

What Does It Really Mean To Observe Passover?

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By Rabbi Stuart Gershon

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We have not truly celebrated Passover until we take something that is broken in this world and make it whole again. We have not truly celebrated Passover until we take something broken in ourselves and make that whole again too!

Shabbat shalom and *Chag sameach*.

I hope you are enjoying the festival of Passover. I hope your Passover Seders were meaningful, thought-provoking, and fun. The theme of my teaching tonight is: “What does it really mean to observe Passover?”

Perhaps your first reaction to my theme is: Isn't it obvious? After all, observing Passover means attending two Seders. Observing Passover means to abstain from eating *chametz*, food prepared with any of the five prohibited grains.

Of course this is correct. But there is more to it. Passover is a subversive activity. Passover constitutes an annual Jewish re-examination of the norms and standards of our society. On Passover, we look at the world as it is and dream of how it should be, of how God still wants it to be. The purpose of Passover is to shake things up, to move our society – and ourselves – out of complacency and indifference with regard to the way things are.

What does it mean to really observe Passover?

On Passover, we challenge ourselves to do better – to care more and to do more. Now please reflect with me on the traditional ritual of hiding and finding the *afikoman*, the special piece of matzah we set aside at the Seder. Nowadays, we use the *afikoman* hunt as a means to entertain the children. And kids love it. I love it. Even teenagers love it.

But the ritual of the *afikoman* is more than child's play. Just think about the symbolism. At the beginning of the Seder we break the matzah in two. We hide one part. Then we search and find that second piece. What are we doing? Now that which was hidden is revealed. We reunite the two parts. We bind the fragments of matzah together. We make that which was broken whole again.

What's the message here? The message is this: We have not truly celebrated Passover until we take something that is broken in this world and make it whole again. We have not truly celebrated Passover until we have taken something broken in ourselves and made that whole again too. And in our heart of hearts all of us know what it is we need to work on,. All of us know what we need to fix within ourselves.

Passover is an annual opportunity to free ourselves from one bad and harmful habit. Passover is an annual opportunity to liberate ourselves from something to which we are enslaved.

Now we finally understand why the Haggadah intones: *Ashata avdei. Leshanah haba'ah b'nei chorin.* "Now we are slaves. Next year may we be free." The Passover Haggadah is not referring here to political freedom. It's talking to us about spiritual freedom, about psychological freedom.

So what does it mean to really observe Passover?

It means that beyond the observance of two Seders, beyond even the meticulous observance of Passover's dietary restrictions, we have truly observed Passover when we use these seven glorious days to put something that is broken back together –

Something in the world.

Something within ourselves.