

A Method to the Madness

RABBI ASHER MENDELSBERG

YOU ARRIVE AT YOUR GOOD FRIEND'S HOME on Purim day with a beautiful *Mishlo'ach Manos* package. You respect this friend for his refinement and pleasant demeanor. He is calm and collected—a true role model. You climb to the top of the staircase and politely knock on the door.

He opens the door smiling broadly and welcomes you with a warm blessing... But something is off. His eyes are glassy, his clothes smell of alcohol, and he seems a bit unsteady on his feet. He has been drinking! As you stand there with your mouth wide open, you wonder: "What is going on here?"

Rest assured, you are not alone!

The Chofetz Chaim asks this question, as well. Why do we celebrate the holiday of Purim with the strange and seemingly inappropriate practice of drinking wine, even to the point of inebriation—when throughout the year this behavior is severely discouraged? Why is this day different than all other days of the year?

The Chofetz Chaim answers that, because the miracles of Purim were brought about through parties and wine, we drink to remind ourselves of the central role of wine and parties played in the miraculous events of Purim.

Queen Vashti was dethroned, and our Queen Esther

was crowned, as a result of King Achashveirosh's grand and infamous party. Haman suffered his downfall and eventual hanging through the clever soirées with King Achashveirosh arranged by Queen Esther. These various wine-centered events led to Mordechai replacing the wicked Haman.

However, we can still ask: Is drinking truly necessary? Wouldn't it be enough just to say a special prayer recounting all of the miracles of Purim, or maybe to place special emphasis in the Megillah reading on the miracles that took place through banquets and wine?

A comment by Rabbeinu Chananel may shed some light on the practice.

...So your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I took them out of Egypt... (Vayikra 23:43)

The "knowledge" written about in this verse isn't that of the person sitting in a *sukkah*... It's the knowledge of... the generations that follow—when they see people building *sukkahs*... they will ask why... and their parents will recount the story of the Exodus... (Rabbeinu Chananel, commentary to Talmud, Sukkah 2a)

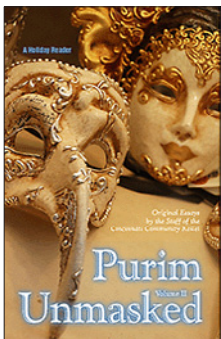
Rabbeinu Chananel's words are strikingly similar to the way that Passover un-

folds. Isn't this exchange between father and son reserved for Passover, on the Seder night? Isn't this the dynamic of the Four Questions of the "*Mah Nishtana*," where the child asks the father why this night is so different from all other nights?

There is a powerful insight that we can take from this Rabbeinu Chananel. We transmit our tradition to future generations by fomenting and then responding to questions. We educate by engaging and interacting. We pique our children's interest to stimulate those probing questions which, we hope, help them make sense of their world. And, most importantly, we prepare ourselves to respond, with answers from our traditions and teachings rendered relevant by their questions. Ultimately, the core of our education is experiential. While book learning plays a most prominent role, rich experiences of Torah and mitzvos provoke questions and foster an ongoing dialogue between parent and child. That dialogue makes room for our teachings and traditions in the lives of our children and ourselves.

The quintessential example of this principle is, in fact, the Passover Seder night, where almost every action and sentence is intended to draw out discussion. From the four outright Questions to the numerous unique customs of the evening, the Seder night is teeming with opportunities to engage our children and deepen their Jewish identity through

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This essay originally appeared in Purim Unmasked, Volume II, one of the Kollel's many Holiday Readers. You can download most of them, in PDF format, from our web site, cincykollel.org—look for "Resources & Links" at the top of the page.

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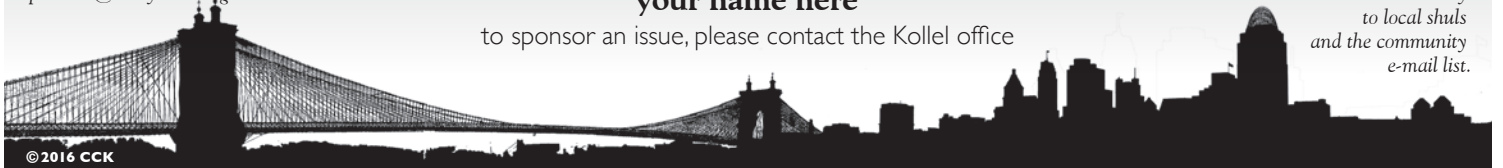
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is distributed weekly to local shuls and the community e-mail list.



