



MIZRACHI

HAMIZRACHI

# Seder Companion 5779

SHORT IDEAS, INSIGHTS AND STORIES TO ENHANCE AND ENRICH YOUR SEDER





## INTRODUCTION

### Being in the Moment

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

**THE FOCUS OF** Seder night is our relationship with time – how we can use the present to reflect on the past to shape our future.

To reach this state, it is necessary for us to be ‘in the moment’ of Seder night, or as Rav Soloveitchik explains, ‘to connect retrospection with anticipation, memory with expectation, hind view with foresight, one must cherish the present fleeting moment as if it represented eternity’ (Noraot HaRav Vol. 4 pp. 153-4).

By cherishing the moments of Seder night, we can achieve true freedom by recognizing that the greatest gift we have at any moment... is that very moment.

So make sure that wherever you are for Seder night, don’t just bring a present, but actually be in the present, so that you cherish the moment of being with those you love, as if it represented eternity.

## KADESH



### Why is This Kiddush Different?

Rabbi Alex Israel

**A SLAVE’S TIME** is not his own. He is at his master's beck and call. Even when the slave has a pressing personal engagement, his taskmaster’s needs will take priority.

In contrast, freedom is the control of our time.

Kiddush says this out loud. We sanctify the day and define its meaning! We proclaim this day as significant, holy and meaningful. We fashion time, claim ownership of it, and fashion it as a potent contact point with G-d, peoplehood and tradition. This is a quintessential act of Jewish freedom.

## Four Cups – Four Mothers

Rabbi Yishayahu Halevi Horowitz  
(The Shla HaKadosh)

**Cup 1:** Sarah Imeinu, who with Avraham brought many people closer to G-d and Judaism. We make Kiddush on this cup and say “Who chose us from every other people.”

**Cup 2:** Rivka Imeinu, who reached great spiritual heights, despite coming from a family of idol worshipers. On this cup we recite the Haggadah passages dealing with Lavan (Rivka's father) and Ya’akov.

**Cup 3:** Rachel Imeinu. We pour it at the end of the meal and say Birkat HaMazon. It was Yosef, Rachel's son, who provided food for the whole of Egypt.

**Cup 4:** Leah Imeinu, who was the first to thank G-d when she gave birth to Yehuda: “This time I will thank G-d” (Genesis 29:35).

## URCHATZ



### A Night of Possibility

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

**“ON PASSOVER, JEWS** are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus and to see ourselves as having lived through that story, so that we may better learn how to live our lives today. The stories we tell our children shape what they believe to be possible.”

## KARPAS



### Are We Really Free?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

**A CHILD ONCE** complained to me, “I feel like a slave on Seder night!”

“Do you work hard to prepare for the Seder?” I asked him.

“No. I go on hikes with my friends.”

“So what’s so hard?” I replied.

“We eat a bite of karpas, and then we have to go hungry for ages until the meal! I really feel like a slave!”

So I said to him, “So why don’t you just get up and go to the kitchen to eat something?”

“But it’s forbidden to eat anything before the Seder!”

“That’s what a free person is!” I told him. “You don’t eat not because you can’t eat but because you understand that the Halacha doesn’t want you to eat!”

A free person is able to wait for a meal even when he or she is starving. A free person knows they should first express gratitude to G-d and tell the story of the Exodus. A free person can delay instant gratification!

## YACHATZ



### The Mayflower

David Ben-Gurion,  
speaking to the UN commission on  
the Partition of Palestine in 1947

**300 YEARS AGO** a ship called the Mayflower set sail to the New World. This was a great event in the history of England. Yet I wonder if there is one Englishman who knows at what time the ship set sail? Do the English know how many people embarked on the voyage? What quality of bread did they eat? Yet more than 3,300 years ago, before the Mayflower set sail, the Jews left Egypt. Every Jew in the world, even in America or Soviet Russia, knows what kind of bread the Jews ate – matzah. Even today Jews worldwide eat matzah on the 15th of Nisan. They retell the story of the Exodus and all of the troubles Jews have endured since being exiled, saying: This year, slaves, next year, free! This year here – Next year in Jerusalem, in Zion, in Eretz Yisrael. That is the nature of the Jews.



