



*Spin the Seder*  
**SEDER STORIES:  
STORIES OF SURVIVAL**



*Pesach Pack*



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# L'Chaim - To Life!

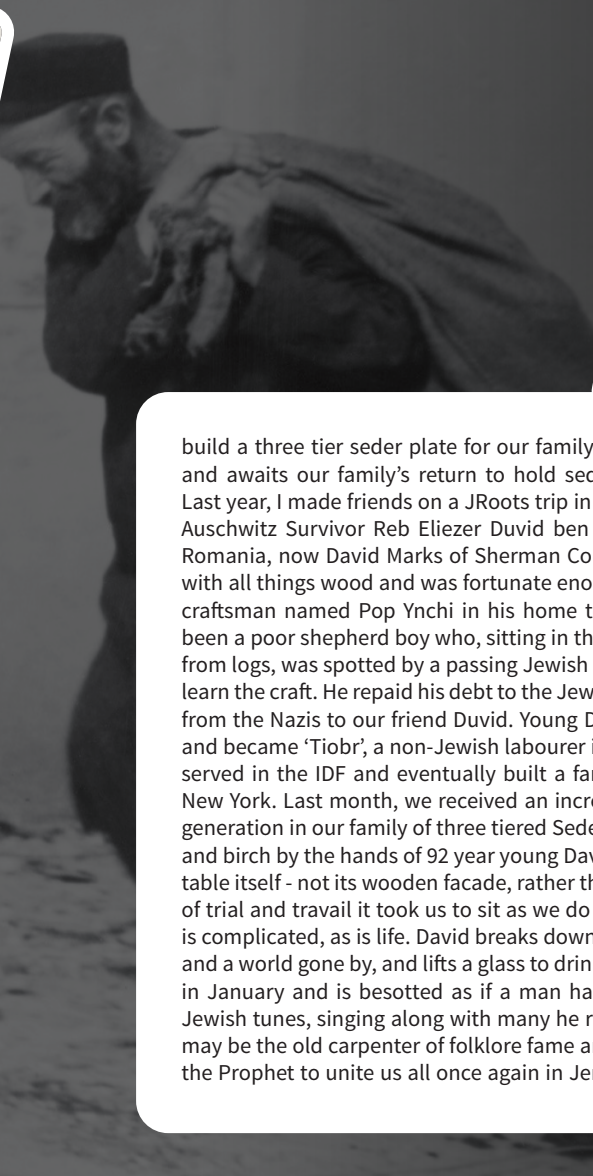
## Rabbi Naftali Schiff

There's a gorgeous little song/story that has become part of Israeli folklore. It's about a reclusive, elderly carpenter who sits alone all day in his solitary hut. No-one ever comes to buy or to visit. However, this old man carries one dream in his heart. His well kept secret is that he dreams that he personally shall craft the chair for Elijah the Prophet. When the Messiah comes he will personally bring his handiwork to greet him. This vision keeps that old carpenter living in hope year after year.

When I was a little boy, I vividly recall how my hard working father would prepare the Seder table at least a week before Seder Night. He would lovingly unwrap and polish the silver wine decanter and candelabra inherited from his grandparents from Antwerp, remove the tissue paper from the carefully preserved matzah covers from ancestors originating from Tarnow and Bialistock and place the three tier wooden structure he had made himself for the matzot in the middle of the resplendent and sparkling festive table. All this took place in eager anticipation, days in advance of the auspicious family gathering for Pesach. My mother's father, who escaped from Berlin via Amsterdam to London in the mid 1930's, also had a wooden three tier seder plate made for his home. When I became Bar Mitzvah, I asked my parents for my gift from them to be a Black and Decker workmate and tools, so that I too could







build a three tier seder plate for our family. The one I made was out of white formica and awaits our family's return to hold seder once again in our home in Jerusalem. Last year, I made friends on a JRoots trip in Krakow with master craftsman, 92 year old Auschwitz Survivor Reb Eliezer Duvid ben Yishayahu Markovits, formerly of Simleul, Romania, now David Marks of Sherman Connecticut. As a young boy, David fell in love with all things wood and was fortunate enough to be taken under the wing of a master craftsman named Pop Ynchi in his home town in the early 40's. Ynchi had originally been a poor shepherd boy who, sitting in the field one day playing at carving out wood from logs, was spotted by a passing Jewish merchant and given the chance to properly learn the craft. He repaid his debt to the Jewish merchant decades later by giving refuge from the Nazis to our friend Duvid. Young Duvid removed his peyos and headcovering and became 'Tiobr', a non-Jewish labourer in the workshop. Duvid survived Auschwitz, served in the IDF and eventually built a family and a successful furniture business in New York. Last month, we received an incredible gift delivered to London - the fourth generation in our family of three tiered Seder dishes. This one is made of maple, cherry and birch by the hands of 92 year young David Marks. He perhaps epitomises the Seder table itself - not its wooden facade, rather the depth of its emotion and the generations of trial and travail it took us to sit as we do today. David is a man in love with all. Love is complicated, as is life. David breaks down in tears easily when remembering a family and a world gone by, and lifts a glass to drink a "lechayim - to life" readily. He remarried in January and is besotted as if a man half his age. He loves listening to traditional Jewish tunes, singing along with many he recalls from the "heim". My hunch is that he may be the old carpenter of folklore fame and has his own chair of love ready for Elijah the Prophet to unite us all once again in Jerusalem.