A Method... CONTINUED

open, honest, and two-sided discourse—but it doesn't stop there.

Every mitzvah we observe is an opportunity to engage our children. A person could go outside on his own to build his *sukkah* and probably accomplish it far faster and with much less fanfare, but we choose to include our children (bring on the fanfare!), and thus begins a dialogue that has been thriving in Jewish homes all over the globe for over two thousand years. It all starts with a child's simple questions: "Daddy where are we going? What is a *sukkah*? Why are we building it?" These are the basic questions which make fertile ground for transmitting the history and mission of the Jewish people.

An underlying theme in both Passover and Sukkos, and indeed in many mitzvos, is inspiring our children to ask the questions that will begin a dialogue, to pass our history and tradition on in a vibrant and enduring way. How do we inspire these questions? We inspire questions by catching our children's attention. We arouse interest by setting a day or an action apart from everyday routine. We promote dialogue by tapping into their natural childhood curiosity and inquisitiveness. The lessons of Passover and Sukkos would not pass as strongly or effectively if there were simply an extra line in our prayers and maybe a Kiddush ceremony to commemorate the holidays. The numerous and unique customs of Passover and Sukkos are not simply to commemorate past events, but also to stimulate discussion of those events and how and why they are relevant to us today.

When we turn to the miracles of Purim, we find that much of the Divine intervention (the rise of Esther and the fall of Vashti, the ascent of Mordechai and the demise of Haman) took place through wine and feasting and the constant Divine Providence throughout. Why not simply mention, in a prayer, the significant role wine played in Hashem's

At the Kollel

Chavrusos are available

for private and group learning—
speak to Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!
weekdays: noon–1
Sunday–Thursday: 8–9:45

Minyanim Daylight Time

Shacharis

Sunday8:15 AM
Monday–Friday7:20 AM
ShabbosN/A

Mincha

SundayCALL
Monday–Thursday5:45 PM
Shabbos5:30 PM

Ma'ariv

In the Beis Midrash:

Sunday–Wednesday9:45 PM
Thursday10 PM
ShabbosN/A

chain of events? Because that would do little toward our ever-present goal of arousing our children's curiosity, and indeed our own curiosity, to explore our rich heritage, our relationship with G-d and our ultimate purpose. In contrast, when young children see their fathers imbibing with uninhibited enthusiasm—behavior which is beyond the norm—they will inexorably be drawn to ask, "Why?" And, once again, a valuable opportunity will arise for us to revisit the masked miracles of Purim—and the faith and knowledge that G-d is always there for us, if well-hidden, even in the celebrations of the wicked; never is all hope lost.

And so we drink, in order to startle ourselves and our children out of complacency, so that we will remember the miracles of Purim and G-d's hidden hand through questions and answers and open dialogue. Sometimes what's up is down and what's down is up. There is a method to the (seeming) madness!

Happy Purim—and bottoms up! 🍷

Every Day

👤👤 "Dirshu" Gemara Shiur

(Maseches Y'vamos)
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

👤👤 Kollel Yisgaber K'ari

(amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

👤👤 Kitzur Shuchan Aruch

Live video conference!
Rabbi Dani Schon.....
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

👤 Daf Yomi

Rabbi Meir Minster.....
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

👤👤 Nightly Halacha Chabura

Rabbi Dani Schon
& Binyamin Teitelbaum
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

Sunday *Free brunch!*

👤👤 America Runs on Torah

(Jewish Law & Parasha)
Rabbi Dani Schon
and Yisroel Kaufman..... 10 AM
Grand Deluxe breakfast served

👤 Shivti

(Self-contained learning, geared toward practical halacha) 10–noon A

Tuesday

👤👤 Partners in Torah at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

Wednesday

👤👤 Torah Treasures for Seniors at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

👤👤 Downtown Lunch-n-Learn at Strauss & Troy

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

Thursday

👤👤 Halacha based on the parasha

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM
Homemade refreshments served.

KEY:

👤👤 Beginners

👤 Intermediate

👤 Advanced

👤👤 for men and women