

**"Crumbs of Matzah"**

By Rabbi Shabtai Slavatitski

A certain Chabad rabbi led a large congregation, many of whom were Holocaust survivors. Each member had his own memories and problems, of course, but all of them learned to cope pretty much. Or so it seemed.

Mr. Goldvasser (fictitious name) was a seemingly normal person - a good businessman with a healthy sense of humor a generous heart and a keen mind. However, he had one idiosyncrasy; he never remained in the synagogue for the Blessing of the Cohanim (Priests) on the holidays.

The Rabbi was always a bit apprehensive about asking Mr. Goldvasser for an explanation, but when his curiosity finally became too great to resist he concocted a plan. He invited the man to his home for a meal, and after they had eaten well, sang a few songs and made a few 'l'chaims,' he asked.

"Tell me Mr. Goldvasser, I've noticed that you don't stay for the blessing of the Cohanim on the holidays. Am I right? Is there some reason? Is something wrong? I know it's not that important; it's just something I have been noticing for quite a while. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I just wondered."

Mr. Goldvasser became silent and it seemed that his eyes became glossy with some past vision, or perhaps with tears.

"Well, Rabbi" he began after almost a minute, "It was like this...."

I was in Auschwitz. I can't explain what happened there, I think it's even forbidden to remember such things. But there was one person; we called him 'The Rabbi,' although we never knew if he was really ordained or not. No one knew his name, but he was different than all of us. He must have lost his family and everything just like the rest of us, but he never showed it. Not only that but he used to keep everyone's spirits up.

If he saw someone depressed he would say a good word. If you ever wanted to talk he would listen. He could listen forever. He always had a hand for a bent shoulder and a shoulder for someone to weep on, and a hug for a broken heart and even a joke to break the sadness.

Anyway, once it was getting close to Passover and he announced that we had to figure out a way to get matza.

Matza! Everyone was thinking about dropping dead and he made us think of matzos. And it worked. Until finally, on the way to where they took us to work outside,

someone noticed a few crumbs of matzot!

It took a few days, but finally we found out that one of the prisoners had a job cleaning the house of one of the Nazi officers and when the German wasn't at home this Jew risked his life and made a matza for himself. If he got caught he would have been killed for sure. Anyway, a few crumbs must have fallen there near the road and that's how we found out. It was a genuine miracle.

The Rabbi had a talk with this fellow and at first he said it was impossible; too dangerous. But finally he agreed...and somehow he succeeded in making two more matzot. Another miracle!

The Rabbi woke us all up for the Seder. It doesn't matter that we were about eight hundred men in that bunker. Do you hear? Eight hundred! But we were actually happy when the Rabbi woke us up at midnight and showed us those matzot.

He broke them into pieces and handed them out, then each of us broke them into smaller pieces until each of us had a piece.

Each person held his piece in his hand while the Rabbi recited what he remembered from the Passover Haggada by heart and we repeated after him.

Finally he finished the recitations and made the blessing on the matza. He ate and so did we - each one ate his crumb of matza. At first we were quiet, whispering so those German snakes wouldn't hear us, but after a few minutes we kind of forgot where we were, and began talking louder.

When we realized, we became frightened. But then the Rabbi demanded our attention and spoke with fire: "Listen Jews! Listen my friends and my brothers. We just left Egypt! See! No one can break our spirit. No one! We are free!" He began to sing a song and to dance. He actually danced! It was not long till we were all dancing. Everyone, even the atheists! We were free.

But then the door came crashing open and the spell was broken. There stood a Nazi officer with a few soldiers behind him like mad dogs.

"What is this?" He screamed, red with anger. "SINGING?!" He screamed even louder. "In Auschwitz you cry, you don't sing!"

He pulled out a pistol, put it to the head of one of the prisoners and said "Tell me who is responsible or I'll kill you. I'll kill all of you one by one! Who is responsible for this?"

Everyone knew it could happen. The Rabbi stepped forward and said in a loud, calm voice. "I am. I'm responsible. You can kill me."

The officer motioned to his soldiers to grab the Rabbi, lowered his pistol, put it in its holster and said, "You won't die so fast, Jew. You will die tomorrow, in public by hanging."