## MAGGID



### Ha Lachma Anya

Rav Reuven Taragin

**HA LACHMA ANYA** ends with an expression of confidence that the Redemption will occur within the next year. We describe two independent aspects of Redemption – that we will be in Eretz Yisrael and that we will be bnei chorin (free).

This duality teaches us that one is possible without the other and that each is independently significant. We should therefore greatly appreciate the privilege to be able to visit, live and conduct a Seder in Eretz Yisrael.

But are we free? “No-one is considered free person apart from one who occupies themselves with Torah” (Avot 6:2) – true freedom can only be achieved when a person frees themselves from foreign influences and knows who they truly are, who they are meant to be, and how they intend to get there.

### Holy is Here

Rabbi Michi Yosefi

**MOSHE SEES THE** Burning Bush and hears the famous words “Take your shoes off your feet, because the place upon which you stand is holy soil” (Exodus 3:5).

This verse teaches us that we do not need to travel far away to undergo a process of change. On the contrary:

“Take off your shoes” – remove whatever is holding you back.

“From your feet” – from your habits.

“Because the place upon which you stand is holy soil” – the place you are at the moment can become holy.

## Observing with Empathy

Dr. David Pelcovitz

**AS MOSHE RABBEINU** grows up, the Torah tells us, וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶרְצוֹ וַיֵּרָא, “And Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens” (Exodus 2:11). Rav Chaim Shmulevitz notes that the verse uses the verb “see” – וַיֵּרָא – to connote how Moshe empathized with his fellow brethren. Rav Chaim explains that empathy is developed through vision and face-to-face contact.

Along these lines, research has proven something fascinating. When a person performs a movement, such as moving his hands, there is a very specific motor neuron that fires in the prefrontal cortex of the brain specifically designed for this movement. Research has shown that when an outsider sees the movements, the same motor neuron activity occurs in the viewer’s head. Observing the body language of one person triggers an identical reaction in the observer. This specific activated neuron is called the “mirror neuron.”

When a person makes eye contact with another the mirror neuron is activated. This is what Moshe experienced when looking at the Jews in Egypt. He closely and carefully looked at their suffering and took their pain to heart. It is therefore most important that parents and children give their undivided attention to each other and make eye contact when attempting to efficiently communicate and emotionally empathize with each other’s feelings.

### My Narrow Prison

Viktor Frankl

**THE HEBREW WORD** for Egypt, מִצְרַיִם, means a tight spot or a narrow strait where we feel “boxed in.”

One day, a few days after the liberation, I walked through the country past flowering meadows, for miles and miles, toward the market town near the camp. Larks rose to the sky and I could hear their joyous song. There



was no-one to be seen for miles around; there was nothing but the wide earth and sky and the larks' jubilation and the freedom of space.

I stopped, looked around, and up to the sky – and then I went down on my knees. At that moment there was very little I knew of myself or of the world – I had but one sentence in mind, always the same: “I called to the L-rd from my narrow prison and G-d answered me in the freedom of space.” (Psalms 118:5).

How long I knelt there and repeated this sentence, memory can no longer recall. But I know that on that day, in that hour, my new life started. Step for step I progressed, until I again became a human being.

## Inscribe the Story on the Hearts of our Children

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

**THE CENTRAL MITZVAH** of the Seder is to tell the story of leaving Egypt, סִפּוּר יְצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. Rav Soloveitchik teaches that סִפּוּר, story, is related to the word סוֹפֵר, scribe, or סֵפֶר, which means a scroll or a book.

This suggests that a scribe who writes a scroll produces something permanent, something that will last for generations.

On Seder night, parents are the scribes, “writing an everlasting scroll.” Our children are the scrolls upon which we etch the beauty of this night for generations.

## Avadim Hayinu: Real Freedom

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook

**REAL FREEDOM IS** that noble spirit by which the individual and indeed the whole people are elevated to become loyal to their inner essential self, to the image of G-d within them. Through this characteristic they can perceive their lives as purposeful and worthy of value.

