



KREPLACH - THE INSIDE STORY

Sometimes, being Jewish might seem difficult, and outright crazy. But that is only if you're looking at it from the outside. Insiders have a different picture.

The Three Basic Observances

On Yom Kippur eve, before the fast begins, there is an ancient Jewish custom of eating Kreplach.

Someone who doesn't know what Kreplach are is truly missing a lot in life. Kreplach are something like blintzes made with meat—and, of course, absolutely delicious. (And for those of you who don't know what blintzes are, please accept my sincerest condolences. You are truly deprived people.)

Now, why do we eat Kreplach specifically on Yom Kippur eve?

Before we answer this question, I have another question: what are the major holidays and major Mitzvos that the majority of Jews observe?

There are certain holidays and certain Mitzvos that most Jews keep. Anyone know what they are?

[Interact with crowd]

Passover is one—most Jews have a Seder in whatever form it may be. Yom Kippur is another one—most Jews mark Yom Kippur in some measure or another.

Now, that's for holidays.

There is also one mitzvah that most Jews keep: circumcision. It is specifically Bris that almost everyone Jewish observes.

The Common Denominator

What do all three have in common?

[Interact with crowd]

So let's first take a look at the mitzvah of Yom Kippur.

Nowhere in the Torah does it say that you have to pray on Yom Kippur. The Torah states, "You shall afflict your souls."

Along came the Sages and defined how a person needs to afflict himself: not to eat, not to drink, not to use creams or ointments, and not to wear leather shoes (because once upon a time shoes were only made of leather, and not wearing shoes was therefore considered suffering). And there's one more thing....

In addition to all that, the rabbis give Yom Kippur sermons that last 45 minutes, ensuring that everyone truly suffers.

Now let's look at a Bris. What happens at your typical Bris? The infant endures pain and suffering.

Actually, this is an essential aspect and important part of the mitzvah—true, the pain is only for a few seconds, but the infant is required to actually feel it. That's why we don't use anesthetic.

Finally, we come to the Seder night. Now, sitting at the Seder table for three hours is suffering enough in its own right! And eating matzah is also not too fun. But an essential part of the Mitzvos of the Seder is the eating of Maror, the bitter herbs—one must explicitly feel pain so as to be reminded of the pain the Jews felt in Egypt. And if you

eat Maror and say: “That actually tasted good! That wasn’t too bad!” it’s a sign that you need another helping—until tears flow from your eyes.

It’s all very strange—specifically the Mitzvos which require the most suffering are the Mitzvos that all Jews happily run to do! What’s going on here? Are we a nation of masochists?

Outsider or Insider

I once asked a school kid which sports he liked. He told me that he was totally into swimming. He said that for a few months through the winter, he got up every morning at 5:00 a.m. and swam from 5:30 to 7:30. Then he would go to school, and after school, he would swim for another two hours, and only then would he go home and do his homework, etc.

I asked him: “You chose this of your own free will?! To get up in the middle of the winter when a wild storm is blowing outside?! At 5:00 in the morning?! It sounds like boot camp to me!”

So the kid told me: “That’s what it looks like to an outsider. But to me, it’s super fun! Yeah, I know it’s hard. But I enjoy every second of it!”

My friends: The same thing holds true in Judaism.

To the outsider, circumcision looks insane: why deliberately cause pain to an infant? And for that matter, what’s this fasting business on Yom Kippur? Are you crazy?!

But for the Jew who does these things, they’re the greatest pleasure.

Yes, it’s hard not to eat for 24 hours.

But the pleasure and enjoyment of doing the mitzvah conceal all the difficulties, and then some.

And it's the same thing with circumcision. The pride and joy at seeing the child become part of the Jewish Nation is immeasurably greater than the fleeting moment of pain the infant endures.

All this explains one more thing that everyone knows.

The Strange Conversion Speech

Halachah, Jewish law, states that when a person wishes to convert to Judaism, the rabbinical court is instructed to convince him not to convert. They tell the would-be convert that the Jewish People is a nation that suffers great persecution. As the text of the Halachah goes: "The Jewish People are afflicted, worn down and disturbed, and agonies come upon them." In short, it's not worth it to become Jewish.

On the other hand, if the convert insists and actually converts, then he or she is told: "You have earned the great merit of coming to rest beneath the wings of the Shechinah, the Divine Presence—and as for seeing the Nation of Israel in pain in this world, a great good is in store for them," meaning, their reward in the World to Come. In short, being Jewish is the greatest possible pleasure.

Now apparently, this contradicts itself! First we explain the would-be convert that it's not worth becoming Jewish. But the moment he or she converts, we suddenly tell him or her a different story—that it's the greatest merit to be Jewish.

So let's understand what's going on here: is it good to be Jewish, or bad to be Jewish?

The Rebbe explains that it's not a contradiction: to the outsider who only sees material things, one only sees trouble and suffering coming upon the Jewish People.

But the very moment he or she converts, they are already one of

ours.

And when the convert does Mitzvos and discovers the beauty and happiness of Judaism, it doesn't make the troubles go away but rather, it reduces them to insignificance compared to the physical and spiritual pleasure one feels by being Jewish.

See the Krepl

Now that's why we eat Kreplach before Yom Kippur.

From the outside, all you see in a Krepl is the dough. But when you dig into a Krepl, you discover the treasure inside, the meat.

My dear friends: this is true not only for the three Mitzvos of Yom Kippur, Passover and Bris Milah, but also true for every mitzvah!

Sometimes keeping Mitzvos seems hard. For example, kosher meat can be expensive. Educating your children and sending them to Jewish private schools is not only expensive, but painful too. But whenever paying tuition is painful, remember that it's only painful when you're an outsider looking in.

When one actually sends his kids to a Jewish school and enjoys the Jewish pride his kids give him every day, this does not mean that tuition doesn't hurt. Rather, it means that the pleasure and pride he gets from his kids is immeasurably greater than the pain of paying tuition.

From this day on, when anyone suggests a mitzvah to you, don't give him the standard response, "It's hard to be Jewish." Rather, remember that being Jewish is like eating a Krepl—there's delicious meat on the inside. The opposite is true. It's a pleasure to be Jewish.

This year, let us be insiders. Let us enjoy every moment and every experience of our Jewishness.