**B”H. Seder Insights & Stories by Rabbi YY Jacobson.** [**YYJacobson@theyeshiva.net**](mailto:YYJacobson@theyeshiva.net)

**Your 15-Step Program Toward Inner Liberation**The Passover Seder is an opportunity that provides us with the energy to access freedom in our personal and collective lives. It consists of an intense fifteen-step program, a blue print toward psychological, emotional and spiritual liberation. Below is a brief description of the meditation, consciousness and inner work reflected during each of the fifteen steps.

**Kadesh** -- reciting Kiddush, designating the time as sacred:

Designate a space in your psyche that is sacred, pure, innocent, curious and child-like. Without this step, there is too much static in your life to allow for real listening, introspection and growth.

**Urchatz** -- washing the hands:

Clean your hands from their involvement in un-cleanliness. Cleanse your life from active lying, cheating, betraying, immoral relationships, destructive addictions, etc. No liberation is possible without this step.

**Karpas** -- eating a vegetable dipped in salt water:

The vegetable growing low from the ground, on which we make a blessing "He created fruit from the ground," symbolizes the body, created from earth (Adamah). The prerequisite for spiritual liberation is to recognize that your body and all of its dispositions are a means to an end; they need to be submerged in the waters of inspiration and Torah. Do not allow your cravings and appetites to define you; you must define them. Do not allow them to take you hostage, but see them as a means for your journey. They are here to be defined and explained by you.

**Yachatz** -- breaking the middle matzah:

Humility, vulnerability is the message of this fourth step. You must have people in your life with whom you are completely open, honest and vulnerable. The fake sense of "I am whole," is the greatest obstacle to genuine liberation.

**Magid** -- reciting the Haggadah:

Tell the story; teach the story. Study, learn, and learn some more. It expands your horizons, challenges your ego, and brings you to a deeper place inside of yourself. Do not let a day pass without some serious learning time.

**Rochtzah** -- washing the hands:

Wash your hands again. The arrogance that may come post-learning is very dangerous. This is the "religious" and "scholarly" pompousness, of "I know it all," and I am "holier than thou." Remain humble, real and authentic.

**Motzei** -- reciting the blessing HaMotzi, “He extracted bread from the earth”:

Extract. Now you are in the position of extracting the opportunities, the "sparks," in everything you come in contact with or anything you own. Judaism does not advocate shunning the world or asceticism, but to utilize all of our gifts and extract the productive and meaningful possibilities inherent in them.

**Matzah** -- reciting the blessing on the matzah and eating it:

The Talmud describes Matzah as "bread of poverty." Extract the possibilities in your life, but maintain perspective and balance. Do not live like a narcissistic glutton, who feels that heshe must maintain the most luxurious lifestyle. Even if you were blessed with wealth, cherish simplicity, refinement and modesty. If you are not wealthy, do not feel pressured to mimic your neighbors or friends. Do things according to your capacity. Let your dignity shine from within. People will love you much more this way. Don’t try to impress people; become comfortable with yourself internally, and the people around you will feel comfortable.

**Maror** -- eating the bitter herbs:

Empathy. Now you can begin to discover the greatest gift of life: To be there for another human being. To be able to look somebody in the eyes and say, "I am here for you," and really mean it and live it.

**Korach** -- eating a sandwich of matzah and maror (in ancient times together with the Passover lamb):

Life is a roller-coaster of Pesach, Matzah and Maror (the Passover lamb, the unleavened bread and the biter herbs) -- rich moments, bland moments and bitter moments. Liberation comes when we discover the art of sandwiching all the components of our life into a single mosaic. Life is a single journey that encompasses all three dimensions, like the professional surfer, navigate the waves.

**Shulchan Orach** – setting the table, eating the festive meal:

Develop a good feeling for hospitality of guests and helping other people. Don't analyze the guests when they leave your home. Remember: Your children will not wish to invite guests to their homes if they know how much you really loath having guests.

**Tzafun** -- eating the hidden afikoman:

At this point in the Seder, we eat and enjoy the hidden Afikoman. At this point in your life, there is "hidden stuff" that may yet emerge. Like the layers of an onion, when you peel one layer, a new one emerges. Do not get frightened or depressed; on the contrary, now that you have achieved so much, new hidden skeletons might come out, since you are now capable of dealing with them. Enjoy the challenge. Also, this reminds you that you still need G-d.