This is not true regarding people with the spirit of a slave – the content of their lives and their feelings attuned to the characteristics of their essential self, but rather to what is considered beautiful and good by others. They are ruled by all sorts of constraints, whether they be formal or moral.

## And You Shall Tell it To Your Children

Miriam Peretz

When every family is sitting around the Seder table telling the history of our people, I will be sitting with my son, Eliraz's, four children. Deputy Commander of the 12th Battalion of the Golani Brigade, he fell in battle in Gaza three days before Seder night...

It won't be their father telling the story to his children but their grandmother, telling her grandchildren about our family Haggadah. I'll tell them about the father they barely knew (the eldest was six when he died); I'll tell them the stories I told to Eliraz, about the yearning for Eretz Yisrael in Morocco, from where the family made aliyah, about the excitement when we said לְשׁוֹנָה הַבְּאָהָה

בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם, about the desire to be a free people in our Land... and about the heavy price our family paid to realize this dream...

And I will tell them that their uncle Uriel, Eliraz's brother, fell in Lebanon 12 years before their father fell in Gaza, and that they and all the other soldiers are the continuation of the generation who left Egypt. With their own bodies, they chose to defend their right and the right of future generations to live lives of freedom in their own country. And because of them and others we are sitting at our Seder table tonight.

And so we entwine my family's story with the story of our people.

And we embrace life.

## The Wicked Son – “What is This Service to You?”

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein

**IN EXILE,** THE commandments were necessary for the purposes of creating a national identity and uniqueness that would protect us from assimilation, but why must they still be observed now that we are in Eretz Yisrael?

The question implies a desire to abandon the mitzvot, because – as the questioner sees it – these are necessary only for an external reason, to create a nation consolidated around something. Now we have returned to our homeland, the mitzvot are no longer necessary.



The parents' answer relates to the commandment of "Pesach dorot," the Pesach sacrifice brought in future generations.

We tell our children that there is room for innovation and change where necessary, in accordance with a changing reality; the commandment of the Pesach sacrifice symbolizes this change.

Change is indeed essential, but only on condition that it is undertaken with complete commitment to Halacha and its obligations, rather than out of a desire to cast away or to submit oneself to fashionable philosophies.

The third qualitative stage of a child's life is study and education. Once a child is alive and learns how to speak he or she begins to receive the Divine message, education. And this is the Revelation at Sinai!

## Four Sons As One

Dr. Tova Ganzel

**ALL OF US** have parts of these four sons within us, and on Seder night we have a special opportunity to connect to our own complex identities, to receive different and changing answers, to be both spectators and participants, to receive a short or a detailed answer, all simultaneously. And to internalize that the different sons are all part of each one of us. There is really no clear distinction between them, because the Torah was given to all... of us.

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## 10 Plagues

Rabbi Stewart Weiss

**THE 10 PLAGUES** represent a breakdown of all the barriers. Suddenly, stunningly, Nature does not "follow the rules:" The water turns into blood, animals encroach upon humans, the sun ceases to shine, fire and ice co-exist.



All this and more serve to demonstrate to us that as a people, as a cohesive nation of Yisrael – rather than just a collection of individuals – we can do anything. There are no boundaries. This is the timeless lesson for us all.

If we ever doubted this lesson, just look at what the State of Israel – badgered, beleaguered and bad-mouthed as it is – has accomplished in its short history: We are one of the world's great democracies with a stunning economy and awesome military – lately judged the eighth most powerful country in the world – with more Jews studying Torah than at any time in the last 2,000 years.

And, b'ezrat Hashem – we are not done yet!

## Reaching Higher

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

**"AND IT CAME** to pass at midnight" – the darkest moment in the daily cycle symbolizes a situation in which a person is stuck in the darkness of the world. Even such a person has the strength to "go out of Egypt" and continue on. It is possible to leave the darkest situation and become a free person.

In contrast, midday is the brightest moment of the daily cycle and symbolizes the brightest parts of a person's life. However, even those people have to "go out of Egypt" and realize that their current situation, however good, is considered to be slavery when compared to even higher levels they should still be striving to reach.