# A Lesson in Thanks

## Rabbi Sandor Milun

The concept of Hakarat hatov - 'recognising the good' - is one that has its roots in the Torah, where Moses is prevented from performing the first three plagues because he was saved by the Nile (which was struck in the plagues of blood and frogs) and by the ground (struck in the plague of lice) which had covered the Egyptian taskmaster who he had slain to protect an Israelite slave.

This is truly quite remarkable – and nearly illogical. Moses has appreciation for water and sand. How much more so should we recognise and appreciate the good done by our fellow human beings.

Allow me to share two different stories with you.

There was an old man who saw his grandchildren chasing a rat with a broom. The grandfather got up and called after them, asking them to stop trying to hurt the rat. The kids stood perplexed, “But Grandpa, aren’t rats vermin?”

The grandfather calmly replied, “My dear children, many years ago Grandpa was in a very horrible place. We were forced to sleep next to each other and we had only a small, thin blanket between five of us.

The blanket covered the middle three. This meant the man on either side was very cold. We would rotate so each day you moved to the left. This meant that for 2 days in a row, you were very cold. Just like we were cold, so were the rats. They would come snuggle up next to us, using our body heat to keep themselves warm. At first this was extremely unpleasant, but because we were so cold, we quickly got used to them. If it wasn’t for those rats, I probably would have frozen to death. So please, don’t hurt the rat.”

A couple of years ago I was privileged to meet a New York businessman, Sol Werdiger. He is a wonderful man with many lively and interesting stories. When he gets excited his enthusiasm is contagious. He was a huge hit with our students.

Two years after we met, word got out of a story that is absolutely incredible – and epitomises the idea of Hakarat hatov – recognising the good.

A South Korean diplomat had requested to meet Sol as he had something ‘important’ to discuss. During the meeting, the diplomat explained that he had previously thought very little of the Jewish people having believed the negative stereotypes that plague (no pun intended) online media outlets.

The previous summer, his daughter had been an intern at Sol’s business in New York. She had been blown away by some of the special practises that she had witnessed.

She had seen many people come and seclude themselves in the conference room during the day - 'very calmly and quietly', even from other offices! There was always a long line of people collecting charity and all were welcomed in a warm and caring manner.

Every Friday afternoon, the office closed early – and the entire staff were given off yet they still received a full day's wage and on a personal note; this outsider – a young girl from South Korea - was treated extremely well, with real concern for her advancing her studies and ensuring that she learnt valuable lessons and gain practical experience.

The diplomat's first request was to try to reimburse Sol for his daughter's entire internship! Sol would hear nothing of it - insisting she had worked well and deserved her wages. What came next though truly epitomises the essence of recognising the good.

The diplomat then said, "As you know, I have voting privileges at the United Nations, As I have a renewed respect and appreciation for the Jewish people, I convinced my government to abstain from voting on resolutions against Israel on three occasions. At one resolution, I was the 9th vote needed to pass the motion and because I did not vote in favour, the motion did not pass!"

This is an incredible demonstration of recognising the good someone had done to his family – and then doing something to 'reciprocate' or even more so, to honour that goodness.

May we all be able to recognise all the incredible goodness constantly done for us, and may we take the lessons of the Seder and implement them as best we can.



# Pesach in Auschwitz

## Zak Jeffay

In a cold Krakow synagogue sits a beacon of warmth and light. Leslie Kleinman, a Holocaust survivor who has accompanied thousands of young Jews back to Poland and Auschwitz on JRoots journeys to recount his story of survival and faith, sits on the wooden pews. He is called to make the blessings over the portion of the Torah which read as follows:

And they [Egyptians] embittered their lives with hard labour, with clay and with bricks and with all kinds of labour in the fields, all their work that they worked with them with back breaking labour. [...] And he said, “When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall put him to death, but if it is a daughter, she may live.”

For Jews, the slavery and redemption in Egypt serve as the ultimate model for the rest of Jewish history. In the midst of the destruction, whilst teaching in Budapest in 1944, Rabbi Aharon Rokeach of the Belz Chassidic sect told his followers, “the exile of Egypt encompasses all the exiles and the redemption from Egypt encompassed all the future redemptions”. The move from slavery to freedom is one of the lenses with which Jews view the world and this optimism has sustained us even at the darkest of times.