**Beirach** -- reciting grace:

Now you can begin to bless G-d for every moment, encounter and experience in your life.

**Halel** -- reciting psalms of praise:

Now, you begin to express praise for every moment. Nothing is taken for granted. Every breath you take and every move you make is an opportunity for praise and thanksgiving.

**Nitrtzah** – Our service is pleasing to G-d:

But really, does anybody care? In the big picture, are we not smaller than specks of dust? Why the bother?

The answer: Nirtzah. G-d's desire in creating the world was that we build a personal, intimate relationship with Him and that we transform our animal soul and our world into a Divine abode. Sure, you can ask many questions, but at the end of day, this is what your Creator desires. Nirtzah! Embrace it and love it.

**Next Year in Jerusalem!**

**The Four Questions of the Soul**

This coming Passover night, countless Jewish children will present four millennia-old questions around millions of Seder-tables across the globe.

"Why is this night different from all other nights?" The children will ask. "On all other nights, we are not required to dip even once, but on this night we dip twice." Second: "On all other nights we eat chametz (leaven) or matzah, but on this night, we eat only matzah."

Question number three: "On all other nights, we eat any type of vegetables, but on this night, we eat maror (bitter herbs)." And finally: "On all other nights, we eat either sitting or reclining, but on this night, we all recline."

Yet how many of us will become better human beings people as a result of listening to the "Mah Nishtanah" streaming from the mouths of our beloved children? If the four questions are merely a simple children's text, why did hundreds of generations of Jews write many myriads of pages of commentary on these four questions?

The Kabbalah indeed explains that these four questions encapsulate a yearlong four-step program toward personal liberation. During the recital of the "Mah Nishtanah," this energy of liberation vibrates through the cosmos, allowing each human being the opportunity to achieve personal freedom in his or her life.

What follows, therefore, is a brief explanation of the "four questions" from a mystical point of view.

The big question

"Why is this night different from all other nights?" Just what is it about this night that makes it so unique? What is it that we do during this night that allows us to free ourselves from addiction, fear, doubt, loneliness and fragmentation?

**Step one: Willingness to change**

"On all other nights, we are not required to dip even once. On this night we dip twice."

On other nights we may feel that we don't need a dip; we may accept our flaws and shortcomings as part of who we are, unwilling to put in any effort toward self-improvement. We may be telling ourselves, "This is who I am and I will not change."  
  
The first step toward emotional liberation requires the recognition that "I need to dip twice." First, I need to cleanse my body -- my physical habits and behavior. Second, I need to purge and wash my spirit -- my mental and psychological attitudes and patterns.

**Step two: Suspension of the ego**

"On all other nights we eat chametz (leaven) or matzah. On this night we eat only matzah."

Chametz (leaven), made of dough that has risen, reflects an inflated ego, while matzah, made from dough that has not risen, represents humbleness and suspension of the self, becoming a conduit for the higher light of the Divine.

On other nights, we vacillate between chametz and matzah, between our tenacious attachment to our egos vs. our moments of self-transcendence. We invite G-d into our lives, but only to a certain point (4). This dichotomy between the chametz and matzah in our lives causes us to remain trapped by our narrow self-image and hinders our ability for true growth and transformation.

On the night of Passover, we eat only matzah. We attempt to let go of our egos completely, allowing G-d to fill the entire space of our consciousness.

**Step three: Sensitivity to one's soul**

"On all other nights, we eat any type of vegetables. On this night, we eat maror (bitter herbs)."

Following the first two steps of "dipping" and "matzah" -- the willingness to change and the suspension of one's ego -- we reach the third step, one designated to help us maintain a lifestyle of inner liberation.

How does one create a daily schedule for oneself that is free from the numerous unhealthy urges and weaknesses inherent in one's character? By paying attention to the bitter tears -- the "maror" -- of one's soul.

