

**Good Yom Tov Everyone.** The Yom Tov of Pesach involves the most extensive preparations for any Yom Tov of the entire year. We clean our homes, cars and office of any trace of Chometz - leavening. We prepare foods which we eat only at this time of the year. As we approach the Yom Tov of Pesach let us tell an amazing story about one Jew's self sacrifice for the mitzvah of Matzohs on Pesach.

R' Moshe Londinski was often honored with the hospitality of the Masito family during his trips to the West Coast. One Shabbos, he was among the guests who had gathered to celebrate R' Yaakov Masito's eighty-first birthday.

R' Moshe was happy for the opportunity to share this special occasion with the Masitos. At eighty-one years old, the patriarch of the family continued to enjoy good health. R' Yaakov was smiling as he turned to R' Moshe during the meal. "Did I ever tell you the story of my teeth?" he asked. "No, I don't think so," R' Moshe replied, intrigued. "What about your teeth?"

R' Yaakov opened his mouth wide. There were several implants, and although R' Moshe was not a dentist, they seemed irregular. R' Yaakov smiled again. "Well," he began, "it was March of 1944..." The Nazi occupation of Salonika, Greece was not pleasant. Yaakov Masito was among the tens of thousands deportees to Auschwitz. Fortunately, he was part of the small percentage who were spared immediate death.

The prisoners who greeted them there were despondent. As far as they were concerned, all hope was lost. But the taste of freedom was still tantalizingly fresh for Yaakov Masito and his friends, and the new arrivals refused to give in. Upon arrival, every inmate received two utensils, a bowl and a spoon. These two utensils were vital for survival. No utensils, no food. As it was, it was nearly impossible to complete the inhumane tasks their captors demanded on their meager daily ration. If a prisoner had no utensils to eat with, he was finished.

So Yaakov Masito accepted the bowl and spoon he was given and guarded it well. But he was not worried about eating today and tomorrow. His focus was on the upcoming yom tov. Where could they possibly obtain matzohs for Pesach.

Yaakov and several of his friends were assigned to work on the railroad line. It was arduous, back-breaking labor. But occasionally, Yaakov and his friends were able to make contact with the local populace.

And one day they hit gold, literally. One of the local Poles was willing to procure two matzohs for them—but for a price. "Yaakov, where are we going to get the money?" one of his friends moaned. Yaakov was silent for a long time as the group of men returned to their work. His mind continued to mull over the possibilities. They were so close to having matzohs, surely there was a way.

And then he had a brainstorm. "I have it," he shouted. As the group watched, curious to see what plan he had come up with, Yaakov extracted his spoon from his pouch and held it up for everyone to see. "A spoon? The Pole is not going to trade matzoh for a little spoon!" "No, no. Just watch."

The men stared as Yaakov placed his precious spoon, his life's support, on the railroad tracks next to him. It wasn't long before a train roared by, flattening the spoon into a long pointy tool. "And now," Yaakov announced, "we use this to pry out our gold teeth." Yaakov held the elongated utensil as it glinted in the sun.

Slowly, painfully, Yaakov pried and prodded until he had extracted all of his gold teeth. His friends quickly followed suit. They offered the Pole this unusual currency, and he happily accepted their payment for the two round matzohs. "We didn't have enough matzoh for everyone to have the proper amount," R' Yaakov concluded, "but at least we all had taste of freedom." R' Moshe sat openmouthed in wonder at the devotion and of R' Yaakov and his friends. There are those who break teeth on a minimal amount of matzoh each year complaining about the difficulty in eating the bread of freedom. R' Yaakov literally broke his teeth, just to eat a small matzoh on Pesach. (Visions of greatness p. 179, Reb Yosef Weiss)

Let us be inspired by this story to do our best to observe the Yom Tov of Pesach in the possible strictest way. **Good Yom Tov Everyone.**

**Good Yom Tov Everyone.** As Gavriel Schwartz was skimming through a Jewish newspaper, an advertisement caught his eye. The ad was for a forum, composed of various halachic questions posed by people from all walks of life. Any rabbi or layman of any affiliation was free to post an answer.

One answer intrigued Gavriel. It was from a Jerry Kornblatt of Oklahoma. The answer was good, with one slight flaw. Gavriel felt compelled to contact the man, "He will want to know the correct answer," Gavriel reasoned to himself. But Jerry was insulted. "I was ordained by an outstanding Reform institution. And who are you? You're a layman, not a rabbi."

Despite their different backgrounds and opinions, Gavriel continued to correspond with Jerry. Pesach was just around the corner, and the two unlikely pen pals discussed their plans for the holiday. "How about a few pounds of hand shmurah matzah for Pesach?." Gavriel offered. "I'm a traditional Jew," Jerry responded. "I buy my matzos in the grocery store." Gavriel sent him a box of matzos anyway. But he didn't receive any thanks in response. "They were hard and broken," Jerry complained.