During the course of the Holocaust, despite the constant encounters with death and destruction, there were many who battled to hold on to those aspects of their identity which they still could control. In Auschwitz in 1944, Rabbi Leib Langfus managed to bribe his way to acquiring flour, and secretly baked matza to be eaten at a Seder recounted entirely from memory. The risks were enormous and being discovered would have meant immediate execution. Nevertheless, the Seder took place.

The question surely is why? Why given the risks would a group of people who are themselves slaves sit around and recount a story of freedom? Where did their ability to be able to speak about freedom even in the depths of hell come from?

The freedom we celebrate on Pesach is not simply about no longer being in Egypt, or no longer enduring the physical labour. Our vision of freedom is also one of self-determination and shaping our own destiny. In a place of slavery, freedom was created in the small areas which people defined for themselves. The block in which Leib Langfus and his friends ate their matzah managed to momentarily remove itself from the hell of Auschwitz and in a sense floated above time. For those precious few moments, they were no longer victims or prisoners: they redefined themselves as free men. Partaking in the Seder was a connection to a family that spread far beyond the barbed wire fences.



And though it is undoubtedly true that the shivering prisoners huddled together in that barracks on that exquisite Seder night would have wondered to themselves if anyone would be alive to bake the matzah next year, they realised a truth that was greater and more profound than the collective might of the Third Reich: People who can celebrate freedom while themselves in the pit of despair can never be destroyed.

Pesach as a festival is emphatically and perhaps uniquely forward-looking. It comes from the very command which we receive in order to make the Seder happen; “and you shall tell it to your children”. The freedom of Pesach is thus seen as inextricably bound to the transmission of its lessons to the next generation. Without that next link in the chain, our own chains were never truly broken. We remain shackled to legends and tales of past glories that fail to shine on our future.

Imparting our values to our children and to the next generation around the Seder table is at the very same time the freedom and also the recipe for freedom. Education and the ability to not only hope for a better future but to actively strive for it is the essence of Pesach and the secret of the Jewish people.

As we battle to tell the story of the Holocaust to the next generation we keep one eye on Pesach to learn how to keep a story alive and how to make its voice echo proudly into the future. It is worth noting that we always talk about ‘the Exodus from Egypt’, rather than ‘the slavery in Egypt’; the redemption itself takes centre stage rather than the slavery. Seeing Leslie tell his story, it is clear that his greatest lessons are the story of his exodus, how he survived, how he rebuilt himself afterwards. Being able to talk about what we did rather than what was done to us gives us the strength and determination to continue building a Jewish future.

We must be tuned in to the disaster in order to understand what happened but we must also listen carefully to how the Jewish people have striven to revive itself regardless of the tragedy. Pesach lifts us out of the hopelessness of the past and forces us to look beyond the horizons of our inglorious past to deservedly greet a bold new future. If we can sit around our Seder table and inspire ourselves and the next generation, then we can maybe for just one moment transcend above time and space, and become a link in the chain of an eternal people bringing God’s eternal message of freedom, not just to the Jewish people, but to the world in its entirety.



# A Song in Nazi Germany

## Tzvi Sperber

Rains had extinguished the flames of the barn in Gardelegen, Germany, where the 1,016 trapped slave labourers perished. When the rains stopped, the survivors from the burning barn, other inmates and POW's were loaded onto trucks guarded by Germans and gendarmes and driven to the woods to be shot. The woods were a few kilometres from the camp. The air smelled fresh and clean. The young brother and his cousin were on one of the trucks.

"I am bored," said one of the guards. "Hey you, Jew boy, sing for me one of your temple songs and hymns!" The cousin, a young Hasid, had a very beautiful voice.

It was April 15, 1945, only five days after the holiday of Passover. The young lad started to sing a song from the Passover Haggadah, "Ve hi she amdah la-avoteinu". The melody was a beautiful one. Soon the other slave labourers of various nationalities and the guards joined in the singing. The gentle spring wind carried the song to the other trucks in the death convoy and they, too, hummed the melody.

As they approached the forest, the German guard stopped the singing. "Tell me the meaning of your song; translate it for me."

