadol
14 Nissan // April 12
 Light candles for Passover after **8:14 pm**
15 Nissan // April 13
 Light candles for second night of Passover after **8:16 pm**
16 Nissan // April 14
 First days end // intermediate days start **8:17 pm**
 Candle lighting times for the last days of Passover visit chabad.org



L'Chaim

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 for Every Jewish Person
 יוסף תורה השלשים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
 "Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth" (Psalms 124:8)

LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

According to the Chabad tradition, the four questions at the Passover seder are asked in the following order:

On all nights we need not dip even once, and on this night we do so twice.

On all nights we eat chametz (leavened bread) or matza, and on this night only matza.

On all nights we eat any kind of vegetables, and on this night maror (bitter herbs).

On all nights we eat sitting upright or reclining, and on this night we all recline.

What is the reason for this particular sequence?

We cannot say that the questions are ordered according to importance, for if they were, the obligation to eat matza on Passover - a mitzva explicitly stated in the Torah - would have been first. By extension, eating maror, which in our times is a mitzva decreed by our Rabbis, would have been second. Reclining, symbolic of freedom, would have been third, and the question as to why we dip twice would have been last, as it is only a custom.

Are the questions arranged according to the chronological progression of the seder? Again, the answer is no, for the first thing we do is to make Kiddush, which is then drunk in a reclining position. If the questions were asked sequentially, "reclining" would have preceded "dipping," for the vegetable is dipped in salt water only after Kiddush.

"Dipping," however, is the first question that is asked by the Jewish child. The "dipping" is what initially attracts his attention and catches his eye, despite the fact that it is not a mitzva explicitly mentioned in the Torah nor one even decreed by our Rabbis. The child's curiosity is aroused, precisely by a Jewish custom.

There are some who contend that every effort must be made to observe the Torah's mitzvot no matter how difficult the circumstances, even demonstrating self-sacrifice when necessary. But in their opinion, Jewish customs are not so important. If it is hard to keep a custom they are willing to forgo it, and downplay its significance.

The order of the questions at the Pesach seder, however, teaches that one must never belittle the importance of a minhag Yisrael, a Jewish custom. It is precisely the custom that is mentioned first in the Hagada. The custom stimulates the child to go on to ask the other questions.

It is specifically our Jewish customs that distinguish us from our non-Jewish surroundings. For it is only when a Jew observes these customs that his uniqueness is apparent, as we say, "You have chosen us from among the nations." "A Jewish custom is Torah!"

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Volume 1

The Rebbe's Birthday: A Time to Connect

The eleventh day of the Hebrew month of Nissan 'Yud-Alef Nissan' is the Rebbe's birthday. A birthday is more than a day for songs and celebrations. Instead, a birthday is a day when mazalo gover, the spiritual source of a person's soul shines with power. When we say "the spiritual source of a person's soul," we mean something more than our conscious thought powers. We have our thoughts and our feelings. And then we possess an inner spiritual core from which those thoughts and feelings spring forth. This spiritual core is the mazal that shines powerfully on a person's birthday.

Since a person's mazal shines powerfully on that day, he should use its influence to focus on his individual mission and align all the particular elements of his life with it. As the Previous Rebbe taught, on a birthday a person should spend time in solitude, thinking over the purpose of his life, correcting those matters that need to be amended, and making resolutions with regard to his conduct in the future.

The Rebbe's birthday is not merely a personal event, affecting him alone. On the contrary, the very name Rebbe is an acronym for the Hebrew words , "head of the Jewish people." The head contains the nerve center for the entire body, allowing all its diverse organs

and limbs to function together as a single whole. Similarly, a Rebbe is a comprehensive soul whose life is lived in consciousness of others and whose efforts are devoted to tightening the connection between them. As such, the Rebbe's birthday is a day which impacts us all.

What is the Rebbe's mazal and where is it directed? In one of his letters, he writes: "From the days I began going to cheder (school) and perhaps even before then, I had a vision of the ultimate Redemption." From his earliest childhood, and in every successive phase of life, the Rebbe devoted his efforts to creating a spiritual climate that will make Mashiach's coming a reality.

On a day when "the spiritual source of his soul shines powerfully," each one of us should think of the way he can help shoulder and advance this mission. The breakthroughs in sciences and communication of our era have created the backdrop for the Redemption. Its is our responsibility to create the conceptual foreground and make the values and principles that will characterize the Redemption factors that influence our lives at present. Anticipating the Redemption in this manner will precipitate its unfolding as actual reality.

Dedicated to the Rebbe
 on the occasion of his 123rd birthday
 whose teachings and example are a never-ending source of life for all mankind.
 May we continue in his path and complete the mission with which he has charged us: to make the world conscious of the imminent Redemption and to prepare the environment where this ideal can be realized.

In duplicate on base call (718) 778 6000

SLICE OF LIFE

Argentina's Non-Profit



Rabbi Tzvi Grunblatt

I had come to New York from Argentina six years earlier to study in the Chabad yeshivah at 770 Eastern Parkway. It was an incredible opportunity to immerse myself in Torah learning in the epicenter of Jewish life. By 1976, at the age of twenty-two, I was one of the older students. My days were dedicated to studying Torah, and on Thursday nights, I traveled to Torah institutions in New York, from nearby Boro Park to the upstate town of South Fallsburg, to give classes in chasidic teachings. These weekly journeys added purpose and meaning to my studies, allowing me to share the wisdom I had learned.