Each of us possesses both an animal consciousness and a Divine soul. Our animal consciousness is the source of our bodily sensations, physical urges and earthly cravings. But in addition to the animal life-force we also possess a Divine soul, a spark of infinity, a ray of G-d, a diamond that descended from heaven. This soul yearns to transcend the ego and melt away in the truth of G-d.

Imagine how horrified you would be if you observed somebody taking the arm of an infant and placing it on a burning stove. Yet the mystics describe each time we utter a lie, each time we humiliate another human being, each time we sin as precisely that: taking the innocent spirituality of our soul and putting it through abuse and torture.

On other nights, we do not necessarily pay heed to the tragic fate of our souls being violated by coarse and immoral behavior. On this night of Passover, however, we eat maror (bitter herbs); we open our hearts to the bitter cries of the soul.  
  
This discipline of constantly recalling the sanctity of the soul within you, and its painful experiences in a lowly and dishonest environment, allows you to preserve your spiritual integrity in your daily life.

**Step four: Reorientation of one's pleasures**

"On all other nights, we eat either sitting or reclining. On this night, we all recline."

In order to achieve true inner liberation, one most cultivate the fourth and most difficult step, namely, the reorientation of one's pleasures in life.

On other nights, the delight we glean from honest relationships and from a genuine life style is only a "sitting" type of enjoyment, meaning that it's not all-pervading and not all-consuming. The satisfaction we gain from our inner spirituality is dulled by the fact that we are still indulging the animal within us and are still seeking to discover gratification in shallow and deprived places. This fragmentation, though extremely tempting, ultimately tears us apart and robs us from the opportunity to live a truly fulfilled and deep life.

On the night of Passover, we recline. We allow our entire identity to dissolve in the ecstasy of an honest life (4). We give up our need to search for satisfaction in alien places as we welcome the joy of our inner Divine souls into every fiber of our being.

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**The Fifth and Sixth Question**

In April 1943, in the Warsaw ghetto, a Jewish family was conducting a seder in a bunker. It was the first night of Passover when the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out.

A child in the family asked the four questions. And then he continued, “Tatti, can I ask you a fifth question"?

The father said, for sure.

So the boy continued with his fifth question: "Why is our nation different than all other nations? Why have we been targeted for abuse and annihilation?"

His father answered, “The Jewish nation began before any other nation had, and it will survive long after the Third Reich is dead. One cannot understand a story if one does not first know the entire story, from beginning to end, and our story is not over yet…"

"Tatty, I have a sixth question. Next year will I be here to ask you these four questions? Will you be here to answer them?"

And the father said, “I’ll be honest with you, my son. I hope yes, but I am not sure. Yet this I want you to know: There is an expression in the sedur, “ki besham kodsecah nishbata shelo yechbe naro leolam vaed," “You have taken an oath that Israel's flame will never be extinguished." So I can promise you that somewhere in the world there will be a Moshele or a Dovidl, a saraleh or a racheleh, asking these four questions to their father and mother."

My dear friends, that little boy and his father perished. But last Passover, at the seder table, 3 million Jewish children turned to their mother's and father's and said, "Tatti, Mammi, I want to ask you four questions…"

My friends, this is why we are all here today. “ki besham kodsecah nishbata shelo yechbe naro leolam vaed," “You have taken an oath that Israel's flame will never be extinguished."

**Borrowing A Father**

The Talmud says, and it's quoted in the Haggadah, that "A second cup is poured and now the child asks 'Mah Nishtanah.'"

The Talmudic words "now the child asks" ("V'kan Haben Shoel") may also be translated as, "now the child may borrow."

Not all of us have been privileged to grow up with parents in our lives. Some were orphaned at a very young age; others may have had physical parents but never had emotional parents. Some of us were privileged to have nurturing parents who have since passed on to the next world. In all of the above cases the children are left behind, a void in their hearts.

Here is the time during the Seder where "the child may borrow" a father and a mother. At this point in time, our father in heaven opens the chamber of unconditional love and boundless nurture, through which we may reclaim the confidence and security we so desperately needed from our fathers and mothers. Now the child is given permission to ask all the questions he could never ask. He may declare: "Father, I want to ask you four questions."