## Second Thoughts

Rabbi Berel Wein

**PHARAOH HAS SECOND** thoughts about freeing the Jewish people and is determined to revert once again to tyranny and murder in order to 'correct' his previous error.

The Torah teaches us here that our second thoughts in life reveal to a great extent who we are and what path in life we wish to pursue. We are often forced to do good things because of social pressures and other unholy motives. When these disappear so does our desire to do good. And the same is true in the opposite vein.

Sometimes we are forced to do things that are really repugnant to us because of outside pressures we cannot control. But we regret having done so because our inner self only desires good and a sincere attachment to G-d and His Torah.

## Seeing G-d's Hand in Everything

Mrs. Shira Smiles

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָלְכוּ בַיַּבֶּשֶׁת בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם (and the Children of Israel walked on the dry land in the middle of the sea). Why does the verse include both "on the dry land" and "in the middle of the sea?"

Doesn't one phrase suffice? Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk explains that these phrases represent different ideas. "On the dry land" symbolizes this physical world and the natural course of events. "In the middle of the sea" symbolizes a fantastic, openly miraculous event like the Splitting of the Sea.

A deeper understanding is that Bnei Yisrael grasped parallel levels of G-d's greatness in the natural (on dry land) and the supernatural (in the sea); the mundane and the miraculous were equally awesome in their eyes.

The Slonimer Rebbe explains that many people are aware of G-d's direct intervention in their lives only when they experience open miracles. But at that time, Bnei Yisrael saw the Hand of G-d in everything. Our goal is to reach that level now.



## Never Give Up Hope

Sara Yocheved Rigler

**G-D, THE AUTHOR** of nature, is not restricted by nature. If you believe in the authority of nature, you are bound by cause and effect, but if you believe in G-d, no situation, no diagnosis, no military threat is beyond G-d's control. There is no room for hopelessness and despair in a G-d-run world. As our Sages said, "Salvation can come in the blink of an eye." Their proof is the Exodus from Egypt.

## A Modern Dayeinu

Rabbi Doron Perez

**IF G-D HAD** brought us back to the Land of Israel

But not given us a sovereign state

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had given us a sovereign state and allowed us a taste of freedom and dignity for but a moment

But we would have lost the War of Independence

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had helped us be victorious in the War of Independence

But we would not have succeeded in building a viable country

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had helped us build a viable country

But not brought back hundreds of thousands of Jews from Sephardic and Yeminite backgrounds

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had allowed us to win the Six-Day War

But not given us the ancient biblical sites of Chevron, Beit El, Shiloh, as well as the Golan Heights

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had given us Hevron, Beit El, Shiloh and the Golan Heights

But not allowed us to return to the Old City of Yerushalayim

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had allowed us to liberate the Old City of Jerusalem

But not allowed us to rebuild her ruins

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had allowed us to rebuild His Old City

But not made Jerusalem into Israel's largest city with a population of over 800,000 people

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had made Jerusalem Israel's largest city with a population of over 800,000 people

But not allowed us to live with dignity in secure borders

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had allowed us to live in secure borders

But not created a strong and sustainable economy

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had built for us a strong and sustainable economy

But not ingathered the exiles from almost 100 countries

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had ingathered the exiles from almost 100 countries



But not allowed us to rebuild the Torah world in Israel with well over 100,000 men and women studying Torah full-time, perhaps the most in Jewish history

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had rebuilt the Yeshiva and Torah world

But not produced so many outstanding Torah scholars and leaders

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had produced so many outstanding Torah scholars and leaders

But not opened the gates of freedom to the oppressed Russian and Ethiopian Jews

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

If G-d had opened the gates of freedom to the oppressed Russian and Ethiopian Jews

But not made Israel the country with largest amount of Jews for the first time in over 2,500 years

*Dayeinu, it would have been enough*

## RACHTZA



### A Story Before the Meal Seder in Siberia

Rabbi Yosef Mendelovich

**I MANAGED TO** pull a Seder together in my last year in Christopol prison, where I was kept in a dark dank cell for three years, for the “crime” of having observed Shabbat. I told Hillel, my cell mate, that we should hold a Seder, but Hillel was skeptical considering the dangers and difficulties, and left me alone to try and scrounge the required foods.