**It Once Happened...**

They took the Rabbi away and early the next morning before dawn they woke us early, and made the entire camp stand in the yard. There were several thousand prisoners and Nazi guards were everywhere with pointed guns. There in the middle, on a podium between two huge Gestapo guards stood the Rabbi.

The officer stood straight, hands behind his back, his chest jutting out and yelled. "Now, Jews, you will see what happens to someone who dances in Auschwitz. Everyone will watch! Do you understand?! Everyone! Anyone caught not watching will be killed on the spot!"

As they were putting the noose around the Rabbi's neck he turned to the officer and said in a clear voice for all to hear, "As a man about to be killed I demand my last wish! Doesn't a dying man get a last wish? Where is your honor?"

The commander hesitated, smiled as though amused, and said.

"Last wish is it? Alright, Jew, what is your last wish?"

"I am a Cohen," he answered. "So I want to bless the crowd."

"Bless? Heh! And how long will this take?"

"It will take half a minute, perhaps less," he replied.

The officer looked at the soldier with the noose, made a motion with his head to wait, looked at the watch on his wrist and said, "You have thirty seconds."

The Rabbi's voice was clear as a child's. He stood proudly straight, closed his eyes and raised his hands with his fingers spread in the special way of the Cohanim while blessing.

The fifteen words of the blessing rang out like a voice from heaven. "Yivorechechaw, HaShem, V'yishmorechaw."

We all burst out crying like babies and when he finished...well, it was over.

Goldvasser looked the Rabbi in the eyes and concluded, "That blessing is what kept me alive in Auschwitz, through the rest of the war and to this very day. It rings in my ears when there is no hope and shines in the darkness when all is lost. I never want to hear another Cohen's blessing. I never want to forget that pure blessing I heard. That is why I leave the Shul."

Reprinted from an email from KabbalaOnline.org.



**Y-GRAPHICS**

Shabbat Times - Parshat Acharei Mot

	Candle Lighting Chag	Candle Lighting Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:36	6:37	7:52	8:31
Tel Aviv	6:52	6:53	7:54	
Haifa	6:44	6:45	7:55	
Be'er Sheva	6:53	6:54	7:54	



## Seeking Elijah After Two Seders By Rabbi Shmuel Butman

It was in the weeks preceding Passover that one of the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov was overcome with a burning desire to see Eliyahu HaNavi [Elijah the Prophet]. The disciple knew that it would require much purity of mind and soul and that generally the Baal Shem Tov discouraged such endeavors. However, the longing to have the great Prophet reveal himself was so intense that he couldn't distract his mind from the thought. After much deliberation and soul-searching, he decided to ask the Baal Shem Tov for his holy advice.

To the chassid's surprise, the Baal Shem Tov agreed to help him prepare himself for this life-transforming undertaking. The Baal Shem Tov gave the chassid an extensive list of spiritual preparations. Upon completing the list, the chassid reported back to the Baal Shem Tov, whereupon he was told to load a wagon with food, wine and matzas, and to travel to a nearby village where he was to spend the first two days of Passover with a certain family. There, surely, Elijah the Prophet would be revealed.

The chassid travelled to the village with mixed feelings of joy and trepidation. Would he truly merit to see the prophet? A little while later, the chassid arrived at the village and found the dilapidated hut of the impoverished family with whom he was meant to celebrate the two Seders and fulfill his heart's desire of seeing Elijah the Prophet.

"Shalom Aleichem - Peace to you" he announced to the man who answered the door. "I am a chassid of the Baal Shem Tov, and he sent me here to spend the two Seder nights of Passover with you. I've brought everything we will need for the holiday with me, enough food for your entire family and even new clothing for your children."

The man stood at the door dumb-founded. His wife came to the door and she, too, could not believe her eyes as she looked out at the overloaded wagon. The couple soon composed themselves and invited the traveler in.

The Seder night was unforgettable. The woman, her husband and their five children had never been in the presence of one of the Baal Shem Tov's holy pupils. They had never heard such rich Torah thoughts said in such clear and simple words that they could all easily understand. They had also never had such a royal feast at their Seder.

The chassid, for his part, did not forget even for one moment why he had come. At every stage of

the Seder that first night, the chassid waited with eager anticipation for Elijah the Prophet to appear.

They drank the four cups of wine, ate the traditional foods, explained each sentence of the Hagada with joy, sang the traditional holiday songs and even danced until the wee hours of the night. But Elijah did not reveal himself to the chassid.

