

FORGET YOUR BELT...

by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

Parshas Pesach

Forget Your Belt... It's Time to Go

Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

Every year around early July, Eitan Aronovitch and his family in the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem prepare for a large feast. The kitchen bustles with activity as the finishing touches are added to the succulent spread. All are dressed impeccably; a holiday spirit is in the air. By all appearances this is a normal pre-holiday scene. But something is strangely missing: belts. No one is wearing belts! There is not a belt to found anywhere in the home. They are preparing to celebrate "The Holiday of the Belt".

Eitan Aronovitch was one of the hostages from the Air France flight hijacked in the summer of 1976 and brought to Entebbe. The Jewish passengers were immediately separated and shepherded into a different room in the airport. They spent their nights on the cold, hard floor. Eitan removed his glasses and his belt to afford himself minimal comfort while he slept.

Suddenly, the door crashed open! Everyone woke up with a frightful jolt. "Israel Defense Forces! Everyone out! GO! GO! GO!" Eitan, in a panic, groped through the dark and found his glasses. "Where's my belt?" "Forget the belt!" shouted a soldier. "The plane is leaving." Eitan raced out and joined the flight to freedom.

When Eitan returned home, he asked his Rabbi how to appropriately celebrate his appreciation of G-d's Divine Providence and obvious miracle. The Rabbi explained the parallel to our celebration on Pesach (Passover) of the Exodus from Egypt. Pesach is known as the "Holiday of the Matzos" because, as the Torah describes, the Jews were in such a hurry to leave they did not have sufficient time for the dough to rise. Thus, we eat matza, unleavened bread. In the same way we use matzos to celebrate our swift salvation, so, too, Eitan was instructed to celebrate the swiftness of his rescue with an absence of belts.

The month of Nissan is intrinsically a time of redemption, and the Messiah's arrival, which is due to

occur in Nissan, will mirror the exodus from Egypt in its suddenness. We will be called upon to drop our possessions and greet him wherever he may be.

The illustrious Chassidic legend, Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl, was spending the evening at an inn and awoke at midnight to recite the Midnight Prayer. The innkeeper, frightened by the impassioned crying, ran in asking for an explanation. "I am mourning the destruction of the Holy Temple and am praying for the Messiah to come." The innkeeper's wife wanted the rabbi to stop; they had just finished paying for their farm and livestock and had no desire to leave it all behind to go to Jerusalem. Rabbi Nochum reminded her that the Cossacks could come at any time and confiscate all of their possessions, so she might as well look forward to redemption. "Rabbi," she responded, "you may continue to pray for the Messiah. Just tell him to come and bring the Cossacks to Jerusalem!"

We recite at the beginning and end of our Seder, "Next year in Jerusalem!" but are we REALLY waiting for the Messiah to come? Are we ready to leave everything behind? When the door bursts open and it's time to go, let us be sure not to miss the plane while we grope for our belts.

Have a good Yom Tov!

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