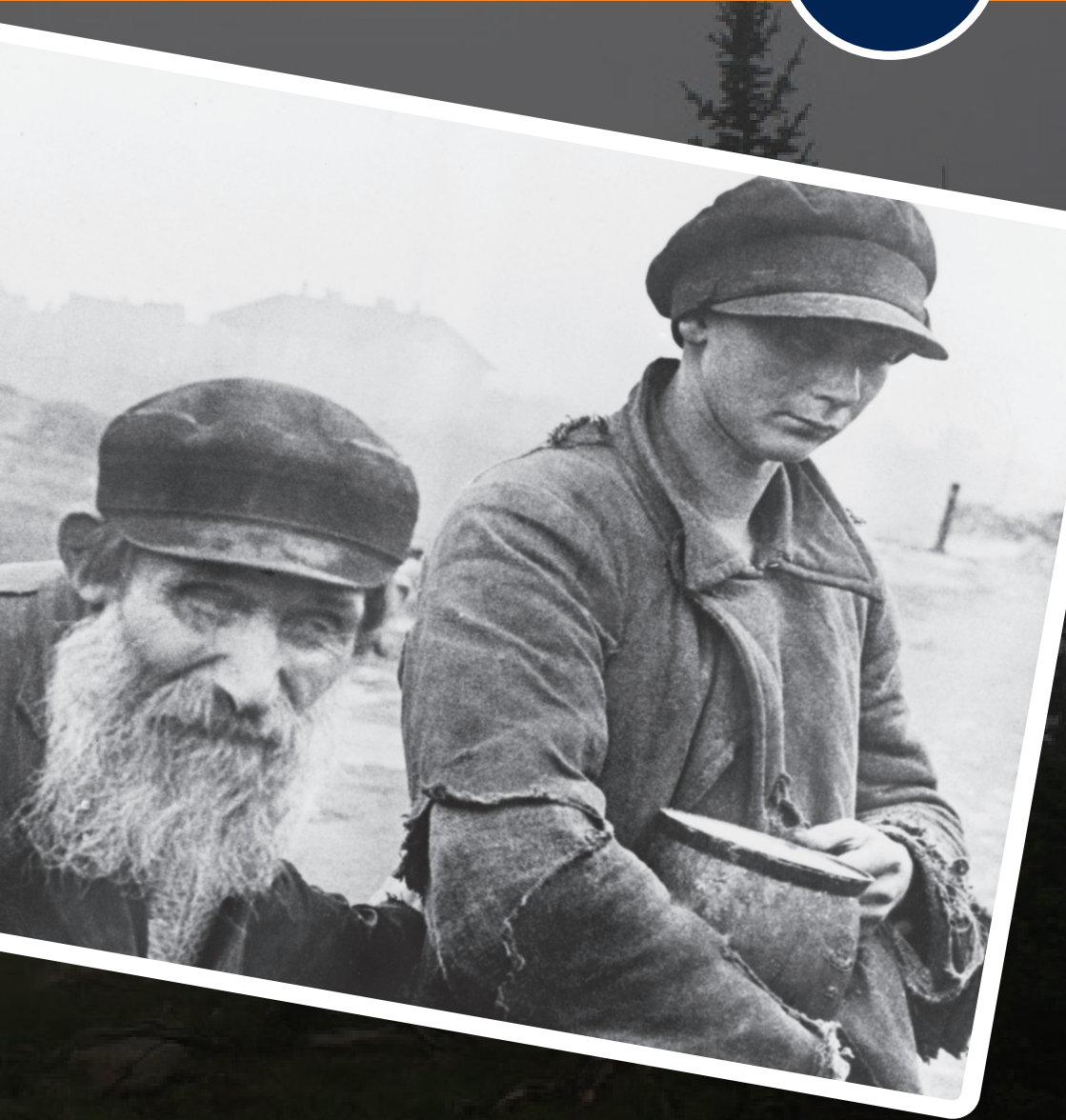
The Hasidic lad translated: "It is this that has stood by our ancestors and us. For it was not only one alone who rose against us to annihilate us, but in every generation, there are those who rise against us to annihilate us. But the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hand."

When the boy concluded the translation, the German burst into a wild, mocking laughter. "Let's see how your God will save you from my hands."

"I am still alive, but I am not afraid to die," replied the lad. They reached a clearing in the forest. In groups of six, they were taken to a ravine in the forest and shot. The two cousins were among the last group. On the face of the German guard was an expression of triumph as the young lads were led to their death.

Suddenly, a motorcycle arrived with two high-ranking German officials. They ordered all remaining prisoners to be taken back to camp. Gardelegen had just surrendered to the American Army.

"Call it fate, call it a miracle, call it anything you want," said Mrs Glatt as she concluded the story about her brother and cousin. "But one thing is clear. We, the Jewish people, with our abundance of faith, will somehow manage to survive forever."





# A Miracle in Prague

## Rabbi Ari Kayser

The great Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713 – 1793), born in Opatow, Poland was appointed a Dayan (rabbinic judge) and moved to become rabbi of the great Jewish city of Prague. Known by many as the Nodah B'Yehudah (“Known in Judah”) after his most famous scholarly work in Jewish law, he was regarded as one of the greatest scholars of his time, to whom rabbis and laymen from all over Europe turned in times of need.

One night, Rabbi Landau was returning home from synagogue following the evening prayers when he saw a young gentile boy, dressed in rags with tears streaming down his face, wandering the streets carrying empty baskets.

“Tell me, little boy, what are you doing walking about the streets of the Jewish quarter and why are you crying?”