At the second Seder, the same wondrous scene repeated itself for the family and their guest. The Torah insights, the joy, the food, the singing, the dancing. But this night, too, Elijah the Prophet did not appear to the chassid.

When three stars appeared in the sky the following evening, and the chassid had not merited to see Elijah the Prophet, he was heartbroken. He thanked the family for their hospitality and returned to the Baal Shem Tov.

During the journey back, the chassid wondered what had happened. Surely the Baal Shem Tov was not wrong when he had told the chassid that Elijah would reveal himself in that family's home on Passover. Elijah must have been there and the chassid had somehow not merited to see him. Perhaps he had dozed off for an instant at the Seder without even realizing it and had missed seeing the Prophet.

When the chassid arrived at the Baal Shem Tov's court, he poured out his heart to his master. He repeated every detail of the past few days, waiting expectantly to hear how or why he had missed Elijah the Prophet.

The Baal Shem Tov thought for a moment and answered, "Go back to the village. Let your horse graze by the window of the house. There you will find your answer."

Without hesitation the chassid travelled back to the village. As he brought his horse to graze by the window of the home, he overheard a conversation between the husband and wife: "What did you think of our guest?" the wife said to the husband.

"What do I think?" he replied "I think we should thank G-d and the holy Baal Shem Tov for sending us his chassid! The words of Torah, the beautiful explanations, the bountiful food. It was amazing!"

"That was no chassid," she interjected emphatically. "That was Elijah the prophet! I am absolutely sure that was Elijah the prophet."

Now the chassid understood. Elijah the Prophet employs many manifestations; fortunate is he who makes himself able to be one of them.

*Reprinted from an email of L'Chaim Weekly.*



Are any of the Mitzvot of the Torah given to us to make us suffer?

You might think that's the case in Parshat Acharei Mot, where the Torah gives us the laws of Yom Kippur: we are told *תענו את נפשתיכם* - you must afflict your souls'.

I heard from Rabbi Mirvis, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and the Commonwealth that the Rambam, in his Mishneh Torah, gives us his explanation. He quotes this verse and explains it by saying, *הויה לשובות לו מאכילה ושתיה* - you must 'rest' on this day from eating and drinking'. It's the soft tone of 'resting' from something in order to provide an uplifting experience. So this 'affliction' is not there to make us suffer - rather it is providing us with the rules of a wonderful game without which we wouldn't be able to play.

It's for this reason, that this whole section of law is called *שבתת עשור* - the 'resting' that we do on this day. It's a positive statement rather than a punitive one.

The same can be applied to all other areas of Jewish law which might seem to be unfairly restrictive. Let's take *kashrut* - the laws relating to kosher food or *taharat hamishpacha* - laws relating to family purity. They actually serve to enhance our lives, to give us meaning and added happiness and joy.

Perhaps the finest example of this is Shabbat. In the Ten Commandments presented in the Book of Devarim, the term used there by Hashem is *'שמור'* - 'guard the Sabbath day' meaning that we must separate ourselves from certain things that we do during the week. But in the Book of Shemot, the term used by Hashem is, *'זכור'* - 'Remember the Sabbath day' through positive action. And in the *Lecha Dodi* prayer that we recite on Friday night, we declare, *"שמור וזכור בדיבור אחד"* - Hashem issued these two statements in one single utterance - indicating that the *'שמור'* is there for the sake of the *'זכור'*. We relate to Shabbat not as being an unfair day of restriction, but rather, as a most beautiful experience through which our lives can be shaped and enhanced immeasurably.

So, are there mitzvot of the Torah which are intended to cause us suffering? Absolutely not! Quite the contrary! It's thanks to all the mitzvot of the Torah that we can live a life of meaning, of spirituality and of deep happiness.

Let's pray for those suffering from the current situation in Israel and Eastern Europe, as well as for the recovery of all the sick, our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and *parnassah* and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, sweet last day of Pesach and Shabbat.

## The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 28  
MITZVOT ASEH: 2  
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 26

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 80  
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1170  
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4294

HAFTORA:  
Ashkenazim & Chabad: Amos 9:7 - 15  
Sephardim: Yechezkel 20:2 - 20

This week in Israel, we study Chapter 1 of Pirkei Avot (outside Israel one does not study it).

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