I had a small postcard with a picture of a Seder plate from the Israel Museum, which was not confiscated because it had nothing written on it. Thanks to that picture I knew what I needed.

And then the miracles began to happen...

Everything I needed came to me. It started when a flu epidemic began spreading around the prison, and the jail's administration gave each prisoner an onion for their health. I put it in water to get green sprouts I could use for maror.

Next up was matzah, and I was fortunately allowed to receive two pounds of bread. My sisters had sent me matzah from Israel, but it arrived in small pieces because the guards thought it contained a secret message.

My father had sent me raisins, so I collected the sugar doled out to the prisoners and put it in a jar with the raisins and water, hiding it by a hot water pipe under my bed in the hope it would ferment and become wine.

But that wasn't all. I found herbs growing under the asphalt in the exercise yard. I took those small leaves breaking through the hard asphalt to be a symbol of freedom, and saved them for my karpas.

Shankbone? That was a little harder! But I did have some chicken soup-flavored cubes sent to me by people from Kibbutz Yavne in Israel.

Finally, I asked my guards for a copy of the Pravda Communist propaganda paper, which I used to craft a seder plate.

I surprised Hillel with the ingredients I had assembled. The raisins had turned to wine, and Hillel had his first Seder.

And the next morning yet another miracle occurred. They took Hillel out of our cell. I thought they were just transferring him elsewhere but Natan Sharansky later told me that he had been released with other friends, and was already in Israel.

## MOTZI MATZAH



### The Blessing Over Chametz in Bergen-Belsen

**BEFORE EATING CHAMETZ** in the concentration camp seder, Jews recited a special prayer:

“Our Father in Heaven! It is well-known to you that we desire to follow Your will and celebrate Pesach with matzah, strictly avoiding chametz. Yet our hearts are pained that the enslavement prevents us from doing so for our lives are in danger. We are here,





KORECH

כֹּרֵךְ

## Hillel's Sandwich

Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf

**TAKE A LOOK** at yourself. Isn't there something within you – an angelic core – that inclines toward the spiritual? Toward that which transcends the mundanity of the corporeal? A portion of your being which yearns to dispense with its preoccupation with food, sleep, and comfort. To free itself to pursue the eternal and not the transitory. To experience that which is intensely meaningful and not fleeting or petty.

Now look again. Is there not a part of you that longs to spend endless sun-massaged days on a quiet beach? Chilled beverages at your side, CDs playing your favorite music, the Sunday paper... and drift away... from all your cares, worries and responsibilities.

This is us. A not-always-so-harmonious blend of spiritual and physical.

One moment selflessly seeking to better the lot of all mankind, the next in a huff over the pizza delivered without extra cheese.

This is all of us. It is the conundrum of our existence and the dynamic to which the matzah and maror allude.

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SHULCHAN ORECH

שולחן אורח

## The Secret to a Happy Home

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrahi

**THE ALSHICH NOTES** that the words מְשִׁפְּחָה (family) and שְׂמֵחָה (happiness) share just about the same letters. The only difference is the letter peh פ, cognate to the

ready to observe the positive commandment of 'living by Your laws' (Leviticus 18:5), and not dying by them. We must take care not to violate the negative commandment, 'beware and guard yourself well,' lest we endanger our lives. Therefore, our prayer to You is to preserve our lives and redeem us quickly, so that we may observe Your Will and serve You wholeheartedly. Amen."

They sit around the table, and the wife serves a lettuce leaf in saltwater...

The non-Jew was a little disappointed, to say the least.

Meanwhile, the family reads the Haggadah, sings the songs until finally, two hours later... it's time for the matzah!

The non-Jew was happy now because his friend had told him that meant the meal was on hand...

So he took a very generous helping of the first food on the table... maror!

As his throat was burning and his eyes watering, he thought his host was making fun of him. Angry, he jumped up from his chair and shouted: "You Jews! After all that waiting, this is what you eat?! And left the house, slamming the door behind him.

