

BS"D Pesach 5783

Tale of Two Cities – Two Worlds

In the United States of America

A frum (observant) family at the Seder night, living in any one of the great Torah centers in the galut – Flatbush, Boro Park, Lakewood, Los Angeles or southern Florida. The home of Reb Sender and Mrs. Rayza Galluty is impeccable; the result of the great time and energy, not to speak of the huge outlay of money, which the expeditious and skillful ba'alat ha'bayit (woman of the house) has devoted to it.

The sofas and armchairs in the sitting room look so inviting, were it not for the thick plastic covers which insure that the upholstery retains its "new" look.

The five-meter-long, Brazilian Mahogany dining room table is covered with the finest Irish linen tablecloth. In the middle of the table stands the imposing sterling silver candle sticks handed down from mother to daughter for generations. The china is the finest Rosenthal, with each plate delicately rounded off with a band of gold. The silverware has been put away in favor of goldware in honor of the sacred night.

On the table, under a hand-embroidered silk cloth, lay the matzot. On the insistence of the two sons who have been learning in the recently opened Yeshiva Taharas Ha'Torah (purity of Torah) in Las Vegas, in order to bring the voice of Torah even to the entrance of Gehennom, the matzot are from

the first 18-minute batch, guaranteeing that no naughty piece of dough would be hiding in any of the rollers. The hand matzot were personally chosen by the rebbe of the shtiebel (homey synagogue) where the family now davens, after leaving the central shul which was costing too much. The rebbe assured the boys that the matzot were bubble-free, with no overturned edges.

The wall-to-wall carpet is as deep as the grass in the beautiful garden. Above the table hangs the family's pride and joy – a multi-faceted crystal chandelier, personally chosen by Rayza on the family's last visit to Prague.

Reb Sender is wearing his new bekeshe (silk robe), the one with the swirls of blue, with a gold-buckled gartel (belt). Rayza has just said the Shehechiyanu blessing (gratitude for seeing this day) over the \$5000 dress imported from Paris. The boys are handsome in their wide-brimmed black hats and the two girls will make beautiful brides when the time comes, dressed in their very expensive dresses imported from Paris.

The seder goes better than expected; words of Torah, beginning with an invitation to the hungry to join with them in the meal, despite the fact that there is not a needy person within 50 miles. A lively discussion develops on the characters of the "four sons." The main course of Turkey and cranberry sauce is served, in the finest American tradition dating from the Pilgrims, of giving thanks to the Almighty for all His abundance. The afikomen (ritual dessert matza) is "stolen" by the youngest daughter who, for its return, has succeeded in extorting from Tattie a vacation in Aruba.

Songs of thanks to HaShem for freeing the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt are recited. For it is a mitzva on this night for each person to undergo a déjà vu experience, as if he or she were newly freed slaves from Mitzrayim.

Birkat Hamazon (grace after the meal) is said as is the second

part of Hallel. Chad Gadya puts the final touch on the mitzvot of the night. Now, just as HaShem destroys the “Angel of Death” in the song, father jumps up and gathering the family in a circle, they all break out in a frenzy of song – L’shana ha’ba’a Be’Yerushalayim – “Next year in Jerusalem.”

Again and again around the table L’shana ha’ba’a Be’Yerushalayim is sounded. Louder and louder until their song merges with the same melody resounding from the neighbors’ homes, cutting a path into the highest realms of heaven.

Suddenly Mama collapses into a chair, crying hysterically. The singing stops. Father runs over and asks, “Why are you crying just at the apex of the beautiful sacred night?”

And between tears Mama answers: “What do you mean next year in Yerushalayim? What about the table, the chandelier, the deep carpet, the Rosenthal china, the garden! How can we leave all this?”

Father approaches Mama and taking her hand while gently dabbing her tears away, in a voice full of compassion, says to his beloved Rayza, “Darling, don’t cry, IT’S ONLY A SONG!”

In Eretz Yisrael

Ten thousand kilometers to the east, in Eretz Yisrael, lives Reb Sender’s brother, Kalman and his wife Sarah, who came on aliya years ago with their five children and changed the family name to Yerushalmi. They were blessed with a beautiful family, an adequate apartment and much nachat. Their son, Yossi, would not be home for the Seder night; he was serving in the army within the Hesder yeshiva system.

The parents were not overly worried, because Yossi told them that he was in a safe place in the north and that next year they will all be together for the Seder.

At 12 noon, on the 14th of Nisan, Erev Pesach (day before Pesach), Yossi and three other soldiers from the same yeshiva were informed that they had been chosen to fill an assignment that evening, on the Seder night. They were to cross into Hezbollah territory in Southern Lebanon and man the bunker on hill 432.

Yossi knew the hill well; he had been there several times in the past year. It was sarcastically called a “bunker,” but in reality, it was nothing more than a foxhole large enough for four soldiers. Their assignment was to track terrorist movements and destroy them on contact. It was tolerable except when it rained, which caused the bottom of the hole to be soggy and muddy. But today, the four hoped that it would rain, even though the chances were small since it was late in the season. On the 14th of every Hebrew month when the moon is full, crossing into enemy territory presents a greater danger; so, rain would be a mixed blessing.

At 5:00 PM, they were given the necessary arms and ammunition. The army rabbinate provided them with 4 plastic containers – each holding 3 matzot and all the ingredients necessary for a Seder – as well as 4 plastic bottles of wine, each one containing 4 cups, and of course four Haggadot (ritual text).

At 6:00 PM, they waited at the fence for the electricity to be turned off in order to cross into hostile territory. Yossi held a map of the minefield they would have to cross. “It was so strange,” Yossi thought, “this is the area assigned to the tribe of Naftali, and we have to enter it crawling on our stomachs.”

At 6:15 PM, the small aperture in the gate opened and they passed through. As they had hoped, it was raining, and the thick fog was to their advantage.

At that moment, 10,000 kilometers to the west, it was 12:15 PM and Yossi’s two cousins in New York were just entering the

mikva (ritual bath) to prepare for the sacred night.

The 4 soldiers reached hill 432 after walking double-time for 5 kilometers. They removed the camouflage and settled in, pulling the grassy cover over them.

Each was assigned a direction. Talking was forbidden. If any murderers were sighted, a light tap on the shoulder would bring them all to the exact direction. After settling in, they prayed ma'ariv and began the Seder. It was finished within a half hour, and they were happy that the 4 cups of wine had no detrimental effect on their senses.

At 6:00 PM in NY, the family returned from shul to begin their Seder. At 11:00 P.M. the family was dancing around the table singing the song of hope that they will be in Yerushalayim the following year.

It was then 5:00 A.M. in Eretz Yisrael, and the 4 soldiers were waging a heroic battle against boredom and sleep. The minutes crawled by, and right before the first approach of light, they exited the outpost and returned through the minefield and electric fence to the base. After reporting to the officer in charge, the four entered their tent and collapsed on their cots without removing clothing or shoes, because in an hour they would have to join the minyan for the shacharit service.

That night, the protecting heavenly angels of Yossi and his friends were draped in flowing, golden robes while sharing the heavenly Seder with the righteous of all the generations.

Next Year in Yerushalayim

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It is not “only a song,” it was the dream, hope and prayer of Jews for two thousand years which have been fulfilled in our time.

How fortunate and favored are we to be the chosen of HaShem to tread in the footsteps of kings and prophets in the holy land and holy city Yerushalayim.

Dear friends, far and near

May we all merit a meaningful, happy and kasher Chag Pesach.

Nachman Kahana

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