Every year, I had the privilege of a private audience with the Rebbe before my birthday. These meetings were milestones in my spiritual development, moments of connection and guidance. However, that year, I was preparing for the audience with a heavy heart. I felt I wasn't succeeding in my studies or in the other activities I was engaged in. Despite my efforts, I struggled to accomplish certain things. These feelings of inadequacy weighed on me as I wrote my note to the Rebbe, detailing my struggles alongside a few other questions.

When I met with the Rebbe, his response profoundly shifted my perspective. Referring to what I had written, he addressed my feelings of failure, reminding me of the teaching of

our Sages: "One who puts in effort will surely succeed." The Rebbe emphasized that this principle applies universally—to me, to him, and to all Jews. He firmly stated that if I was making an effort, failure was not a possibility. This simple yet powerful truth dismantled the doubts I had been harboring.

The Rebbe went further, addressing the emotional burden I had been carrying. He advised that any thought leading to melancholy or depression must be dismissed entirely, as these emotions drain enthusiasm, waste time, and weaken one's trust in G-d. Sadness, he explained, is a distraction from the joy that is essential to serving G-d. Serving G-d with joy is not limited to moments of Torah study or prayer; it encompasses every aspect of life. The Rebbe quoted the verse, "Know G-d in all your ways," underscoring that happiness is a constant requirement.

He then highlighted my accomplishments, pointing out that I gave classes, assisted fellow students, and influenced others through what I had learned. By doing so, he assured me, I was succeeding in meaningful ways. What struck me most was the Rebbe's description of me as an emissary—a "shlichach"—doing the work of the Rebbes. This term carried immense weight, and hearing it in reference to myself was both humbling and empowering. It gave me a new sense of purpose. Before concluding, the Rebbe expressed his hope to hear good news about my work being done with joy.

Leaving the audience, I felt transformed. The Rebbe's words had lifted the veil of doubt and given me clarity and motivation. I walked out with a renewed sense of self-worth and a deeper understanding of my mission.

Later in the same audience, I asked the Rebbe whether I should join Chabad's rabbinic visitation program in Argentina that summer. I already had the yeshivah's approval, but I sought the Rebbe's blessing. He encouraged me to go "with joy," reinforcing the theme of happiness as integral to my service. Following his advice, I traveled to Argentina and, after getting married, my wife and I moved there permanently to serve as shlichim.

The early years of our mission in Argentina were marked by significant challenges. The country faced a major economic crisis, followed by the

Falklands War in 1982. These events created a climate of uncertainty that made fundraising exceedingly difficult. We found ourselves in debt, struggling to sustain our activities. At one point, we couldn't even afford bus fare to pick up 500 copies of "Thought of the Week," a Torah publication we distributed weekly.

In moments of despair, I sought guidance from the Rebbe. I called 770, navigating the cumbersome international telephone system. Miraculously, I got through quickly and was connected with Rabbi Mordechai Hodakov, the Rebbe's chief secretary. I explained our dire situation and asked for advice. Within minutes, Rabbi Hodakov called back with astonishing news: the Rebbe had decided to loan us \$3,000. This was far beyond what I had expected, as I hadn't even mentioned financial assistance in that call. The loan resolved many immediate problems, and we repaid it as soon as we were able.

The Rebbe's message during this time was clear. Our mission was not to analyze Argentina's economic or political situation but to spread Judaism with trust in G-d. When asked about the future, the Rebbe advised responding, "I am not a prophet. My mission is to spread Judaism while trusting in G-d."

Shortly afterward, a friend arranged a meeting with the president of a bank. Despite having never met me, he asked what we needed. I explained that \$25,000 would clear our debts. To my amazement, he told me to return the next day, and the full amount was provided. It was our first major donation, arriving at an unlikely time during the war. This experience reinforced the Rebbe's teachings and became a golden rule in my life: trust in G-d, and avoid overthinking or predicting the future. Attempting to navigate Argentina's constant economic fluctuations would have been overwhelming without this faith.

In the years that followed, I stopped reading newspapers to avoid unnecessary stress. Even during the pandemic in 2020, when uncertainty was at its peak, we pushed forward with building a new school. The six-and-a-half-thousand-square-meter facility became a reality, a testament to the Rebbe's guidance. Today, it stands as one of the finest Jewish schools in the world, a symbol of perseverance and trust in G-d.

CUSTOMS

What are some Jewish customs to celebrate on a birthday?

It is appropriate to celebrate with family and friends, giving praise and thanks to G-d, and to express one's joy, if possible in the fulfillment of a mitzva, by reciting the blessing of "Shehecheyanu" over a new fruit. Also, to undertake a good resolution in the area of Jewish observance, give charity and increase one's Jewish knowledge.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

A Pesach Message From the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

The festival of Passover calls for early and elaborate preparations to make the Jewish home fitting for the great festival. It is not physical preparedness alone that is required of us, but also spiritual preparedness—for in the life of the Jew the physical and spiritual are closely linked together, especially in the celebration of our Sabbath and festivals.