Later that night, his friend arrived back, happy and satiated from his sumptuous meal. Seeing his friend's bitter face, he asked him what had happened. When he heard the story, he laughed out loud:

"If you were a Jew you would understand that to enjoy anything good in life, you have to eat a little maror first..."

MAROR

מָרֹר

## Benefits of Bitterness

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

**A JEW AND** a non-Jew were traveling together on business, and they'd lost all of their money.

Said the Jew: "I have an idea! It's Passover Eve. Let's go to the synagogue and I'm sure someone will invite us home for the Seder. I'll explain to you what it's all about and teach you what to do so you'll know how to behave."

With nothing to lose and very hungry, the non-Jew agreed. And indeed, they were both invited, but to two different homes!

The non-Jew's host took him to his large, warm and beautiful home, and his guest, who was starving by this time, eagerly awaited the first course.



word פֶּה (mouth). Through expressing kind, encouraging and uplifting words to one's spouse and children happiness is infused into the home. The mouth פֶּה-דוֹר (a talking mouth) is the key to a happy home.

TZAFUN



## Memory

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

**THERE IS A** profound difference between history and memory. History is his story, an event that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is my story – something that happened to me and is part of who I am.

To be a Jew is to know that over and above history is the task of memory. More than any other faith, Judaism made this a matter of obligation.

Pesach is where the past does not die but lives, in the chapter we write in our own lives and in the story we tell our children.

BARECH



## The Greatest Blessing

Rabbi Zev Leff

**WHEN G-D WISHED** to impress upon the Jewish people the greatness of the Land of Israel prior to their entry, He said, “For the Land to which you come is not like the land of Egypt...” (Deuteronomy 11:10-11). While the River Nile overflows and provides a readily available water supply to all of Egypt, Israel is a land of hills and mountains and its only water supply is rain.

What G-d was saying was, “Let Egypt take care of itself. I will have nothing to do with it. The Nile will provide all of its water.” On the other hand, the Land of Israel is personally taken care of by G-d. Rain is sent directly from Him and is one of the keys He does not give away to other messengers (Ta’anit 2a).

In other words, “You may not have as much water in Israel as in Egypt, but you have

a relationship with Me. And that is worth everything in the world.”

## Why Not Drink the Fifth Cup?

Rabbi Shimshon Nadel

**THE FOUR CUPS** of wine we drink at the Seder correspond to the four expressions of Redemption found in Exodus 6:6-7.

But there is also a fifth expression: “And I shall bring you to the Land...” (Exodus 6:8).

So why don't we drink a fifth cup of wine?

According to Da’at Zekeinim (Exodus 12:8), the fifth expression, “And I will bring you to the Land,” is the basis for the other four. It does not require its own cup of wine, as all the other expressions are predicated upon it. G-d took us out of Egypt to give us a Torah and bring us to the Land of Israel. Da’at Zekeinim asks, “Had G-d not brought them into the Land of Israel, what was the purpose for taking them out of Egypt?”

The gift of the Land of Israel represents the deep bond between G-d and His people. It is so fundamental it need not be expressed through its own cup of wine.

HALLEL



## Time to Sing Hallel

Rabbi Judah Mischel

**JUST BEFORE OUR** recitation of Hallel, we open the door and utter seemingly harsh words: ...שָׁבֵרָה עַל הַגּוֹיִם, “Pour out Your fury upon the nations that don't recognize You... pursue them with anger and eradicate them!”

In the early 1970s Reb Shlomo Carlebach z”l spent the first days of Pesach at an international gathering focused on healing the planet, and conducted an open Seder filled with song and spirit. At this point in the evening, at the height of the celebration, a young hippie challenged him, “Why are we using this moment for negativity and vengeance? If we're redeemed, why don't we pray for love and world peace?”

Reb Shlomo answered, “As beautiful as everything is for us here at the Seder, we still have enemies who need to be dealt with. So you know what I say to G-d? Right now, everything is so good, I don't want anything to do with hatred, with war. Please Hashem, You do it. I just want to be with You, and to sing Hallel.”

NIRTZA



## The Power of Story

Elie Wiesel

**WHEN THE JEWS** were being mistreated, the great Baal Shem Tov would walk into the forest, light a holy fire and say a special prayer, asking G-d to protect His people. And G-d sent him a miracle.