The boy explained, “My mother died last year and my father, who is a baker, has remarried. My stepmother is a heartless woman who loads me with baskets of bread every morning and commands me to sell every single one. If I should fail to sell each one, she beats me and makes me go to bed without food. Now I am afraid to go home.”

Moved by the plight of this young boy, Rabbi Landau asked, “You appear to have sold all your bread. Why should you be afraid to go home?”

The boy replied, “Today, I was able to sell all my bread, but as I began my journey home I noticed all the money was gone. I have been wandering the streets cold and afraid that she will beat me.”

The Rabbi brought the boy to his house and gave him something to eat. He took out 30 gold coins and gave them to the boy. The boy was very thankful and ran all the way home.

The years passed, and one Passover, on the eve of the seventh day, Rabbi Landau was learning Torah late at night. There was a soft knock on the door, and as the door opened, a young gentile walked in. Rabbi Landau was curious about his unknown guest.

“I am sure that you do not remember me for it has been many years since I was last here. I am the little boy you once helped when I had lost 30 gold coins and was hungry and frightened. I never forgot the kindness you showed me and I resolved to pay you back if I could. That time has come.

“The Jews of Prague are in great danger. Last night, the bakers of Prague gathered in my father’s home and, at the instigation of my wicked stepmother, they made plans to kill the Jews of Prague.



“They know that on the night when Passover ends the Jews buy leavened bread from non-Jewish bakers since all Jewish bakeries are still closed. The have plotted to put poison in the bread and in this way kill all the Jews in one night.

“I have told you this to repay you for the kindness you showed me. You must think up some way to save your people, but I beg of you to let no-one know that it was I who told you.”

Rabbi Landau shuddered at the terrible plot against his community and felt the weight of the world on his frail shoulders. He thanked the young man and sat deep in thought, formulating a plan that would both save the Jews and bring the culprits to justice. Time was of the essence.

On the eighth and last day of Passover, Rabbi Landau ordered all the synagogues to be closed and announced that he would address the entire Jewish community in the main synagogue on an important issue.

As the confused community gathered to hear the words of this great sage, Rabbi Landau rose to his feet and said, “As the generations pass, the Torah becomes more and more forgotten. The rabbis and leaders become less worthy and mistakes become more frequent. I must confess to you that the Bet Din (Rabbinical Court) of Prague has made an error in calculation of this year’s calendar, and in doing so, we have almost brought the congregation to eat chametz (leavened bread) on Passover.

“We mistakenly proclaimed Passover one day earlier, and so today is not the eighth day, but the seventh day. It is therefore forbidden to eat chametz tomorrow night”

Unsurprisingly, the people were shocked, but how could you argue with the Rabbi?

The following morning, police surrounded the homes of the bakers and discovered the poisoned bread, and those who conspired were brought to justice. The Jews of Prague now understood the wisdom of their leader, although they never knew how he had known of the plot in the first place.

As promised, Rabbi Landau had kept the young man’s secret, and only before his death did he reveal the story to his son, saying “It was not through my wisdom that the Jews of Prague were saved, but through an act of kindness from an old man to a little boy.”



# Against the Odds

## Rabbi Gitsy David

The year was 1942 and Myanmar (Burma) has just been invaded by the Japanese army. Myanmar had been home to numerous Jewish residents since the mid-nineteenth century, primarily hailing from Iraq.

It was a frightening time and with foresight of what was to come, leaving Myanmar was everyone's priority. For many, the only option was the dangerously long journey by foot across Asia. It's a story rarely told, despite being one of the most difficult, desperate mass evacuations in human history. Astonishingly, some 220,000 refugees survived the harrowing journey of up to 300 miles. Sadly, over 4000 are recorded to have died en route from sickness, exhaustion, malnutrition, starvation or drowning – although the true death toll will never be known. Before long, the opportunity arose to travel by boat. Some of the Jewish community managed to secure places on these boats.

One such family boarded a ship, India bound. The moment that was meant to be one of salvation, turned into a tragedy. Imagine the panic, thousands running to make it onto the ship. Air raid sirens wailing. Children crying. Some caring for the sick and elderly while others frantically calming their toddlers. In the middle of this chaos, one young mother of four hurried her children onto the boat while her husband accompanied his elderly parents. Convinced they had all made it safely aboard, she breathed a sigh of relief. She held her newborn tight and turned to gather her other three children. And that was when her heart sank like lead. Her three-year-old son was nowhere to be seen! The ship's horn sounded and it began to move away from the dock.

She desperately looked around panicking, her mind racing and heart pounding. Was he somewhere on the ship in the teeming crowd of desperate people, or could it be that he was still at the port? She shouted his name again and again, terrified to think that he'd been left behind, a small child lost to a country in the midst of a terrifying war.

Suddenly, she spotted a worker from the port standing with a child on his shoulders. The worker was calling out to help try and reunite the child with his mother, but in all the commotion, it was barely possible to hear him. She ran to the side of the ship to get as close as possible and cried out to her child. Their eyes locked and the child started crying for his mother.

