

Hate Religion, But Love Passover

Back when I was a kid, growing up in a Jewish family in the 1980s, Passover was a really unique time of the year. Even though I didn't grow up in a "religious" family, we were a family that was very proud of our Judaism, and we loved celebrating all the holidays. That meant, for one week each year, we didn't eat bread. Instead, we ate matzah or unleavened bread.

The whole point of eating matzah, is to fulfill the commandment of God to remember the miracle He did for the Jewish people in freeing them from slavery in Egypt. When the Pharaoh finally relented, and "let our people go," the Jews had to hurry out of Egypt and didn't even have time to let the bread they were baking rise. Eating the flat, hard, tasteless matzah once a year gives us a glimpse of what that fateful journey must have been like for our ancestors.

Eating matzah for a week caused our family to have to get creative. We would make matzah pizza (matzoh with tomato sauce and cheese on top), fried matzah (which is just french toast, but using matzah instead of bread), and, of course, matzah sandwiches.

But nowadays, there's very little sacrifice involved in celebrating Passover. Modern times have led to a modern Passover. Here are some examples:

Passover in Israel is a multi-million dollar industry. Companies bend over backwards to alter their products just enough, to get the stamp of approval from some bureaucratic rabbinical institution that hands out "Kosher For Passover" certificates.

There are Kosher for Passover cereals, cookies, cakes and

even, yes, Kosher for Passover bread! Bread? Doesn't that defeat the entire purpose of this special time of remembrance?

Wednesday I went to one of my favorite cafes. I was lamenting the fact that they wouldn't have my favorite breakfast treat, which is called "bourekas," a flaky, doughy, pastry filled with cheese or potato or mushrooms. Obviously, this is a no-no for Passover, so I knew it would be a week before I could indulge again.

I was prepared to just have coffee, but when I arrived, I was shocked to see the pastry display area was filled with delicious looking treats! "What is that?" I inquired. "Those are kosher for Passover bourekas and strudels," I was told. Well, I never! I ordered one of each, sat down to taste and was blown away. They were almost even more delicious than the "non-kosher" for Passover versions.

But that's when it hit me. This makes no sense whatsoever. The point of Passover isn't to simply remove a few ingredients so it passes some rabbi's inspection. The point is to feel the pain of our forefathers, to go without, to fast in a way, and thus empathize with the struggle of those who went before me.

They had to rush out of Egypt and couldn't wait for their bread to rise! The pastries I ate yesterday took time to cook and bake. thus defeating the very purpose of this annual memorial.

The final straw for me was an article I read, saying some rabbi had declared that cigarettes are now kosher for Passover. Cigarettes? Seriously?

First of all, cigarettes don't have leaven in them, so why they're even part of the Passover discussion is beyond me (by the way Doritos, potato chips and the thing of cinnamon I bought yesterday also had 'kosher' stamps on them). Again, it's just another way for so-called rabbis to make money.

But why would a supposed 'man of God' even want to encourage people to smoke during this holy festival? Wouldn't someone who really cares about people, if asked, tell his parishioners not to smoke this time of year ... or ever, for that matter!

And thus we get to the very heart of why I hate religion. It's the same reason Yeshua hated religion. People turned His house of prayer into a marketplace of thieves.

For me Judaism was fun while growing up in America. Judaism was alive! I loved going to my synagogue. I loved taking part in activities there. I loved learning about Judaism and about God. It gave me an incredible foundation of faith.

But the sad reality is, most Israelis don't have that love for being Jewish. To them, it's not about God; it's about politics. Judaism is about a country. It's about serving in the army. It's about flying a blue and white flag. But it has nothing to do with God.

God belongs to those guys in the black hats and the black jackets and the long beards. They got the monopoly on God. and they are not my friend. They don't work. They don't serve in the army. They study in their schools all day, and live off of my taxes.

They're the people I have to hire to marry me, sitting through their lectures about what it means to be a Jewish husband or Jewish wife ... their customs which I don't agree with, but I have no choice but to listen to, because the Israeli government has given them control over weddings in our country.

And the same is true for when I have a son and want him to be circumcised. The same is true for when my parents die and I need to arrange their funeral and burial. I have to jump through religious hoops with rabbis I know nothing about and who know nothing about me. They're just a government institution like the place where I go to get my driver's

license.

The very concept of 'Jewish atheism' was introduced to me by Israelis. They are Jewish by birth, but they want nothing to do with God.

That broke my heart.

I never grew up thinking all that much about God. I usually only prayed when I had a test at school or a girl I wanted to like me.

But, growing up in my synagogue, going to Hebrew school and Purim carnivals and Simcha Torah parties and Tu b'shvat seders ... I was falling in love with Judaism and with God, without even realizing it.

God's existence, God as someone 'good' was never a question for me. It was just a given.

But that's not the case here in Israel. God is just a bureaucrat. Just another line I need to wait in. And that is heartbreaking.

So, as you celebrate Passover this year, do me a favor and say a special prayer for the Israeli people—especially now that we have a new government in place, without the ultra-orthodox controlling any government agencies for the first time in years. Let's pray that this truly would be the dawning of a new day in Israel—a day where God is our love and our faith ... not a guy who decides if my morning muffin is kosher for Passover.

Our ancestors have been freed from the bondage of Egyptian slavery thousands of years ago, but today we need freedom from rabbinical religion.

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