Gavriel did not give up. He continued to be in touch with Jerry, exchanging personal experiences and ideas with his pen pal. And as the second Pesach rolled around, Gavriel once again shipped a box of matzos to Jerry Kornblatt in Oklahoma. Still, Jerry was unmoved and unappreciative.

Shortly after Pesach, Jerry began to bemoan his daughter who "just won't listen to anything I say!" Gavriel sympathized with Jerry to the best of his ability. The summer months passed, winter set in, and still Jerry complained about his daughter, though this time to a different tune. "She hooked up with a bunch of friends and joined an orthodox religious seminary!" Jerry wrote to Gavriel. "I cannot believe she's doing this to me." "It is not so bad," Gavriel reassured him.

But Jerry remained impervious to any attempt of consolation. Orthodox Judaism was not for any member of his family, and certainly not for him! The cold thawed, and Pesach was around the corner again. Gavriel sent yet another box of matzos to his friend, the Reform rabbi, despite the discouragement of his family, "The man is a Jew. It is not his fault that he was not educated in the Torah way. He deserves kosher matzos for Pesach," Gavriel declared.

And so a box of matzos, along with Gavriel's best intentions for a fellow Jew, arrived at the Kornblatt home in Oklahoma that year. It was a year later. Gavriel was visiting Eretz Yisroel, and he wrote to Jerry to ask for his daughter's phone number. Jerry had told him that his daughter had stayed in seminary in Israel, and had finally married and settled down in Yerushalayim.

Gavriel was interested in finally meeting the daughter, and her husband, whom he had heard so much about. After calling for directions, Gavriel found the right apartment and knocked on the door. It was answered by a young married woman, her hair covered modestly with a tichel (head covering.) "I'm Gavriel Schwartz," the visitor introduced himself to his hostess. "You must be Kim, the wayward daughter your father has been complaining about for so many years. It's nice to finally meet you." Kim smiled. "That's me! Please come in. I'm happy to meet you, too." She opened the door wide, motioning her hand toward the dining room where a man sat over an open sefer. "And this is my husband, Shlomo."

As Gavriel sat down next to her husband, Kim remarked, "You know, you were the one who made me religious." "Me?" Gavriel was surprised. "What did I have to do with it? I never even met you before!" "Well, when I first became interested in Orthodox Judaism, I was studying here in a seminary. The teachers were inspiring, but I wasn't sure if I could make the commitment to a religious life. When Pesach break rolled around, I decided to go back home to Oklahoma. I had been away for a few years, it was time to see my parents anyway."

Kim knew that her teachers would be concerned about her decision. They realized Kim would be going home to face fierce parental opposition, and they sensed that she was unprepared to fight the tide against her father's objections. Kim knew that they were right, but at the same time, she was feeling a bit unsure about this whole religion thing. She felt that she was being pressured to make a decision and she just wasn't ready for that yet. "I understand your need to go home and see your family," Rebbetzin Friedman said when Kim came to say goodbye. "But what are you going to do about Pesach?" "I know my father's Reform, but we do celebrate Pesach, you know," Kim answered defiantly.

Rebbetzin Friedman sighed. "Here," she said, pulling a brown cardboard box from on top of the bookcase behind her. "At least take these matzos with you." "If G-d wants me to have matzos, rebbetzin, G-d will give me matzos." Rebbetzin Friedman hugged Kim in parting, hoping the warmth would rekindle the smoldering spark in her soul. Kim did not respond. "By the time I got on the plane," Kim went on, "I started feeling guilty. But it was too late. You can't buy shmura matzah in Oklahoma. "It was erev Pesach when I got to my parents' house. And when I walked through the door, there it was, on the table," Kim paused, smiling at the memory. "a box of shmurah matzos," Gavriel concluded. "That's when I decided I was definitely going to lead an observant life. So even if my father didn't appreciate those matzos, I did," Kim finished. "Thank you."

Gavriel looked around the couple's small apartment. Sefarim filled the shelves. Shabbos candlesticks gleamed from the sideboard. Pictures of Gedolim – Torah leaders adorned the walls. The matzos didn't manage to connect to one Jew, Gavriel thought to himself, but they had definitely created the connection for another.

Pesach is special time which has the power to uplift every Jew. By dedicating ourselves to observing Pesach, we can all take advantage of this Yom Tov. Let us use the last days of Pesach to tap into the spiritual goodness which Hashem showers down upon us. **Good Yom Tov Everyone.**