

Passover: The Story that Could Not Be Forgotten

WHILE THEIR LIPS were sealed, the Jewish people were re-enacting that story annually with their hands, at the Seder, the most sacred occasion of their religious year. Thus it was kept fresh and unforgettable in their hearts for nearly two millenniums.

The New Ingredient

The Law of Moses which gave the Passover to Israel carefully prescribed the manner in which it was to be kept. The outstanding feature of that feast was the Lamb offered by the Priests in the Temple of Jerusalem, commemorating the Lamb slain in Egypt, and which alone was called the "Passover."

All of this is recorded in the 12th chapter of the Book of Exodus. Yet today with the Temple and the Priesthood gone, and no possibility of offering the Lamb, we nevertheless persist in our claim that we are keeping the Passover!

And as if to make up for that deficiency, a new ingredient has been added to its observance, namely the wine. Although nowhere, neither in the writings of Moses, nor in those of the Rabbis (including Hillel) during the fifteen centuries that followed the days of Moses, is there any mention made of wine as being necessary for the keeping of the Passover. (Wine must not be Fermented wine)

The Hagadda (the Jewish Passover story) tells us how Hillel kept it. Only three things were essential: Pesach, Matzo, and Moror, that is: the Passover Lamb, the Unleavened Bread, and the Bitter Herbs.

In other words, during the fifteen hundred years between Moses, and the birth of Christ, Israel kept the Passover without the wine. Possibly, wine was used by those who could afford it, but it was not an essential part of the observance of the Passover.

Yet today the four cups of wine for the celebration of the Passover, or Seder, are

mandatory. No Jew could keep the Passover without them. The Shulchan Aruch (Jewish Book of Rules) further instructs that the wine used on that occasion should be red!

The Drama Of The Matzo

Moreover, as an additional feature, so as to make up for the sorely felt loss of the Passover Lamb, part of one of the Matzos on the Passover Table or "The Seder" (as it is now called), is no longer just "Unleavened Bread." It is called Aphikomen and has been vested with a new significance. **It now symbolizes the Passover Lamb itself!**

An interesting little drama is being enacted every year in connection with the Matzo: Three Matzos are placed on the table, one on the top of the other. The person who conducts the ceremony breaks the middle one into two unequal parts. The larger piece he wraps in a clean cloth and hides. Then, at the close of the meal, he recovers it from its hiding place and shares it among all members of the family. That piece of Matzo, or the "Aphikomen" the Shulchan Aruch bids to be treated with special regard and eaten at the close of the Seder with special reverence, because, it says, it represents the Passover Lamb which was eaten at the close of the meal.

As the matter now stands, it is no longer the Passover Lamb, commanded by Moses, which constitutes the main feature of the Jewish Passover, but the bread (Matzo) and the wine. This marks a radical departure from the feast initiated by Moses. What was the cause of this departure? Who substituted the matzo for the Passover Lamb? Who made the Wine an essential part of the Seder? Why should it be red like blood?

The Story That Was Not Allowed To Be Forgotten

The answer to the above questions may perhaps surprise the reader. But I am sure he will be glad to know it. It will throw a new light upon one of the most vital episodes of Jewish history.

The things we are doing to the Matzo and the Wine is a story in action, or a drama, of something that happened long ago, about someone that lived long

ago.

This story is told in secret, as it were, because the people were afraid to tell it openly. And for centuries Jewish lips were forbidden to utter the name of the hero of that story or to reveal its source.

That story, however, could not be forgotten. It became indelibly enshrined in the soul of Israel. In order to keep it alive and fresh, it was re-enacted year after year at the Seder which is the most sacred and the most religious occasion of the Jewish home. It waited until the book where that story is written could be opened and read without fear. That book is the Book of the New Testament. It is the book which tells the Life, the Teaching, the Suffering, the Death and the Resurrection of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah!

The Core and the Substance of the Seder

About three decades before the destruction of the Second Temple (A.D. 70) we are told that Jesus, at the close of His career, went with His disciples to an upper room in Jerusalem to keep the Passover with them. Someone present on that occasion describes the incident in the following words:

As they were eating [at the close of the supper], Jesus took bread [Matzo] and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, take, eat; this is my body.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. -Matthew 26:26-28

Questions and Answers

In those few sentences which describe the institution of the Christian Passover or the Lord's Supper, the answers to the questions we asked above are found:

Why does the Jew, while eating the piece of Matzo which is called "Aphikomen," believe (according to the Shulchan Aruch) that he is eating the PESACH (or the Passover Lamb)?

The origin of this idea is not found in the Talmud; **it comes from the New Testament**. It is because Jesus took bread (Matzo) and said: "This is my body." It is He who gave His disciples bread and told them, as they were eating it, to believe that they were eating the Korban Pesach (Sacrifice of the Passover). He, the Messiah, was the true Korban Pesach. It was from Him that the Rabbis learned to make such an identification.

Some Jewish readers at this point might protest and cry: "This is impossible! Jews would never do such a thing!" Yet it is so. The New Testament undoubtedly is the source and origin of the essential features of the Jewish Seder. What follows will dispel any further doubt in the matter.