The great masters taught (Sicah 11 Nissan 1983), that even if your parents passed away, during the four questions, they come back to your seder. When you say “Father I will ask you…” you are actually addressing your father in a very real way.

So I will ask each of you to hold on your father’s hand right now. Share with him what you would like to tell him if he were physically near you and emotionally near you. Ask him all the questions you ever wanted to ask… Let it all go.

**A Tale of Three Matzahs**

Rabbi Eliezer Zusha Portugal (1896-1982), the Skulener Rebbe, was a Chassidic master from a small town, Sculeni, in northeastern Romania. (Note: “Skulener” is pronounced skoo-LEH-ner). Toward the end of the Second World War, in March of 1945, he found himself along with other holocaust survivors and displaced persons, in the Russian-governed town of Czernovitz, Bukovina. (The Russian army liberated Bukovina in April 1944 and completed the expulsion of the Nazi’s from most of Eastern Europe by January 1945, at which time the Russians entered Budapest, Hungary. )

Passover, beginning March 29th, would soon be upon them. Some Passover foodstuffs might well be provided by charitable organizations. Nonetheless, the Rebbe sought to obtain wheat that he could bake into properly-guarded and traditionally baked matzah. Despite the oppressive economic situation of the Jews, he was able to bake a limited number of these matzahs. He sent word to other Chassidic leaders in the area who would conduct larger Passover seder’s, offering each of them no more than three matzahs.

One week before Passover, Rabbi Moshe Hager, the son of the Seret-Vizhnitzer Rebbe, came for the matzahs that had been offered to his father, Rabbi Boruch Hager. After being handed the allotted 3 matzahs, he said to the Skulener Rebbe: “I know that you sent word that you could give only three matzahs, but nonetheless my father, the Seret-Vizhnitzer Rebbe, told me to tell you that he must have six matzahs”. The Skulener Rebbe felt that he had no choice but to honor the request, albeit reluctantly.

On the day before Passover, Rabbi Moshe returned to the Skulener Rebbe. “What can I do for you?” asked the Skulener Rebbe. Rabbi Moshe answered, “I want to return three of the matzah’s to you”.

“I don’t understand”, replied the Skulener, ”I thought your father absolutely had to have six matzahs?”

“My father said to ask whether you had saved any of the matza for yourself.”

Embarrassed, the Skulener Rebbe replied, “How could I, when so many others needed matza for Passover?”

“My father assumed that this would happen”, explained Rabbi Moshe. “That is why he requested an extra three matzahs to hold them for you.”

For me this episode captures what it means to live a life of dignity and of true inner freedom. To really be able to be there for another human being.

**Don’t ignore the small stuff**

According to Jewish law, it is forbidden to have even a tiny piece of leavened grain in your home or property during the eight days of Passover (unless you don’t own it). On the night before the Passover Seder, Jews conduct thorough searches in their homes to eliminate every single piece of bread that may be lingering under a couch or a bed, etc.

Why this obsession to eliminate even small pieces of bread? Does G-d really care if you leave a little piece of a bagel in your pantry?

Leavened bread, made from dough that has inflated, represents the inflated ego. Now, this ego does not manifest itself only in “big things,” reflected in the big pieces of bread. Rather, the human ego, our greatest enemy to authentic liberation, disguises itself more often in small and apparently insignificant interactions and encounters.

Most quarrels, for example, between husbands and wives are not about the big questions of life, say, how long America should remain in Iraq, or what the world would have looked like if Mohammad was never born. Most battles usually revolve around “minor” issues: Who is responsible for the loss of the car keys; who is to be blamed for them showing up late to the Bar-Mitzvah reception; who ought to carry the guilt for such large credit card bills and for the fact that there is nothing to eat for dinner.

On Passover we are called to search and eliminate the powerful ego that is hidden in the small stuff of life, in the small pieces of leaven.

**The masculine and feminine journey**

During the Seder we eat three Matzos and we drink four cups of wine. The three matzos represent the three Patriarchs of the Jewish people, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the four cups of wine personify the four Matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

This distinction between masculine matzah and feminine wine is connected to their respective journeys to freedom.

The main challenge of a male in his journey to freedom is to become like matzah. To deflate and flatten his ego; to challenge the arrogance and the self-consciousness that obstruct his path to liberation.