On Passover we celebrate the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery and, together with it, the liberation from, and negation of the ancient Egyptian system and way of life, the "abominations of Egypt." Thus we celebrate our physical liberation together with our spiritual freedom. Indeed, there cannot be one without the other; there can be no real freedom without accepting the precepts of our Torah guiding our daily life; pure and holy life eventually leads to real freedom.

It is said: "In every generation each Jew should see himself as though he personally had been liberated from Egypt." This is to say, that the lesson of Passover has always a timely message for the individual Jew. The story of Passover is the story of the special Divine Providence which alone determines the fate of our people. What is happening in the outside world need not affect us; we might be singled out for suffering, G-d forbid, amid general prosperity, and likewise singled out for safety amid a general plague or catastrophe.

The story of our enslavement and liberation of which Passover tells us, give

ample illustration of this. For the fate of our people is determined by its adherence to G-d and His Prophets.

This lesson is emphasized by the three principal symbols of the Seder, concerning which our Sages said that unless the Jew explains their significance he has not observed the Seder fittingly: Pesach [the Paschal Offering], Matzoh and Moror [bitter herbs]. Using these symbols in their chronological order and in accordance with the Haggadah explanation, we may say: the Jew can avoid Moror (bitterness of life) only through Pesach (G-d's special care 'passing over' and saving the Jewish homes even in the midst of the greatest plague), and Matzoh—then the very catastrophe and the enemies of the Jews will work for the benefit of the Jews, driving them in great haste out of "Mitzraim" [Egypt], the place of perversion and darkness, and placing them under the beam of light and holiness.

One other important thing we must remember. The celebration of the festival of freedom must be connected with the commandment "You shall relate it to your son." The formation and existence of the Jewish home, as of the Jewish people as a whole, is dependent upon the upbringing of the young generation, both boys and girls: the wise and the wicked (temporarily), the simple and the one who knows not what to ask.

Just as we cannot shirk our responsibility towards our child by the excuse that "my child is a wise one; he will find his own way in life therefore no education is necessary for him"; so we must not despair by thinking "the child is a wicked one; no education will help him." For, all Jewish children, boys and girls, are "G-d's children" and it is our sacred duty to see to it that they all live up to their above mentioned title; and this we can achieve only through a kosher Jewish education, in full adherence to G-d's Torah. Then we all will merit the realization of our ardent hopes: "In the next year may we be free; in the next year may we be in Jerusalem!"

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Baal Shem Tov established a custom to eat a third meal on the last day of Passover. This meal is known as "Moshiach's Meal," for on this day Moshiach's radiance is revealed. This revelation foreshadows the Redemption. It takes place specifically on the last day of Passover, for this is a day which is added only in the Diaspora. The essence of the

added day is that in the Diaspora and in the time of exile, the Jewish people transform 24 mundane hours into a day of holiness. On the last day of Passover this means transforming them into a festival of freedom and redemption. And this process of transformation is the essence of the imminent Redemption - converting the very exile itself into redemption, so that G-dliness is revealed even at the very lowest levels of creation.

(Likutei Sichot)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'Chaim Publication.
From the Archives

Every year in honor of the Rebbe's birthday, Rabbi Butman would dedicate this article to the new chapter of Psalms being recited in connection to the Rebbe's birthday.

On the 11th of Nissan, which falls out this year on April 9, we begin reciting the 124th chapter of Psalms in honor of the Rebbe's 123rd birthday.

In keeping with that tradition, in addition to messages from the archives we will include in this article insights on chapter 124 in the book of Psalms.

The Psalm begins, "A song of ascents. Of David. Had it not been for the Lord Who was with us, let Israel declare now." This first verse sets the tone for the entire chapter in which David declares that had not the Al-mighty saved the people the people would not have been able to sustain themselves in face of all the challenges of those who sought to destroy them.

In the following verses, he goes on to compare the hatred of the enemies of the Jewish people to a relentless sea and our escape to that of a bird who narrowly escapes the trap of the hunters.

The third verse states, "Then they would have swallowed us raw when their anger was kindled against us." comparing our enemies to people who are so hungry that they do not want to wait until the food is fully cooked, rather the enemies would swallow them alive.

King David concludes in verse number eight by saying, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth".

The commentary known as the Metzudas Dovid explains that the meaning of this verse is that our help comes when we mention the name of Hashem, Who made heaven and earth, emphasizing that our salvation does not come through our own strength.

As we prepare for the Passover seder, the Rebbe notes that the custom of Elijah's cup is not mentioned in the Talmud or in any of the earlier texts regarding Jewish law. Its earliest source is in the writings of the sixteenth century. This is attributed to the fact that pouring a cup for Elijah is an expression of our faith in the coming of Moshiach, and with each passing year the feeling of anticipation grows stronger and more widespread.

This year, may we see the fulfillment of our anticipation as we conclude the seder with the words, "Next year in Jerusalem," when G-d will fulfill His fifth and final promise with the revelation of Moshiach and the Redemption.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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