

YIZKOR
APRIL 26, 2011
8TH DAY OF PESACH
RABBI VERNON KURTZ

I have in my possession many facsimile Haggadot produced by the Diskin Orphan Home of Israel. The home, in order to gain donations each Pesach, sends out facsimiles of medieval and modern Haggadot and I possess a large collection of them. We use them on the holiday specifically when we recite Birkat HaMazon at our meals, since nothing can be more chametzik than the regular benchers that we use each Shabbat.

The Haggadot are interesting not only because there are some different texts that are used, and the illustrations are very much representations of the time in which they were written, but it is easy to see that they were used. On a number of the facsimiles are wine stains, others clearly have a little bit of haroset on them, and still others probably have a little bit of the Seder meal on them as well. These are not merely books for the shelves of historians; they are living texts of our tradition and our history.

No book is more beloved to the Jewish people than the Haggadah because we use it at a home ritual which is meaningful for Jews around the world. There are more Haggadot published each year than one can keep track of and I sometimes wonder, many years from now, what will our facsimiles look like when succeeding generations begin to use them as part of their Seder ritual?

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin writes that he was sitting and talking with his friend Dave about his family's Pesach and Dave told him of his father's Haggadah: "I was thinking about this being the tenth Pesach since my father's death," Dave said. "We have a pile of Haggadot that we use every year. You know, nothing special - the old Maxwell House Haggadah. And then, I picked up a Haggadah and I opened it up. In its pages I found my father's handwriting in pencil. It was the Haggadah he used to use when he led our Seders when I was a kid. On the bottom of page 38, I saw this little notation: 'Skip to page 42.' And that was when I lost it."

All of us can relate to that story. We all have special reminiscences of those no longer sitting with us at the Passover table. It may be the Haggadah that they used, the tune that they sang, the story that they told, the gift that they gave for the afikoman, or the food they prepared for the special Seder meal – whatever it was, those memories remain with us. They are part of our ongoing Seder ritual whether the individuals who produced them are there with us or not. We are very much the products of those memories and we can only hope that we create similar memories for the generations that come after us.

Yizkor at Pesach brings with it many memories, most of them having to do with the holiday itself. This significant family festival is both a time of great joy and many times a time of sadness as well, as we recall those no longer with us. Their spaces at the table may be empty, but their stories are part of our souls and the fabric of our lives.

Life has a way of passing us by so quickly. Memories of sedarim seem to join together in one mass memory, it is almost impossible to separate them. As we review the meaningful sedarim in our lives it is very difficult for us to comprehend that time is passing us by so quickly. However, as we review the sedarim of the passing years we know it is the case.

Rabbi Larry Kushner is a marvelous storyteller. In his books he uses everyday occurrences to teach us the importance of Jewish values and of living a meaningful life. In his new book *"I'm God, You're Not"* he tells the following story: "We were getting ready to leave Los Angeles after visiting our two oldest children two years ago. They are in their twenties; one was in graduate school and the other had his first real job. Since we had an early morning flight back East, we decided to stay at the airport for our last night.

After dinner, our son drove us to the hotel. As he helped me take the luggage out of the trunk of his car he said: 'Do you have your plane tickets?' I produced the envelope from my jacket pocket. We hugged and then I watched him drive off in his car.

I said to my wife: 'Just who does he think he is, asking me if I have my plane tickets?' 'He's only trying to take care of you the way you took care of him when he was a boy and the way he saw you take care of your father before he died,' consoled his wife. 'You better learn to live with it.'"

So often in life when we look back we wonder where all the years have gone. It only seemed a short while ago that we were children living in our parents' home; teenagers getting ready to go off to college; college students enjoying life and getting ready to earn a livelihood. Before we knew it we were out on our own, attempting to live life as adults, trying to find jobs, looking for mates, friendships and meaningful relationships. Some of us are fortunate and children were born into our families. We watched their growth and couldn't believe how quickly they grew at the very same pace. And if we are even more fortunate we have seen another generation of our own family born in our own lifetime. And we see the cycle beginning again. It goes by so fast, so quickly. Once children, we were cared for by our parents. Now very often the roles are reversed and parents are cared for by their children.

Yet, it is our memories which make us human. The Pesach sedarim we recall, the people who made a difference in our lives, the moments of significance, the joys and sorrows of our journey in life – they are all part of our personal saga. When we sit down at the Pesach Seder those memories all come together. When we sing the songs that we learned from our grandparents, use the Haggadot with the special markings in them, recite the same jokes that we heard from our loved ones and eat the same delicacies that were produced generations before us – it is then we realize the passage of time and the meaning of each moment.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin is currently the Chief Rabbi of Efrat which is a city situated between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Rabbi Riskin was trained at Yeshiva University and was Rabbi at Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York for many years before making

Aliyah and establishing Efrat. He, too, is a marvelous storyteller using events from his personal life in the United States and in Israel to teach meaningful lessons to his congregants and his students. He, too, has written a new book entitled *“Listening to God: Inspirational Stories for my Grandchildren.”*

He writes that on his graduation day from Yeshiva in Brooklyn, he learned a very important lesson. The lesson concerned the importance of time and how we must plan every day and every hour of the precious time G-d gave us. Quoting the guest speaker who told an analogy from the Hafetz Hayyim, Rabbi Riskin writes: “Life is like a postcard. You begin to write and you leave a great deal of space between the letters, words and lines. After all, the postcard is large and you don’t have all that much to say. But then, as you come toward the end of the card, you realize that it was smaller than you thought and that you had more to say than you thought. So you squeeze the words together and you squash the lines in a mad, last minute attempt to get everything in. Most of the time, you don’t succeed. Often you leave out your most important thought. Tragically, you sometimes don’t even have room to sign your name.”

We have all been through that experience. We all need to learn the preciousness of time through that little postcard and to know that the space of our lives quickly gets used up, that the journey that is ours keeps moving whether we are ready for it or not, that time has a way of marching on beyond our control. It is important that we create meaningful moments not only for ourselves but for those around us who will eventually be the bearers of our legacy.

Rabbi Salkin suggests that the story of Dave’s father’s Haggadah is about the power of memory. “It is as if each of us has inherited a Haggadah, a Seder, a book of life from our loved ones whom we miss.” Using that analogy he asks us to respond to this most important question: “What is the Haggadah we are now writing to be read by others?”

Let us make the most of our time here on earth, let us create significant memories on our journey in this world. When the books of our lives are examined by our descendants may those who follow us see the markings in our books as representations of lives lived with love, caring and meaning.