The main challenge of a woman in her journey to liberation is to allow her inner power, represented by wine, to emerge and bring joy and holiness to the world.

For a man to be free, he needs less of himself. For a woman to be free, she needs more of herself.

**Six Lights**

On our Seder plate we place six items, in the form of two upside-down triangles. On the top right, we put the shank bone, which looks like a stretched out arm. On the top left, we place an egg. In the center below them, the bitter herbs, used to eat independently during the Seder. Then, in the next trio, on the right, under the shank bone we place the Charoses, a mixture of fruits. On the left we place a vegetable. Then, in the center below them, we put again bitter herbs, this is used a part of a sandwich comprised of matzah and bitter herbs.

These six items represent the six points of light that comprise the emotional identity of the soul – attraction, inner strength, empathy, aggressive power, humility and bonding. The plate itself embodies the seventh point of light, selflessness, which receives all of the former six and passes them on.

The stretched out arm embodies Chesed, attraction. The egg, the only food that gets harder, not mushier, with more cooking, represents inner strength. Bitter herbs, causing one to feel pain, embody the energy of empathy, the ability to experience another human being.

The mixture of fruits, growing tall and high, reflects the energy of aggressive power. The vegetable, growing humble and low, embodies humility, while the bitter herbs at the bottom symbolizes, once again, the ability to bond with something greater than yourself, to become part of a greater sandwich in life.

The three matzos symbolize the three cognitive powers, conception, comprehension and application.

When we eat each of these items during the Seder, we attempt to focus on how we can achieve liberation in each of these characteristics.

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Another way of explaining the 4 questions:

Question of the Week:

My favourite part of the Seder is when the kids sing the famous Four Questions, Ma Nishtana. But I always wondered why we call it the Four Questions. Look at the text, they are actually four statements:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights we eat chometz (leaven) or matzah. On this night we eat only matzah.

On all other nights we eat any type of vegetables. On this night, we eat maror (bitter herbs).

On all other nights we are not required to dip even once. On this night we dip twice.

On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining. On this night, we all recline.

So are they questions or answers?

Answer:

You are right. There is only one question here. Why is tonight different from all other nights? What power does the night of Pesach have over all other nights, that it can inspire even the most distant soul and touch even the most stubborn sceptic? What will happen tonight that will change our perspective, open our spiritual eyes and ignite our souls?

The answer: there are four ingredients to this night that make it different, and give it the power to inspire. This night is different because on this night we eat matzah and bitter herbs, we dip and we lean.

On this night we eat only Matzah. Matzah represents humility. It is flat and tasteless, unlike bread which is puffed-up and full of itself. Humility is the first prerequisite to growth and learning. Someone who is full of themselves cannot change. Only if I am open and humble can I truly develop as a person. So while on other nights my ego may get in the way of my own spiritual development, tonight it won't because tonight we eat only Matzah, the bread of humility.

On this night, we eat Maror. Many people are closed to spirituality not out of arrogance, but rather out of indifference. They simply don't care. Such people cannot be inspired because they lack feeling, they are numb and insensitive. They need a jolt, something to shatter their complacency and make them feel again. This is the Maror. There's nothing like a mouthful of horseradish to get your heart pounding. So we eat the Maror, to remember the bitterness of slavery that our forebears experienced, and by extension our own inner bitterness, our slavery to bad habits, and the darker side to our personality. All other nights we may remain apathetic and avoid feeling the pain, but tonight we take the bitter pill, we eat the Maror.

On this night we dip twice. Some of us go through life without ever being present. We may be sitting in one place, but our mind is elsewhere. We are constantly focusing on what needs to happen next, or where we would rather be, and never experiencing the moment for what it is. Such a life is no life. We can miss out on the magic of everyday, simply because we are not looking. So tonight will be different. Tonight we will immerse ourselves in the moment, and be totally transfixed by the Seder and its message. We will dip ourselves entirely in the words of the Haggadah. Not once but twice - both body and soul will be present at the Seder.