Years later, his disciple, the Maggid of Mezritch, would go to the same part of the forest and cry: “Master of the Universe, I don't know how to light the holy fire but I do know the special prayer. Answer me please!” And He did.

Another generation passed and Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov rushed to the same part of the forest, looked up to the Heavens and said, “Almighty G-d, I don't know how to light the holy fire nor do I know the special prayer but I still remember the place. Help us!” And the L-rd helped.

And fifty years later, Rabbi Israel of Rizhin, confined to a wheelchair, spoke to G-d. “I don't know how to light the holy fire, I don't know the special prayer and I can't even get to the forest. All I can do is tell this story and hope You hear me.”

And indeed, telling the story was enough for the danger to pass.

## All Life Needs

Rachel Naomi Remen

**OFTEN, WHEN HE** came to visit, my grandfather would bring me a present... once, in the month of February, he brought me a little paper cup containing some soil. “If you



promise so put some water in the cup every day, something may happen,” he told me.

At the time, I was four years old and we lived on the sixth floor of an apartment building in Manhattan. The whole thing made no sense to me. I looked at him dubiously. He nodded with encouragement. “Every day, Neshume-le, my little one,” he told me.

And so I promised. At first, curious to see what would happen, I did not mind doing this. But as the days went by and nothing changed, it got harder and harder to remember the water for the cup. After a week, I asked my grandfather if it was time to stop yet. Shaking his head no, he said, “Every day Neshume-le.”

The second week was even harder, and I became resentful of my promise to put water in the cup. When my grandfather came again, I tried to give it back to him but he refused to take it, saying simply, “Every day Neshume-le, my little one.” By the third week, I began to forget the water altogether. Often I would remember only after I was in bed and I would have to get out of bed and water the cup in the dark. But I did not miss a single day.

And one morning, there were two little green leaves that had not been there the night before.

I was completely astonished. Day by day they got bigger. I could not wait to tell my

grandfather, certain that he would be as surprised as I was. But of course he was not. Carefully he explained to me that life is everywhere, hidden in the most ordinary and unlikely places. I was delighted. “And all it needs is water, Grandpa?” I asked him. Gently he touched me on the top of my head. “No, Neshume-le,” he said. “All it needs is your faithfulness.”

## Seder in Syrian Captivity

Baruch Gordon

**ON THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 1970**, the Israeli Air Force attacked Syrian tanks and artillery in the Golan Heights. Three Syrian MIG jets were downed, as well as one Israeli Phantom jet.

Israeli pilot Gidon Magen and navigator Pinny Nachmani parachuted out of the jet safely, but were captured by the Syrian enemy. They spent the next three years in the high-security Mezza military prison in Damascus.

Writing on small pieces of toilet and wrapping paper, Pinny kept a secret diary of 300 pages. He made the following entry after their second Seder night in 1971: “Pesach has passed, the quintessential national holiday of the Jews. We are among the few who are prevented from celebrating with our families. It’s difficult to describe the

Pesach atmosphere in a Syrian prison. On the morning before, we meticulously cleaned our cell (removing any crumbs of leavened bread) in a way that the cement floor had never been cleaned before.

“On cardboard, we drew a Seder plate, with a Star of David in the middle and room to place each ingredient on the six protrusions of the star.

“In the afternoon, we succeed in organizing permission to shower, albeit in freezing water, after which we donned our holiday clothes and anxiously waited for the beginning of the holiday. These were difficult hours of contemplation – the memories which swelled up to the point that we choked as we recalled our homes, and tried to feel the atmosphere of Pesach as sundown approached, and sense the distinct smells of the late afternoon.

“... As we celebrated and loudly chanted the Haggadah, the prison guards appeared and demanded that we stop. In the next cell sat the recently-deposed President of Syria, Nureddin al-Atassi, the very man who when he had imprisoned us declared, ‘Let the Israeli prisoners age in Syrian prison.’

“We refused to stop! Even the threat of solitary confinement could not stop the roar of freedom.”

# לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם הַבְּנוּיָה