The worker saw the terror in the mothers eyes, heard the child crying out, and put two and two together. But he barely had time to think. By now, the boat had turned and was nearly clear of the dock. Not knowing what else to do, the worker threw the child with all his might towards the mother!



The moment passed in agonising slow motion. Incredibly, the toddler landed safely, albeit terrified, into his mother's arms. She embraced him lovingly, overcome with emotion of what might have been if only a few moments more would have passed.

It's times like this that it's better not to think of what might have been but instead be grateful for what is. The young family went on to temporarily make Calcutta, India their new home, before returning to Myanmar a few years later to rebuild their lives in the new world after the war. That little boy is my uncle, Dayan Abraham David.







# Pesach in the Camps

Tzvi Sperber



The conditions in the Vaihingen Concentration Camp were horrific, especially during the dreadful winter of 1944-1945. The Jews imprisoned in this Nazi concentration camp were brought from the Radom Ghetto in Poland in order to engage in slave labour for 12-hour shifts, without a break. They built armaments, dug tunnels for bomb shelters, and performed many other highly physical tasks for the Nazis, who sought to bring their armaments manufacturing underground due to intense Allied bombing. The subhuman conditions and treatment of prisoners caused Vaihingen Concentration Camp to have one of the highest mortality rates of all of the Nazi concentration camps. As the war dragged on, French and even German prisoners were sent to join the Jews there. Towards the end of the war, the Vaihingen Concentration Camp was where sick and dying people were sent.

However, despite all of the afflictions that the Jews of the Vaihingen Concentration Camp suffered, they still managed to celebrate the Passover Seder. They were determined to preserve the traditions of their ancestors, despite the fact that doing so was a risky business in a Nazi concentration camp. One camp prisoner, Moshe Perl, whose testimony is preserved in the book 'Inferno and Vengeance', recounts: "The people in the camp were already used to their miserable situation. They saw death before their eyes. But they were not willing to eat chametz on Passover." "However", he asked, "Where could we get flour and potatoes and how could we bake matzah, right under the noses of the guards!?"

Moshe recalls thinking of an innovative idea: "Shortly before Passover, one of the SS men in the camp entered my workshop, where I painted signs. He asked me to make dummy targets for target practice. Just then, an idea flashed through my mind; I could suggest making big targets with wooden frames and covering them with paper bags, which were available in abundance in the camp storehouse. I claimed that I would need flour, lots of flour, to paste the pictures of soldiers on the targets. He asked me how much flour I would need. I asked for five kilograms. He liked my suggestion and immediately gave me the appropriate referral."

The Jews of the Vaihingen Concentration Camp went to work baking the matzah in secret, even though they knew that they would die if they were caught. Moshe continues, "Throughout the camp, we organized wooden beams. We found a wheel among my work tools with which to prepare the matzah and our matzah-baking operation shifted up a gear. We collected glass bottles, washed them well, cleaned an upside down table with the fragments and kneaded the dough. We baked the matzah in the oven in my workroom, keeping the door and windows hermetically sealed. Our problem was how to hide the matzah we managed to bake at such great risk. We found a solution to the problem. We hid it under the shingles of our workshop roof!"

When the night of the Seder came, twenty Jews in the Vaihingen Concentration Camp managed to pull off a Seder, where aside from the matzah they ate potatoes and drank homemade wine which consisted of water and sugar. They even managed to recite the Haggadah!

Pesach and the story of the Exodus have become synonymous with acts of brave defiance. Its energy inspired the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, which started in earnest on April 19th, 1943 - Passover eve. That same energy inspired the clandestine Seder in Vaihingen. And that same energy inspires us to this day.



# Miracle in Iran

## Rabbi Moshe Levy

The owner of Daniel's Bakery in Finchley, Mr Daniel Hakimian, recalls his very own Pesach miracle in Iran over 50 years ago:

"My brother-in-law was imprisoned in Iran for two and a half years for involvement with the Israeli government during Golda Meir's term in office. After his release, he told us that there were two boys still stuck in prison who were so distraught they wanted to give up and end their lives. Pesach was imminently on the horizon and he told us that the inmates were desperate to have someone come and make some sort of a Seder for them. I volunteered, much to the horror of my loved ones, who knew all too well how dangerous a task that was to undertake. But to me, the thought of two Jewish boys having nothing for Pesach was too much to bear so I felt I needed to do whatever I could to help their situation.

I took with me enough matzah, marror and eggs for twelve inmates as well as a chicken bone. The Iranian guard was not aware of the reason for our having this special meal and he came up to me during our Seder to interrogate me as to why I was conducting this and started to question me.

With a smirk on his face, he asked, "Why are you using the chicken bone, egg and green leaves?"