On this night, we all recline. A major impediment to growth is our feeling that we are stuck as we are, and we can not change. If only we realised what untold powers lay within our soul, we would know that there is so much more we could be achieving in our lives if only we faced our fears and took on our challenges. With all our failings and all our weaknesses, we have a soul that is pure royalty, a divine spark that towers over and above all the challenges that life brings. And so while on all other nights we may not be aware of it, tonight we recline like the kings and queens we truly are, we act like royalty because we are royalty, the sons and daughters of G-d.

And so indeed the four questions are really four answers. Why is tonight different? Why will our souls be set free tonight? Because we will have the humility of the Matzah, we will banish our indifference and sensitise ourselves with the Maror, we will immerse our body and soul in the experience of the Seder, and we will acknowledge the true nobility and royalty of our infinitely powerful soul.

And it's the kids who teach us how to do this. Look at a child. They are truly free, because they have the humility to learn, the openness of heart to feel, the trust to be immersed in the moment, and the confidence to believe that they can do anything. So let's listen to the kid's questions. In them we can find some answers. (This version by Rabbi Aaron Moss).

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**The Seder of the Recovering Alcoholic**

**A Tale of Two Cities: Kobe and Barditchov**

**Passover In the Far East**

Passover of 1997 I celebrated in Japan.

Rabbi Moshe Katlarsky of Chabad World Headquarters in Brooklyn requested of a colleague and myself to travel to the Far East and conduct public Passover Seder's for the Jewish community living in the remote city of Kobe. Our journey to Japan and the numerous encounters with hundreds of Jews residing in that part of the world remains etched in my heart and fresh in my memory.

My friend, Moshe Leiberman (today a Rabbi in Boston), supervised the meticulous procedures of koshering the Synagogue kitchen for Passover and preparing the food for the Seder. We did not know how many people to expect (there are wandering Jews to be found in every corner of Japan). To our astonishment, our first public Seder attracted close to two hundred Jews, most of them from very secular backgrounds, some have not attended a Passover Seder in decades.

The energy was awesome. The melodies, the discussions, the traditions and the overall spirit during the Seder were inspiring and uplifting.

In the middle of the Seder I was searching for words to describe my sentiments. My memory brought forth a moving Chassidic tale -- one of my personal favorites -- about the holy Rebbe (spiritual master) of Barditchov.

Here it is.

A drunkard's Seder

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov (1740-1810) was one of the great spiritual masters of his generation. One Passover, following an emotionally charged Seder, the Rebbe was told from heaven, that Mosheleh the water carrier's Seder was superior to his. "This year," he was informed from above, "G-d's most lovable Seder was that of the water-carrier of Barditchov."

The next day after services, the Rebbe's disciples went up to Mosheleh the water carrier and asked him to come see the Rebbe. Mosheleh came before the Rebbe, and he began to cry bitterly. He said, "Rebbe, I'll never do it again. I'm so sorry; I don't know what came over me." The poor man was devastated. The Rebbe said, "Listen, my dear Jew, don't worry so much; just tell us what you did last night."

Here we must interrupt the story for a moment. It is well known that generally, intoxication and alcoholism are viewed in Jewish literature as repulsive and destructive. Yet our dear Mosheleh was orphaned at a young age and was miserably poor. He thus sadly succumbed to the temptation of alcohol as a way to deal with his daily agony and stress. Essentially, Mosheleh was a good and innocent man, a G-d fearing individual and a pure heart, But this temptation, unfortunately, got the better of him, and he drank often.

The "problem" is that on Passover you can't drink whiskey. So Mosheleh had a tremendous idea: He'll stay up the whole night before Passover and drink an amount of whisky that would keep him "high" for eight days straight, throughout the entire Passover holiday.

This Moshe did: When the night before Passover arrived he drank and drank, until the minute when you must stop eating Chamatz (leaven) on the morning before Passover. When the clock struck twenty minutes after nine, he took his last "L'chayim" and he was out cold.

Seder night arrived. His wife came to wake him and said, "Mosheleh, it's really not fair. Every Jewish home has a Seder. We have little children, and we are the only ones who don't have a Seder." Mosheleh gazed at the Rebbe of Barditchov and continued relating his tale: "By then, did I regret that I drank so much the night before! Did I regret it! I would have done anything not to be drunk. But I couldn't help it. So I said to my wife: 'Please wake me up in an hour. I just can't get it together yet.'

