



Shvi'i Shel Pesach: Give Credit Where Credit Is Due

Why can't we decide on one name for the holiday, Pesach or Chag Hamatzos? And, who was the first to enact a 'Prohibition' of alcohol?

Prohibition

In 1920, an amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution that banned the drinking of alcohol. This national ban was in force for almost 14 years, until the government came to the conclusion that the law turned otherwise honest and good people into scofflaws—not only did the drinking of alcohol not stop, but directly because of the law, the black market flourished and grew.

Now, when they were writing this law and deciding its definitions and limitations, they first established that alcohol would be permitted for medical and religious uses. I am sure that this made a lot of people suddenly much more religious. I'm sure that a lot more people suddenly started going to synagogue. Maybe that's where the custom of "Kiddush Clubs" comes from—you know, the group of people who step out while the rabbi is speaking to toss back a few cups of "l'chaim" so that they'll have the strength to keep on praying.

But regardless, America was actually not the first country to invent this wheel. Banning alcohol had been tried before that in Russia. During the rule of one of the Czars, there was a period during which it was against the law to drink or traffic in strong drinks.

The story goes that during this time, the great Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of

Berditchev (1740-1809), one of the legendary Chasidic leaders, asked his assistant to get him a little vodka. It was the first night of Passover, during which all wheat-based products, including alcohol, are banned. So of course, the assistant was shocked. “Rebbe! It’s Pesach now!” But Rabbi Levi Yitzchok only said: “Do what I told you! I want you to get me a l’chaim now!”

Not having a choice, the assistant went to the house of the nearest Jewish neighbor to find a little vodka. After knocking on the door, he explained that he just need to borrow a little vodka to drink. The neighbors were shocked to see a Jew asking for vodka on Passover. However, the assistant informed them that Rabbi Levi Yitzchok himself had sent him—and that he was willing to get vodka at any price! Still, when the neighbors heard this, despite their great desire to fulfill their Rebbe’s wishes, they still said that since it’s Pesach, they didn’t have a drop of vodka in the house.

So the assistant returned to the Rebbe and told him that he didn’t find any vodka— but the Rebbe merely sent him back out to get vodka from other neighbors. Still, the assistant returned with empty hands.

Now the Rebbe told his assistant to go look for vodka at the non-Jewish neighbors’ houses. The assistant went to the first house. The first neighbor said that since vodka is illegal, he had none in the house. But after the assistant pressured him and even promised to pay him handsomely after the holiday, then all kinds of alcoholic beverages were suddenly available for sale. So the assistant returned to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok and told him that if the Rebbe wants vodka, there’s plenty available at the non-Jewish neighbor.

Upon hearing that, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok stood up at his Seder table and turned to G-d: “Master of the Universe! See what a wonderful nation You have! The Russian Czar forbids all the people of his country from drinking alcohol, and he has an army and police force through which

he can enforce the law! Anybody caught violating the law pays a fine and gets thrown into prison—but still, you can get all the alcohol you want for a few rubles. But You, Master of the Universe, have no army, no police force, no fines and no prison—but nevertheless, you can't find a single drop of vodka in a Jewish house on Pesach for all the money in the world!"

This is who Rabbi Levi Yitzchok was—a man who loved his fellow Jews and always found ways to say something good about Jewish people.

The Rebbe once said that Rabbi Levi Yitzchok once said that if he were given the choice to be alone in Heaven or be in, um, another place but together with other Jews, he'd go down there just to be together with his fellow Jews.

Pesach vs. Chag HaMatzos

Now, the Passover holiday has several names: the Holiday of Matzos, the Time of our Freedom, the Holiday of Pesach. The Jewish people generally have the widespread custom of calling this holiday Pesach. Indeed, the Sages of the Mishnah and Talmud, who put together the Talmud's tractate of "Pesachim" and created the "Seder for the night of Pesach," did it all based on the name Pesach. But in our prayers where this holiday is mentioned, it is referred to as "the Holiday of Matzos." And indeed, the Torah itself refers to Passover as the "Holiday of Matzos" in the Book of Shmos and the Book of Devarim.

In one of his talks, the Rebbe quotes Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, who explains that these two references to the "Holiday of Matzos" are like a couple with a happy, positive marriage.

In such marriages, the husband is always praising his wife, giving her the credit for taking care of the home. When you compliment such a husband for his kids' good behavior, he always says, "It's all my wife's credit! She raises them and teaches them!" And it's the same thing

the other way—whenever you compliment the wife, she gives all the credit to her husband.

This is what is going on with the marriage of the Jewish people with G-d. When we use the word “Matzos,” it reminds us of the fact that the Jewish people left Egypt and didn’t prepare food for the road—so they “baked their dough... into matzah cakes.”

Why didn’t they prepare food for the way? Didn’t they know they were going to leave Egypt? The answer is that they trusted in G-d saving them. They trusted that G-d would provide all their needs! They didn’t ask how they would get pacifiers for the babies or pills for their elderly parents—they followed Moshe Rabbeinu with hearts filled with confidence that he would take care of everything.

That’s why the Torah itself, which was given to the Jewish people by G-d, refers to this holiday as the “Holiday of Matzos”—to praise the Jewish people for having the faith to leave Egypt with no worries.

On the other hand, the Jewish custom is to refer to the holiday as the “Holiday of Passover”—to remind us that G-d “passed over” and skipped the Jewish homes and didn’t strike us with the Plague of the First Born.

In successful marriages, the husband gives the wife all the credit and wife gives the husband all the credit—and the more each gives the other credit, the more they get back. Lets make sure to give credit where credit is due.