Until this very day I'm not sure how the words found the way to my lips but I gave him answers which satisfied him. I somehow made up lots of creative 'reasons' for a lot of the items. I told him that the marror correlated to the green belt worn by a renowned Islamic Imam. I also added that the egg was meant to be a prevention against sin and that the chicken bone represents the Islamic equivalent of Moses!

He enjoyed my answers and left us alone which was a miracle in and of itself.

Whenever I tell over this story I am transported to a different world where I feel so clearly that this was a Pesach miracle, so obviously orchestrated by the hand of God and one which certainly belongs to a bygone era where Jews sacrificed their lives for altruistic reasons.





That whole night another man and I stayed up talking on the prison floor covered in a blanket. I was supposed to stay for both nights, but at 7 am I was rushed out of the prison and told to go home.

I went straight to my synagogue where I was embraced by everyone because they really did not believe I would come back in one piece. I broke down in tears, filled with emotion and gratitude to our Creator. I was then given the great honour of holding and opening the Torah scrolls. We know Hashem is our protector as we say every day in prayer: "God is our shield" and I know Hashem did a great miracle for us all by allowing me to stay protected. Thank God those young boys stayed strong, survived and eventually moved to Israel. I am overwhelmed with deep happiness when I think about that miraculous day and know that it helped to save their lives."



# Confronting Grief

## Hannah Cohn

David felt very content and thanked God daily for his blessings. He was happily married, had four beautiful daughters and his wife Tali, a social worker who specialized in helping families of terrorist attacks, was eight months pregnant with their first son. He was a headmaster of a primary school. He lived in a picturesque community in Gush Katif.

One fateful day in 2004 while David was at work in Ashkelon, he heard news reports of a terrorist attack on the Gush Katif road. There had been a drive by shooting. His first thought was: 'Tali and the kids were due to meet him in Ashkelon later that day, and they would have been travelling on that same road!' David tried to call Tali to ask what they could do to help the family of those injured. But no-one answered the call. He called her a few more times. David started to get worried. Other members of her family had also tried in vain to get in touch with her. Finally, David made his way to the site of the incident. Upon arrival he was informed that Tali and all four daughters were killed in the attack. David's whole world collapsed in front of him. He had nothing.

Before he had time to digest what had happened, David had to make urgent and heart wrenching decisions – where to bury his family, in what order to lay them to rest? The shiva mourning period was attended by hundreds of people. Family, friends, government leaders, rabbinic figures from throughout Israel. Many survivors of previous terror attacks came and offered comfort. They were testimony to the power of time. Life continues. However, it was a comment from Rabbi Yakov Ariel which stuck with him as the shiva ended. Rabbi Ariel commented that never before had a whole family been wiped out in a terror attack. With tears in his eyes, the Rabbi continued: this was a personal holocaust. For whatever reason, this comment stuck with David and helped him start to rebuild his life months later, as he went to speak to holocaust survivors and took inspiration from them as to how they were able to rebuild and start new lives and families.

After the shiva, David was enveloped in the warmth and care of his and Tali's family. He was advised to take time off and not go straight back to work, giving himself time to grieve. Despite this, the first decision he made was to go straight back to work. He needed routine. He needed to be busy and feel productive. David admitted that there were times when he felt that he had no chance of emerging 'normal' from such a huge tragedy. David made a decision to choose life. He often says that he had two possibilities – one was to crumble and give up, the other to choose life and continue. He compares himself to a tree that has been stripped down to the bare stump. All the leaves and branches have gone. But new leaves can still grow. New life can once again blossom from the barren tree.



David not only questioned how best to rebuild and continue, but if it was at all possible to continue. Was the attempt futile from the onset?

He ascribes his ability to move forward to five 'rules' he stuck to:

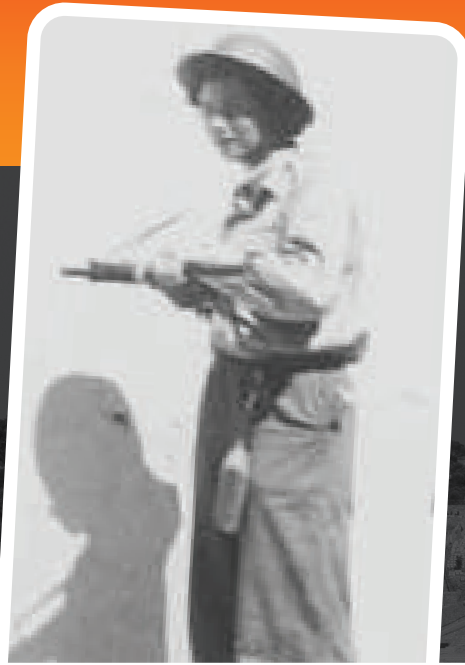
1. Faith in God. David quickly learned that asking 'why?' does not help. It doesn't let you rest. It is a question with no answers and nothing productive can ever come out of it. David understood that there are some questions we can't understand. Asking why won't help him remember or rebuild. So instead of asking, "Why did this happen?", he switched to asking, "For what purpose? What am I meant to do now?"
2. Community. David says that his every need was taken care of in the first couple of months after the tragedy. He was accompanied to work and back. His meals were arranged. He was never allowed to feel alone.
3. Routine. His decision to go straight back to work was crucial to his healing process.
4. Hope. David needed to look forward. He needed to find a new life for himself. Comparing himself to an olive branch, which can bring new life even after it has been cut from the tree, David pledged to start over again. He met his new wife Limor two years after the tragedy. They are now blessed with six children. The names he has given his children all testify to his hope and optimism. For example, Tchiya – Life; Amichai – my people are alive; Bneya – to build. He has not forgotten his old family, but rather sees his new family as a continuation of them.
5. Remembrance. It was important for David to find ways to keep the memory of Tali alive and to do something in her and the children's memory. He started a charity that helps families undergoing fertility treatments. David wanted to create new life in response to the lives which were ended. By using the initials of his daughters' names, David created the Tali Byad Ramah charity which has helped hundreds of families bring new life into the world.