My wife kept waking me every hour, and then every half-hour. Then, suddenly, she came to me and said, 'Moshe, in twenty minutes the Seder night is gone and the children are all sleeping. Shame on you. You are a disgraceful father and husband!'

"Gevald! I was so devastated," Mosheleh told the Rebbe. "Here, my children are so precious and I am such a lousy alcoholic father, I didn't even give them a Seder. I realized how low I have fallen, how my addiction destroyed my life and my relationships, how I sold my soul to the devil of alcohol. So, with my last strength I got out of bed and sat down at the Seder table. I said to my wife, 'Please, call our holy children.'

"She called the children and I said to them, 'Please sit down very close to me, I have to talk to you.

"I want you to know, children, that I am so sorry that I drank. I am so sorry that I am a drunkard. If my drinking can make me not have a Seder with you, then it's not worth it." I said to my children, 'I swear to you, that I'll never drink again in my life. But, right now, it's Seder night, so let me just tell you the Passover story in a nutshell.'"

Mosheleh said to the Rebbe, "You know, I was still drunk, and I barely know how to read Hebrew. But, I tried my best. I said, 'Children, I want you to know that G-d created heaven and earth in seven days. Then Adam and Eve ate from the Tree and were thrown out of Paradise. Since then everything went down hill: There was a flood, there was a tower of Babel - that was as much as I knew. Then came Abraham and Sarah. They began fixing the world again. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah and their twelve holy sons. Then Pharaoh made slaves out of us, and tonight, G-d took us out from Egypt.

"My Sweet children, now we are also in exile. And I want you to know, that the same G-d who took us out from Egypt is still alive and present and very soon He will liberate us from this exile too."

"I turned to G-d, and said: 'Father in heaven, thank you so much for taking us out of Egypt. And I beg you, sweetest father, please take us out of our present exile very soon'! Rebbe, I'm so sorry. I couldn't say anything more because I was still drunk.

"I Took the Matzah, Maror and Charoses situated on the table and ate it. I filled four cups and drunk them one after another, I turned over and I fell asleep again."

The holy master Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Barditchov was crying bitter tears. He said to his disciples, "Did you hear that? Did you hear that? I wish that one time in my life I should communicate Yiddishkeit (the Jewish spirit) to my children, the way Mosheleh the water carrier gave it over to his children Seder night. I wish that one time in my life I should converse with G-d like Mosheleh did during his Seder."

A women's story

I concluded the story and then I said:

"I want you to know that I celebrated many a Seder-night in a very observant Jewish community in New York. Yet I get the feeling, that G-d's most lovable Seder was the one done right here, in Kobe, Japan! Many of us here this evening may be unaware of the detailed Seder rituals and customs, and so many of us may not even know how to read the Haggadah in Hebrew. But, my dearest brothers and sisters, the sincerity and the passion of so many Jews thirsty to reconnect with their inner soul -- this I've never seen before during a Passover Seder and I thank you for allowing me this special opportunity."

I felt that the story has stirred up deep emotion in the audience. I could see tears streaming from some people's eyes. But one woman was sitting at the other end of the room and was weeping profusely. She later approached me and related her personal tale:

"I grew up in a very assimilated home," the woman said. "I know almost nothing about Judaism. I'm living here in Japan for more than twenty years, working as a school teacher and involved in the mystical disciplines of the Far-East."

She related to me that she was uninterested in attending the Seder, as she felt completely alienated from Judaism, yet a friend persuaded her to come.

"The only thing I remember about Judaism," she continued, "was that my grandmother would always tell me, that I have a special spiritual connection. Why? "Because you are the tenth generation of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov."

"Who is Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Barditchov? That my grandmother never knew. She just knew that he was some great man who lived in Eastern Europe. And she insisted that I always retain this peace of history in my memory.

"So thank you Rabbi Jacobson for serving as the messenger of my holy grand father to bring me to come back home this Passover night," the women said to me.

I wiped a tear from my eye and thanked the Almighty for sending me to Japan for Passover