To continue: Why are there three Matzos on the Seder table, and why is the middle matzo broken?

The customary explanation for the presence of the three matzos is that they represent the three groups in Israel: the Cohen, the Levites, and the Israelites. But if that be the case, why is the middle matzo broken, wrapped and hidden (a recent Jewish writer uses the term "buried" instead of "hidden"), and then recovered from the hiding place and shared among the members of the family? Why also is it called by the mysterious name, Aphikomen? What has all this to do with the Levites? Nothing like this has happened to them!

But every single act done to that middle Matzo is a description of what happened to Jesus. It is therefore He whom the Aphikomen represents. And all the three Matzos are symbolic of the threefold revelation of the Godhead according to the Bible: God the Father and Creator, God the Savior or Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit. The middle Matzo which represents Jesus is therefore broken. He was broken when He was crucified!

Why is the broken Matzo, called Aphikomen, recovered from its hiding place? Because on the third day God raised Jesus from the grave in His resurrection from the dead.

Why is the Aphikomen eaten as the last act of the Seder? Because other parallel

reports of this incident inform us that this institution of the "Lord's Supper" took place at the close of the meal in the upper room in Jerusalem.

And finally, Why is the Aphikomen shared among all the members of the family? Because the followers of Jesus are regarded as the family of God; and Jesus had said to them, "Take, eat!" He is the bread of life to all who believe in HIM.

The Wine That Was Red

The incident related in the New Testament also answers the questions with reference to the Wine on the Seder table.

Why is wine necessary and essential for the Seder? Because Jesus took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to His disciples.

Why is the wine to be red, resembling blood? Because Jesus said: "This is my blood of the New Testament, shed for many for the remission of sins."

Why is it mandatory that every Jew should drink wine at the Seder? Because Jesus said: "Drink ye all of it."

The Mystery Of The Aphikomen

What is the meaning of this mysterious word "Aphikomen?" It looks like a Greek word. Most scholars agree that it is, but different opinions exist as to its meaning. Some say it comes from "Epikomos" and means "dessert." But that does not seem to be correct, since a great deal of violence had to be perpetrated on the word "Epikomos" in order to turn it into "Aphikomen."

But there is another Greek word, which gives a full and satisfactory explanation, and where violence is not at all necessary to give it meaning. It reads exactly as our **Aphikomen**. What does it mean? According to the Greek lexicon it means "**I CAME.**" Who came? The One obviously, whom the broken Matzo represents, namely the Lord Jesus, the True Pesach!

In the Aphikomen, therefore, the Lord Jesus calls to all who are waiting and hoping for the coming of the Messiah, "Why do you wait any longer? I came

already! Aphikomen! Open your eyes of faith, and behold Me. I am the True Passover. I shed my blood to shield you from death and give you eternal life. I stand in the place of your Passover Lamb because I am its fulfillment!"

Jesus is the Shepherd of Israel. He has not forsaken His people. We cannot escape Him. Like the Good Shepherd He is following His sheep through all the places of their wanderings. He has been with us through all the vicissitudes of our sorrowful existence. "In all their afflictions he was afflicted," the Prophet Isaiah assures us. Do not turn away from Him. Still He is calling, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

How It Happened

Before we leave our subject, we must still say a word as to how it was that the "Lord's Supper" became the core of the "Jewish Seder." Briefly, it happened like this: At the time of the birth of Jesus, and about thirty years after, only one kind of Passover was in vogue in Israel; the kind that Moses instituted at the Exodus, and the kind Hillel observed fifteen hundred years after Moses. Then Jesus held His memorable supper in the upper room in Jerusalem, saying to them: "This do in remembrance of me."

Thereafter, there were two kinds of Passover in Israel; the one that Hillel kept according to the Law of Moses, and the other which the Lord Jesus instituted. To begin with, the disciples of Jesus, being devout Jews, observed both kinds. As long as the Temple stood, they with the rest of the Jewish people ate the Passover after the manner of Hillel, and at the close remembered with the bread and the wine the death and the resurrection of their Lord. Then in A.D. 70 Jerusalem and the Temple with the Priesthood were destroyed. As a consequence, the Passover after the manner of Hillel was done away with, and only the Passover after the manner of Jesus remained.

The abolition of Hillel's Passover left an intolerable void in the religion of Israel. That void had to be filled if Israel as a nation was to survive. But it had to be a kind of "Passover" which was not tied inseparably to the Temple and the Priesthood that were no more. The "Passover of the disciples of Jesus completely answered their purpose. The Jewish leaders, therefore, incorporated it into the

religion of their people, building around it embellishments and other features to adapt it to the circumstances of Israel in the Golus (Exile). Yet, in spite of all the features and embellishments with which they loaded it, they could not efface its inner and original importance.

Always, and ever, therefore, it was Jesus, the Shepherd and Savior of Israel, who provided for the spiritual need and sustenance for His people to insure their survival, and forever He will stand by their side, waiting till they hear His voice, find safety in His fold, and find rest for their troubled hearts.

By Solomon Brinbaum