# Pesach in 1948

## Rabbi Naftali Schiff

Just two years after the end of World War Two, with the devastating extent of the destruction of European Jewry through the Holocaust only just becoming palpable, the Jewish people were thrust into a battle for survival in the only place they had ever aspired to call home; the Land of Israel. In 1946, a young British girl by the name of Esther Cailingold, a graduate of North London Collegiate School, decided to leave her family in London, England in order to play her role as a teacher in the formation of the eternal dream of finally building a home for her people in Israel. Esther became a schoolteacher in Jerusalem. However, soon after this she enlisted in the Hagganah, the fledgling Israel Defence Forces, which at that time intermittently engaged in skirmishes with the army of the British mandatory forces, the Arab irregular fighters and subsequently the Jordanian Arab Legion. By Pesach 1948, the few hundred remaining beleaguered Jewish citizens of the Old City of Jerusalem were desperate. Under harsh conditions with sparse supplies of basic provisions including food and medicine, they found themselves reciting the haggadah story inside the besieged city. There were only 80-100 defenders of the Jewish enclave inside the Old City, and they were totally surrounded by enemy forces. Two millennia of almost uninterrupted Jewish habitation of Jerusalem was under threat. But the few hundred residents were determined to hold on, boosted in morale by the arrival of a fresh small group of Hagganah reinforcements numbering about 20 who had recently arrived, Esther and Rabbi Shear Yashuv HaCohen (later Chief Rabbi of Haifa) amongst them. Guns in one hand, haggadah in the other, the story of the Exodus from Egypt was recounted, at best in groups of two or three, each defender simultaneously manning their guard post. The Israelites' journey through the desert, the eventual arrival in Canaan, the growth then demise of the Jewish settlement, destruction of two Temples, dispersion of the Jewish people and the ever evolving, ever wandering story of 2000 years of exile culminating in the loss of 6 million and the current battle for Jewish independence. To say the poignancy of the experience was overwhelmingly powerful would be an understatement.



Just three weeks later, this young British teacher from London was fatally wounded and lay on a stretcher in agony in a makeshift hospital in the bombed out Old City of Jerusalem as the sun set on Friday afternoon. Then still just a young Yeshiva student, Rabbi HaCohen, who was smuggled in by the Hagganah to give strength and spiritual inspiration to the valiant citizens of Jerusalem, related the scene of those final minutes of sundown Friday 28th May 1948. One of the Arab Legionnaires, feeling sorry for the brave young girl, lit a cigarette and held it to her lips as a way of possibly distracting her from her pain. Indicating that Shabbat was entering, Esther instead requested that a prayer book be brought to her. She was propped up, the prayer book opened to the opening prayer of the Friday night service. Her strength fading together with the sun's rays, she pointed to the opening words-“ Lechu Neranena Lashem- 'לכו נרננה לה' Come let us sing songs to HaShem"! Singing this song was Esther's final act in this world.

This story was first related to me by Rav Yeshayahu Hadari z"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Hakotel. Like Esther, at the time I was a British Jew serving in the Israeli Defence Forces. I shall never forget the Rabbi then turning to us 20 year olds some 40 years later and bellowing with his signature flourish "עלינו להמשיך" עלינו להמשיך" - את הלכו נרננה שלה!" it is incumbent upon each of us to continue her song! Seder night is about relating the long and arduous journey of our people. But we don't view it as a journey per se. We talk of a 'story', one spanning 3500 years and counting. As we share our story and invite each person at our table to play their role, somehow, as a family that is part of an incredible people, our story transforms into a tumultuous song. Perhaps that song is sung in Esther's tune. Perhaps it harmoniously bridges the score of history to form the crescendo of the symphony that awaits you and I so soon.



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